RECORD VOTER TURNOUT REQUIRES MORE STAFF BUT SPACE LIMITED TO SAFELY WORK BECAUSE OF COVID-19 RESTRICTIONS

OPEX®

// THE BACKGROUND

In 2000, Oregon passed a bill to make voting exclusively by mail. For 22 years, Multnomah County, home to Portland, has successfully processed all of its ballots on a timely basis. State law allows Oregon counties to open and scan ballots seven days prior to Election Day. November general elections tend to have the most volume, and Multnomah voting officials recognized that voter turnout would be high. What was not anticipated was the effect of COVID-19. In the past, Multnomah County handled the demands of ballot envelope opening by increasing staff. However, in this election year, Multnomah lacked adequate space to accommodate the additional staff and efficiently process ballots due to social distancing requirements.
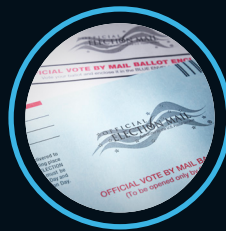
// THE CHALLENGE

It was no longer possible to have the normal 120 workers per shift. During the May primary, Multnomah officials learned they could only use 75 workers per shift to perform ballot opening due to COVID-19 restrictions. Because there was only a 50% turnout for the May primary, the workload was manageable, but November was going to be a different story. Multnomah County's voter rolls have been growing steadily and record-high turnout was expected. These predictions proved to be correct. Turnout was at 82%, resulting in 465K ballots that needed to be extracted. In previous elections, each worker processed approximately 200 ballots per hour.
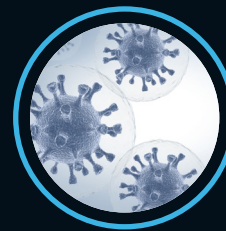
// KEY CHALLENGES

GROWING POPULATION MEANT MORE VOTERS IN THE NOVEMBER ELECTION

EXTRACTING MORE BALLOTS FROM ENVELOPES WITH LESS PEOPLE PER SHIFT

KEEPING STAFF SAFE DUE TO PANDEMIC GUIDELINES

// KEY RESULTS

465K

BALLOT ENVELOPES OPENED

375

AVERAGE NUMBER OF BALLOTS
PROCESSED PER STAFF
MEMBER PER HOUR

50%

DECREASE IN NUMBER
OF STAFF NEEDED

// THE SOLUTION

While Multnomah County was familiar with the OPEX® Model 72™ Ballot Opener and Extractor, it wasn't until their Director of Elections, Tim Scott, went to Denver and saw it in action that he realized this equipment could make a huge difference. And he was right. The OPEX Model 72 Ballot Opener and Extractor allowed Multnomah County to increase the number of ballots processed per worker from 200 ballots an hour to between 350 - 400 ballots an hour. In addition to increasing efficiency, the machine also helped to increase security: Because of how the ballots are loaded into the machine, the operator cannot see the names on the envelopes. Additionally, the number of times staff touches the ballots is reduced. This investment in automation paid off. Even with a 16% increase in ballots from the 2016 election, Multnomah County was able to reduce staff from 120 to 60, well below the 75-person limit.

// THE FUTURE

Multnomah County now has the tools it needs to deliver an efficient voting process with fewer workers no matter how large the county continues to grow.

> "WE COULDN'T RISK NOT HAVING ENOUGH ROOM FOR STAFF TO PROCESS OUR BALLOTS IN A TIMELY MANNER. AUTOMATING BALLOT EXTRACTION REALLY WORKED WELL."
>
> -Tim Scott
> Director of Multnomah County Elections

> "THE INTEGRITY OF THE BALLOT IS IMPORTANT. THE EXTRACTOR PROVIDED ANOTHER LAYER OF VOTER SECRECY WE DIDN'T EXPECT."
>
> -Tim Scott
> Director of Multnomah County Elections

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