



Wisconsin Elections Commission News

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Wisconsin Elections Commission Offers Grants to Help Improve Cyber Security

MADISON, WI – The Wisconsin Elections Commission is pleased to announce a \$1.1 million grant program to help municipalities and counties upgrade office computer security for the 2020 elections.

“WEC’s goal is to make sure that every clerk has an up-to-date, secure computer and access to professional IT support,” said WEC Administrator Meagan Wolfe. “To do that, we will be offering grants of up to \$1,200 to municipal and county election offices using part of the federal election security grants Wisconsin received.”

Election security grants to clerks are the latest effort to secure Wisconsin elections. Since 2016, WEC has significantly strengthened security for clerks to access the statewide voter registration system, developed a nationally-recognized election security training program, and expanded post-election audits to ensure the accuracy of election results.

“These grants present a next step in election security – meeting security needs in small communities with limited resources,” Wolfe continued. “We developed the program in consultation with the professional organizations that represent local election officials including the Wisconsin Towns Association, the Wisconsin Municipal Clerks Association, and the Wisconsin County Clerks Association, as well as our clerk advisory committees.”

Wolfe said that the WEC wants to make sure all users of the statewide voter registration system are using secure computers. However, another concern is the hundreds of small towns and villages that do not use the state’s system, but still use computers and email to communicate with voters about registration and absentee ballots, print poll lists and other election notices.

“If one clerk’s outdated computer gets a virus or ransomware, it could spread to other clerks and systems,” Wolfe said. “We have to make sure clerks have the tools they need to serve voters and run elections smoothly in 2020. We are pleased to be able to share our federal election security funds directly with our local partners in this way.”

Wisconsin clerks will have until November 15 to apply. WEC plans to process the requests and issue checks as soon as possible for the first round of grants, with all checks issued by November 29, 2019. Clerks who receive grant funds must have updated computer systems in place by January 28, 2020. Clerks who have not already attended a security training session will be required to do so, and can be reimbursed for travel costs to attend.

The Commission is also seeking input from counties and municipalities that already have updated computer systems about additional cyber security needs.

At its meeting September 24, the Commission also directed that grant applications from jurisdictions in the 7th Congressional District will be considered first due to the upcoming special primary and election on December 30 and January 27 to fill the vacant seat in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Wolfe noted that clerks who use the statewide voter registration system will be required to have a computer that meets minimum standards, including a current operating system, malware and phishing protection, and professional IT support to keep the computer updated. The grant program is designed to help clerks meet those standards. The Commission will deny system access to computers that do not meet standards by January 28, 2019.

Jurisdictions receiving grant funds must have an up-to-date computer and professional IT support, attend training, and complete a contingency plan by January 28, 2020. WEC may grant extensions to jurisdictions, but the final deadline to expend the grant funds is September 30, 2020.

More information about the grant program is available here:
<https://elections.wi.gov/clerks/election-security-grants>.

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The Wisconsin Elections Commission is responsible for administration and enforcement of election laws in Wisconsin. The Commission is made up of six Commissioners – four appointed directly by the State Senate Majority Leader, Speaker of the Assembly and the Minority Leaders in the State Senate and Assembly. The remaining two Commissioners are by the Governor with confirmation by the State Senate from lists of former municipal and county clerks submitted by the legislative leadership in each party.