

# 2008 Wisconsin Election Data Collection Grant Program Evaluation Report



A Report to the Wisconsin Government Accountability Board

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# **2008 Wisconsin Election Data Collection Grant Program Evaluation Report**

## **Executive Summary**

- The GAB successfully used EAC grant funds to develop the Wisconsin Election Data Collection System. The online WEDCS data entry application is simple and effective for the state's clerks to use. It will serve the state's election administrators for years to come.
- Clerks who used the WEDCS rate it highly and on average prefer it to the GAB-190 paper form it replaced. Although many clerks lack high-speed internet access, technological hurdles were not a major hindrance in the implementation of WEDCS.
- Clerk training opportunities were plentiful and successful. Although fewer clerks participated in the training than was planned, those who participated were pleased with its quality.
- The development of the WEDCS was delayed by approximately six months and has not reached high usage rates among municipal clerks. Yet delay in the project's timeline had several unanticipated benefits that improved its implementation.
- Data from the November 2008 federal election were successfully delivered to the EAC before the March 31, 2009 deadline. Essentially all of the precinct-level data elements were collected. The GAB should continue to seek complete data in future elections and build in checks to maximize the validity of individual elements.
- By spending less than budgeted, the GAB was able to leverage grant funds to accomplish other tasks related to election data collection and clerk training.

## Authors and Acknowledgements

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## Glossary of Abbreviations

CEOEL	Continuing Education, Outreach, and E-Learning A Division of the University of Wisconsin-Extension
DET	Department of Administration's Division of Enterprise Technology Wisconsin's chief information technology agency
EAC	Election Assistance Commission A federal agency that serves as a resource for election administrators
EDS	Election Day Survey (also known as Election Administration and Voting Survey) A biennial survey of state and local election officials conducted by the EAC
GAB	Government Accountability Board Wisconsin's highest election administration authority
HAVA	Help America Vote Act A 2002 federal law that created the EAC and established new election administration standards
SVRS	Statewide Voter Registration System Wisconsin's voter database created after the passage of HAVA
UW-Madison	University of Wisconsin-Madison Wisconsin's flagship research university
WEDCS	Wisconsin Election Data Collection System The main electronic application created by the project

## Grant Development

On March 27, 2008, the U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC) issued a request for proposals, inviting states to apply for grants to improve election data collection practices.<sup>1</sup> As authorized in October 2008 by the Omnibus Appropriations Act, the EAC was given authority to distribute grants of \$2 million to each of five states.<sup>2</sup> The deadline for applications was April 28, 2008. As one of ten applicants, Wisconsin submitted a grant application via the state's Government Accountability Board (GAB), the agency housing the state's chief election official. On May 28, 2008, the EAC awarded grants to five states: Illinois, Minnesota, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin.

The purpose of the EAC grant was for each state to create a program that improves data collection processes and documents best practices that can be transferred to other states. Efforts were to focus on the federal elections scheduled for November 4, 2008, and projects were to be completed by June 30, 2009. The guidelines required the GAB to report on its progress at various points during the grant period and electronically submit to the EAC precinct-level election data by March 2009. The request for proposals named six specific elements to report in this manner.<sup>3</sup>

The GAB's proposal asserted that the project would develop "a Wisconsin strategy for increasing public confidence in the election process" and that the initiative

would "increase transparency, standardization, efficiency, and accuracy of data collection and reporting." The GAB contended that Wisconsin's local election administration puts the state in an advantageous position to collect federal election survey data because it already collected many data at the precinct level.

The proposal called for building a web-based survey instrument to collect data from local elections officials, as well as a dedicated database to house the data. The system would interface with the election administration application in Wisconsin's Statewide Voter Registration System (SVRS), the tool used to manage voter records. The state's many election clerks would be trained by a combination of in-person and web-based methods developed by a grant partner. The greatest challenge to data collection was expected to be the acquisition of information on absentee ballots that was not previously shared with the state. Once collected, the data would be immediately available to the state, the federal government, and the public.

## Background on Wisconsin Election Administration

Wisconsin's decentralized election administration is anchored by an oversight state agency, the Wisconsin Government Accountability Board. The GAB formed on January 10, 2008, as a result of a state law that phased out and combined the State Elections Board, which had been in place since 1974, and the State Ethics Board.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Funding number EAC-08-001.

<sup>2</sup> Public Law 110-161.

<sup>3</sup> These were numbers 1, 2, 18a, 23, 29, and 30 of Appendix A. These items are discussed in more detail below.

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<sup>4</sup> For a fuller history see *From Registration to Recounts* by Steven F. Heufner, Daniel P. Tokaji, and Edward B. Foley, with Nathan A. Cemenska (2008), <http://moritzlaw.osu.edu/electionlaw/joyce>.

The GAB is headed by a Director and General Counsel and six retired judges. The GAB has two divisions, one for Ethics and Accountability and the other for Elections. Unlike other states where an elected Secretary of State is typically charged with such duties, the Director and General Counsel is the state's chief election authority. The Election Division has responsibility for Wisconsin statutes, administrative rules and policies, and federal laws governing election administration.

The actual administration of elections, however, is conducted at the municipal level. SVRS connects municipalities through a single database maintained by the state. Wisconsin's 1,851 municipal clerks, and 72 county clerks conduct elections.<sup>5</sup> The City of Milwaukee and County of Milwaukee have election commissioners in place of clerks. Responsibility for election data rests with local election clerks, who are far more numerous in Wisconsin than in other states. Although Wisconsin's population accounts for only two percent of the nation, the state's municipal clerks comprise approximately one of every five local election officials nationwide.

Some municipal clerks provide election information themselves, but most rely on county clerks to provide this information for them. When a provider clerk agrees to manage the SVRS responsibilities for a relier clerk, the relationship is governed by a "Memorandum of Understanding" (MOU).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> In November 2008 the state had 1,851 municipalities. We estimate that approximately 13 individuals were clerks for multiple jurisdictions, bringing down the number of *unique* clerks to 1,838.

<sup>6</sup> Some clerks are amending their MOUs to specify responsibilities for WEDCS.

The GAB estimated that 437 municipal clerks, or approximately 24% of the total, are "self-providers." These clerks use the SVRS database directly and manage other tasks independently. The remaining 1,414 municipalities are "reliers" who depend on "providers" – county or other municipal clerks – for these services. On average, relier clerks represent smaller municipalities than do self-providers.<sup>7</sup>

As a consequence of local administration, Wisconsin collects a great deal of data at the ward level. For the 1,851 municipalities in existence for the November 2008 election, there were approximately 3,700 polling places and 6,900 wards.<sup>8</sup> While this averages to roughly two wards per municipality, the significant population differences create imbalances. The City of Milwaukee has 311 wards, yet over 90 percent of municipalities had fewer than 5,000 people and many had just one ward each. Accordingly, clerks vary substantially in their responsibilities and the resources at their disposal.

## Timeline

The GAB proposal was ambitious. Contingent on winning the EAC grant, the effort would begin immediately, with the new data system developed in only two

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<sup>7</sup> The mean municipal population was 1,000 for reliers and 8,893 for self-providers. Municipalities may be cities (11%), towns (66%), or villages (23%).

<sup>8</sup> The smallest electoral units in Wisconsin are wards. Reporting units frequently combine two or more wards. Each municipality has at least one ward and one reporting unit. The numbers of these units varies by election and depends on whether wards without active voters are counted. The number of municipalities decreased by one to 1,850 in December 2008 when the village of Rochester and the town of Rochester consolidated.

months (July-August 2008). Clerk training would occur between August and October, and the system would be deployed between September and March. The goal was to implement the new data collection system for the November 2008 general elections.

The proposal stated that a new system prototype would be ready for the September 9, 2008 primary election, allowing a subset of clerks to test it. Based on their feedback, improvements could be implemented in time for the November 2008 general election. County clerks would be trained in September and October at five consecutive sessions offered by CEOEL staff. These clerks would in turn coordinate training opportunities for municipal clerks in their counties. All municipalities were expected to use the system for reporting data from the November 2008 federal elections.

The GAB was unable to maintain the proposed timeline. The schedule slipped for several reasons. First, and most fundamentally, the grant program did not permit sufficient planning time or flexibility. EAC's request for proposals forced states to act quickly and without extensive guidance. Budgets were required to total exactly \$2,000,000. Second, the GAB itself faced challenges in pursuing such an ambitious project. As noted above, it was a new agency that had combined and supplanted the State Elections Board and State Ethics Board just 10 months before the presidential election. The GAB was only five months old and had not yet overseen a federal election when the proposal was submitted. Hiring of new personnel did not happen quickly enough and in some cases

did not happen at all.<sup>9</sup> Third, the state's local election officials were more resistant to the project than initially assumed. County clerks expressed many concerns to GAB staff when agency personnel introduced the initiative at an association meeting on June 24, 2008. The clerks were particularly worried about new mandates being implemented just before a presidential election.

Because of these factors, development of, training for, and deployment of the new system were all delayed until early 2009.

### **Benefits of a Delayed Timeline**

The delay produced several unexpected benefits. Clerks were hesitant to take on additional responsibilities, particularly just before a presidential election. Because of the delay the WEDCS was implemented in the less demanding February 17, 2009 and April 7, 2009 elections. This gave clerks time to understand what was expected of them, and an opportunity to invest more fully in the new application during a more relaxed work season.

The delay also made clear that the GAB was actually introducing not one but two innovations. The first was the revision of the EB-190 form, the document through which municipal clerks report election statistics. The second was the transition from that paper form to a web-based platform. For many clerks, complying with the updated form was more challenging than shifting to the new technology. Delayed development of the WEDCS permitted clerks to become familiar with

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<sup>9</sup> See the Personnel and Project Management section below for more detail.

the new data requirements before learning how to use the electronic application. By focusing first on upgrades to the paper form, GAB personnel were able to make a number of improvements, including a helpful guide to each question on the form.

An extended timeline also permitted the evaluation team to augment their work with additional tasks. In particular, members of the evaluation team collaborated with the GAB Director and General Counsel to secure a grant to study early voting and Election Day registration by adding items to the clerk survey and conducting separate data analysis. The results of this study will aid the GAB as it evaluates the desirability of various early voting proposals for the state.

Finally, clerk cooperation with the research was likely greater in April and May of 2009 than it would have been in November and December of 2008. Clerks' busiest times are the weeks immediately preceding and following presidential elections. Following the November 2008 elections, clerks remained occupied with collecting data, completing paperwork, and tackling other tasks that were displaced by election responsibilities.

## **Personnel and Project Management**

As outlined in the GAB's proposal, the project made extensive use of existing agency staff members who would be partially supported by the grant. Using existing personnel took advantage of the staff expertise and their relationships with clerks. The grant proposal enabled this arrangement by providing support for partial time to be devoted to the project – between five and fifteen hours per week –

from many GAB personnel. A senior GAB staff member left the agency in August 2008, but other continuing personnel helped to make the project a success.

Regarding new staff within the GAB, the proposal called for the hiring of a full-time Project Manager who would coordinate and monitor all schedules and activities. The Project Manager would be responsible, under the direction of the Project Director, for developing and implementing the project. The Project Manager would organize and manage project staff, assign tasks, obtain necessary resources, and move the initiative toward its final deliverables. The grant also called for the immediate hiring of three other positions: Training Coordinator, Financial Specialist, and Administrative Assistant.

Hiring these staff members proved to be problematic; the positions were filled later than planned or not at all. The delays in the development of the WEDCS were related to the failure to hire new personnel. Although the GAB was actively developing the project from the day the state was awarded the grant, it quickly fell behind schedule. For example, pre-testing of the system took place in early February 2009 rather than August 2008 as proposed.

The problems in hiring staff were in part due to state government human resources procedures, which were not conducive to working with the ambitious timeline in the GAB proposal. The GAB first requested position authority from the state's Department of Administration Budget Office and Bureau of Personnel for four new positions on May 30, 2008. These DOA agencies required additional information and acted more slowly than the data

collection project team desired. According to the Project Director, the DOA Budget Analyst took approximately six weeks to respond to the initial request. The Analyst requested additional information from the GAB including position descriptions. After the GAB provided this additional information, the positions were approved approximately two weeks later.

The GAB hired two of those positions – Accountant and Offices Operations Associate – effective October 2008, approximately eight weeks after gaining approval from DOA. A new position, Assistant Project Manager, was filled in December 2008. A Project Manager was hired in January 2009. That individual remained in the position only a few weeks and was not replaced.

The Project Director had many duties. In addition to his major responsibility as head of the Elections Division, he attempted to manage the day-to-day developments in the WEDCS project. Lines of authority were sometimes unclear as the Project Director and Assistant Project Manager often shared responsibilities. For example, the Assistant Project Manager occasionally presided over project team meetings. Failure to delegate duties to a Project Manager clearly deterred the project's progress.

When the grant was awarded, the full project team agreed to meet twice each month to make decisions, share information, and monitor progress. Throughout the fall of 2008, the Project Director cancelled most of these meetings, often without explanation. Personnel for the project were also distracted by other pressing yet unanticipated demands on their time. For example, the GAB had to

respond to a lawsuit brought against it by the state's Attorney General in September 2008 in which he asserted that the agency was not properly implementing background checks required by the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) to verify new voter registrations. Although the complaint was eventually dropped, responding to the suit took significant amounts of GAB staff time.

Three subcontracted computer project positions – two programmers and an analyst – were budgeted in the proposal but not filled. Instead, as we discuss below, technology development was contracted to the Wisconsin Department of Administration's Division of Enterprise Technology (DET).

The proposal utilized several external partners. The grant proposal noted that the agency had recent experience with outside technical assistance, provided by Accenture for the development of the \$24 million SVRS and Deloitte Consulting for managing the SVRS project.<sup>10</sup> The University of Wisconsin-Extension's Division of Continuing Education, Outreach, and E-Learning (CEOEL) was contracted to develop the training curriculum and technology. Faculty members in the Department of Political Science and the La Follette School of Public Affairs at the University of Wisconsin-Madison were asked to provide an evaluation of the WEDCS. DET would oversee development of the information technology aspects of the project, as the

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<sup>10</sup> It should be noted that the State Election Board's contractual relationship with Accenture was criticized by some and the agreement was terminated prematurely. See Heufner et al. (2007) for an overview. Several other states developing voter registration databases also terminated their Accenture contracts.

agency already provides infrastructure support for SVRS.

### **The GAB-190 Form**

Until 2008 the EB-190 form – the Election Voting and Registration Statistics Report – was the primary vehicle used by clerks to provide election data to state elections officials. State law required municipal clerks to deliver completed forms to their county clerks within 30 days following an election. County clerks would then deliver copies of those forms to the State Elections Board (now the GAB). Compliance with this procedure was generally uneven in previous elections and not all municipalities provided the data.

To fulfill grant promises and comply with changes made to the EAC's Election Day Survey, the GAB revised the form (relabelled the GAB-190) in preparation for the November 2008 federal elections. The new form required clerks to answer survey questions related to the Uniformed and Overseas Citizen Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA), Federal Write-In Absentee Ballots (FWAB), and traditional absentee ballots. In addition, clerks were required to provide data by reporting unit, rather than by municipality, for some data elements. The purpose of these changes was to obtain better data about election administration as required by the EAC grant conditions.

The EB-190 form used in the 2006 general elections asked clerks for just 11 pieces of data. These included the number of voters using an absentee ballot and the number of provisional ballots issued. The revised GAB-190 form requested 25 data elements, as well as additional information about voting

equipment and ballot counting processes. To meet the requirements of the grant, the most dramatic changes related to absentee, military, and overseas electors. These topics alone comprised 16 questions.<sup>11</sup> A benefit of these revisions is that the GAB produced a helpful guide that provided clear instruction on how each question was to be answered. That innovation was genuinely appreciated by clerks. Nevertheless, our interviews with clerks found many of them displeased by repeated revisions to the form, especially those introduced just before the demanding 2008 presidential election.

Through the grant, clerks were offered a \$100 incentive per reporting unit for each November 2008 GAB-190 form returned to the GAB. The money could not be kept by the individual clerk, but could be spent on legitimate election-related activities. GAB personnel made numerous contacts with unresponsive clerks and assisted many of them in completing the forms. These two actions resulted in nearly 100% compliance. To our knowledge, such incentives will not be offered in the future. It is unclear whether return rates will remain high without financial incentives.

In the early part of the grant period, GAB staff members focused on the new internet technology, training, and usability rather than the burdens placed on clerks to provide additional data. In retrospect, the transition to a new technology was less difficult than the call for additional data collection. Clerks complained that they were not given adequate notice when the new GAB-190 form was introduced. They

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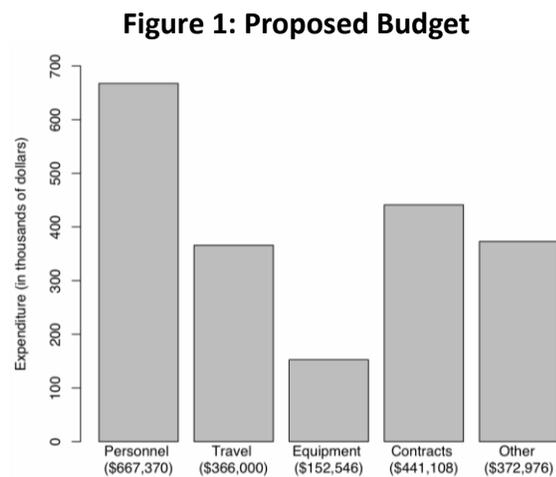
<sup>11</sup> A further revision for the February 17, 2009 election increased this number again.

also felt unprepared to collect some of the data. Submitting data for each reporting unit multiplied the number of forms, particularly for clerks from larger municipalities. In contrast, the shift to a web based application for collecting these same data proved less difficult.

## Budget

At the time of this report, approximately \$1,700,000 of the \$2,000,000 grant has been spent.<sup>12</sup> The remaining funds are targeted largely to initiatives that are in development with DET and CEOEL.

The EAC's grant competition required that a proposal's budget equal exactly \$2,000,000. That amount was divided into several expense categories. As Figure 1 shows, the largest budget categories were GAB personnel (\$667,370) and contracts to partners (\$441,108).



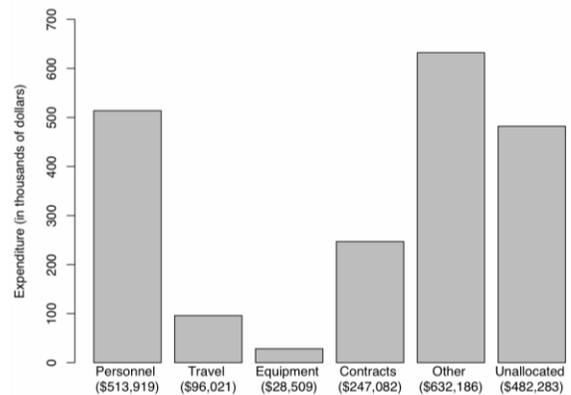
Spending commitments are displayed in Figure 2. It should be noted that the figure tracks committed spending through June 30, 2009 on a cash basis for a total of

<sup>12</sup> WEDCS grant budget summary through October 1, 2009.

\$1,543,152, or about three-fourths of the overall award.<sup>13</sup> Because the EAC granted the GAB a one-year extension, Wisconsin has until June 30, 2010 to spend the remaining funds.

The actual spending patterns deviated from the proposed amounts, primarily because cost reductions in some areas permitted additional activities in others. In particular, because hiring was delayed or did not occur, staffing expenses were significantly less than expected. Travel costs were also much lower than anticipated.

**Figure 2: Committed Expenditures through June 30, 2009**



Because of the project delays, grant partners at the DET and UW-Madison were required to extend their initial timelines and invited to take on additional responsibilities. As the primary technology partner, DET took on a larger role in the development of the WEDCS than initially anticipated. DET became the primary developers of the WEDCS technology and agreed to develop additional technologies, such as an application to make the post-election canvass process electronic. This

<sup>13</sup> When computed on an accrual basis, total spending through June 30, 2009 is slightly higher at \$1,566,868.

work is ongoing. The UW-Madison evaluation team was required to extend its monitoring and to delay the production of its final report by several months, largely because of the delays in completing the WEDCS and administering the clerk survey.<sup>14</sup>

At the same that these partners were expanding their roles, CEOEL's role was reduced. Development of training materials was delayed. Training was conducted in-person by GAB staff without CEOEL participation, although this did not result in cost savings.

Travel expenses were much less than budgeted. The proposal allowed for travel by both continuing and new GAB staff to clerk trainings, but only the Training Coordinator was a regular participant in these events. The budget also provided travel funds for every clerk and deputy clerk to attend trainings, but less than half of clerks attended in-person trainings.

Finally, the budget included incentives to municipalities for every reporting unit for which they completed a GAB-190 form after the November 2008 elections. Incentive payments were offered to all clerks for compliance with the evaluation survey. Provider clerks were also offered incentives for entry of April 2009 election data into WEDCS. They payments comprise much of the "other" category in both budget figures.

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<sup>14</sup> In addition, the group was asked to consider taking on other tasks such as an analysis of polling place incident logs.

## **The Wisconsin Election Data Collection System (WEDCS)**

The GAB developed what became the WEDCS in cooperation with DET. The primary goal of the system is to facilitate the collection, reporting, and management of election data. The WEDCS consists of a secure web-based data entry page that enables municipal and county clerks to submit election data for each reporting unit; a database that stores these data; and applications that facilitate data querying and reporting.

As noted above, the GAB's proposal called for developing the system in house using personnel funded by the grant. The software company Oracle contacted the GAB soon after the grants were announced, offering a product that would fulfill the data collection tasks promised in the grant proposal. This was an unsolicited offer. An initial presentation by Oracle representatives on June 30, 2008, was not well received because it was focused more on technology than the specific needs of Wisconsin clerks and the GAB. Oracle was provided with feedback and after further review in early September by GAB staff, the project team decided to purchase Oracle products as the platform on which the WEDCS would be built.

Upon further consultation between GAB and DET staff personnel, the GAB project team was persuaded that having DET develop the application would be preferable. DET was already experienced with the SVRS infrastructure and could use existing Microsoft SQL technologies rather

than the less prevalent Oracle platform.<sup>15</sup> DET took ownership of the Oracle product and reimbursed GAB for the \$128,100 expense.

WEDCS was designed to mimic the paper-based data collection process that it replaced. This was a wise decision in our view because it helped smooth clerks' transition to the new technology. As explained above, prior to the implementation of the WEDCS, the GAB collected most of its voting and registration statistics through the paper GAB-190 form. Clerks submitted the form by fax or mail and GAB staff manually entered the data into a database. WEDCS replaced that paper-based process with an electronic version of the GAB-190 that clerks fill out online. The data that clerks submit online is automatically entered in the database; consequently, data entry is in the hands of clerks instead of GAB staff.

The WEDCS takes advantage of the structure of the SVRS to provide a secure data entry and submission process. The SVRS requires that clerks log into a secure server to access voter registration data, and clerks must receive training and certification from the GAB before they are given a username and password to access the system. The GAB and DET utilized this connection by requiring that clerks log into the same web interface to access the WEDCS. Moreover, the GAB requires that clerks be trained before they are given a link to the WEDCS page.

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<sup>15</sup> Structured Query Language (SQL) is a popular computing language designed for managing relational databases.

Municipal clerks, and the county clerks who provide data entry services to municipalities, enter the voting and registration data by reporting unit and therefore must fill out one form for each reporting unit in their jurisdictions. Clerks need not enter all of their data in one sitting, and data are not submitted to the GAB until a clerk elects to submit it. That is, clerks may "save" data from multiple sessions and "submit" the completed reports to the GAB. The GAB and county clerks can use the system to track the reporting units for which complete data have been submitted.

Once submitted, the data from the online GAB-190 form enter the WEDCS's Management Information System (MIS). This system consists of the database in which the GAB-190 data are stored, the separate SVRS database, applications that permit the cross-validation of SVRS and GAB-190 data, and applications for querying and reporting of these data. The WEDCS was developed primarily to facilitate the reporting of data for the EAC's Election Day Survey (EDS), but the WEDCS's MIS was designed to be flexible so that the data may be used in a wide range of applications for data analysis and reporting. The use of XML (Extensible Markup Language) makes the data especially versatile. The queryable nature of the database allows users to generate a wide variety of reports, the potential of which have yet to be realized.

The grant proposal identified four key features of the system: security, manual data entry, a data export function, and a data import function. The first two of these – password-protected security and manual data entry – are key elements of the operational system. The third feature has

also been realized as DET exported data from the November 2008 election into an Excel-formatted spreadsheet. To our knowledge, only the data import function has not been implemented. The main innovation of the system – simplicity – was fully realized.

### **Unanticipated Benefits of the WEDCS Project**

Our evaluation effort produced two unexpected benefits. The first was the development of an accurate listing of clerk contact information for the survey, which the evaluation team shared with the GAB so that the agency could update and expand its own database. Clerk positions turn over frequently, making it difficult to maintain current contact information for each county and municipality. Because of the survey effort – which required corresponding with clerks and following up on undeliverable mailings – that database has been thoroughly vetted. As a result, the GAB ends the project with a comprehensive database of clerk contact information.

Second, the survey data provided the GAB with valuable data on such things as clerks' levels of formal education, training, years of experience, methods of selection, incomes, and competing obligations.<sup>16</sup> Because of Wisconsin's emphasis on local election administration, these clerks most directly serve the state's voters and are the GAB's primary constituents. This new information should allow the GAB to be more responsive to clerks' needs in future trainings, communications, and policy developments.

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<sup>16</sup> See Appendix C for more information.

The project also helped to refine DET's business practices. Based on its positive experience with the GAB, the DET is modifying its approach to contracts by focusing more on the customer and giving developers additional control of products.

### **Preexisting Challenges for the WEDCS**

As we document below, the clerk survey revealed that there was relatively high awareness of the WEDCS. While early use was not widespread, clerks who had undergone training and used the online system were highly satisfied with both. Clerks who used both the GAB-190 paper forms and the new WEDCS application rated both highly but preferred the WEDCS. In short, the new application has been well received among early adopters. At the same time, there remain clerks who need to be convinced of the benefits of the online system and provided with resources to access it.

Two important contextual factors emerged from the clerk survey and interviews. The first is that local election officials perceive constant change and significant growth in the administrative burdens of their position since the passage of HAVA in 2002. They especially dislike changes that alter their responsibilities from one election to the next. Changes brought on by the data collection grant were initially viewed in the same negative light as SVRS, new voting equipment, and other mandates originating at the federal level. This is a challenge faced by election officials all over the country.

The second factor is more specific to Wisconsin. The highly decentralized nature of election administration in Wisconsin means that elections are actually conducted by clerks working with limited resources and balancing competing demands on their attention. Indeed, even communication and training are challenges, particularly when many clerks do not have email accounts and most do not work full time in their clerk capacities. Because most clerks have responsibilities extending well beyond election administration, inducing compliance with new procedures in Wisconsin will always be a challenge as long as elections continue to be run at the municipal level.

The interaction of these two factors – a growing administrative burden and limited administrative capacity – frames how clerks interpret any changes proposed by the GAB. Innovations such as the WEDCS are perceived as adding onto a workload that has already increased significantly since 2002. Part-time clerks, who make up 62% of our sample are especially likely to feel stretched beyond capacity, struggling to balance other administrative duties within an abbreviated work-week.

While the GAB tries to help clerks with their election duties, the introduction of any new practice runs the risk of being lost amid the demands of clerks' other duties. The comments of one clerk illustrate this point: "As a part-time municipal clerk, I have many more things to do and be responsible for than just elections. The time spent on trying to absorb all the election information received by mail, e-mail, training, etc. is overwhelming and frustrating. All the forms that need to be filled out get to be too many - especially when they change the

form every few days or weeks." The GAB needs to be sensitive to this context in considering how it interacts with clerks, and how it implements new changes. This problem is more acute when changes are introduced in close proximity to an upcoming election.

### **Clerk Familiarity with the WEDCS**

The first survey question asked clerks whether they "were aware of the GAB's new Wisconsin Election Data Collection (WEDC) application."<sup>17</sup> More than four out of five clerks (82%) report being aware of the system. Knowledge of the new system depended on the amount of time individuals spent working on elections. Most (86%) of those who had not heard of the new system were part-time clerks. Reliers, who made up 76% of our survey, were also less likely to have heard about the training. Less than 5% of self-providers had not heard about the new system, compared to 24% of reliers.

We were surprised to learn that so many clerks were unaware of the WEDCS. Although one might not expect specific knowledge about its purpose and use, basic awareness should have been almost universal. The system was introduced through months of announcements and promotion at clerk meetings, in memorandums, in the GAB's monthly "Election Update" newsletter, as well as news coverage. Some of the lack of awareness can be attributed to due to the

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<sup>17</sup> In its early development the system was referred to as both the WEDC and the WEDCS. In this report we use the WEDCS acronym even through the survey referred to it as the "WEDC system" or "WEDC application."

fact that some clerks still do not have regular internet access, but it does not fully explain the incomplete penetration of the GAB’s message. When one out of five clerks remains unfamiliar with the new product after months of introduction, full adoption of the WEDCS system is unlikely to happen quickly. And whereas awareness is merely informational, adoption requires more purposive action by the clerk. It is possible that earlier and more deliberate promotion of the project would have improved clerk familiarity with WEDCS.

We cannot overstate the degree to which clerks are distracted from election administration by other duties, both in their capacities as clerks and in other realms of their professional and personal lives. The survey asked clerks to estimate “what percentage of the overall time you spend on clerk duties is for election administration.” The median response was 25%. Not only does the typical clerk spend three-fourths of her time on non-election duties, but most are only part-time clerks in the first place. Thirty percent are also the treasurers for their municipalities. More than half hold another job beyond their clerk (and perhaps treasurer) positions. Indeed, the part-time nature of the clerk job translates into low pay. Almost half of the respondents earn less than \$10,000 per year for their clerk responsibilities.

### **Prevalence of WEDCS Training**

A prerequisite to using the WEDCS is training. The GAB offered county and municipal clerk training both in person and online. In early 2009, in-person trainings were held in the locations and dates listed in Figure 3. Training opportunities were held at a Wisconsin County Clerks

Association (WCCA) meeting, district meetings of the Wisconsin Municipal Clerks Association (WMCA), individual county meetings, and other general sessions.

**Figure 3: Training Dates and Locations**

March 3	WCCA (Madison)
March 13	WMCA District 6 (Campbellsport)
March 16	Waukesha County (Waukesha)
March 19	Open Registration (Stevens Point)
March 20	WMCA District 8 (Woodruff)
March 23	Green Lake County (Green Lake)
March 24	Dodge County (Juneau)
March 24	Open Registration (Madison)
March 25	Dodge County (Juneau)
March 25	Open Registration (West Allis)
March 26	WMCA District 2 (Woodville)
March 27	WMCA District 1 (Spooner)
March 31	Open Registration (Stevens Point)
April 1	Marathon County (Wausau)
April 14	Brown County (Green Bay)
April 15	Port Washington
April 15	Open Registration (Kenosha)
April 17	WMCA District 3 (Tomah)

These training opportunities were communicated to clerks in mailings and on the GAB web site. Clerks’ travel expenses were also subsidized. This deviates from the grant proposal, which specifies that the GAB would train county clerks who in turn would offer training to their municipal clerks online at central locations. The online training modules were first available on March 30, 2009, just before the April 7, 2009 election in which clerks were expected to use the system. As a result, GAB staff members travelled to various locations around the state to conduct large-scale in-person trainings with municipal clerks. A smaller number of clerks used the online training modules.

Just over half of clerks (53%) reported that they had participated in training for the

new system. However, of those who did not receive training, the vast majority (84%) indicated that they would be willing to do so in the future.<sup>18</sup> Together, these numbers suggest a general willingness among clerks to undertake the training required.<sup>19</sup> The challenge for GAB staff is to communicate these training opportunities and offer them at convenient times and places. This effort must be continuous because clerks turn over at a fairly high rate.

As noted in the previous section, four out of five clerks were aware of the WEDCS; and half of those who were aware went through training. In other words, about 800 of the state’s municipal clerks have been trained (about 44%). This falls far below the proposal’s goal of universal training. It should be noted, however, that the majority of self-provider clerks were trained.

The WEDCS training was offered both in person, utilized by 62% of respondents who took the training, and via the internet, used by 38%. The relative importance of the in-person training reflects the limited access to high-speed internet connections in some rural communities, and the preference of some clerks for in-person interaction. Of those who received the training in-person 91% received it from GAB staff, while the rest received it from their county clerks.

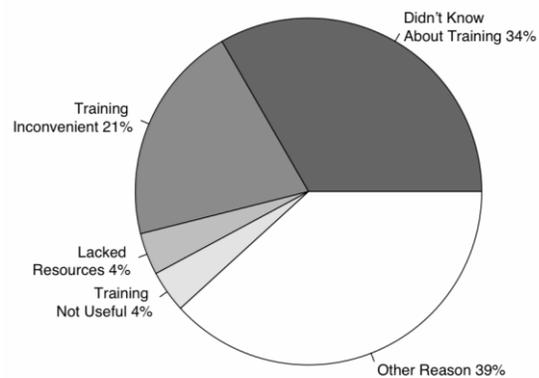
Clerks who did not participate in training were asked why, and offered four possible reasons. Clerks were allowed to check

<sup>18</sup> It is possible that clerks who did not respond to the survey would be less willing to undertake training.

<sup>19</sup> The surveys were returned by mid-May 2009. More clerks may have received training after returning the survey.

multiple options as well as offer other reasons, thus permitting the totals to exceed 100%. As Figure 4 shows, the most common reason (just over one-third) was that clerks did not know that the training was being offered. The timing and location of the training was an issue for about a fifth of respondents. Of those who took the training, 96% reported that the timing and location was convenient, and this level of satisfaction does not decline even if we exclude those who took the training online.

**Figure 4: Why Clerks Were Not Trained**



The distance to training sessions could be significant, particularly in rural areas, something unavoidable in a state where so many clerks are located in remote communities. Because many clerks held multiple jobs and have limited time to devote to election-related duties, they were understandably hesitant to undertake training. Most clerks who lacked training (86%) were reliers who were accustomed to having county clerks report their data. While only 40% of reliers took the training, 77% of self-providers did.

A clerk’s attitude toward technology was strongly related to whether or not they took the training. The vast majority of

clerks (83%) reported using a computer at home, and a similar percentage (85%) saw computers as a generally beneficial force that solve more problems than they create. Clerks who had critical views of computers were significantly less likely to have taken the WEDCS training: while 55% of clerks with a positive view of computers took the training and used WEDCS only 39% of those with critical views of computers had used the WEDCS. In time, this resistance may weaken as broadband access continues to cover more of the state and turnover among clerks produces a more technology-friendly population.<sup>20</sup>

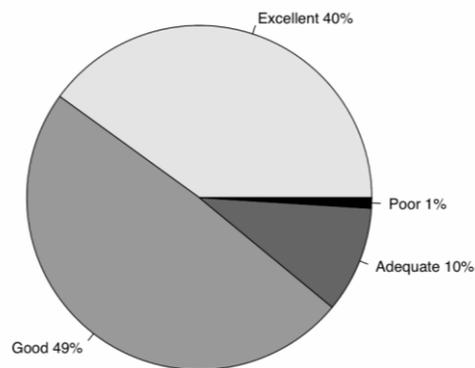
### Perceived Quality of Training

Respondents who took the training were satisfied with its quality. As shown in Figure 5, when asked to rate the quality of the training, the average response was between excellent and good, with 89% of responses falling in these two categories. Interviews and open-ended responses from the survey tended to reinforce the positive views on the quality of the training. “I had the training for the WEDC in person and found it very informative,” said one clerk. Another observed that “Some of it was basic, but I think it’s good to go over it. I’m

<sup>20</sup> A recent report from the Federal Communications Commission states that as of December 31, 2007, 81% of residential users in Wisconsin have high-speed internet access via DSL and 96% have access via cable modems (“High-Speed Services for Internet Access: Status as of December 31, 2007”). These figures do not include internet access via satellite. Because clerks overrepresent rural communities, they disproportionately come from municipalities where high speed internet access is not available. The typical clerk represents a municipality with a population of 3,044 whereas the average Wisconsinite resides in a municipality of 88,538 people.

a firm believer in not always assuming that people just understand something. I think it was helpful.”

**Figure 5: Rating Overall Training Quality**



One cannot know if the remaining clerks will be as positive when they undergo training, but the main message for now is that clerks exposed to training were pleased with its quality.

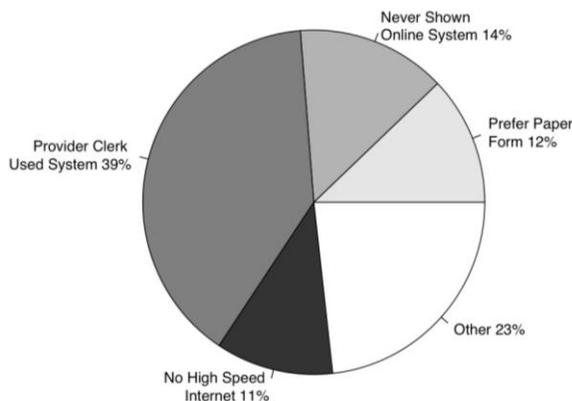
### Adoption of the WEDCS

Only 26% of the respondents reported using WEDCS in the April 2009 election. This number might underestimate the degree of adoption because clerks could have used the system after completing our survey or could have delegated the task to staff. Yet, even with those caveats, usage levels are well below the universal adoption among municipal clerks envisioned in the grant proposal. There are reasons to believe that usage rates will increase over time as awareness, acceptance, and training become more widespread. When we asked those who had not used the WEDCS why they had not done so, a large number of those who selected the “some other reason” option stated that they planned to

use it in the near future.<sup>21</sup> The failure to do so thus was often because officials said they simply did not have time to do so thus far, or had not yet taken the training.

Clerks gave a variety of reasons for not using WEDCS, as displayed in Figure 6. Of most concern is that some did not use the new system because they stated that they preferred the old one (12%). For others, the problems were more practical than philosophical. A lack of high-speed internet was a concern for 11% of respondents. This is reflected in the comments of one official: “Although I have Internet access at home, it is a slow connection because dial-up is the only option I have available at this time. My town hall does not have Internet access, nor does it have a telephone. This would make it very difficult on election night to submit the form over the Internet.” Another 14% indicated they did not use it because they had not been introduced to the WEDCS.

**Figure 6: Reasons for Not Using WEDCS**



Adoption patterns roughly correspond to existing arrangements between provider

<sup>21</sup> A smaller number of clerks explained that someone else in their office had entered the data.

and relier clerks, as defined by the usage of SVRS. Most reliers (86%) have not used WEDCS. In contrast, the majority of self-providers (63%) have used the new system.

Some reliers expressed willingness to becoming self-providers in the future, at least in terms of using WEDCS. Such comments raise the question of whether the WEDCS will encourage some reliers to become self-providers. That 14% of reliers were using the system is encouraging; it means that a significant portion of those who have relied on county clerks to deal with the SVRS may use the WEDCS system on their own. Some municipal clerks who found SVRS intimidating were pleasantly surprised by the ease of using WEDCS. Comments suggest that many more reliers may have made this switch since the survey was administered. One indication of this intent is that, as noted above, 40% of reliers have taken the training for the WEDCS.

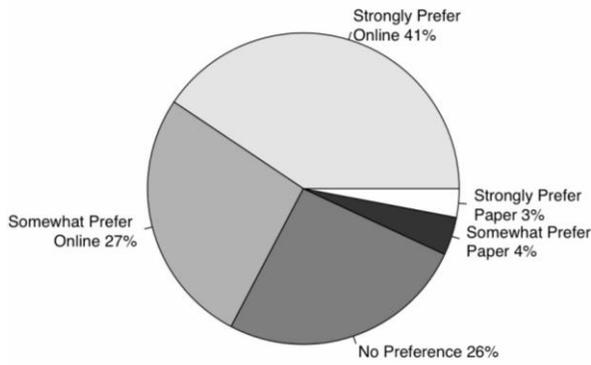
Overall then, we expect that WEDCS use by municipal clerks will increase, but not to the point of universal adoption. Use is likely to increase in the near future, as more clerks become aware of the WEDCS, take the training, experiment with becoming a self-provider, and as high-speed internet penetration increases across Wisconsin.

### Comparing the GAB-190 and WEDCS

The survey asked respondents to compare the traditional GAB-190 paper-based reporting system with the new WEDCS online reporting application. The results displayed in Figure 7 suggest that for those who used both systems, there was a clear preference for the WEDCS. Almost 68% either strongly or somewhat preferred the

WEDCS while only 7% preferred the old system.

**Figure 7: Preferences for GAB-190 Form or WEDCS**

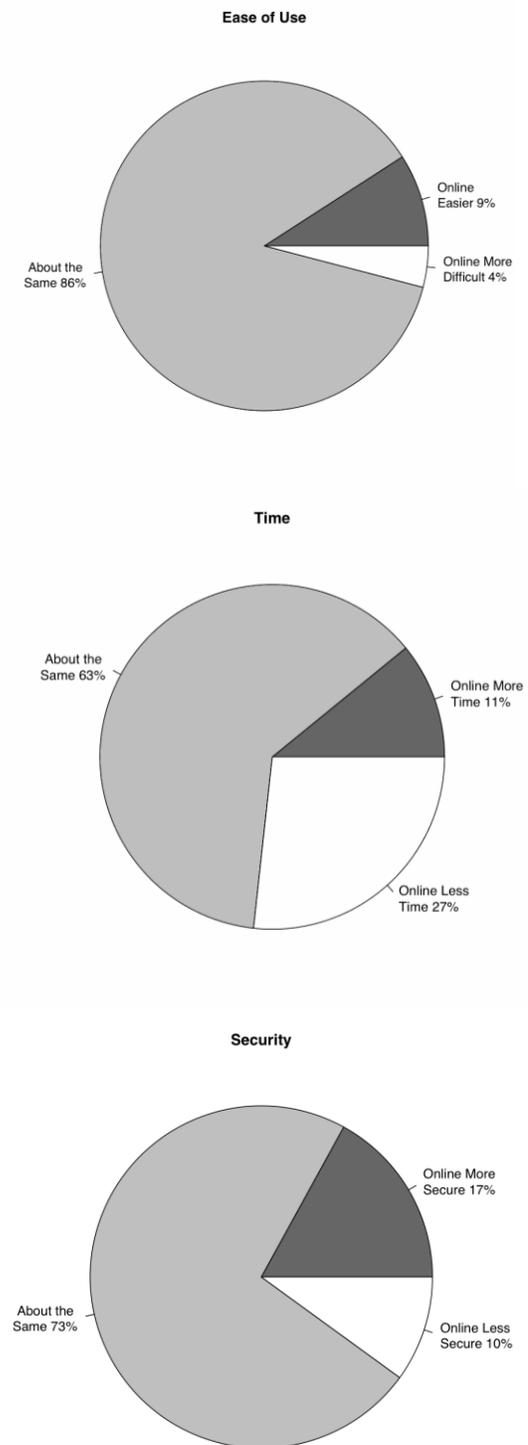


The overwhelming majority (90%) of those who had used the WEDCS believed that the GAB should continue to use this application for future elections. “I think any time we can do it online that's the way to go. I like that much better,” said one clerk, while another noted that “We’d rather submit it online. It’s much easier for us because when we’re finished the county clerk can just go in and look at them. . .So that’s a nice feature. A fillable form online is always easier I think.”

Ease of Use

While most respondents did not object to the old GAB-190 system, the WEDCS received higher marks in almost every respect (though at times the differences were small). Most respondents were content with the traditional paper-based GAB-190 form. Over 92% rated the GAB-190 as “very” or “somewhat” easy to use. By comparison, 96% said that they found the WEDCS “very” or “somewhat” easy to use.

**Figure 8: Comparing GAB-190 and WEDCS on Specific Attributes**



When we directly asked users of both systems which one was easier to use, the vast majority (86%) did not see any difference between the two systems, as shown in Figure 8. Nine percent saw the online system as easier, while four percent saw the old system as easier to use. In short, among those who used the WEDCS, the distinction between paper and electronic formats is not important. The result, then, shows that clerks found the WEDCS easier to use than the GAB-190, but not by much; both systems were widely viewed as user-friendly.

### Time Commitment

Another basis to examine preferences between the two systems is the perceived burden the new system creates. This was a concern raised by clerks as soon as the GAB was awarded the grant. As it happened, using WEDCS resulted in unexpected efficiencies. While most users (63%) did not see a major difference in the time commitment involved, 27% of respondents felt that the new system took less time. Moving from the GAB-190 to WEDCS will entail some transition costs, as clerks devote the time necessary to learn the new system. But greater familiarity and more practice with the WEDCS will most likely reduce the time required to use the system in the coming years. This was reflected in many of the clerks' comments. As one explained, "Gathering the information on this new form for the first time was a little more time consuming. However now that I know how to obtain the required information, filling out online is easy. Another clerk predicted that "Continued use of the online WEDC program will improve the comfort level with it. This is the first time I used it and it took more time

than I anticipate it taking in the future. I will be more prepared going into an election for answering the questions on the form."

### Security

Another indication of the quality of the new system is the perceived security of the data. Widespread criticism of the security of electronic voting may have created a concern that any computer-based system increases the vulnerability of election systems and data. While most respondents saw little difference between the old or new systems, a plurality of clerks viewed the WEDCS as being more secure than the GAB-190 paper system.

### Special Features

Many adopters used the printing options available in WEDCS to produce paper copies of reports. Two-thirds of these clerks used the printing feature. Among those who did not print, many found the original 190 form to be an adequate paper record. Others either did not see the need for a physical copy or did not know that printing directly from WEDCS was possible. The majority of WEDCS users (63%) reported being highly satisfied with the print feature and only a small minority (10%) reported discontent. Some of this discontent stems from a bug in the printing feature that has since been remedied by DET and GAB staff. Overall, the findings suggest that the printing option was popular and worked well for most of those using the WEDCS.

### Administrative Burden

Technology is not the only hindrance to election data collection. The revised GAB-

190 form, on which the WEDCS is modeled, asked for some additional information and required reporting by reporting unit rather than by municipality. How clerks responded to this mandate depended in part on the sizes of their communities. As one clerk summarizes, “It takes significantly longer to report the [new] GAB-190’s because over 20 reports now need to be submitted instead of 1 for the municipality.” A clerk from a small municipality commented that, “I believe the GAB-190 is tedious. . . I can’t imagine how long it must take those municipalities with a large number of reporting units.”

At the same time, other clerks were pleased with this new arrangement. As one clerk reported, “It went so fast. I think it only took about a minute to do every [reporting unit] survey. So there’s nothing I can see they could do any better.” Likewise, a county clerk stated, “I entered the GAB-190 forms for 27 Reliers, and found the process to be very ‘user friendly.’ The [municipal] clerks had done all the work and filled out a paper form, then I just did the data entry.” For some clerks with responsibility for multiple reporting units, entering data for each was not difficult. The burden was often greatest for mid-size municipalities, where reporting demands increased significantly but clerks lack the staff and other resources of clerks in large cities.

Finally, in assessing the support for the new system, it is important to note that because we could not ask non-users of the WEDCS to compare the two approaches, the survey responses reflect the views of the early adopters of the WEDCS. The responses do not reflect the views of all clerks. As a result, the responses we received comparing the two systems may be

positively biased, because those who selected to use the new system may have had a positive view of it. It is possible, therefore, that we have underestimated opposition among non-users of the WEDCS. Responses to open-ended questions featured some clerks who expressed misgivings about the new technology and 12% of clerks said they had not used the new system because they preferred the familiar paper form. As one clerk put, “I feel more confident using paper forms.”

### **November 2008 Election Data**

The grant program required states to develop new processes for collecting precinct-level data from the November 2008 federal election. States were required to submit these data to the EAC by March 2009. As noted above, the requirement was to report the number of:

- registered voters;
- active and inactive registered voters;
- persons who voted;
- provisional ballots cast, counted, or rejected;
- votes cast at polling places, by absentee, at early voting centers, provisionally, or by other means; and
- votes cast for each candidate including write-ins and overvotes for each federal office.<sup>22</sup>

The last of these items was not included on the Election Day Survey, leaving five categories and 13 distinct pieces of data to collect at the precinct level (or, in Wisconsin, at the “reporting unit” level).

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<sup>22</sup> Federal offices on the ballot in Wisconsin included President/Vice-President and eight members of the House of Representatives.

Because the software was not ready, clerks did not use the WEDCS to enter data from the November 2008 federal election. Instead, they provided the data using the modified GAB-190 forms and were offered financial incentives for doing so. Following the 30-day deadline for returning these forms after the election, GAB staff devoted significant effort to contact each non-responsive clerk by phone, email, and fax to gather all of the forms. Many completed forms were incorrect or were the old version of the GAB-190. The GAB's sustained efforts to get data from clerks resulted in a compliance rate of essentially 100%, for the first time ever. We regard this as a success. Once collected, the GAB-190 forms submitted by clerks were manually entered into the system in a matter of days. After correcting obvious errors and insuring proper formatting, the data were successfully submitted to the EAC on March 27, 2009, thus meeting a critical milestone.<sup>23</sup>

The UW-Madison evaluation team requested and received a “flat file” version of the dataset. This version differs from the more cumbersome version submitted to the EAC in that unnecessary, repetitive labels are removed and each row in the database corresponds to one of the 3,585 reporting

units.<sup>24</sup> The data were provided in an Excel-ready format as required by the EAC.

The evaluation team generated descriptive statistics to determine whether the data met the grant requirements. The GAB provided 11 of the 13 precinct-level variables, because two data elements were not collected. Wisconsin does not distinguish between “active” and “inactive” registrants, thus collapsing those two items (A3a and A3b) into one. Second, the early voting count was not provided because Wisconsin did not have early voting centers in the 2008 general election (F1e).<sup>25</sup> The GAB could have reported a value of zero in that column for every reporting unit.

**Figure 9: Completeness of Required Data**

A1	Total Registrants	100%
A3a	Active Registrants	99.8%
A3b	Inactive Registrants	NA
E1a	Provisional Ballots Submitted	100%
E2a	Provisional Ballots Counted	100%
E2c	Provisional Ballots Rejected	100%
F1a	Total Voters Participating	100%
F1b	Voted at Election Day Polling Place	99.6%
F1c	UOCAVA and FWAB Voters	100%
F1f	Voted Using Provisional Ballot	100%
F1e	Voted at Early Vote Center	NA

As Figure 9 shows, completeness reaches 100% for all but two of the reported items. Those two items – which report active registrants and votes cast at Election Day polling places – are only missing 8 and 13 reporting units. We do not regard these missing values as material, as most of these municipalities are reported to have one or two eligible voters. In our assessment, the

<sup>23</sup> Analysis of these data and those from other states may be found in the EAC's *2008 Election Data Collection Grant Program Evaluation Report* submitted to the U.S. Congress on June 30, 2009. Averaging across the indicators, the document reports that Wisconsin submitted either 94% or 100% of the required data, depending on whether the “more stringent” or “less stringent” definition is used. The GAB has challenged the 94% figure and other statistics in the report.

<sup>24</sup> This analysis omits two reporting units where the numbers of registered voters are missing.

<sup>25</sup> Wisconsin voters may cast in-person absentee votes, but this differs from true early voting.

required data were provided. The high level of data provision in such a decentralized environment is one of the project's clear successes.

Although the completion level is high, there are questions about the validity of the data. The data are generally sound, but a complete verification will require additional investigation.

Consider a prominent example. One section of the Election Day Survey (EDS) asks for the total number of voters participating in the election and then disaggregation of this total into four different means of voting: in person, overseas (UOCAVA), absentee, and provisional. Logically these individual components should sum to the total, but they seldom do. In almost every reporting unit the sum exceeds the reported total. The main cause of these discrepancies is that the number of people who vote in person at a physical polling place (F1b) is frequently larger than the reported total (F1a). The latter sums to 2,996,869, nearly matching the official GAB tally of 2,983,417 votes for president reported from the county canvass.<sup>26</sup> However, adding the individual components far exceeds this total. It is possible that clerks and the GAB mistakenly reported the numbers of eligible voters. In further conversations, GAB staff reported that the discrepancy was due at least in part to flaws in the query process. Having identified the likely source of the problem, GAB staff members are taking steps to correct the error.

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<sup>26</sup> These numbers are expected to differ slightly because the number of participating voters is frequently larger than the number of valid votes cast for president.

At the same time, the evaluation team recommends that the WEDCS application include a validation function that prevents clerks from entering unreasonable or faulty data into the system. Several sections of the EDS ask for both totals and the individual components that comprise those totals, and the evaluation team found a number of instances in which these components did not aggregate properly. Constraints could be built into the WEDCS that prohibit clerks from finalizing their reports unless the sums of the components match the totals.

## Conclusion

The GAB made efficient use of EAC grant funds through the development of the WEDCS application for election data collection. By all accounts the system operates smoothly, is simple to use, is easily updated, and will be a valuable element of the state's election administration infrastructure in future elections. Moreover, because the technology is owned by the state, it can be rescaled and adjusted to accommodate changes in election practices. The technology should be attractive to other states with a decentralized administrative design. All things considered, the WEDCS is on a path to success.

The WEDCS was implemented later than promised, with data entry for the November 2008 elections taking place months after the election. To date, the fullest implementation occurred in the April 2009 election, when many county and municipal clerks first shifted from the GAB-190 paper form to the WEDCS. Many municipal clerks remained wedded to the traditional paper-based reporting method

and continue to rely on county clerks to enter the data into the electronic system. It is clear that adoption by municipal clerks will continue to increase but that full adoption at the municipal level, let alone universal training, will be difficult to achieve. In this regard the WEDCS has not met the potential outlined in the grant proposal, but given the decentralized nature of election administration in Wisconsin, such a goal was probably not realistic in the short-run.

Computer and internet technologies are useful tools but also raise barriers, especially due to access and implementation costs. We expect these barriers to recede as more clerks become aware of and open to using WEDCS. Still, it is vital that training proceed continuously, especially as clerks are new clerks take office. The in-person trainings by GAB staff can be supplemented, and eventually replaced, by online training that takes advantage of the modules developed by CEOEL.

One key lesson from the project is that the most serious impediments to improving data collection processes are not technological but rather the more mundane matters of familiarity and experience. Clerks are attached to current GAB-190 procedures because they are predictable and well-known. Making changes in procedures or forms such as the GAB-190 within weeks of an election creates problems. As the GAB knows from listening sessions around the state, clerks dislike changes in election procedures even more acutely when notice is short.

Another lesson is that participation by clerks in the design and adoption of new

procedures and technologies is invaluable. Incorporating clerks into the development of new applications is beneficial because it improves the product and facilitates widespread adoption. The county clerks who provided feedback on the pilot version of the WEDCS generated useful suggestions for improving its usability. These revisions were easy for GAB and DET personnel to implement, eased the transitions for many clerks, and encouraged the clerks to become more invested in the technology. Some of the discontented clerks continue to express concern that the SVRS was developed without their consultation; WEDCS followed a different approach. In contrast to the SVRS experience, the WEDCS project relied on Wisconsin partners in state government and the state university system. This was an appropriate and cost-effective approach that avoids intellectual property limitations if other states wish to adopt parts of the WEDCS model.

The data collection effort from the November 2008 election achieved a high level of completeness, something the evaluation team considers a significant success in a state with extremely decentralized election administration. Most of the individual data elements are valid, but errors in specific entries are frequent. WEDCS should be modified to prevent logical errors wherever possible and clerk training should help clarify what data are to be reported.

A message for agencies like the EAC is that grant opportunities must allow for more budgetary flexibility, more time for development, and more guidance on what is expected. The initial schedule required by the EAC in the grant announcement was

overly ambitious and difficult to meet. Any state required to put together a large-scale proposal with a pre-determined budget in a limited period of time and with minimal guidance will experience some of the unexpected problems faced by the GAB.

Given the recent rollout of the WEDCS, and the fact that many clerks have not used it, the high level of satisfaction among adopters should be regarded as a good start rather than a final outcome. Those who have been slow to embrace the WEDCS are likely to have more negative views of the new system. This might change as more clerks use the WEDCS and come to believe that it is a permanent system that will not vary from election to election. Clerks who feel challenged by the pace of change are likely to be resistant to any additional initiatives, and there is a danger that some view the WEDCS in that context.

Wisconsin's system for administering elections continues to be one of the most decentralized in the United States. In part because of local administration, voters in Wisconsin are more satisfied with elections than are voters in other states.<sup>27</sup> Yet ensuring compliance with and even communication about GAB innovations is challenging in an environment with 1,850 independent municipal clerks of varying backgrounds, resources, and responsibilities. The GAB effectively used EAC funds to develop a technology that accommodates local diversity and strives for greater transparency, efficiency, and consistency in the college of essential election data.

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<sup>27</sup> See the report "Wisconsin Voter Experiences in the November 2008 General Election" presented at the May 5, 2009 GAB meeting.

## **Appendix A: Evaluation Methodology**

The mission of the University of Wisconsin-Madison evaluation team was to judge the success of the GAB's implementation of new election data collection procedures following the November 2008 elections. Drawing on expertise at the state's flagship research university, the evaluation provides an independent assessment of the data collection project. The evaluation team consists of faculty members and doctoral students in the UW-Madison Department of Political Science, with one faculty member from the La Follette School of Public Affairs. Because of Wisconsin's decentralized election system, the evaluation focuses on the experiences of the state's many municipal clerks with the new product. This team brings a great deal of experience with election systems, survey research, and data analysis.

The evaluation team has been active throughout the grant period. Members of the team have participated in all of the grant project meetings that began in July 2008. Members of the team also observed events related to the development, pilot testing, and training for the new WEDCS application. This included a pilot testing and feedback session with a set of county and municipal clerks and training at the Wisconsin County Clerks Association meeting on March 3, 2009. Members of the evaluation team also participated in each of the GAB's grant team meetings, observed clerk trainings, and analyzed the final dataset from the November 2008 election that was submitted to the EAC.

The evaluation pays particular attention to the experiences of clients who are charged with using the new system: the state's municipal and county clerks. The focus is on the quality and uniformity of clerk experiences with the WEDCS using both qualitative and quantitative indicators. The team administered a comprehensive survey of all 1,850 municipal clerks and 72 county clerks and sought personal interviews with 100 select municipal and county clerks.

The survey was administered in two ways. Most clerks received on an online version of the survey programmed entirely by evaluation team staff. The remainder, who lacked internet access, received a paper survey. The paper survey was designed to mimic the online version as closely as possible. All clerks were provided with reminders by email or postcard to complete the survey. Many clerks also asked for assistance from evaluation team staff. Because other parties' efforts to survey local election officials had yielded response rates between 40% and 60%, the GAB offered to provide incentive payments of \$100 to communities whose clerks responded by the announced deadline. This incentive helped bring the final response rate to 72%. The details, relevant sections of the questionnaire, and top line results may be found in Appendix B. The survey results provide a rich picture of the clerks' experiences with the WEDCS and are the source of the main quantitative indicators in this report.

For the in-person interviews, a semi-structured interview protocol was developed. The material for this protocol came from the themes in the survey, discussions with clerks at GAB meetings, and an open-ended comments section at the end of the survey. As described in Appendix C, a sampling procedure was developed that assured representation of the state's 15 largest municipalities and a random selection of the remaining 85 in a manner that mimics the

distribution of the state's voting age population. Five interviewers from the team contacted clerks in these communities to arrange personal meetings and establish travel plans to accommodate them. Staff used digital voice recorders to document the interviews for later analysis. Representative statements from these interviews were combined with the open-ended comments provided by clerks at the end of the survey to serve as qualitative indicators.

## Appendix B: Clerks Interviewed in Person

A primary consideration in the selection of clerks was the sizes of their municipalities, which vary significantly. They range from the town of Kingston, which in 2000 had a total population of just 900, to the city of Milwaukee, which had a population of nearly 600,000 people. Population is consequential because the number of voters in a jurisdiction affects a clerk's administrative burdens and the overall voting experience. Moreover, the size of a community is correlated with the type of voting equipment used, the backgrounds of clerks, and voter diversity. While a sampling procedure must reflect the range of community sizes in the state, a simple random sample would likely omit some of the largest and most politically important municipalities in the state because there are few of them. Our approach balanced these competing concerns in two ways. First, we selected the 15 municipalities with the largest numbers of registered voters. These communities comprise 30% of the total registered voters in Wisconsin. Second, we selected 85 clerks from the remaining municipalities, sampling in proportion to their size. That is, a community with 5,000 registered voters had twice the chance of being selected as a community with 2,500 registered voters. This produced an overall sample of 100 municipalities whose clerks were contacted for personal interviews. The 83 municipalities where interviews were successfully conducted are listed below.

Addison	Dover	Kronenwetter	Neenah (city)	Surgeon Bay
Algoma	Eagle	La Crosse Lake	Neenah (town)	Superior
Amery	East Troy	Geneva	New Berlin New	Sussex
Appleton	Eau Claire	Lake Holcombe	Richmond	Tainter
Ashland	Fort Atkinson	Lebanon	Oak Creek	Verona
Aztalan	Franklin	Ledgeview	Onalaska	Walworth
Beloit	Gibson	Madison (city)	Osceola	Waukesha (city)
Brookfield	Greendale	Madison (town)	Peshtigo	Waukesha (town)
Brunswick	Greenfield	Manitowish Waters	Pewaukee	Waunakee
Burlington	Harrison	Marshfield	Plover	Wausau
Caledonia	Hartford	Mayville	Port Washington	Wausatosa
Cedar Lake	Hazelhurst	Medina	Prairie du Sac	West Allis
Cedarburg	Janesville	Merrill	Racine	West Bend
Centerville	Jefferson	Milltown	River Falls	Wheatland
Clarno	Kenosha	Milwaukee	Sheboygan	Whitewater
Coloma	Kewaskum	Monona	Stettin	
Decatur	Knowlton	Muskego	Stevens Point	

## Appendix C: Clerk Survey Results

A survey was administered to every municipal and county clerk in Wisconsin beginning on April 15, 2009. Of these, 1,674 were conducted online for the clerks who had valid electronic mail addresses. These clerks received an email message from the evaluation team containing a link to the survey. The remaining 249 clerks received an equivalent paper survey by postal mail. These mailings included addressed stamped envelopes. Clerks' communities were promised a \$100 incentive payment for surveys received by May 8, 2009. The data below are based on all surveys received by June 10, 2009. A total of 1,388 surveys were completed for a response rate of 72%. County clerks, self-providers, those who got paper surveys, and those from larger communities were somewhat more likely to respond, but overall the respondents represent the population of Wisconsin clerks well.

Responses are reported only for clerks who answered the question or for whom the question was appropriate. As a result, effective sample sizes will vary by question. Percentages for individual questions may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

### Training and Awareness of the WEDCS

Are you aware of the GAB's new Wisconsin Election Data Collection (WEDC) application?

82% Yes  
18% No

[Of those were aware of WEDCS:] Did you participate in any kind of training for the new WEDC system?

53% Yes  
47% No

[Of those who were not trained:] Why did you not participate in training? (Select all that apply.)

33% I did not know training was offered.  
21% The training was held at an inconvenient time or place.  
4% I lacked resources to attend the training.  
4% The training did not appear to be useful.  
39% I did not participate for another reason.

[Of those who did not receive training:] Would you be willing to receive training in the future?

83% Yes  
17% No

[Of those who were trained:] Did your training occur in person or was it done online via the internet?

62% In person  
38% Online

How were you trained?

- 59% By GAB staff
- 6% By my county clerk
- 35% By the online training module

Was the training offered at a time and place that were convenient for you?

- 96% Yes
- 4% No

How would you rate the overall quality of the training?

- 40% Excellent
- 49% Good
- 10% Adequate
- 1% Poor

### Using the WEDCS Application

How would you rate the ease of use of the GAB-190 paper form?

- 48% Very easy to use
- 44% Somewhat easy to use
- 7% Somewhat difficult to use
- 0% Very difficult to use

Have you used the new WEDC online application?

- 28% Yes
- 72% No

[Of those who did not use WEDCS:] Why did you not use the new WEDC online application?

- 12% I preferred to continue using the GAB-190 paper form.
- 14% I was never shown the new online system.
- 39% A provider clerk offered to use the new online system for me.
- 11% I do not have ready access to high speed internet.
- 23% Some other reason.

[Of those who used WEDCS:] Did the new WEDC online application take more or less time than the GAB-190 paper forms to complete?

- 10% The online application took more time.
- 63% The online application and the paper form took about the same amount of time.
- 27% The online application took less time.

How would you rate the ease of use of the new WEDC online application?

- 65% Very easy to use
- 31% Somewhat easy to use
- 3% Somewhat difficult to use
- 0% Very difficult to use

Overall, do you prefer the new WEDC online application or the GAB-190 paper form?

- 41% I strongly prefer the new online application.
- 27% I somewhat prefer the new online application.
- 26% I have no preference.
- 4% I somewhat prefer the paper form.
- 3% I strongly prefer the paper form.

Should the GAB use the new WEDC online application for future elections, or should it stick with the GAB-190 paper form?

- 89% I think the GAB should use the new WEDC online application.
- 11% I think the GAB should stick with the GAB-190 paper form.

Election officials have an interest in keeping data free from tampering by others. Do you believe that the election data you provide are more secure using the new online application or the paper form?

- 10% I believe that the data are more secure using the paper form.
- 73% I believe that the data have about the same level of security either way.
- 17% I believe that the data are more secure using the online application.

Were you able to provide all of the data requested by the GAB-190 paper form?

- 98% Yes
- 2% No

Was it easier or more difficult to provide the same data in the new WEDC online application?

- 9% Easier using the online application.
- 86% About the same either way.
- 4% More difficult using the online application.

The WEDC interface allows users to print reports that resemble the GAB-190 forms. Did you use this feature?

- 65% Yes
- 35% No

[Of those who did not print:] Why did you not use the report printing feature?

- 19% I did not know printing was possible.
- 32% I preferred to use the GAB-190 form as the paper record.
- 18% I did not see a reason to have a paper record.
- 31% Some other reason.

[Of those who did print:] How satisfied were you with the report printing feature?

- 28% 1 Highly satisfied
- 35% 2
- 12% 3
- 8% 4
- 6% 5
- 6% 6
- 5% 7 Highly Dissatisfied

## Clerk Backgrounds and Use of Technology

How would you rate your computer skill level, or do you not use computers?

- 3% I do not use computers.
- 7% Beginner
- 65% Intermediate
- 25% Advanced

[Of those who use computers at all:] Do you regularly use a computer at home?

- 83% Yes
- 17% No

In general, which of the following statements do you agree with most?

- 15% Computers generally create more problems than they solve.
- 85% Computers generally solve more problems than they create.

Wisconsin elections are administered at the local level by municipal clerks. Some believe that local administration makes elections more efficient since clerks are responsible for a smaller number of voters. Others believe that a more centralized system would increase efficiency and uniformity across the state. How about you – all things considered, do you think that it is better to have local election administration or would it be better to have more centralized election administration?

- 84% I believe that local election administration is best.
- 16% I believe that more centralized election administration would be best.

Do you believe that county clerks should play a larger role in election administration than they currently do?

- 27% Yes, county clerks should play a larger role in election administration.
- 73% No, county clerks should not play a larger role in election administration.

Were you appointed or elected to your current election administration position?

- 40% Appointed
- 60% Elected

Thinking about all of the things you do as clerk throughout the year, what percentage of the overall time you spend on clerk duties is for election administration? (Entry is mean with range in parentheses.)

- 28% (0 to 100)

Is your position as a clerk full or part time?

- 38% Full time
- 62% Part time

As clerk, are you also the treasurer for your jurisdiction?

- 30% Yes
- 70% No

Do you have another job beyond your position as a clerk (and treasurer)?

54% Yes  
46% No

Were you ever provided with a written job description outlining specific expectations for your position beyond the written materials provided by the GAB, or its predecessor, the State Elections Board?

25% Yes  
75% No

Did you receive training specifically designed to prepare you for your duties as election clerk?

86% Yes  
14% No

Considering all of the training you have received, how would you rate your preparation for the complexities of running elections?

30% Excellent  
54% Good  
15% Adequate  
1% Poor

How many presidential elections have you administered as an election clerk?

(Entry is mean with range in parentheses.)

3.1 (0 to 14)

In what year did you begin in your current capacity as a clerk?

(Entry is mean with range in parentheses.)

1998 (1953 to 2009)

Please select the annual salary you receive as an election clerk. If you are paid on an hourly basis, please estimate what you earn in a year. Choose one:

44% Less than \$10,000  
20% \$10,000 to \$30,000  
15% \$30,000 to \$50,000  
11% \$50,000 to \$70,000  
2% More than \$70,000  
8% Not applicable – this is an unpaid position

What year were you born?

(Entry is mean with range in parentheses, converted to ages.)

53 (23 to 87)

Are you male or female?

14% Male  
86% Female

What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- 1% Some high school
- 27% High school graduate or equivalent
- 29% Some college coursework
- 18% Associate's degree
- 17% Bachelor's degree
- 4% Some graduate school, but no degree
- 5% Master's degree
- 0% JD, PhD, or other advanced degree