VIRGINIA
DEPARTMENT *of* ELECTIONS

VERIS RFP Project
Site Visit and Interview Notes

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General Information
Topic: Day in the Life

General

Efficiency
All applications take far too many steps to efficiently process. Typically, the process involves a search, validation and update.

Certain aspects of the process should be background processes (e.g. USPS address verification).

Logging and auditing
Leaving a comment on a registration change would be helpful, but it's hard to actually see/surface the comments on the records. When a change is made, the system should have a visible comment field to log and display reasons for the action.

Addresses

Validation and overrides
The USPS address validation tends to vary from the street file. For example, USPS corrects the street "St Paul St" to Saint Paul St, which is not the legal name. For these issues, an override needs to be applied to the address every time. The GRs maintain a file containing common overrides. Performing a manual override of an address can be dangerous since, if the override doesn't match the address with a street in the street file, it may leave voters without a precinct. In this situation, VERIS doesn't adequately warn the user about potentially removing the precinct from the voter. The user would have to look for a small piece of metadata at the bottom of the page to know that the precinct has been removed.

When a user overrides an address, the data that was originally entered is cleared from the form requiring the GR to manually re-enter the information. Even if an override for a particular street has been applied once before, the same street will need to be repeatedly overridden.

The data being transmitted from the DMV is also problematic. The DMV often omits apartment numbers and provides PO Boxes in the residence address field, which results in addresses that fail validation.

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Hoppers

Incomplete
The incomplete hopper needs a search by transaction number, name, and SSN. The GRs use emails to perform research when an email address exists. The GRs would like to see the system manage the emails to the registrant and the responses from the registrant, which would provide an audit log of the transactions.

The GRs mentioned that the records in the incomplete hopper used to have "x" symbols next to the records, which would remove them. The GRs would like that feature back.

DMV
When military voters try to renew their driver's licenses, they sometimes cancel their ongoing absentee ballot request by mistake because of an address update. They update their address at the DMV to a non-military address and fail to realize their voter registration record will also be updated.

Absentee

Military and overseas
The GRs feel that military and overseas records should be flagged in red. The GRs perform an FPCA audit on a regular basis. They check the current VERIS FPCA list against the paper records. Often, they find discrepancies between the paper copies and the electronic records.

Nuances of absentee
In this scenario, a voter fills out a manual application in the GR's locality. The next day, the same voter fills out an online application and absentee ballot request in a different locality. The second locality processes the online application and transmits a ballot. The first GR finally processes the manual application and it cancels the absentee ballot, even if the voter filled out the ballot and sent it back. The ballot would not count in this situation.

Document scanning
The locality is a non-scanning locality and keeps paper records of everything. They harbor a deep distrust of VERIS based on their experience. VERIS has crashed too often at crucial times for the GRs to trust it. However, if one of the other GRs asks for an application to be scanned, they will scan the document into VERIS.

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Candidates

Candidate communication
The GRs like the candidate filing management system being separate from VERIS. Candidate establishment and petitions are connected to VERIS due to voter registration being a key factor in both.

Candidate certification
The Electoral Board is the legal body that should effectively be qualifying candidates, but VERIS doesn't necessarily have the means to follow this process. For instance, the GR qualifies candidates based on the filings, petitions, and other valid criteria, even though technically it's the board's role to be the final decider. Some GRs provide the list of qualified candidates to the boards.

For the candidates running in a primary, the political parties handle the petitions and certification. However, the GRs process independent candidates. .

The GRs maintain their own separate system of candidate management in the form of Word documents and Excel spreadsheets that allow them to capture additional pieces of information related to candidate filings that are not tracked in VERIS (e.g. form not notarized, required questions not answered).

Petitions
The GRs don't understand why they need to set up a master petition, a second petition, and then have to re-enter all data from the master petition into the second. Regarding the paper size, when adding a new page, the page size selection should be on the individual page and not the master petition, considering that a candidate could start with a 12-line petition and eventually turn in a 21-page candidate signature

For offices that cross locality lines, the filing jurisdiction validates all petition signatures, including the ones in the neighboring jurisdiction.

Regarding information on the petitions, the overall number of petition signatures not accepted includes blank lines. This is confusing to the GRs and the number of blank lines should be excluded from the signatures-not-accepted number.

There are status codes they can apply to the signature validation process and "CI" (cannot identify) is too broad. They would like categories for "not dated," "no address provided," and "circulator signed." Some signature statuses can be contested by the candidate, while some cannot. The proposed new categories should not be contestable.

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Petition page should check whether the circulator is a felon. Circulators cannot be felons that have not had their rights restored.

COMET

GRs think that smaller localities would like all candidate management activities to be handled within VERIS, but the GRs believe that the campaign finance aspect of the process is better served by COMET and should remain separate. Since the system knows the filing deadlines and whether the candidates have filed, it would be great if COMET would automatically generate notes as to when the candidates have missed their filing deadline and have been fined.

Reports

Alpha roster

The GRs need a CSV or Excel download. The voter status and type need to be added for filtering voters (e.g. active, inactive, homeless, UOCAVA, and protective order).

Pollbook

Filename issues

Import into Excel or pollbooks requires the report file to be named .csv and not .txt. The file format is comma-separated values, so the file exported should be correctly named to make import into related programs easier.

Pollbook data upload

While this issue is only tangentially related to reporting, it does link to the issue of VERIS being unable to correct ingest reports from other systems. For dual-party primaries, the GRs export a report from the pollbooks after the election. The default export provides all participating voters with a field containing party affiliation. If that file is loaded into VERIS, all rows are attributed to one party. VERIS should respect the party field as this affects individual voter credit. Since absentee data is similarly loaded into the pollbook, this issue affects them as well.

Errors and validations (E&V)

This report contains all transactions that the GRs have done, such as errors in records, registration denials, registration changes, registration updates, and registration transfers. This report should be used for daily audits, but the GRs often lack the time. For ease of use and greater utility, this is one report the GRs would love to have as a CSV or Excel export.

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Duplicates

There are a number of reports that help identify duplicates present in the system.

Duplicate social security number report

This report provides matches on social security numbers. The records only appear on this report if the social security number is a 100% match between records.

Duplicate record report

This report looks at records that have name and date-of-birth matches. The report only presents records that have a 65% or greater match percentage.

Research registration listing

This report contains duplicates that populate the duplicate hopper. Some records on the report do not appear in the duplicate hopper.

Electoral Boards vs General Registrars

The GRs deal with the mechanics of the election and ensure that candidates meet the qualification requirements. Electoral Boards certify election equipment and officially qualify candidates. While the GRs try to separate the responsibilities, VERIS makes it difficult to grant access to EB members for their limited areas of responsibility.

Data sources

Felon processing

Felon restoration is difficult because the Secretary of the Commonwealth and the Corrections data in VERIS conflicts. Sometimes, both data sources are stale.

Deceased processing

Both the Bureau of Vital Statistics and Social Security Administration are sources for death information. GRs do not scan obituaries as the local media does not publish addresses. There have been some instances where voters have been incorrectly flagged as being deceased by the Social Security Administration.

Correspondence

The GRs would like to greater ability to customize correspondences. In certain cases, the GRs are dependent on the state for communication to their voters. For example, if there is a polling location

change, the GRs should be able to send letters to their voters and not have to wait for the state. The last time a polling location change was made, ELECT took three weeks to send a letter.

GIS

If there were GIS errors, having GIS functionality in the system would make precinct and district assignments harder. With GIS, it would be easier to tell if an address exists or if it is a valid address (e.g. parking lot). It would also make redistricting easier.

Division of Legislative Administrative Services (DLAS) maps and boundaries are not the same as the locality's boundaries. DLAS uses Census data as a basis for their data. According to Commonwealth code, the Census data wins if there's a conflict between the state and local data.

Voter registration

Denials

The GRs mentioned that the legal signature, if visually interpretable as cursive characters, must match the printed name of the applicant. If it doesn't, the application is denied. For homeless applicants, they have to adequately describe an actual location where they generally reside—not a generalized location—because the address is necessary for precinct assignment.

Delays

Nearly every process in VERIS is immediate with the exception of voter registration and restoration of rights. Both actions take 24 hours to be processed and added to the alpha roster. It's not clear to the GR staff why this is.

Last-in, first out

The last voter registration update will be a destructive merge against what's currently in the system. For example, if a voter has a full middle name and registers online using only their middle initial, if the GRs simply accept the merge, the full middle name will be removed in favor of the middle initial. To fix this issue, the registrars go back and re-enter the pre-existing data. The GRs would prefer a more intelligent merging process.

Special characters

The GRs remove special characters (e.g. ñ, å, é) from registration records, both online and paper, because sometimes VERIS will not accept them. Sometimes, VERIS will accept an apostrophe or a dash in

a hyphenated name, but, sometimes, the system rejects the input. In addition, VERIS' search functions are not sophisticated enough to account for names with non-Latin characters.

Duplicates

Manual

By law, the GRs have to process manual applications, even if the applications are duplicates. If the voter provides a different social security number, the same voter could end up in the system twice.

If the GRs add a voter registration without previously doing a search and the voter they're adding is already registered, trying to enter the voter will result in VERIS attempting to suggest a record to link. However, this suggestion is a small line at the bottom of the page and easy to miss. If the GRs don't see this link suggestion and they process the application, it will result in two identical records with different voter id numbers. These can be merged within VERIS, but the process involves a significant amount of work and research.

Online

There are duplicates that land in the duplicate hopper that are from the 100% matches. This can be frustrating, but, sometimes, the ADRM process can have unintended side-effects. The ADRM process can sometimes remove UOCAVA status.

Transfers

Duplicates sometime happen when GRs are transferring voters out of their jurisdiction. For example, a GR creates a new application and then realizes the voter is in another locality. The GR merges the two records together and the record to transfer ends up in the other locality's transfer hopper.

Provisional voters

If on the provisional history screen, it's unclear if the provisional votes give the voters credit and change inactivity status.

Election results

When the GRs are tired and have to manually enter the results, it is really challenging to use the various forms on VERIS because they're not well-designed. The locality IT has figured out a way to automatically upload the data to the state that works, most of the time. When it doesn't, it has to be entered by hand.

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The locality devised a system that uploads results, provisional ballot numbers, pollbooks numbers, and curbside voters to the locality's mainframe, which, in turn, uploads the data to ELECT. This system involves a native iPhone application that the locality developed and is run on locality-owned iPhones.

Provisional results

The GRs hate this report, largely because it's unclear why ELECT needs the information. The GR's assume it's for EAC survey requirements, but it's not clear. The GRs would like to make the reporting easier and less detailed, especially since the GRs don't use the data.

Security

Roles and responsibilities

For some tasks, the GR has to grant too much administrative access to the staff using VERIS to allow them to perform simple and/or common tasks.

Election management

New election

ELECT controls the elections. All districts, polling locations, etc., should be set up when the election is created. The GRs fail to see a logical reason why they have to take any action to copy the information from a previous election.