



## SOLANO COUNTY REGISTRAR OF VOTERS

### Election Cost Allocation Methodology

#### ELECTION BILLING

Election Code section 10520 allows the Registrar of Voters (ROV) to determine the actual cost incurred for conducting an election for a district/agency and bill each accordingly. Solano County uses standardized procedures and methodologies for computing the costs of elections and for allocating these costs to school districts, cities and other entities. Through the County's participation with the California Association of Clerks and Election Officials the ROV has confirmed that the cost allocation method is substantially similar to other counties in the State. The election cost allocation methodology has been reviewed by the County Auditor-Controller.

Estimating election costs is complex due to the number of variables and uncertainties in planning elections in California. The number of elections per year, districts participating in a given election, the number of ballot types in the election, changes to Federal and State election law, administrative directives from the California Secretary of State, and the lack of a truly competitive marketplace for election systems and supplies can make costs vary significantly from one election to another.

For example:

- Districts participating - Generally speaking, the more overlapping districts involved, more costs are shared, and thus costs for those districts are relatively less. If the State/Federal office or County participates in the election, costs for local districts lower considerably (and the County is responsible for those State/Federal, and/or County shares). When estimating election costs in the future, often ROV cannot predict which districts will have elections on a given date, and therefore, operates from a conservative assumption that there will be NO overlapping districts which increases the cost estimate for a given district.
- Related to the bullet above, Number of Ballot Types - While overlapping districts lower some costs, they can raise others. For example, the City of Fairfield is totally within the Fairfield-Suisun Unified School District (FSUSD). If both go to election, FSUSD will have at least two ballot types, one within the city and one outside of it. The Solano Irrigation District (SID) going to election further complicates ballot types because SID is geographically dispersed and can cause multiple ballot types for itself and other districts in the election. Each ballot type gets its own Sample Ballot which for costs can be compared to a newspaper: the first paper off the press is the most expensive so the more you can print, the less expensive the individual sample ballot is. These costs ripple through printing to addressing and mailing.
- Staff level - This is slightly contrary to the first bullet, but ROV assumes a countywide election will take place and budgets for the extra-help needed accordingly. This increases the cost estimate for a given district.
- Vote by Mail (VBM) costs - ROV acquired VBM processing equipment in 2007 with federal grant money that included per-envelope charges. The quantity of envelopes covered by the grant has been exceeded, and is no longer offset by grant revenue. This cost is allocated proportionately to the districts participating according to the number of VBM envelopes processed.
- Election system costs - The current election system was acquired with federal grant money. Currently, only annual maintenance costs for the equipment is included in the cost allocation to districts. At some point equipment will need to be replaced and there may or may not be



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available grant funding for the replacement. If no funding is available, the period cost for the replacement equipment will be charged to districts. Given the lack of options and competitiveness for certified election systems, the replacement cost could be high.

- Census results and National Voting Rights Act. Based on the results of the 2010 Census, ROV will likely be required to print certain election materials in multiple languages, which could significantly increase election related costs.

#### How Costs are Accumulated

**Staff Costs** -- Employee task sheets are completed by all regular and extra help each pay period. Time listed on each task sheet is coded into one of the following categories:

- Administration
- Ballot Prep & Proofing
- Programming and Testing
- Billing
- Boards & Polls/Pollworkers
- Canvass/Final Count
- Election Day/Night
- Election Prep
- Customer Service
- Vote By Mail

Employee hourly rates are computed via the Auditor-Controllers' standard methodology for computing productive hourly rates. Full-time employees are charged at a rate approved in the fee schedule. Extra help employees are billed at their actual hourly rate plus FICA. Departmental overhead is charged against salaries and is calculated using methodology provided by the Auditor-Controller's Office. Generally, overhead is the ratio of salaries vs. indirect costs (also commonly referred to as a loaded hourly rate, or fully-burdened hourly rate). Indirect costs include benefits and non-productive time, space costs, technology and communications services, and insurances.

**Purchased Goods and Services** -- actual vendor/supplier invoices are used to accumulate election costs into major cost categories (such as Sample Ballot, Poll Workers, Postage, etc.), and may be further identified to a specific district, if applicable. These costs are assigned without mark-up.

#### How Election Expenses are Allocated

Election expenses are charged to districts using all of the following methods:

**Actual** – an expense that can be readily identified as belonging to a specific district is charged directly to the district whether they are on the ballot or not.

Example 1 – Publication of notice of a measure for a district. This expense only benefits the district with the measure on the ballot so the entire expense is charged to that district.



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Example 2 – Candidate nomination expenses. Candidates may file with city clerks or directly with ROV (school and special districts). Verifying candidacy eligibility incurs costs regardless of whether there are sufficient candidates to put the contest on the ballot.

**Split** – Used when the expense cannot be readily identified as belonging to a specific district and where voting opportunity would cause an expense to be unfairly charged to a district that does not benefit from it. In this scenario, expenses are “split” equally among the different districts within that ballot type. See ballot type abbreviated report.

Example – expense for a polling location and for the poll workers who work there are split by ballot type. The voters in a particular ballot type vote on the same races on the ballot, therefore, the associated expenses can be allocated fairly to those districts.

**Voting Opportunity** – These expenses benefit all districts on the ballot and cannot be readily identified as belonging to a specific district (*Actual*) or split among districts in a particular ballot type (*Split*). Voting opportunity is the number of voters as of the 15-day close of registration within a particular district. All voting opportunities are added together to create a total. Then each district’s voting opportunity is divided by the total to arrive at a percentage. For costs other than *Actual* or *Split*, the expense is charged to the districts by multiplying the expense amount by the district’s percentage. Voting Opportunities change with each election.

Example of the computation of Voting Opportunity (staff time is charged to districts using the voting opportunity formula unless time is spent on a specific district; e.g., counting ballots).

VOTING OPPORTUNITIES		
DISTRICT	VOTING OPP	PERCENT
State/Federal	196,133	56.3369075%
County-4 <sup>th</sup> Supervisorial District Only	35,608	10.2279810%
San Joaquin Delta Community College	5,113	1.4686494%
Davis Jt Unified School District	31	0.0089044%
River Delta USD	5,087	1.4611812%
Winters USD	579	0.1663110%
City of Dixon	8,552	2.4564619%
City of Rio Vista	4,808	1.3810417%
City of Suisun City	12,444	3.5743933%
City of Vacaville	43,163	12.3980663%
Benicia USD	17,379	4.9919142%
Dixon USD	9,918	2.8488294%
Travis USD	9,328	2.6793588%
TOTAL	348,143	1.000000



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Costs allocated to a district can vary significantly with the composition of the ballot. Starting with the example above, if the County Supervisorial contest was replaced by a countywide race instead, the costs allocated to other districts is greatly reduced (for example, the City of Vacaville’s percentage of cost is reduced from 12.398% to 8.485%)

DISTRICT	VOTING OPP	PERCENT
State/Federal	196,133	38.5581558%
County-wide contest	196,133	38.5581558%
San Joaquin Delta Community College	5,113	1.0051743%
Davis Jt Unified School District	31	0.0060943%
River Delta USD	5,087	1.0000629%
Winters USD	579	0.1138267%
City of Dixon	8,552	1.6812538%
City of Rio Vista	4,808	0.9452138%
City of Suisun City	12,444	2.4463894%
City of Vacaville	43,163	8.4854955%
Benicia USD	17,379	3.4165703%
Dixon USD	9,918	1.9497983%
Travis USD	9,328	1.8338091%
TOTAL	508,668	100%

**Even-Year and Odd-Year November Elections** – The mix of districts for November elections varies considerably over a four-year cycle. For even years divisible by four, statewide races include President, Congress, Assembly, and two out of three such elections, US Senate. Locally, there may be run-off elections for County Supervisor and Superior Court judge. All seven cities run in all even-year November elections as well as all fourteen school districts. State ballot measures will most likely appear for these elections, too. For even-year elections *not* divisible by four, statewide State offices (governor, Lt. governor, etc.), and Assembly, State Senate, and Congress will be on the ballot. Locally, there may be run-off elections for County Supervisor, Superintendent of County Schools, Superior Court Judges, and elected County department heads (Sheriff, DA, etc.). Also, the seven cities and fourteen school districts will be up for election.

Odd-year elections now have just two special districts up for election. In all of these cases, whether a district goes to election depends on whether it has more candidates than positions in the election. For example, a school district with three trustees up for election will not be on the ballot unless there are four or more candidates.

Generally, districts’ costs are lower when costs are shared with countywide races (President, statewide State offices, and County countywide offices). Some districts’ costs are lower when Congress, Assembly, and State Senate races occur (although redistricting impacts the overlapping districts every 10 years).



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Other costs are likely to increase. The 2008, 2010 and 2016 November General elections required printing two-card ballots. Adding districts to the ballot also increase either the size or number of cards. Presently, each ballot card costs about 50 cents. More ballot cards require additional precinct supply cases and more storage than presently available. These costs are either split or shared by voting opportunity. On one hand, the more overlapping districts there are, the more costs are shared. On the other hand, the more districts there are, there are more costs to share. Currently, the ROV election schedule is similar to many counties which do not have a regularly scheduled odd-year November election and all districts run in even-years. This schedule increases the chances for multiple card ballots.