

Government Accountability Board

State of Wisconsin

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G.A.B. Releases 2012 Local Election Data and Costs

MADISON, WI – Running the November 2012 Presidential and General Election cost local governments an estimated \$10 million, according to new data released today by the Government Accountability Board.

Poll worker wages topped the list of expenses borne by local governments at \$3.2 million, while election official staff cost \$3 million and ballots cost \$1.4 million.

“Today’s Spring Primary election will cost significantly less because clerks have fewer workers at the polls and they print far fewer ballots,” said Kevin J. Kennedy, Wisconsin’s chief election official. “Unlike November when turnout was more than 70 percent statewide, we expect today’s turnout to be less than 10 percent.”

The 2012 election data released today includes statistics reported by Wisconsin’s 1,851 municipalities about the numbers of voters, ballots, absentee ballots, and voter registrations. It also includes clerks’ cost estimates for administering elections. The G.A.B. began requiring local election officials to report their costs in April 2012 to gather information for its use and respond to numerous questions about the cost of conducting elections.

One key statistic in the data is the number of voters in the November 2012 Presidential and General Election who took advantage Election Day Registration, whether registering to vote for the first time or updating their name or address on an existing registration.

“The use of Election Day Registration fell significantly between November 2008, when more than 15 percent of voters registered at the polls, and November 2012, when just under 11 percent did,” Kennedy said. “The two statewide special elections in the spring of 2012 gave voters more opportunities to register, which may have decreased the number of Election Day registrations in November.”

Highlights of the election data include:

- 3,080,628 out of 4,378,741 eligible voters participated in the election for a turnout rate of 70.35 percent.
- 3,085,015 total ballots were cast, which includes spoiled ballots that were not counted.
- 736,466 absentee ballots were cast, or nearly 24 percent of the total. That compares to 633,610 (21 percent) in 2008.

- Nearly 70 percent of absentee ballots were cast in person at the clerk's office in the two weeks prior to the November 2012 election. A complete tally of absentee ballots cast by mail and in person for 2008 is not available; however, a sampling of 2008 data found that 64.5 percent were cast in person.
- Of the 3,568,692 voters who registered for the November election, 337,033 registered on Election Day, or 11 percent
- Only 135 provisional ballots were cast, of which 44 were counted, 77 rejected and 14 were unknown.
- 82.8 percent of ballots were cast on optical scan tabulators, while 10.4 percent were cast on touch screen equipment and 6.4 percent were hand-counted paper ballots.
- 34,925 poll workers (1.1 percent of the electorate) staffed Wisconsin's 3,527 polling places. Nearly 30 percent are age 71 and older, while 38.5 percent are age 60 to 70. Less than 8 percent of poll workers are age 40 and under.
- The average poll worker was paid \$93.80 for the November election (\$3,276,180 divided by 34,925 poll workers).

Overall, the five statewide elections in 2012 cost local governments more than \$37 million, noted Michael Haas, the G.A.B.'s Elections Division Administrator. That does not include the cost of the February 2012 nonpartisan Spring Primary or the December 4, 2012 Senate District 33 Special Election, which were not statewide elections, and for which cost estimates were not collected.

"We appreciate the work of local election officials in reporting the data which is useful for evaluating election administration and for policymakers and the public," Haas said.

Spreadsheets containing the election data and election costs for each municipality and county are available on the agency website: <http://gab.wi.gov/elections-voting/statistics>.

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The Government Accountability Board (G.A.B.) is responsible for administration and enforcement of campaign finance, elections, ethics and lobbying laws in Wisconsin. The G.A.B. is made up of six non-partisan, former judges and is supported by an agency of non-partisan staff members.