



Review of the 2008 General Election Costs

June 9, 2010

Report No. 09-17



Office of the County Auditor

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Executive Summary

This report presents the results of our review of 2008 General Election costs reported by the Supervisor of Elections' Office (SOE). The purpose of our review was to:

- Review reported election costs,
- Identify recurring and non-recurring costs of the election, and
- Identify opportunities for potential cost savings in future elections.

Review of reported 2008 General Election costs:

- Reported election expenditures agreed with SOE accounting records.
- Actual election costs of \$8.8 million exceeded the original budget by \$4.2 million.¹ The most significant cost overruns were in equipment (\$1.1 million), printing (\$847,000), overtime (\$822,000), contracted worker salaries (\$585,000), and contract services (\$575,000).
- Several factors contributed to higher than expected election costs including; state mandates requiring new equipment, additional staff effort for post election audit procedures, increased early voting and unrealized expectations of voter turnout.

Recurring and non-recurring costs:

- The \$8.8 million in 2008 Election included approximately \$3 million in non-recurring costs.

Potential cost savings in future elections:

The SOE has identified potential cost savings in future elections, including:

- Reducing the number of voting sites through use of "supersites,"
- Implementing improved techniques for determining the appropriate staffing levels at voting sites,
- Negotiating a reduced price per ballot for the Ballot on Demand (BOD) equipment,
- Utilizing BOD machines to avoid over prints at the Early Voting Sites, and

¹ In January 2009, the SOE reported to the Board of County Commissioners that the November 2008 General Election budget was exceeded by \$4,060,397 and requested the Board approve a budget amendment to cover the cost overrun.

- Amendments to Florida Statutes providing greater flexibility in election operations.

Purpose and Scope

We reviewed the 2008 General Election costs reported by the SOE in January 2009 totaling \$8.8 million. Our objectives were to:

- Review reported election costs,
- Identify recurring and non-recurring costs of the election, and
- Identify opportunities for potential cost savings in future elections.

Methodology

To accomplish our objectives, we:

- Traced reported 2008 General Election expenditures to the SOE's accounting records (e.g. general ledger),
- Reviewed:
 - Section 101.56075, *Florida Statutes* related to the required transition from electronic to paper ballots,
 - Section 101.591, *Florida Statutes* related to the Post-Election Certification Voting System Audit,
- Interviewed SOE staff, and
- Surveyed other County election offices in Miami-Dade, Palm Beach, Hillsborough, Orange, Pinellas, and Jacksonville (Duval County).

We were unable to obtain comparable data due to differences in the organizational structure of the election offices and lack of accurate and complete financial data.

Background

Broward County's SOE is a constitutional office of the State of Florida. The office is managed by an elected official (the Supervisor). The primary funding source for the SOE is general ad valorem taxes collected and appropriated by the Board of County Commissioners (Board). The Supervisor submits an annual budget to the Board for approval.

The Supervisor is responsible for conducting all Municipal, Special, Primary, and General Elections held in Broward County. The following are the major functions in the election process:

- Conducting voter education, outreach and registration,

- Maintaining updated voter records,
- Purchasing and maintaining voting equipment,
- Hiring and training of all election day workers including: poll workers, technical support staff, call center operators, ballot sorters, regional site staff, special deputies, van and truck drivers, security staff,
- Locating, assessing, staffing and equipping polling places,
- Tabulating and auditing voting results, and,
- Certifying election results.

In general, the election process consists of six phases: Voter Education and Outreach, Voter Registration, Early Voting, Absentee Voting, Election Day Voting and Post Election Activities.

Voter Education and Outreach

Section 98.255, *Florida Statutes* states that each county supervisor shall implement the minimum voter education standards, and shall conduct additional education efforts as necessary to ensure that voters have a working knowledge of the voting process. In 2008, Broward County increased voter registration and participation in the General Election by intensifying education programs and strengthening community partnership. Daily outreach activities and events were staffed in order to reach as many new and potential voters, as well as people who were already registered.

Voter Registration

Eligible persons² who wish to vote in the election must first register. The registration process involves completing a voter registration form either online or at an official voter registration location. These locations are usually public libraries, driver's license offices, various state agencies or the SOE office. The voter registration application requests personal information about the citizen including name, address or legal residence, Florida Drivers License or Identification Card number or last four digits of the applicant's Social Security Number.

New applications for registration submitted to the SOE must be entered into the statewide voter registration system within three days of receipt. Applications must be received and processed at least 29 days before an election in order for the applicant to vote. Newly registered voters are mailed their official registration card denoting their voting districts and precinct location.

² To qualify you must be US citizen, Florida resident at least 18 years old, not be adjudicated mentally incapacitated with respect to voting, and not be a convicted felon.

Early Voting

Early Voting begins fifteen days before a county-wide election. Registered voters can visit any location designated as an early voting site to cast their votes. At the close of each day, the paper ballots and the electronic record are transported to the Voting Equipment Center (VEC) where they are sorted and stored by precinct until they are tabulated on Election Day.

During the 2008 General Election, there were 17 early voting sites located at various city halls and libraries throughout Broward County.³ Due to high turnout, the Governor extended voting from eight to twelve hours each day.

Absentee Voting

Absentee voting is another option available to registered voters. Any Broward County resident eligible to vote may request an absentee ballot up to six days before an election by submitting a request to the SOE office in person, by mail, telephone or online. Generally absentee ballots are mailed out at least three weeks prior to an election. Voters complete the ballots and then mail them back to the SOE's offices where they are sorted by precinct and stored until the votes are tabulated on Election Day. Ballots must be in the possession of the Supervisor of Elections by 7:00 pm on Election Day to be counted.

According to the SOE's office, approximately 137,000 registered voters used absentee voting during the Election.

Election Day Voting

Election Day voting involves registered voters visiting their designated polling sites on the day of the election to cast their ballots. The SOE operates approximately 786 precincts located in 458 polling sites (many of the sites accommodated multiple precincts). Each precinct depending on location and size is staffed with seven to ten poll workers who manage the voting process and operate voting equipment. Once all votes are cast on Election Day, each precinct is required to collect and secure all ballots, completed forms, and necessary recording devices (USB jump drives, flashcards, personal electronic ballots) in the proper containers. The containers are sealed prior to leaving the polling place and delivered to the assigned regional site. Each of the regional sites transmit their results to the SOE's voting equipment center where they are totaled.

³ Florida law stipulates that early voting sites are limited to specified government offices such as city halls and libraries.

Post Election Activities

Certification of Results

Election results are not final until the election has been “certified”⁴ by the County’s Canvassing Board. Although preliminary election night results are available for reporting to the public, the SOE continues to perform the following steps after the polls close on Election Day:

- Resolve issues with provisional ballots,⁵
- Allow time for receipt of military overseas absentee ballots – a period of 10 days after Election Day, and
- Perform recounts of close contests.

The final certification of election results is made after all provisional ballot issues are closed, military absentee ballots received and if applicable, recounts are performed. The final certification of the election occurs on the eleventh day following the election as prescribed by Florida Law.

Post Election Audit

The Florida Legislature revised Section 101.591, *Florida Statutes* effective July 1, 2008 to require a post election audit be conducted after each election was certified. The Statute mandates that the County Canvassing Board⁶ “conduct a manual audit of the voting systems used” and stipulates that the audit must be completed by 11:59 p.m. on the 7th day following certification of election results. Some of the main required steps in this process include:

- Ballots must be sorted by precinct and kept separate and grouped by Early Voting, Absentee Voting, and Election Day Voting,
- Post public notice of audit proceedings,
- Select and train audit team members,
- Random selection of a race,
- Two person audit teams conduct the audit with members from the public and media observing, and
- An audit report signed by Canvassing Board must be submitted to the State within 15 days of certifying results.

⁴ Certification is the process established by State Election Law, the Canvassing Board certifies results following every City Primary and General election.

⁵ A ballot that is used by a voter to vote when the voter’s name is not in the precinct register and their eligibility cannot be determined.

⁶ The Canvassing Board is to be comprised of the Supervisor of Elections, a County Judge and the chair of the County Commission.

Requirement for Paper Ballots

The most significant change impacting the 2008 General Election in Broward County was the requirement to use paper ballots. Effective July 1, 2008, Florida voters were required to use a “marksense ballot”. This is a printed paper ballot to be marked by each voter and is used in conjunction with an electronic or electromechanical vote tabulation system. As a result of the new regulations, Broward County was required to convert from its touch screen voting system to a paper based system. This required the:

- purchase of new equipment to print ballots for early voting,
- conversion of old voting booths with writing platforms, writing devices and lighting to accommodate the new paper ballots,
- purchase of new equipment to store and transport ballots, and
- lease of three additional M-650 optical scanners to read and tabulate completed ballots.

Broward County’s 2008 General Election Process

During the 2008 General Election, the SOE served approximately 740,000 registered voters in 786 separate voting precincts. The Election included races for President, Representatives in Congress, State Senators and Representatives, and various local elections. The ballots also included six State of Florida constitutional amendments and ten Broward County Initiatives. Ballots were printed in three languages (English, Spanish, and Creole) and were four pages (front and back) in length. Planning and preparation for the Election started approximately 18 months prior to November 2008 and included:

- Conducting voter education, outreach including registration drives,
- Preparing training manuals for poll workers, EViD operators⁷, Voting System Technicians (VSTs), VST Field Supervisors and Call Center Operators,
- Locating and reserving facilities for training and voting on election day,
- Hiring, scheduling and placement of approximately 11,000 temporary staff and poll workers,
- Providing state mandated training for each election day worker,
- Preparing ballots for printing, including audio ballots per ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) requirements,
- Preparing Precinct Layout Diagrams to identify polling site equipment and election worker layout,
- Mapping out routing for trucking and delivery of equipment, and
- Securing regional site locations to facilitate movement of voting materials at the close of Election Day.

⁷ EViD is an electronic voting identification machine which checks in voters by swiping magnetic forms of identification such as driver’s licenses.

Observations

Observation 1

Reported election expenditures agreed with the SOE accounting records.

To verify reported election costs, we traced the SOE's reported election expenditures to the SOE official accounting records noting reported costs were consistent with the accounting records.

Observation 2

The 2008 General Election cost approximately \$8.8 million, approximately \$4.2 million more than the original budget; the most significant cost overruns were experienced in equipment, printing, overtime and contract services.

The SOE's original budget for the General Election was \$4,568,430 and actual reported costs were \$8,779,781. Table 1 on the next page, compares the budget to actual costs for the 2008 General Election. The most significant additional costs were incurred for equipment and machinery, printing, overtime, contracted election worker salaries, and contract services.

**Table 1: Comparison of Budget to Actual Costs
2008 General Election**

Expenditure Type	2008 November Election Budget	2008 Actual Election Expenditures	Variance Between Budget and Actual
Contracted Election Worker Salaries	\$1,918,690	\$2,503,369	(\$584,679)
Overtime*	47,500	869,514	(822,014)
Contract Services	291,400	866,551	(575,151)
Communications	151,040	100,430	50,610
Telephone-Special Circuits		70,712	(70,712)
Travel		13,975	(13,975)
Professional Services	3,000	15,726	(12,726)
Equipment & Ballot Transportation	111,520	60,666	50,854
Printing Costs	1,427,880	2,255,248	(827,368)
Postage	553,330	271,477	281,853
Utilities		11,488	(11,488)
Rental and Leases		206,052	(206,052)
Repairs & Maintenance		9,483	(9,483)
Advertising	14,070	0	14,070
Legal Ads		8,046	(8,046)
Office Supp	50,000	379,963	(329,963)
Equipment and Machinery		\$1,137,081	(\$1,137,081)
Total	<u>\$4,568,430</u>	<u>\$8,779,781</u>	<u>(\$4,211,351)</u>

Source: Supervisor of Elections

* Includes FICA taxes and retirement contributions

Observation 3

Several factors contributed to higher than expected election costs.

According to SOE staff, there were several factors which contributed to the ultimate cost of the election being significantly higher than expected. These factors, explained in greater detail below, included unanticipated costs associated with the new paper ballot system and increased staffing resulting from high levels of pre-election voter registrations and early voting and the mandated post election audit.

New paper ballot system costs:

- New equipment to meet the statutory requirements for paper ballots cost approximately \$1.1 million,
- Printing of paper ballots resulted in significant unanticipated costs:
 - Individualized ballots specific to each precinct were prepared in advance of Election Day. Ballots may vary across individual precincts based upon assigned voting districts, applicable races, and the potential inclusion of municipality or special district initiatives.⁸ Further, each ballot contained English, Spanish and Creole translations of all items and was on average, four pages front and back in length.
 - In anticipation of high voter turnout and potential spoilage by the voter, the SOE ordered the printing of 327,000 additional ballots. SOE reports that the cost for printing extra Election Day ballots was approximately \$425,160.
 - The SOE needed to print (and in a number of cases reprint due to voter error) precinct-specific ballots 'on demand' (BOD) at each early voting site resulting in additional costs of approximately \$64,667.
 - Due to timing issues resulting from the Mardi Levy lawsuit, there was insufficient time to print and mail Absentee Ballots. The SOE used the BOD's to print the additional absentee ballots at a cost of approximately \$281,780.
 - As a result of a September 2008 court ruling eliminating candidate Mardi Levy in favor of candidate Pedro Dijols for Circuit Judge, 17th Circuit, Group 3, previously printed ballots were reprinted at a cost of \$42,730.

Increased staff requirements:

- High level of pre-election voter registrations - In connection with the 2008 election, the SOE reportedly added approximately 138,000 individuals to the County's register of eligible voters. In the two weeks prior to closing the voter

⁸ Pre-printing ballots allows the SOE to obtain volume pricing, permits staff to deliver ballots to each precinct and facilitates quicker voting on Election Day.

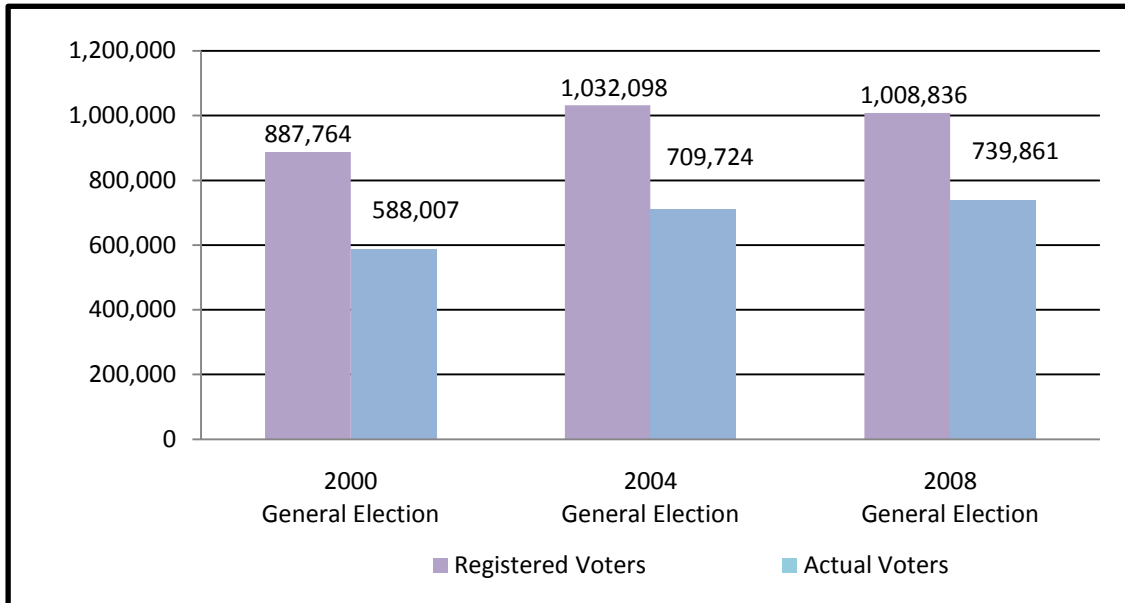
registration roll, the SOE received approximately 25,000 voter registration forms from the Florida State Division of Elections. In order for all voter registration forms to be processed in time for the election, the SOE hired and trained additional data processors at a cost of approximately \$480,000.

- According to the SOE's office, approximately 137,000 registered voters used absentee⁹ voting during the Election. This was a 35% increase over the 2004 General Election which reportedly had 101,000 absentee votes. The increase in the number of absentee ballots cast required SOE to contract additional staff to handle the extra work load. (See exhibits 3 and 4 on page 12 for a comparison of voter activity.)
- Early voting exceeded expectations –Early voting in the 2008 election was approximately 44% higher than in the 2004 General Election. In 2008, 253,000 voters cast ballots during early voting, representing an increase of 76,000 over the 177,000 early voters in 2004. The unprecedented early voting turnout prompted the Governor's extension of voting hours which further increased staff costs. (See exhibits 3 and 4 on page 12 for a comparison of voter activity.)
- Newly mandated audit requirements - staff is required to sort ballots by precinct at the close of each voting day. The newly mandated Post Election Audit procedures resulted in additional costs due to the need to hire more temporary and contracted staff, and payment of overtime. Additional facility space was needed to process early voting ballots therefore, modifications were made to the existing Voting Equipment Center and additional security system was installed to ensure the security of the ballots.
- Additional Precinct staffing - On Election Day there were approximately 458 separate polling locations to serve 786 voting precincts. Each precinct is typically staffed with 7-10 poll workers serving functions such as clerk, assistant clerk, inspector, poll deputy, special deputy and voting system technicians. Due to anticipated high voter turnout and concerns in using new voting equipment, more than the customary number of pollworker staff were assigned to each precinct.

We noted voter turnout increased as shown in Exhibit 1 and 2. Exhibit 1 on the next page depicts total registered voters and ballots cast for the 2000, 2004 and 2008 General Elections and Exhibit 2 on the next page calculates the percentage of voter turnout for the same periods.

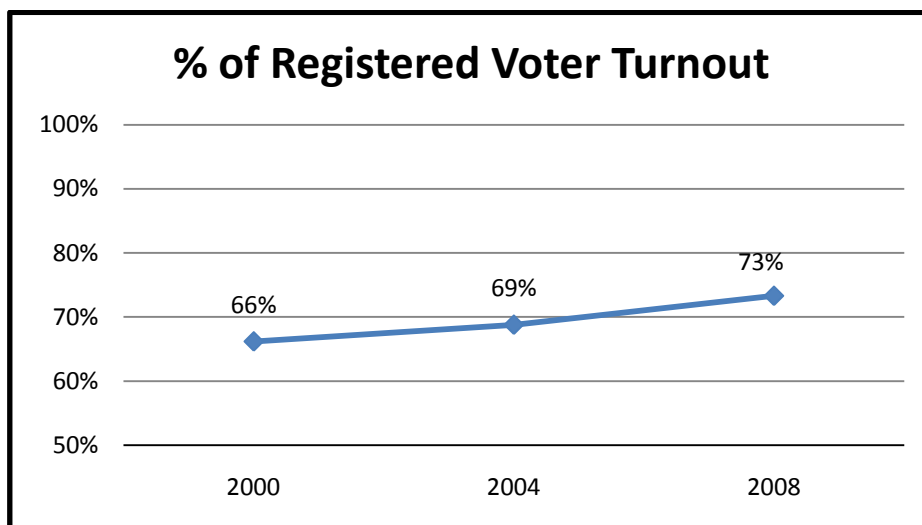
⁹ Absentee voting statistics include provisional ballots.

**Exhibit 1: Registered Voters and Ballots Cast
General Elections
2000, 2004, 2008**



Source: Supervisor of Elections Website

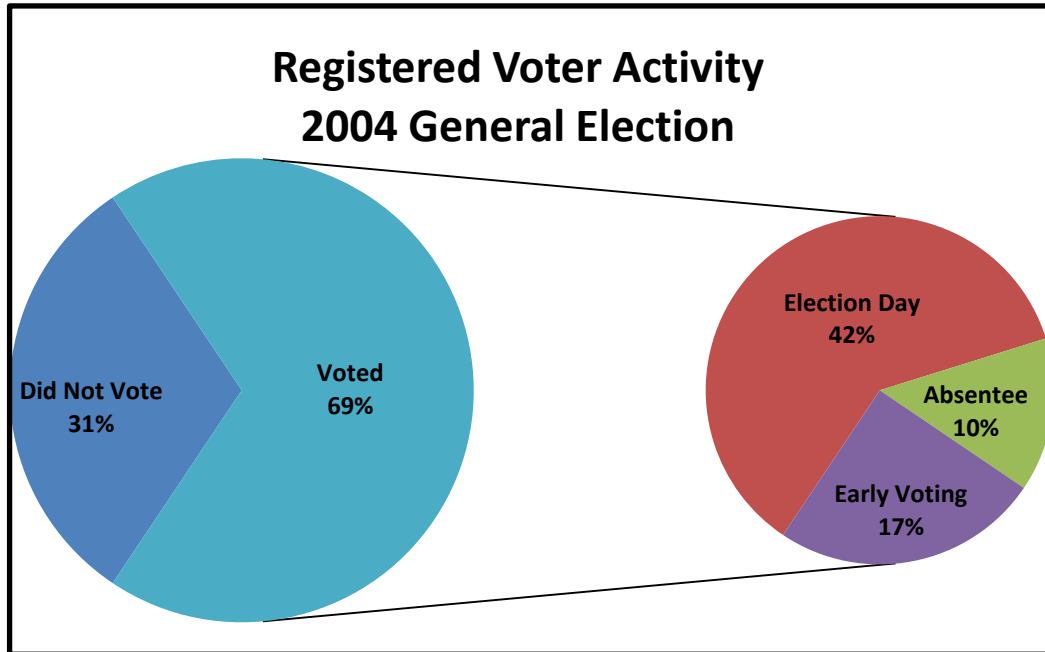
**Exhibit 2: Voter Turnout Percentages Have Steadily Increased
From 2000 to 2008**



Source: Office of the County Auditor analysis of Supervisor of Elections data

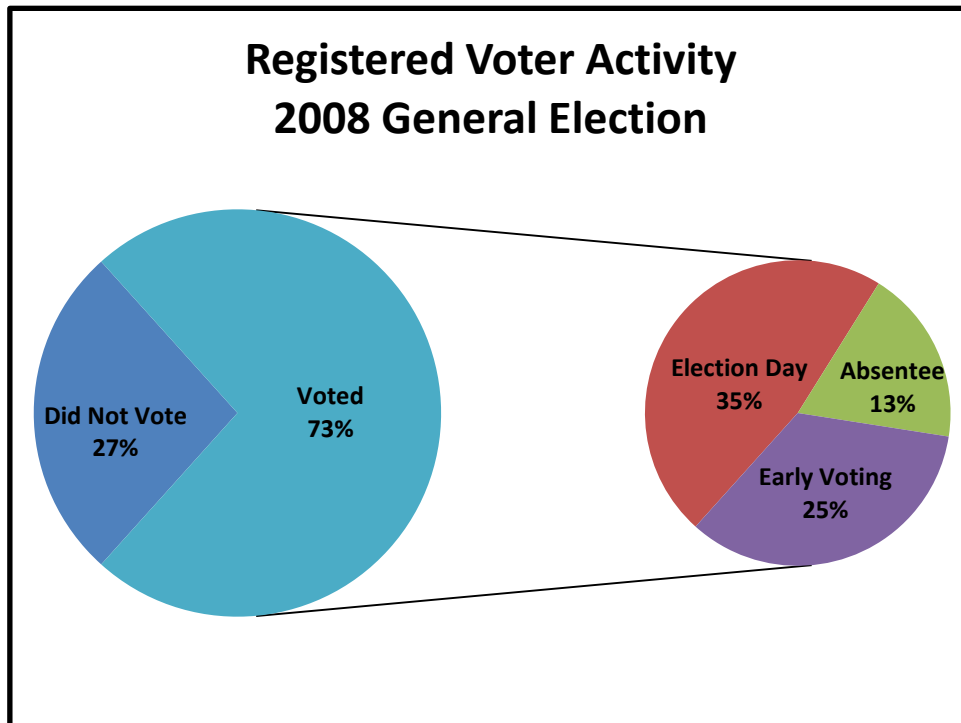
Exhibits 3 and 4 on the next page graphically display the shift in voting from election day to early and absentee voting in the 2004 and 2008 General Elections.

Exhibit 3: Analysis of Voting Methods in the 2004 General Election



Source: Office of the County Auditor analysis of Supervisor of Elections data

Exhibit 4: Analysis of Voting Methods in the 2008 General Election



Source: Office of the County Auditor analysis of SOE data

Observation 4

The \$8.8 million in 2008 Election included approximately \$3 million in non-recurring costs.

Based on our review of 2008 election costs and in consultation with SOE staff, we prepared Table 2 below which identifies recurring and non-recurring costs:

Table 2: Recurring and Non-recurring Election Costs for November 2008 Election

Recurring Costs		
Contract election worker salaries	\$2,318,600	
Printing ballots	1,927,880	
Contract services	400,000	
Postage	390,011	
Overtime	250,000	
Other	<u>486,944</u>	
Total Recurring Costs		\$5,773,435
Non-Recurring Costs		
Equipment	\$1,088,711	
Print overruns	347,247	
Contract services	466,551	
Office supplies	300,494	
Overtime	485,661	
Other	<u>317,682</u>	
Total Non-Recurring Costs		<u>\$3,006,346</u>
Total Election Costs		<u>\$8,779,781</u>

Source: Supervisor of Elections

As indicated above, of the \$8.8 million in 2008 election costs, approximately \$3 million are non-recurring (one-time) costs, including \$1.1 million in equipment purchases and \$952,000 in overtime and contracted services.

Recurring costs represent the greatest potential for ongoing savings. Some of the recurring costs incurred by the SOE in the 2008 Election include:

- Recruitment, selection and training of clerks and other poll workers for early voting and election day activities,
- Printing of ballots,

- Contracted Services for security, data entry, technical support and drivers to transport equipment,
- Postage for mailing of absentee ballots, sample ballots and registration cards, and
- Overtime for regular staff that perform additional work during elections.

Observation 5

The SOE identified ways to reduce recurring costs in future elections.

The SOE indicated early voting, contract services, and printing operations can be managed to reduce costs. Also, SOE reports that they have moved the fees for equipment maintenance and annual licenses to election budgets so that municipal elections share in the costs. The SOE states plans are underway to incorporate the following changes to their processes and programs to streamline and reduce costs for future General Elections.

Early Voting

- Reduce the number of early voting sites by using “supersites” that will allow for large volumes of voters to be processed timely and efficiently. These facilities can accommodate three to four “ballot on demand” machines, a large number of voting booths, and adequate space to process voters.
- Increase the number of election staff at each early voting site to allow for greater flexibility in shift assignments and thereby reduce the cost of overtime.

Contract Services

- The SOE has refined their planning models to assist in determining staffing requirements by precinct in order to avoid over or under staffing of a precinct. As a result, they have reduced Election Day staffing at the precinct.
- The SOE refined the ballot sorting process to significantly reduce the associated labor cost.
- The SOE reduced the number of poll deputies on Election Day by allowing poll deputies to oversee polling sites with multiple precincts.

Other Cost Saving Initiatives

- SOE reviewed the various Help America Vote Act (HAVA) grants and reclassified several costs currently budgeted for the General Election to voter education services which are covered under HAVA. For example, SOE was

able to reclass the budget for printing and mailing the sample ballot (\$121,600) and printing training manuals (\$115,000). In addition, HAVA grant funds will be used to train Election Day poll workers and VSTs.

- SOE's current printing contractor recently added digital printers allowing the SOE to order absentee ballots as needed verses estimating the amount necessary. This will reduce waste from over prints.
- Implemented Electronic Voter ID equipment (EVID) at the precinct level which reduced the amount of manpower on Election Day and increased efficiency in processing voters.
- Reduced the amount of provisional ballots on Election Day by raising awareness to "Check Your Voter Status" prior to Election Day.
- Reduced the amount of telephone inquiries by providing pertinent information on the SOE's website, and through mainstream advertising.
- Increased awareness of important dates and deadlines by implementing a full scale advertising campaign via bill boards, movie theaters, television and radio, as well as over seventy (70) public buses.
- The SOE will produce more in-house brochures, pamphlets, posters and literature.
- The SOE is working to substitute County funds with funds from various grant programs to educate the public. For example, the News in Education (N.I.E.) grant in conjunction with the Sun-Sentinel allows the SOE to reach hundreds of thousands of households about the voting process.

Legislative Proposals

In addition to the SOE's plans to change their processes and programs to reduce costs; the SOE requests the Board consider including in its 2011 legislative requests the following amendments to the Florida Statutes:

- Providing for local flexibility in establishing operating hours for early voting,
- Providing for local flexibility in selecting early voting sites,
- Providing for local flexibility in establishing super-sites for election day voting, and
- Providing for vote by mail elections for all special elections.