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**Processing and Reimbursement of  
DHHS Grant Funds**

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State Election Commission

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**STATE DOCUMENTS**

**Background:**

As the chief election agency in South Carolina, the State Election Commission (SEC) is tasked with the responsibility of overseeing the voter registration and election processes in the State. Our primary goal is to provide the highest possible level of service within our statutory mandates.

In October 2002, President Bush signed the "Help America Vote Act of 2002" (HAVA). This legislation was introduced as a result of the problems encountered in Florida with the 2000 federal elections. The main purpose of the legislation is to improve the election process in the United States through providing federal funds to update technology in the voting places and voting booths. This Act provides that every citizen is afforded an opportunity to vote and to have their vote counted.

The SEC had never received federal funds prior to the implementation of HAVA. In 2003, we received \$6,819,929 in initial incentive funds to be used for activities to improve the administration of elections such as educating voters, training election officials and poll workers, developing our state plan, etc. The initial funds did not require a state match, and the use of those funds did not have to be outlined in our state plan. The funds we receive over the next three years will require a 5% match. We anticipate receiving a total of approximately \$49 million. General Services Administration (GSA) in Washington is administering those funds.

In addition, in 2003, we were awarded a separate federal grant from the Department of Health and Human Services in Washington in the amount of \$167,271. That grant is to be used for obligations under the Election Assistance for Individuals with Disabilities (EAID) grant program. We will receive additional funds from DHHS each year over the

next three years. We do not have to provide a match for the DHHS grant funds. We anticipate receiving approximately \$120,000 in 2004. However, that amount is subject to change because, regardless of the source, all HAVA funds are distributed based on voting age population in the state. Therefore, if a county decides not to participate, the funds that would have been distributed to that state will be divided among the other participating states. For purposes of this project, I am going to focus on the DHHS grant, because more guidelines have been established for that program by the SEC at this time.

**Problem Statement:**

When we initially received funds for HAVA, we were told an independent entity, the Election Assistance Commission (EAC), would oversee the HAVA program. A big problem for us was that the Commission had not yet been appointed and we had already received some of the funds. I contacted the GSA who administered the initial funds and they were helpful, but somewhat reluctant in giving us specific information since the EAC would eventually be overseeing the process.

The same problem existed with the DHHS grant. We were having difficulty finding out what the federal process was as it relates to HAVA. The DHHS grant funds are to be used as follows:

- 1) to make polling places, including the path of travel, entrances, exits and voting areas of each polling facility accessible
- 2) to provide the same opportunity for privacy and independence as for other voters
- 3) to provide individuals with disabilities with information about the accessibility of polling places

- 4) to train election officials, poll workers, and election volunteers on how best to promote the access and participation of individuals with disabilities in elections for federal office.

We have designated the use of the first available funds from DHHS to upgrade polling places in the various counties that needed such.

We had to decide what process would be used to determine which polling places needed to be upgraded so they were fully handicap accessible. The following steps were taken to develop the program to be used to distribute the funds:

- Determined the funds would be managed centrally by the SEC and payment would be provided to the counties on a reimbursement basis
- Memo was sent to all counties announcing the possibility of receiving the funds.
- Memo sent to counties requesting their input on which polling places in their county needed to be upgraded
- Responses received from counties
- Counties were advised that priorities would need to be established if requests for improvements to precincts exceeded the amount available from DHHS
- Mailed direct deposit form to DHHS in order for them to process the funds into our account
- Called DHHS contact person regarding availability of funds and was instructed to fax information to them verifying who would perform the “draw down”. Also was advised that we would be receiving a certified letter from DHHS with instructions on how to draw down the funds.

- Received certified letter and followed process outlined for set up in preparation of drawing down funds.
- Counties were mailed another letter advising them of procedures they would need to follow when submitting a request for reimbursement. The following procedures were established for counties when requesting reimbursement under the EAID grant funds:
  - ❖ Once renovations have been approved for a county, they can go ahead and begin the approved renovations.
  - ❖ A photo of the completed work must be sent in with the request for reimbursement, along with a copy of the bill **and** the county will need to send us a written confirmation that the person writing the letter has viewed the completed work and it is what was required and approved by the SEC.
  - ❖ Once all required documentation is received, the SEC will draw down the funds and send reimbursement to the County Treasurer.
  - ❖ Someone from the SEC will make an actual onsite visit to view the completed renovations.

**Data Collection:**

The following information was received from the counties regarding their needs:

<u>County</u>	<u>#Total precincts</u>	<u># Precincts requesting improvements</u>
Abbeville	15	0
Aiken	73	0
Allendale	9	7
Anderson	76	6
Bamberg	14	0
Barnwell	16	1
Beaufort	77	0
Berkeley	51	1

Calhoun	13	0
Charleston	174	1
Cherokee	34	0
Chester	23	17
Chesterfield	30	8
Clarendon	26	6
Colleton	33	30
Darlington	34	0
Dillon	21	0
Dorchester	37	2
Edgefield	12	0
Fairfield	23	3
Florence	64	5
Georgetown	35	0
Greenville	136	0
Greenwood	34	5
Hampton	19	0
Horry	109	0
Jasper	15	11
Kershaw	31	0
Lancaster	28	3
Laurens	36	4
Lee	25	0
Lexington	76	0
McCormick	11	6
Marion	18	4
Marlboro	16	11
Newberry	32	3
Oconee	31	1
Orangeburg	54	8
Pickens	53	0
Richland	111	7
Saluda	19	5
Spartanburg	85	2
Sumter	55	1
Union	30	3
Williamsburg	34	0
York	<u>57</u>	<u>11</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b>1960</b>	<b>172</b>

According to county requests for upgrades to make polling places handicap accessible, 8% of those reported needed improvements. The exact same percentage needed improvements in 1992 as reported by the Federal Election Commission following the

1992 General Election. With the budget situation being grim for the past few years, we are fortunate to have the federal funds available to finally improve these polling places and make them handicap accessible.

**Implementation Plan:**

The following priorities were established by order of most requested to least requested:

1. Handicapped ramp for polling place
2. Curb cuts for wheelchair access
3. Rails for entryway
4. Paved parking
5. Handicapped striping of parking area
6. Handicapped parking signs
7. Add or redesign restrooms
8. Widen entryway/restroom threshold
9. Various miscellaneous items

We received requests back from the counties totalling \$549,556. As the amounts requested exceeded the anticipated funds, we advised the counties we would be reimbursing for the first three items on the list at this time. Counties were advised if they had submitted a request for any of those three items, they would be receiving an approval letter outlining the amount for which they had been approved in each precinct.

The attached spreadsheet shows the amounts each county requested by category and the amount for which they were approved.

**Obstacles:**

The biggest obstacle for me in completing this project was a combination of lack of information, lack of knowing where to obtain the information and inconsistent guidance. Members of the Election Assistance Commission were not confirmed until January, 2004 and were not available as a Commission until sometime in March.

**Evaluation Method:**

No funds will be reimbursed to the counties until all documentation is received by the agency. We received the information we requested from the counties when advising us of the necessary improvements needed for the precincts in their county. We have received only one request for reimbursement at this time, but no funds have been drawn down to reimburse the county. We are waiting on a letter from the county stating the person sending the letter has seen the completed work. In the beginning of the process, we gave the county an option of either sending in photos of the completed work or certifying by letter. During the time I have been working on my project, we examined what documentation from the county we feel will be necessary for us to keep on file and the decision has been made to require counties provide us with both the photos and the letter of certification.

The project will benefit our agency as it has helped us to develop more effective procedures by requiring me to look for certain information we may not have considered otherwise. The procedures developed will allow us to monitor the use of the funds so we will be prepared for any future audits.



## References

Help America Vote Act of 2002

South Carolina State HAVA Plan

Federal Election Commission Report, page 6

County	Total Amt Request	Access Ramp	Curb Cuts	Rails	Pave Parking	Striping	Information Parking Signs	Comfort Restrooms	Threshold	Misc.	Amount of Authorization
Abbeville	\$ -										
Aiken	\$ -										
Allendale	\$ 51,509	\$ 7,615	\$ 1,200		\$ 6,027	\$ 450	\$ 750	\$ 31,201	\$ 275	\$ 3,991	\$ 8,965
Anderson	\$ 24,744	\$ 200			\$ 19,444	\$ 3,000	\$ 1,500		\$ 200	\$ 400	\$ 200
Bamberg	\$ -										
Barnwell	\$ 6,750	\$ 750		\$ 1,500					\$ 3,950	\$ 550	\$ 750
Beaufort	\$ -										
Berkeley	\$ 1,800	\$ 1,800									\$ 1,800
Calhoun	\$ -										
Charleston	\$ 2,000	\$ 2,000									\$ 2,000
Cherokee	\$ -										
Chester	\$ 87,840										\$ 11,840
Chesterfield	\$ 3,992						\$ 3,992				
Clarendon	\$ 15,500	\$ 15,500									\$ 15,500
Colleton	\$ 158,450	\$ 18,000	\$ 5,600	\$ 4,500	\$ 43,200	\$ 52,000	\$ 7,500	\$ 21,250	\$ 7,300		\$ 28,100
Darlington	\$ -										
Dillon	\$ -										
Dorchester	\$ 3,200	\$ 3,200									\$ 3,200
Edgefield											
Fairfield	\$ 8,000	\$ 6,000		\$ 2,000							\$ 8,000
Florence	\$ 10,400	\$ 1,500			\$ 4,000		\$ 550		\$ 200	\$ 4,200	\$ 1,500
Georgetown	\$ -										
Greenville	\$ -										
Greenwood	\$ 24,900	\$ 2,000	\$ 1,000		\$ 3,500	\$ 900	\$ 400	\$ 15,600	\$ 1,500		\$ 3,000
Hampton	\$ -										
Horry	\$ 3,000	\$ 3,000									
Jasper	\$ 22,800	\$ 3,000		\$ 12,000	\$ 6,000		\$ 1,800				\$ 15,000
Kershaw	\$ -										
Lancaster	\$ 8,000	\$ 3,000			\$ 2,000			\$ 3,000			\$ 3,000
Laurens	\$ 5,000	\$ 5,000									\$ 5,000
Lee	\$ -										
Lexington	\$ -										
McCormick	\$ 20,520		\$ 700	\$ 1,000	\$ 1,000			\$ 17,220	\$ 600		\$ 1,700
Marion	\$ 1,500	\$ 1,500									\$ 1,500
Marlboro	\$ 12,390	\$ 1,500						\$ 8,500		\$ 2,390	\$ 1,500

Newberry	\$ 34,570											
Oconee	\$ 4,000							\$ 5,450				
Orangeburg	\$ 4,875						\$ 677	\$ 3,202		\$ 996		
Pickens	\$ -											
Richland	\$ 6,500	\$ 3,500	\$ 1,000							\$ 2,000	\$ 4,500	
Saluda	\$ 2,300				\$ 1,800			\$ 500				
Spartanburg	\$ 2,000	\$ 2,000										\$ 2,000
Sumter	\$ 3,000	\$ 800		\$ 875		\$ 125	\$ 200	\$ 300	\$ 100	\$ 600	\$ 1,675	
Union	\$ 15,938	\$ 3,000								\$ 12,938	\$ 3,000	
Williamsburg	\$ -											
York	\$ 4,078	\$ 1,500					\$ 483		\$ 595	\$ 1,500	\$ 1,500	
<b>Totals</b>	<b>\$ 549,556</b>	<b>\$ 86,365</b>	<b>\$ 9,500</b>	<b>\$ 21,875</b>	<b>\$ 43,771</b>	<b>\$ 56,475</b>	<b>\$ 17,852</b>	<b>\$ 106,223</b>	<b>\$ 14,720</b>	<b>\$ 29,565</b>	<b>\$ 125,230</b>	