



**POST-TRANSITION COMPILATION REPORT
OF THE COUNTY CLERK'S OFFICE
AS DIRECTED BY THE COUNTY MANAGER**

MARCH 20, 2019

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Cc: Internal Audit Advisory Committee

**Doña Ana County Internal Audit
County Clerk's Office – Post-Transition Compilation**

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Abstract

Incoming leadership is often faced with many challenges when taking over the management functions of a government office. Leadership styles vary per the individual, and experienced leaders learn quickly to adjust to changing conditions within their office or department. To assist leadership in their continued learning curve, the internal auditor has compiled data obtained from staff within the County Clerk's Office. The following compilation serves to inform the County Manager and the County Clerk about areas of operations within the Clerk's Office that are considered strengths, as well as those areas that are seen as needing improvement.

March 20, 2019

Doña Ana County Manager & County Clerk,

The duties of the County Clerk are established in the New Mexico Constitution and fall under four main areas:

1. Recorder of the County, on behalf of the Board of County Commissioners.
2. Chief election officer responsible for the administration of elections in the County.
3. Clerk of the Probate Court in handling informal proceedings only.
4. Miscellaneous duties such as those of notary public, administration of oaths, certification of acknowledgments, declarations, instruments and protests.

The Office of the County Clerk is responsible for keeping records, resolutions and ordinances adopted by the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC). Herein, the County Clerk serves as secretary to the Commission, performing the following functions:

- Records all proceedings of the Board; makes regular entries of all resolutions and decisions in all questions concerning the raising of money; and records the vote of each Commissioner on any question submitted to the Board, if requested by any member.
- Signs all orders issued by the Board for the payment of money, records the action and the receipts of the County Treasurer that show the income and expenditures of the County.
- Preserves and files all accounts acted upon by the Commission, noting the Board's action and performing such special duties as required by law.
- Maintains files of all newspapers published within the County.
- Issues marriage licenses and other permits, deeds, and licenses.
- *Receives nominations and petitions related to elections, registers voters, and supervises the preparation of election ballots and voting machines, as well as trains poll workers.
- Serves as clerk to the local court if state law does not provide for such an official.
- The Clerk's Office also supports the Office of the Probate Judge in handling informal proceedings.

* - The Bureau of Elections handles matters pertaining to elections in Doña Ana County, and is a subsidiary office of the Clerk's Office.

Questionnaire Summary

STATISTICAL DATA

The internal auditor performed a Compilation Engagement of the County Clerk's Office in efforts to make the Clerk aware of areas within this office that are considered to be functioning effectively, as well as those that may require attention and improvement. A Compilation Engagement consists of gathering and analyzing data, and then reporting the results within a report. I distributed to and collected feedback from the Clerk's staff, via a questionnaire. In this report, I am providing a summary of responses received, and auditor comments and recommendations based upon an analysis of those responses.

Over a two-week period, 13 of the 18 employees contacted responded to a questionnaire remitted by the internal auditor. Of those respondents, 6 were veteran employees with 8 or more years of experience working within the Clerk's Office; 1 had worked in this office 4 – 7 years; 5 claimed 3 years or less of work experience in this office, while 1 failed to respond to this particular inquiry. Four of thirteen respondents held primary job assignments within the Recording & Filing section, while 7 of 13 held primary assignments within the Bureau of Elections; 1 of 13 classified their primary assignment as 'Other,' and 1 of 13 failed to respond to this particular inquiry.

JOB FUNCTIONS (STRENGTHS VS AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT)

When queried about job functions or tasks that are performed with minimal difficulty, most tasks were mentioned, ranging from assisting customers and performing administrative duties, to filing voter registrations and appointing election officials. Experienced staff and training were reasons cited for these tasks being performed with minimal difficulty. Although many tasks are performed with minimal difficulty already, the suggested means for improving current job performance included filling current vacant positions, improving communications and providing better training.

Per staff feedback, job functions or tasks that need to be improved include (1) reducing recording mistakes, (2) improving efficiency, (3) the upkeep of permanent records, procedures, and projects, (4) communication, (5) establishing Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), (6) improved Human Resources (HR) procedures for the hiring of temporary election officials, and (7) procedures for locating older vault documents or odd documents within County Fusion. Promoting more teamwork to meet all deadlines was also noted as a function that could be improved upon. Although cross training is viewed as a positive, one respondent felt that staff should only be expected to establish a limited proficiency in such auxiliary duties.

Areas within the Clerk's Office that are considered strengths, as they are functioning well, include:

- A supportive training staff

- Cross training between departments
- Willingness of non-leadership staff to cover all bases in times of need
- Customer service
- Voter registration updates, and marriage/business application processes
- The number of experienced staff
- Team work from staff

These areas are considered strengths due to the efficient and effective efforts of an experienced staff, as well as the cross training of BOE (Bureau of Elections) personnel to aid R & F (Record & Filing) staff. The area(s) or function(s) listed above could still be improved upon by holding people accountable to SOPs and assigned tasks, as well as invoking a more efficient hiring process for vacant positions so that the office can be fully staffed.

Areas that need improvement in the Clerk's Office as a whole include developing SOPs, administering more professional development, and further developing the "one team" concept. These areas were mentioned for improvement due to the current lack of SOPs, some noted inefficiencies, and as stated earlier the higher than normal vacancy rate for authorized positions.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

When asked if the current organization of the Clerk's Office allows for a fairly even distribution of the workload, 5 of 13 respondents agreed, 4 of 13 disagreed, 3 of 13 were neutral (neither agreed nor disagreed), while 1 of 13 failed to respond to this particular inquiry. Explanations supporting the even distribution of the current workload credited additional duties that everyone has in addition to their main functions. These additional duties include both ancillary tasks as well as assuming back-up roles. Explanations against the even distribution of the current workload cited high staffing vacancies and a lack of proper training, as the motives for their responses.

Five of thirteen respondents agreed that the current organizational structure of the Clerk's Office allows for maximum efficiency from each employee, with 2 of 13 disagreeing, 4 of 13 remaining neutral, and 2 of 13 failing to respond to this particular inquiry. Responses supporting the efficiency of the organizational structure noted teamwork to accomplish tasks or meet deadlines, unique duties assigned to each individual, and cross training, which has allowed a number of others to perform the duties of someone else in the event of the individual's absence.

While more people than not agreed that the organizational structure allows for maximum efficiency and that the workload is evenly distributed, only 1 of 13 respondents agreed with the suggestion that if the office were organized or structured differently, the current amount of personnel could accomplish most or all office tasks in a timely manner. Herein, 6 of 13 respondents disagreed, 5 of 13 remained neutral, and 1 of 13 failed to respond to this particular inquiry.

Only one respondent concurred that his/her workload is more seasonal and that current staffing could be redistributed to make the workload more consistent, during the off election season. Those who disagreed with the suggestion cited reasons such as performing duties outside of their job descriptions (as some supervisory duties are assigned to non-supervisory staff). Some mentioned negative attitudes from key players, as well as a lack of proper training. Still another referenced the lack of an R & F coordinator, for their disagreement.

DEADLINES & CONSOLIDATED ELECTIONS

When queried if sections were able to meet their work deadlines, 7 of 13 respondents agreed that their sections were able to meet current deadlines while 6 of 13 disagreed. For those who disagreed with being able to meet deadlines, they recommended evenly distributing the workload amongst both team members **and** leads while holding each accountable. Others suggested that current staffing simply could not meet deadlines without being overworked.

I inquired about anticipated workload distribution for the newly implemented, consolidated elections and received the following feedback. Some stated that consolidated elections would equate to even more work via election preparation and the administration of local elections, bringing more workload consistency throughout the year. However, March through July, and September through December are anticipated to be the busier months, along with the impact of the peak business renewal season.

When I inquired about tasks performed consistently outside of the election cycle, I learned that because at least one election occurs annually, election related tasks must be performed year-round. Such tasks include the process of registering new voters, voter file maintenance (includes ERIC as well as numerous updates), auditing voter rolls, election planning, familiarization with new statutes/rules, data verification (includes National Change of Address postcards), and post-election filings. Other functions listed as consistent were customer service, processing recordings and business registrations or renewals, redacting, indexing, verifying documents, and marriage and liquor license processing.

ADDITIONAL INPUT

Additional comments are summarized as follows: The largest hurdles for the Clerk's Office in the past have been changes in leadership, vacant positions, and a lack of support from Upper Management (to include the BOCC). Herein, respondents also criticized past elected officials (in the Clerk's Office) for both their reluctance to accept County policy and their focus upon mainly acquiring reelection, rather than concentrating on office operations. Even when there had been focus upon office operations, it was normally disproportionately slanted towards the Bureau of Elections, leaving little attention towards R & F. While historically there had been a need for greater respect for staff concerns, the **current leadership** is showing care for employees. According to one respondent, the initial means for this office to develop a positive public outlook and better serve the community is to get constituents registered to vote.

Auditor Comments & Recommendations

The statistical data above indicates a high volume of responses, suggesting that Clerk's Office leadership encouraged employee participation for the questionnaires. For this, the internal auditor is grateful. Feedback from veteran staff should be valued based upon the experience from which it was derived, and input from new staff when taken into consideration, holds value as it could result in higher retention within this office. I recall that when I conducted a limited-scope audit (in the R & F Section) in this office, I found a professional and talented team that was open to implementing audit recommendations that could improve individual and team performances. Such are attributes that the current leadership can build upon.

Based upon the data received and the analysis conducted, the County Clerk could make improvements within office operations by focusing upon the following areas:

- Filling Authorized but Vacant Positions (Full-Time Employees - FTEs)
- Establishing & Improving SOPs
- Adhering to Multi-level Accountability
- Continued Professional Development

In the Clerk's Office, a large number of experienced staff is a strength, as well as staff's dedication to providing excellent customer service. In addition, cross training efforts that have been occurring between sections appears to be a positive. However, recent changes in leadership and an increase in vacancies have been a challenge for this office. The Clerk's Office is arguably one of the most visible, public-facing departments within Doña Ana County. That argument can be strengthened when there is an upcoming election. With less than 10% of respondents agreeing that the current level of staffing could meet deadlines if there was a reorganization in the office, filling vacant positions should continue to be a departmental focus until personnel levels are adequate.

It is my understanding that the Clerk's Office is currently in the process of hiring more personnel, which after they finish the learning curve, should bring about a higher level of efficiency. With incoming personnel, it is important not to forget the logical development process of forming, storming, norming and performing. I mention this in reference to the 'one team' concept that is purported within this office, which will take time to develop and fully implement.

While the leadership of this office is responsible for bringing this one team concept to fruition, the establishment and use of Standard Operating Procedures cannot be overstated. Creating and maintaining SOPs was among the findings in my last audit of this office, and I have noted the lack of SOPs as a countywide challenge, not just one that occurs within the Clerk's Office. Establishing well-written SOPs not only addresses the efficiency challenges cited in questionnaire responses, but can also assist in the cross training and professional development cycle. SOPs do not just set standards to which jobs are to be performed, but they also chronicle institutional knowledge, which can prevent departmental 'brain drain' when more experienced

staff leave County service or in the event of an unusually sudden transition of multiple staff members, out of county service. As with most SOPs, management can expect that the most critical details will involve those that keep the department within compliance of county, state, and federal regulations. Weaknesses or failures in such areas could result in costly penalties to the County, and negative recognition.

In addition, thoroughly written SOPs specific to job functions and then on a broader scale office-wide duties, contain the details needed to bring uniformity and consistency to daily operations while still allowing supervisors to establish their own style of management. As SOPs outline standards to which functions are to be completed, they allow a basis for performance evaluations that can reward good work, alert supervisors to areas that require improvement, and serve as a system of accountability for both staff and supervisors.

Along with SOPs should come accountability, at all levels. Although the BOE has election-specific duties even when elections are not occurring, cross training is allowing those employees to fulfill other duties. Whether it is R & F staff covering down on BOE duties, or vice versa, accountability amongst staff and supervisors is key to cultivating and maintaining a culture of mutual trust and respect. NOTE: All staff should perform duties within their statements of work.

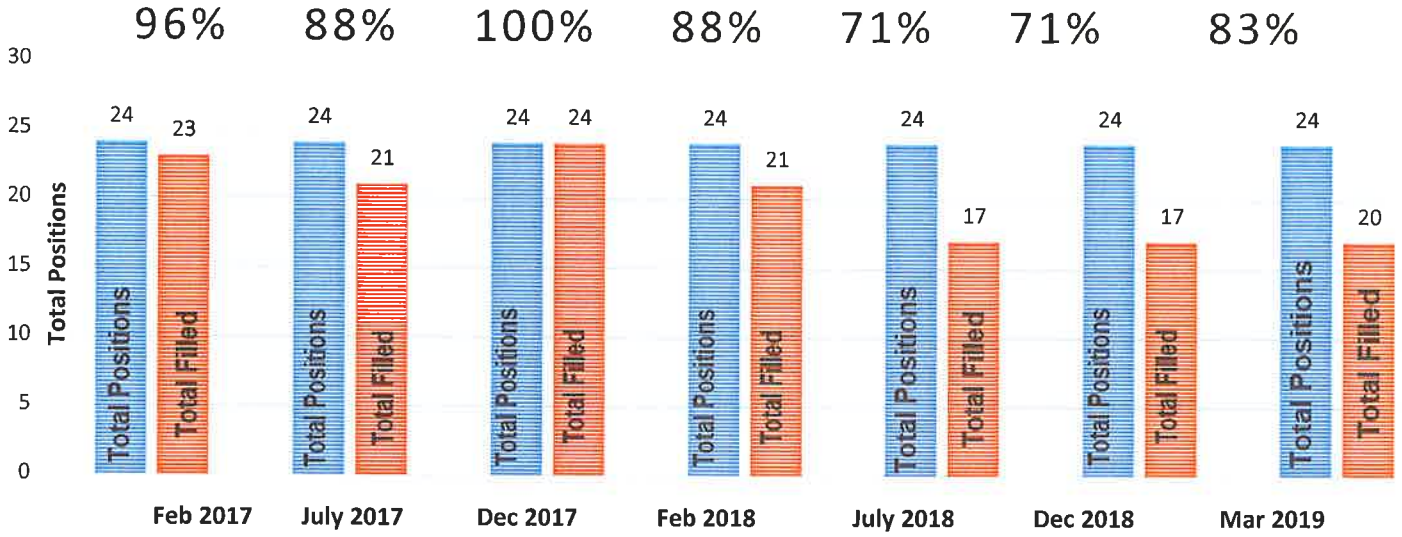
A final area that was noted for both its strength and its need for continued growth is professional development. Providing periodic professional development opportunities via trainings can result in value-added, as the staff becomes more qualified because they gain new skills and perspectives. Greater productivity and efficiency, increased retention (as workers perceive that leadership cares about their career progression) when staff understands that there are opportunities of promotion from within, and increased confidence and credibility are all benefits of providing professional development opportunities for your office.

The data below was compiled for FTE staffing positions, indicating staffing levels over the past 2-year period for the Clerk's Office:

2/4/2017- 24 FTE Positions with 23/24 Positions Filled (96%): Krahling, S.
7/22/2017 – 24 FTE Positions with 21/24 Positions Filled (88%): Krahling, S.
12/9/2017 - 24 FTE Positions with 24/24 Positions Filled (100%): Krahling, S.
2/3/2018 - 24 FTE Positions with 21/24 Positions Filled (88%): Krahling, S.
7/21/2018 - 24 FTE Positions with 17/24 Positions Filled (71%): Krahling, S.
12/8/2018 – 24 FTE Positions with 17/24 Positions Filled (71%): Askin
3/20/2019 – 24 FTE Positions with 20/24 Positions Filled (83%): Askin

Dec 2018–Mar 2019: Amanda Lopez Askin, County Clerk

FULL-TIME POSTIONS



Ernest Harvin

13 November 2023

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Internal Auditor – Doña Ana County

Date