

Assistant Chief Education Program - Introduction

04-Jul-2025

This presentation has audio, make sure your speakers are not muted and your volume is turned up.




Introduction

- Purpose: This is an education program to teach the election related skills and knowledge an Assistant Chief needs to have to work in a polling place in Albemarle County. Some capabilities the prospective Assistant Chief needs to come up with on their own: willingness to lead, organizational ability, communication skills and personnel management skills. Completing this education program does not guarantee a spot as an Assistant Chief, but it is a good start.
- This presentation describes the Assistant Chief education program, the process for becoming an Assistant Chief, and the fundamental leadership concepts that are necessary to be an Assistant Chief or Chief. The presentation therefore has three parts:
 - Assistant Chief education program
 - Assistant Chief selection process
 - Leadership of a polling place
- The goal of this program is through standardized education, to have consistent, high-quality elections conducted at every polling place.



Assistant Chief Education Program

- The education program materials are open to all, whether an individual is putting themselves on the Assistant Chief track or just curious.
- Each course in the program has an accompanying test.
- The course and test materials change as polling place operations change. This may be due to changes in the law, hardware or software changes, process improvements, or lessons learned.
- The courses can be taken in any order, although the order on the next slide might make the most sense. 

Curriculum Outline

1. Overview
 1. Introduction to the program, goals, process, leadership and responsibility
 2. The Law
2. Pre-Election
 1. Project Management 101 – Every Election in Every Precinct is a Project
 2. Communications planning
 3. Team Planning – education, setup, first assignment, rotation schedule, closeout
 4. Site prep, election materials pickup, review and prep the night before
3. Election Day
 1. Arriving, swearing in, handing out materials, contacting latecomers, calling the Registrar, managing Poll Watchers, confirming the team and equipment are ready, open the polls
 2. Daytime Administration, hourly reconciliation, logbook, incident management, complaints, rotating assignments, election official evaluation, assistant chief education, election official education, precinct flow control
 3. Emergency voting procedures: hand counting ballots and paper pollbooks – how-to demonstration, temporarily moving the election due to a fire alarm, etc.
 4. Closeout – teams, poll watchers, results, calling in, boxes and envelopes, return to the Registrar
4. Post-Election
 1. Day-after availability, fixing fixable problems, following up with your team, evaluating election officials, evaluating assistant chiefs, hotwash, improving your site (layout, assignments, setup changes)



Where do Chiefs Come From?

- Where do Chiefs come from: Assistant Chiefs
- Where do Assistant Chiefs come from: EOs
- Where do EOs come from: Folks who volunteer. The Code of Virginia envisions that these volunteers will to a greater or lesser extent be drawn from the two major parties – in equal numbers if possible.
- At each step along the way, the appointment as an Officer of Election, Assistant Chief or Chief is made by the Electoral Board.



Assistant Chief Process

- Any Officer of Election (EO) may select themselves for the Assistant Chief process.
- EOs may be nudged by their Chief or Assistant Chief(s) or the Elections Manager to consider themselves for the process, but that is not required.
- The process begins with the courses in this Assistant Chief education program.
- Complete each course and the test for each course.
- Submit an application to be an Assistant Chief.
- Include with your application a recommendation from a Chief and your test results.



Assistant Chief Selection Process

- The Electoral Board, with input from the Registrar and Elections Manager, selects officers of election to be Assistant Chiefs.
- Factors considered in this process include (but are not limited to): performance as an officer of election, the application, recommendation from the chief, the current demand for new Assistant Chiefs and the party the candidate represents.
 - From § 24.2-115, Chiefs and Assistants should not represent the same party and there should be equal representation between the two parties among the officers of election where practicable.



Assistant Chief Selection Results

- There are three possible outcomes from this process:
 1. The candidate is accepted as an Assistant Chief and assigned to a precinct, or
 2. The candidate's application is acceptable, but there is no precinct where they are needed at this time and their application is retained for future consideration, or
 3. The candidate's application is not acceptable.
- Candidate applications may not be acceptable because of their test scores, their experience as an officer of election, the recommendation from the chief or other factors.
- All candidates will be advised of the results and specifics on how they might improve or what to do if they were not accepted.



Precinct Leadership – Self Assessment

- An Assistant Chief needs to be ready and prepared to be a Chief. Applying to be an Assistant Chief means the candidate has considered this and is willing to step up if the time comes.
- In the normal course of things an Assistant Chief will work a number of elections as an Assistant Chief, possibly in more than one precinct, before the opportunity to be a Chief is presented to them.
- However, in an emergency or unexpected situation, the Chief may be unavailable, leaving the Assistant Chief in charge.
- Therefore, each candidate should consider whether they would be willing to take this responsibility before they embark on this path.
- The goal with this education is to make sure each candidate has the knowledge needed to do the job. From assignments as an Assistant Chief, candidates will get the experience they need to do the job.



Precinct Leadership – Captain Analogy

- The Chief of a precinct is analogous to the Captain of a ship. Most of the time each of these is out of contact with their superiors and they personally are in control of and responsible for what happens in their command.
- A Chief or an Assistant Chief projects confidence to their fellow officers of election and to the voters – even when their confident response to a problem is “I don’t know the answer, I will call the Registrar’s office.” This air of confidence keeps things calm. Chiefs and Assistants need it because they will encounter situations that they do not know how to handle.
- The Captain (or the Chief) inspires confidence in others by demonstrating it.



Precinct Leadership – The 4 “E”s

- There are more than 80,000 books on Amazon which a search for “leadership” turns up. Many of them are probably good reads, but that level of detail is beyond our goals.
- Leadership is different when practiced with new personnel than it is when practiced with experienced personnel who want to get the job done.
- Leadership in a foxhole means one thing, in an Operating Room it means something else, and in an office still something else.
- Each person has a style of leadership that suits them – some are more effective than others. Some leaders adjust their style of leadership to suit the situation.
- There is a very simple model than anyone can follow as a basis for being a leader – the 4 “E”s:
 - Eagerness, Expertise, Experience, Example



Precinct Leadership - Eagerness

- Eagerness comes from within. Your enthusiasm for what you are doing can be infectious. Your lack of eagerness can be equally infectious.
- Eagerness must be expressed. Tell your team how excited you are, show them.
- Eagerness is simple, it just takes energy.
- Eagerness should not be faked – if you are not “up” for it you should consider whether you are in the right role.



Precinct Leadership - Expertise

- Expertise is what you know how to do.
- The polling place is a small enough organization that the Chief should know how to do every job well.
- This includes keeping up with all the changes and dusting off your skills between elections.
- Expertise is most useful as a leader when it is demonstrated and shared with those you lead – show folks how to do things when they do not know how, or when they should know how but are not doing them.
- Demonstrating your expertise makes your team more confident because they will know you have their back if they have trouble.



Precinct Leadership - Experience

- Experience is what you have done.
- The only way to get experience is to get experience.
- You can shorten your path to getting experience by education and by having an open mind to learning new things.
- Experience is of value to a leader in making judgments and solving problems. Mentioning that experience, e.g., “I remember when we had a similar situation...” helps others learn from what you already know.



Precinct Leadership - Example

- Leadership literally comes from the top. The example you set sets the tone for everyone in your polling place.
- If you are having a bad day, the sour curmudgeon example you set will affect your team.
- If you show your team your commitment to following the law and the guidelines, you will see that attitude reflected in their behavior as well.
- If you treat every voter with courtesy and dignity, you show your team what is expected of them.
- As you act, so will they. Setting a good example is critical to being a good leader. You set the standard.



Precinct Leadership - Listening

- Listening is NOT one of the 4-Es, but it is very important.
- Leading is not about giving orders. Far more important than speaking is listening. Listening to your team and listening to the voters.
- If you do not hear someone you can not know what they need or want from you. This does not mean you should put fresh batteries in your hearing aid – it means you should take the time to focus on people who need or want your attention.
- When you listen, you should practice active listening:
 - Look at them, nod in acknowledgment as you understand their points, say back to them what you heard and what you are going to do, ask questions when you do not follow – these are some of the active listening skills.



Afterword

- You decide if you want to be on the Assistant Chief path.
- It is very different being an Assistant Chief or Chief as compared to being an officer of election– consider whether you are willing to take on this leadership role before you take the time to go through this program.
- The additional responsibility comes with the additional reward of doing an important job that only a few officers of election will ever do.
- Do not hesitate to ask questions of your Chief or Assistant, or the Registrars office or an Electoral Board member if you need help deciding to move ahead.

