VERIS RFP Project
Site Visit and Interview Notes

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General Information

Pain points

Usability
The column headers should stay fixed to the fields in the Provisional/Absentee spreadsheet. The GRs lack the ability to perform searches within hoppers or filter the content within.

Training materials
The step-by-step guides to VERIS are unhelpful. Most of the information is several years old and has not been maintained. Some links no longer work.

Correspondence
The GRs appreciate that VERIS can create form letters for various types of voter correspondence. The GRs believe there is a need to customize letters, especially to include the specific staff person sending the letter.

GRs get calls from voters who have received letters, but sometimes the person answering the phone doesn't know what has occurred. Therefore, they need to send the voter to the staff member who worked on their records and, without the name on the letter, this takes some time to track down.

Voting equipment
GR expressed need for a "Consumer Reports" guide to voting systems. An objective assessment of voting systems for the localities to refer to would be helpful to the GRs.

New early voting in 2020
The GRs expressed concern and wondered about the new uncharted territory of "early voting" for the November 2020 Presidential election and how that would impact VERIS.

Candidates
A candidate is typically required to reside in a locality where the office they are running for is located. The exception is if the city is wholly surrounded by a single county, the city is a separate locality, and the county's courthouse is located in that city. The candidate may run for the county's Commonwealth Attorney positions, yet the candidate can reside in the city.

System issues

System speed
Even when the system isn't overburdened by user, VERIS is generally slow.

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System availability

The system has failed at critical times.

Session timeout

Similar to the reports in other localities, the GRs complained about getting logged out at random intervals.

Hoppers

Search

The GRs would like to be able to search within hoppers and, currently, this isn't possible.

Processing

There used to be a discard button for various applications, but the button was taken away over the years. This function is useful in certain edge cases. One voter applied for an absentee ballot, moved to a different locality and registered, the GRs sent the application to the new locality. Interestingly, the locality sent the absentee request back. The election ended and now there's nothing that can be done about the transaction record which is still sitting in the hopper.

Citizen Portal

Unclear

Voters say the Citizen Portal is hard to find on the ELECT website. There's a direct link to the new registration form in the middle of the home page and it takes you directly to the new registration form, without first looking up the applicant in VERIS, which may cause duplicate registrations. If the user clicks on the "How do I register" link in the main menu, there are three screens to move through before getting to the registration page which contains both the voter lookup form and the new registration link.

Absentee requests

The absentee ballot request allows the applicant to submit applications that are going to be denied. For example, physical inability to come to the polling place involves a doctor to fill out a form and sign it, which has to be submitted with the voter registration the first time and, since the Citizen Portal doesn't allow document uploads—and VERIS can't accept them—the supporting documentation is missing so the application will be denied.

Application processing without required information

The GRs feel VERIS needs a system message that tells the applicant what information is required for a complete application and a mechanism that will not send the application to VERIS without required

information or allows the applicant to save their partially completed application and return to complete it at a later time.

Confirmation and status messaging to applicants

Applicants currently don't receive a message to confirm their application has been submitted. This has caused confusion and the occurrence of applicants submitting their applications over and over again.

Duplicates

If the duplicate is an exact duplicate, VERIS removes them from the queue. However, many currently-registered voters will submit slightly different registrations, so these registrations show up in the hopper and must be processed.

Petitions

Candidate acceptance

The GRs want system to automatically move on to the next stage when enough signatures are accepted.

GRs from other localities can check voters on a petition, but there is concern is that if someone is checking voters outside of their locality, they may not be as careful.

Creating a master and second master

For local offices, setting up two masters seems redundant and unnecessary. For a Virginia House of Delegates election, you need a master petition because the candidate runs across several districts. But no master petition needed for a local candidate.

Voter registration

Valid updates

If there is an existing, complete registration, an abbreviated voter registration can serve as an update, as long as the voter fills out name, registration address, and signs the form.

Default dates

When processing records, after entering the first process date, that date is applied to all of the following applications. The GRs would like to make sure the date of the application is recorded correctly, but, when processing lots of applications, the GRs may not notice the date is prepopulated. The system should not auto-fill the date.

Attached documents

In processing voter registration updates, there's no way to signify the original, complete voter application, so the GRs have to look in every document to find the needed information.

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The difference between the comment and description fields isn't clear. The description field seems to be generated by ELECT and the comment field is additional info the GRs notate in the document. However, the description field is the only field that is surfaced in the documents list.

Documents on the record are listed in scanning order, not by signature or application date.

Printing records

There are different record sizes and some have very small type making them difficult to read. Some print without the title or ID which is problematic.

Absentee application processing

The GRs have dedicated computers for absentee application ballot processing .

VERIS has a report of annual absentee applications (703.1 and FPCA), which is used for annual correspondence. In order to keep track of the applications, the GRs keep another spreadsheet with the voter's primary information, date of original application, and doctor's date of signature, since VERIS makes this difficult to track.

The online portal is confusing for overseas voters, so many potentially returning voters are flipped to voters with no intent to return, which restricts them to a federal-only ballot. GRs usually personally know the voters and typically update their absentee requests to match their previous applications.

Absentee
Ballot mailing

If the voter exists, the ballot is mailed the next day. If the voter is new and registering in-person, there's a 5-day wait before the ballot can be sent.

VERIS does not keep track of this 5-day time period or alert the GRs when ballots should be sent out. There was some discussion about how the 5-days should be interpreted (e.g. 5 business days or 5 days) and they would like VERIS to track this time. GRs are forced to keep a list in a paper file to track the 5-day wait.

The GRs get pre-printed ballots (i.e. no ballot on demand).

Paper applications

To process a paper application, the GRs validate the application and then perform a voter search. If the voter is found, they perform an absentee ballot search to see if they have a pre-existing absentee ballot request. If the GRs find an existing absentee ballot and they see if it's an FPCA, they contact the voter to see if they need a new ballot. If they do need a new ballot, they have the voter fill out a Gold Oath—also

called a "statement of voter"—form, which is a lost ballot form. If they don't need a new ballot, the GRs deny the non-FPCA form. If the GRs don't get a reply from the voter, they deny the application.

If the voter doesn't have a pre-existing application, the GRs process the application.

If the voter has a pending absentee request, the GRs process the OVR first and then the absentee ballot request.

A voter can apply for Absentee ballot as of January 1 of the election year, but can only vote during the 45-day window prior to election day. Some GRs hold onto requests, because they don't trust VERIS. Other GRs have started putting them into VERIS, as they have found that some voters check to see if they are in the system.

If the applicant is not a registered voter, the GRs deny the application. VERIS generates a denial letter. The GRs mail the letter.

Absentee search

If a voter is searched for in the absentee search, the system only looks for absentee within the locality. However, if you perform the same search 3 times, the system will perform a statewide search. None of the step-by-step guides describe this, so this may be an undocumented feature.

List maintenance

21 days prior to the election, the GRs stop adding new voters and keep removing voters until the weekend prior to the election.

Emergency absentee

After noon Saturday and until 2 PM on Monday just prior to the election, you can request an emergency absentee ballot for the following reasons:

- Business emergency (705.2 - Cream application);
- Hospitalization of the voter or member of family (705.1 - Green application);
- Death of a member of family (705.2 - Cream application);
- Officer of Election (705.2 - Cream application).

The voter—or designated party in the case the voter is unable—has to show up in the office to get the application. The voter fills it out or the designated party brings it to the voter to fill out. In the case of the voter being hospitalized, the designated party has to bring the forms back to the voter and return to the office with the application and the doctor's note. The GRs process the application in VERIS which verifies the application against the rules, but VERIS doesn't capture the name of the designee, which would be helpful for security purposes. The GRs give the designee the ballot who bring it back to the

hospital to have the voter fill it out. When returned, these ballots are processed in the Central Absentee Precinct.

In the case of a non-medical issue, the voter shows up in-person and fills out the 705.2 application. The GRs process the application in VERIS which verifies the application against the rules. The GRs give the ballot to the voter and the voter completes the ballot and puts it in the scanner. The GRs append these absentee records to the poll book or call the polls on Tuesday AM.

In these cases, VERIS is doing fairly complex application validations, but won't in others (e.g. 5 day wait for absentee for new voters).

Absentee ballot return

Pre-process
In pre-processing, the GRs slit the outer envelope to see if the inner envelope is marked with the required information (e.g. signature, witness signature) and, if not, they flag any ballots for the CAP to check. That's all that's required without bi-partisan (plus one other) observers present.

Ballot ready date
The Ballot Ready Date is when ballots are ready to mail which corresponds to the 45-day window for sending to absentee ballots to voters covered under UOCAVA.

VERIS know if ballots are not mailed by the deadline.

Late and rejected ballots
There is no letter sent to voters regarding late ballot receipts by some GRs. Other GRs send a letter for late ballots, and others send a letter for "rejected" ballots. Technically, a "late" ballot is not a "rejected" ballot.

Addresses

Incorrect locality assignment
When the voter is asked for their locality through any of the online registration processes, sometime the voter will select a neighboring locality, which, if their registration existed in their actual locality, their record would drop into the transfer hopper to be transferred to the new locality.

Sometimes VERIS gets it wrong and it will tell the GRs they need to transfer the voter to the city, but it is a county street address.

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Cancelling the transfer process is confusing as the system asks something like "keep this record by clicking 'no.'"