Wisconsin Elections Commission

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DATE: May 28, 2020

TO: Wisconsin County Clerks
Wisconsin Municipal Clerks
City of Milwaukee Election Commission
Milwaukee County Election Commission

FROM: Meagan Wolfe
Administrator

SUBJECT: **May 27 Elections Commission Meeting Update**

At its May 27, 2020 meeting, the Commission directed staff to adopt a spending plan for CARES Act funds and provided further guidance on three programs: 1) sub-grant to local jurisdictions (formerly postage sub-grant), 2) options for an informational mailing to voters about how to request an absentee ballot, and 3) absentee ballot certificate envelope redesign. A summary of each program is included below. The total expenditures authorized for each program area are:

Program	Expense
1. Sub-Grant Program to Local Election Officials*	$4,126,528
2. Absentee Informational Mailer	Not more than $2,252,035
3. Sanitation and PPE Supplies	Not more than $500,000
4. WEC development costs for mail tracking bar codes and other absentee process improvements. Also, reserve fund for April/May costs not yet billed.	Not more than $400,000
5. Absentee Envelope Redesign program (Suspended)	$0
Total	$7,278,563

**Some jurisdictions may decide to not request subgrant funds. Those funds would then be used to offset additional WEC staff time and development costs on approved CARES grant projects.*

1) CARES Act Sub-grant to Municipalities

The Wisconsin Elections Commission approved a CARES Act Subgrant program for all Wisconsin municipalities to help cover additional 2020 election costs incurred due to the pandemic. To distribute subgrant funds proportionally across all jurisdictions, the Commission approved a grant formula - each

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municipality that requests a subgrant will receive a base amount of $200, plus an additional $1.10 per registered voter in the municipality as of June 1, 2020.

Municipalities can use the funds to pay for additional (unbudgeted) 2020 election costs that result from the coronavirus crisis. A broad set of categories are permissible, including ballot supplies, printing, postage, cleaning supplies, cleaning services, protective equipment, additional staff, and many others. Please consult the subgrant agreement for full details.

To request the funds, municipalities must complete a subgrant agreement that outlines the terms, including the allowable costs, the documentation and reporting requirements, timelines for the program and applicable certifications. The receiving jurisdiction must sign the agreement and return it via their official email address to elections.finance@wi.gov.

Once WEC staff receives the subgrant agreement, the agency's financial team will process the subgrant payment based on the established formula above and then issue a subgrant award letter via email. Additional information, including a sample expenditure reporting form will also be provided to assist municipalities with the reporting requirements outlined in the subgrant agreement.

Key Dates:

September 1, 2020 - Subgrant Agreement Return Deadline: The commission will expedite the disbursement of funds as the agreements are received.

December 1, 2020 – Subgrant Expenditure Report Deadline: Municipalities must report to the WEC all sufficiently documented subgrant award expenditures, including those expenditures above the subgrant award. All unbudgeted costs incurred as a result of the pandemic, between January 20, 2020 – November 30, 2020 must be included.

December 15, 2020 – Return of Unused Funds: Municipalities must return any unused subgrant funds by this date.

The WEC will conduct a webinar in early June to walk municipalities through the subgrant application process and answer any questions about the program.

2) Absentee Voting Information Program

The Commission also approved a mailing to assist voters who wish to vote absentee by mail in the November General Election because of the COVID-19 crisis. By providing voters information early, the mailing should reduce the number of voter questions that clerks receive. In addition, WEC staff will process paper applications received through the mailing, reducing the number of absentee applications that clerks must enter. Clerks will not have to perform data entry of any applications returned from the mailing.

The proposed design is an information page describing: (1) the legal requirements to vote absentee by mail in the State of Wisconsin; (2) the process to request an absentee ballot online at the MyVote Wisconsin website, (3) the process to request an absentee ballot by paper form, and 4) information on the standard voting opportunities outlined in Wisconsin state law including in-person absentee and

Election Day. The letter will also contain an opportunity for voters to use a paper process to make their request. Finally, the mailing will include a pre-addressed business reply envelope so voters may return the paper form if desired, at no cost to the voter.

Approximately 2.7 million registered voters will receive the mailing. This includes all registered voters who are not on the ERIC Mover's list and who do not already have an absentee ballot application on file.

The mailing design will be approved by the Commission, and shared with clerks, before it is sent. The estimated mailing date is no later than September 1, 2020.

3) Sanitation and PPE Supplies.

As with the April and May elections, the State of Wisconsin plans to provide available supplies to jurisdictions ahead of the August and November elections. In the following week, a survey will be sent to all Wisconsin clerks seeking your combined supply request for both fall elections. The available products are likely to include hand sanitizer, surface sanitizer, surgical masks, gloves, spray bottles, isopropyl wipes, pens, and tape.

4) Mail Tracking Barcodes and Absentee Improvements

With the commission's support, WEC staff are preparing WisVote to print Intelligent Mail Barcodes (IMBs) on address labels generated for absentee ballot envelopes. IMBs are scanned by United States Postal Service processing centers and post offices while the ballot is en route to the voter. WisVote users will have access to the status and location of the ballot in WisVote and their voters will have access to this USPS-informed information in MyVote. Staff will be updating WisVote with this new functionality the week of June 15. The implementation of IMBs will not change your current ballot preparations in any way. IMBs will simply provide new information like USPS processing status and allow WisVote fields like "Date Ballot Sent" to be populated more precisely. Training dates for IMBs and other WisVote absentee improvements will be communicated next Wednesday, June 3.

5) Absentee Ballot Envelope Redesign.

The Commission affirmed that any redesign of the absentee by mail envelopes will not take place until 2021. The State will also not be pursuing a bulk envelope purchase and clerks should proceed with any upcoming envelope orders using the current version of the transmittal and return envelopes. Clerks can continue to use existing stock of absentee envelopes for the fall 2020 election cycle.

Municipalities may use funds from their CARES Act sub-grant to purchase additional absentee envelopes for use in 2020. This funding could be used to cover costs for new envelope orders and can also be used to offset extra charges for envelopes with recommended features and customizations. Clerks have provided positive feedback to WEC staff regarding several printing and envelope options that improve the clerk and voter experience, including the following:

1. **Highlighting areas for required information on the absentee return envelope**. Return envelopes can be printed with required areas of the certificate (EL-122) on the return envelope highlighted to alert voters to those requirements. The voter signature, witness signature and

witness address areas are examples of required fields that can be highlighted for greater visibility.

2. **Self-adhesive return envelopes.** Clerks may choose to purchase self-adhesive envelopes for use by the voter to return their ballot.
3. **Pre-printed clerk return address.** CARES Act sub-grant funds may be used to customize the return envelope with a pre-printed municipal clerk address. Many clerks prefer this printing option as it reduces the time needed to prepare a ballot for mailing, but customization such as these usually carry an additional set of charges.

Thank you for your diligence and dedication to administering elections in Wisconsin. If you have questions please contact the Help Desk at 608-261-2028 or elections@wi.gov.