



Memorandum

To: Honorable Members Board of Supervisors
From: John Arntz, Director
Date: May 18, 2020
RE: Initial Cost Estimates: Mailing Ballots to All Registered Voters and Voter Outreach

Overview

This memorandum provides initial cost estimates associated with the Board of Supervisors' (Board) proposed ordinance, File 20-0400, regarding the mailing of ballots to voters who have not previously requested vote-by-mail ballots for the November 2020 election, and a partial accounting of costs associated with voter outreach. The proposed ordinance requires a report from the Department of Elections (Department) by June 30, 2020 that details the Department's plans associated with "(1) voter outreach, education, and services, including to limited-English speaking communities and persons with disabilities, (2) staffing, hiring strategies, and staff training, (3) voting equipment and capacity, (4) preliminary voting locations and hours, dropbox or curbside drop-off locations and hours, (5) ballot collection and processing, and (6) public health measures and procedures for both voters and poll workers."

The Department has not yet had sufficient time to fully develop plans related to all elements of conducting the election referenced in the proposed ordinance. Also, election planning and cost estimates rely on criteria set for the November 2020 election by either the state legislature or the Governor. In a recent Executive Order (N-64-20), the Governor set a deadline of May 30, 2020, to determine the criteria by which counties will provide in-person voting opportunities, and other election-related activities.

Initial cost estimate: mailing ballots to "non-permanent" vote-by-mail voters

To identify additional costs to mail ballots to voters who have not requested ballots prior to the beginning of the election cycle, the Department multiplied unit cost by the number of registered voters who have not requested "permanent" vote-by-mail status. Each election, the Department automatically mails ballots to voters with permanent vote-by-mail status as prescribed by state elections law.

Currently, 360,788 of San Francisco's 511,031 registered voters are permanent vote-by-mail voters, or, approximately 71% of voters receive ballots in the mail for each election. However, the Department expects an increase in the number of registered voters prior to the November 2020 election. For planning purposes, the Department considers a registration total of 550,000 voters.

The Department applies a base unit cost of \$4.55 a voter for a five-card ballot mailed to a voter. This base cost includes the costs for card stock, assembly, envelopes, informational insert, postage, and costs related to temporary as-needed personnel to process voted ballots. These initial costs do not include ballot formatting, translations, phone bank assistance, ballot deliveries to people experiencing incarceration or in long-term care facilities, etc.

Since approximately 71% of registered voters are permanent vote-by-mail voters, the Department would need to mail ballots to the remaining 29%, or, 150,243 voters. Thus, mailing and processing of ballots associated with these additional voters is estimated to establish a base cost of nearly \$683,606. Should the number of registered voters increase to 550,000, the number of additional voters who will require mailed ballots is 38,969. This higher number of registered voters requiring a ballot in the mail would add additional costs of nearly \$177,309.

Other costs related to the processing of the vote-by-mail ballots include a site relocation and additional equipment to process vote-by-mail ballots. The Department cannot process vote-by-mail ballots in City Hall for the November 2020 election cycle since the site does not provide sufficient space for personnel to practice social distancing. The Department will need to move the processing of vote-by-mail ballots outside of City Hall and has yet to set this location.

To meet the 30-day requirement under state law to complete the processing of ballots and certify the election, the Department will obtain additional equipment. These costs are not yet final and are not included in this estimate.

Initial cost estimate: voter outreach

Language Preference Notices

In June, the Department plans to send nearly 20,000 language preference mailers to City voters born in Chinese, Spanish, Filipino, Korean, Vietnamese, Burmese, Japanese or Thai-speaking countries and who have no language preference on file as well as voters who did not provide their birthplace when registering to vote. These mailers will list available translated election materials with simple, bilingual instructions. Voters may select their language preferences on the notices using easy-to-use language preference checkboxes and return the notices, postage-paid, to the Department prior to Election Day.

Department personnel will process returned language preference mailers by entering voters' stated language preferences into its registration database to ensure respondents receive the official ballot and other election materials in their preferred languages this fall. To reach new voters who register after the initial language preference mailings are sent, the Department will continue sending language preference notices on a rolling basis up through the mailing of vote-by-mail packets in October.

The unit cost for each of these mailers is approximately \$1.19, which includes costs associated with printing and postage. Costs related to design, data processing, and additional mailers or correspondence with voters are not included in the unit cost. The Department expects to mail approximately 20,000 Language Preference Notices for an initial cost estimate of nearly \$24,000. Printing costs comprise \$2,400, and postage costs comprise \$21,400.

Voting Options Notices

To inform voters about their voting options in the November 3 election, the Department will send at least three multilingual notices to each of the 374,446 households in San Francisco this summer and fall. These notices will provide key information regarding both mail and in-person voting options and highlight accessible and language services associated with each option. Voting Options notices will encourage voters to "Take action today!" to ensure timely delivery of their ballots by

checking their residential and mailing addresses on their registration records via the Secretary of State's website at voterstatus.sos.ca.gov or by contacting the Department.

The unit cost for each of these notices is approximately \$.60, which includes costs associated with printing and postage. The Department has not yet estimated costs related to design, data processing, or correspondence with voters. The Department expects to mail the three notices to approximately 374,446 addresses. Each mailing would cost approximately \$225,000. The estimated printing cost for each notice is \$37,400, and the estimated postage cost is \$187,200. The estimated cost for three mailings of these notices is \$674,000.

Grant Program

As part of its effort to focus supplemental outreach in the communities referenced in the proposed ordinance, the Department intends to seek the approval of \$250,000 in grant monies to be disbursed to local non-profit partners interested and willing in assisting the Department in reaching voters in vulnerable or hard-to-reach communities beginning in the summer and continuing into the fall.

Summary of Costs

To send ballots to all voters who have not currently requested permanent vote-by-mail status, the initial base cost estimate is nearly \$684,000. This estimate considers only the current number of registered voters and does not include the expected increase in the number of registered voters for the November 2020 election who will also require ballots mailed to them.

This estimated cost also does not include additional equipment to process the increased volume of ballots, ballot security, or safeguards the Department will need to implement to allow personnel to practice social distancing during the election cycle in relation to ballot processing.

Initial cost estimates for providing outreach to voters regarding the election total nearly \$925,000. These costs do not include additional outreach the Department will need to implement in relation to the proposed ordinance, or, the costs associated with the Department's established outreach for an election.

Thus, currently, the initial cost estimate for activities identified in relation to the proposed ordinance is nearly \$1.65 million.