

Building the Election Workforce: Training, Development, and Retention of Election Staff

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Who We Are

The Center for Election Innovation & Research is a nonpartisan nonprofit that works with state and local election officials around the country on both sides of the aisle.

Our research supports election officials with practical analysis about election administration and informs the public about how elections work to increase confidence in our election system.

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Defining Mid-Level Staff

Staff who fall between chief election officials and temporary workers (e.g., poll workers).

Mid-level staff titles vary widely (e.g., Deputy Registrar, Absentee Voting Coordinator, Office Clerk), but they share the common responsibility of handling the operational backbone of elections.

Key Challenge: These roles often span a wide range of duties, which complicates efforts to train them effectively, especially as their responsibilities shift throughout the election cycle.

This Research

What does training for mid-level staff look like inside local election offices?

This presentation examines:

- How offices train mid-level staff
- What constraints shape training
- What different models reveal about workforce development

Through case studies from:

- Marion County, Indiana
- St. Louis County, Missouri
- Story County, Iowa

Roadmap

- Case Studies
- Cross-Case Findings
- Promising Effective Practices

Case Studies

Case	Core Training Model	Main Constraint
Marion Co, IN	Cross-training + mentorship	Time/resources
St. Louis Co, MO	Role-based professional development	Equal opportunity + internal politics
Story Co, IA	Statewide formal training system	Coordination + timing

Marion County, Indiana

Operational Cross-Training Model



Characteristics

- High-volume urban office
- About 20 full-time staff
- Training embedded in daily operations



Core practices

- Cross-training
- Vendor + state supplemental training
- Peer mentorship
- Standard Operating Procedures
- Collaborative culture



Training functions as an operational resilience strategy.



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St. Louis County, Missouri

Structured Role-Based Model



Characteristics

- High-volume urban office
- About 50 full-time staff
- Bipartisan governance structure
- Internal promotion system



Core practices

- Role-specific training
- Decentralized professional development
- Webinars + certifications
- Peer office visits



Training opportunities are shaped by equal opportunity and organizational politics—not just availability.

Story County, Iowa

Statewide Standardization Model



Characteristics

- Rural county office
- 2 full time election staff
- All office staff assist during elections



Core practices

- Iowa SEAT program
- Tiered statewide training
- Practitioner-led instruction
- Continuing education



*Formal statewide systems improve consistency,
but timing and implementation remain challenging.*



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Cross-Case Findings

1. Informal learning remains foundational

- Even offices with formal training systems rely heavily on:
 - Mentorship, peer learning, and experiential knowledge

2. Training access is shaped by organizational structure

- Barriers are not only financial and include:
 - Staffing capacity, governance systems, equal opportunity, and office culture

Cross-Case Findings

3. Workforce development is highly localized

- No single model fits all jurisdictions

4. Expanding training opportunities ≠ expanding participation

- Availability alone does not guarantee:
 - Time to attend, equitable access, retention, or institutional stability

Promising Effective Practices

- **Cross-training** improves operational continuity and resilience
- **Practitioner-led instruction** connects policy to operational reality
- **Peer exchange** builds practical knowledge and confidence
- **Structured professional pathways** establish professional identity and career mobility

**Workforce development is
election infrastructure.**

**It requires intentionality,
investment, and time.**

Spotlights



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OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS

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Thank You

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