

1 MINUTES

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3 The Virginia Elections Benchmark Index Workgroup (“the Workgroup”) meeting  
4 was held on Tuesday, July 24, 2018. The meeting was held via conference call.

5 In attendance were the Workgroup members: Allison Robbins, Chair and General  
6 Registrar (“GR”)/Director of Elections of Wise County; Al Ablowich, Vice Chair and  
7 Electoral Board (“EB”) member of the City of Virginia Beach; Barbara Tabb, EB member  
8 of Prince George County; Tracy Howard, GR/Director of Elections of the City of Radford;  
9 Teri Smithson, GR/Director of Elections of Hanover County; Jacqueline Anderson, ICS,  
10 Inc.; Nikki Clemons, Policy Assistant at ELECT; and Shihan Wijeyeratne, Data Analyst at  
11 ELECT. The meeting was called to order at 2:30 P.M.

12 The first order of business was the approve the minutes from the June 25  
13 Workgroup meeting. Chair Robbins moved the Workgroup approve the minutes, and Ms.  
14 Smithson seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously. The next order of  
15 business was to approve the agenda for the July 24 meeting. Chair Robbins noted that  
16 Michele White, GR/Director of Elections of Prince William County, was not able to attend  
17 the meeting and suggested deferring her presentation until the next Workgroup meeting.  
18 Vice Chair Ablowich motioned the Workgroup approve the agenda, with the modification  
19 of Ms. White’s presentation’s deferral; Ms. Smithson seconded the motion, and the motion  
20 passed unanimously.

21 The next order of business was to review the preliminary proposed project plan.  
22 Vice Chair Ablowich discussed his main concerns with the resolution that was passed and  
23 approved by the State Board of Elections (“The Board”) during the April 25 Board meeting.  
24 The Vice Chair said the Workgroup should present the project plan, once finalized, to the  
25 Board to give the Board a chance to review the plan, provide feedback, and address  
26 concerns and questions. The project plan was created from the Board’s resolution, and the  
27 Vice Chair raised concerns around some of the resolution in the plan. For example, Vice  
28 Chair Ablowich pointed to one of the goals in the project: to “develop benchmarks to  
29 determine the performance and achievements of local electoral boards and their several  
30 members.” The Vice Chair noted this goal, which was taken directly from the Board’s

31 resolution, did not specify who would determine or use these benchmarks to determine EB  
32 performance.

33 Mr. Ablowich suggested it be a self-evaluation. Chair Robbins asked if it would  
34 be appropriate for EBs to do self-evaluations when the GRs would not get to self-evaluate  
35 and instead be evaluated by the EBs. The Chair remarked that if the new benchmarks were  
36 going to be included in the annual evaluation of the GR, that it seemed to be an unequal  
37 application because a similar process for evaluation does not exist for the EBs. Ms.  
38 Smithson noted the resolution was more to serve as a general guide for overall unification,  
39 consistency, and similar goals for localities to work through, rather than a way to punish  
40 localities that may underperform in some areas. Vice Chair Ablowich raised concerns  
41 around how to use and preserve the benchmarks created. The Vice Chair asked who would  
42 be responsible for retaining a permanent document with all of the benchmarks, and who  
43 would update and maintain the document after the Workgroup was finished. The group  
44 resolved to keep this question in mind while developing processes in the future.

45 Ms. Anderson reviewed the steps she took in order to create the project plan. To  
46 begin, Ms. Anderson took a document of Vice Chair Ablowich's recommendations and  
47 used it as a guide to create the plan. Ms. Anderson suggested the group focus on a clear  
48 project statement to demonstrate what the mission of the Workgroup was, and then to take  
49 that statement to the Board. Ms. Anderson also suggested creating a new section in the  
50 plan document to address the Vice Chair's questions about documentation and retention.  
51 Vice Chair Ablowich asked how the Workgroup should execute the tasks laid out in the  
52 project plan. The Vice Chair suggested identifying which group— between ELECT, EBs,  
53 GRs, and the Board— are responsible for which roles in terms of election-related processes  
54 in order to answer this question. Chair Robbins agreed, suggesting the Workgroup clearly  
55 identify which responsibilities are Code-designated or EB-designated, and whether those  
56 responsibilities are delegated to GRs or EBs. Ms. Smithson asked if the Workgroup needed  
57 to establish a baseline clarification of exactly what each group did and was responsible for.  
58 Chair Robbins said yes, noting the group would need a list of responsibilities in order to  
59 know if there were adequate resources for the job and if each group was able to sufficiently  
60 fulfill its responsibilities. In order to gather all a comprehensive list of all of GRs duties,  
61 Chair Robbins suggested drafting up a confidential survey for ELECT to send out. Vice

62 Chair Ablowich cautioned against the time and level of detail this endeavor could take; for  
63 example, if a question asked how often GRs trained election officials, the quality of the  
64 training and the split of responsibilities between the GR and the EB with establishing  
65 guidelines could begin to create a complicated, multi-layered scenario that could not easily  
66 be answered with a yes or no question on a survey.

67 Chair Robbins recognized the Board's goals with establishing the Workgroup, but  
68 also acknowledged a secondary set of goals focused around EBs and GRs. This secondary  
69 set of goals serve to highlight the work that GRs and EBs do, and highlight that that work  
70 is measurable. These benchmarks can be used to justify that election offices should receive  
71 better funding for adequate staff, resources, salaries, and more. Ms. Smithson agreed,  
72 stating the goal of the group should be to quantify what election offices do, the time, effort  
73 and resources it takes to do it, and use those statistics to create a compelling argument for  
74 increased funding and support from the legislature. Ms. Smithson seconded the opinion  
75 that the Workgroup should go before the Board to verify that the Workgroup was working  
76 towards goals that were in concert with the Board's original resolution. Ms. Clemons  
77 informed the Workgroup that the next Board meeting would be on August 15, 2018. Ms.  
78 Smithson said the group would need a revised project plan and clearer scope before going  
79 to the Board, and asked for the group have more time to review the project plan. Ms.  
80 Anderson suggested the group present the Board with the approach the Workgroup planned  
81 to take for developing indexes, in order to develop the processes later in the group's work.

82 The Workgroup reviewed the project plan, and all agreed on the terminology and  
83 definitions presented. Mr. Howard asked if the document should clarify what the term  
84 "resources" would mean, as one of the project goals read: "[to] review and compare  
85 resources available..." Ms. Smithson asked Ms. Anderson if the original document  
86 expanded on the definition of "resources," and Ms. Anderson said it did not. Chair Robbins  
87 asked Mr. Howard to create a list of resources to compile a definition for the term. Chair  
88 Robbins asked if evaluations and benchmarks, as well as data collected while developing  
89 the benchmarks, were going to be available to the public. Mr. Howard stated that because  
90 the information would be used to show the General Assembly what was being done at a  
91 local level, it should be public.

92 Ms. Smithson suggested the Workgroup focus on processes first, to narrow its  
93 scope. Ms. Smithson asked if the project plan would be narrowed to the main goals and  
94 questions of the Workgroup to go in front of the Board for clarification. Ms. Anderson  
95 suggested creating a different document, separate from the project plan, to list the questions  
96 for the Board. Mr. Howard asked what the motivation to increase funding for elections  
97 would be if the numbers and statistics collected by the group proved that localities could  
98 run successful, safe elections even with limited to no funding. Vice Chair Ablowich said  
99 the results of the Workgroup’s benchmarks and research could be used in different ways  
100 and communicated in different ways to make an argument for additional funding for  
101 elections.

102 Ms. Anderson suggested the Workgroup include the work they do in a manual that  
103 would explain how to create indexes and how to best utilize the results from the  
104 benchmarks. Ms. Anderson said part of the goal of the benchmarks was to show what  
105 localities may not be reaching the benchmarks, and to examine why those localities may  
106 have had trouble reaching those set goals and indexes, whether those reasons were because  
107 of financial, personnel, or budgeting problems.

108 Chair Robbins suggested the group take time to review the projected plan, with  
109 updates that Ms. Anderson would provide the group after the conclusion of the call. Mr.  
110 Howard would provide the group with further definitions on resources. During the next  
111 meeting, Ms. White would review the data she collected, in addition to Prince William  
112 County’s five year plan. Ms. Clemons would reach out to the group after speaking with  
113 Commissioner Piper, who was unable to attend the meeting, and send a survey to the group  
114 in order to set the time and date of the next meeting. Chair Robbins then moved to adjourn  
115 the meeting. Vice Chair Ablowich seconded the motion, and the meeting adjourned at  
116 approximately 3:30 PM. The Workgroup did not set a time and date for the next meeting.

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Secretary

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Chair

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