
OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
U.S. Election Assistance Commission

**MANAGEMENT CHALLENGES
FOR THE U.S. ELECTION
ASSISTANCE COMMISSION
IN FISCAL YEAR 2025**



Contents

Introduction	1
1 Aligning Resources with Mission	2
2 Coordinating to Meet Customer Needs.....	5
3 Effective Management of Grants.....	7
4 Strengthening Internal Controls	8



**U.S. ELECTION ASSISTANCE COMMISSION
OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL**

Introduction

This is the Office of Inspector General’s (OIG’s) independent assessment of the top management and performance challenges facing the U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC). The Reports Consolidation Act of 2000 requires us to annually update our assessment of EAC’s “most serious management and performance challenges facing the agency and briefly assess the agency’s progress in addressing those challenges.”¹

The challenges are derived from cross-cutting issues that arise during regular audit, evaluation, and investigative work. They are also influenced by our general knowledge of EAC’s operations and the works of other oversight entities, such as the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO).

We identified four challenges EAC must navigate in fiscal year (FY) 2025: (1) Aligning Resources with Mission; (2) Coordinating to Meet Customer Needs; (3) Effective Management of Grants; and (4) Strengthening Internal Controls. These challenges are similar to those presented for FY 2024, though we have updated the descriptions to reflect new conditions. We have also combined challenges and streamlined their presentation, while still aiming to include a description of each challenge and the progress EAC has made to address them.

The Government Performance and Results Modernization Act of 2010 identifies major management challenges as programs or management functions that are vulnerable to fraud, waste, abuse, and mismanagement, and where a failure to perform well could seriously affect the ability of the agency to achieve its mission or goals.² We highlight that these challenges do not necessarily imply significant deficiencies or neglect from EAC. Elements of these challenges are longstanding, complex, and stem from factors beyond EAC’s full control. For our part, OIG is committed to providing timely oversight of EAC’s programs and operations and this report will help inform future work.

¹ The Reports Consolidation Act of 2000, Pub. L. No. 106–531 § 3 (codified at 31 U.S.C. § 3516).

² Public Law 111-352.

1 | Aligning Resources with Mission

Priority Areas

- Ensuring funding is strategically allocated across objectives.
- Strengthening human capital management.

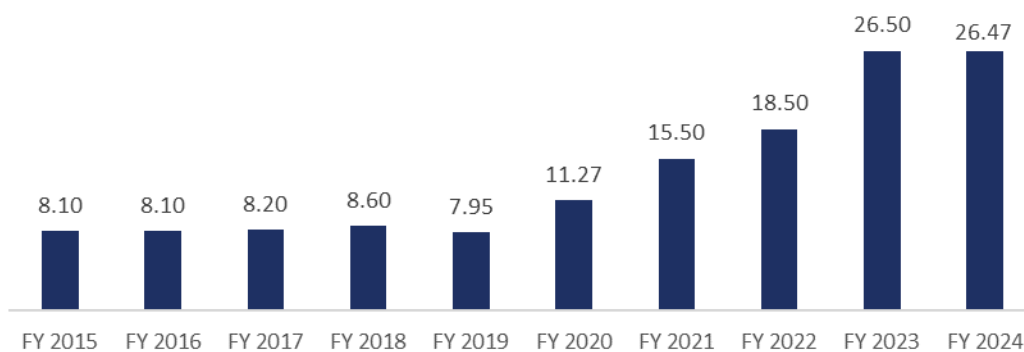
EAC was established in 2002 with the enactment of the Help America Vote Act (HAVA),³ and remains the only federal agency with a specific mandate to help improve U.S. election administration.⁴ Its primary functions are testing and certifying voting systems, maintaining a clearinghouse of information for election officials and the public, conducting research aimed at improving the voter experience and supporting election administrators, and distributing grants to states and territories. EAC executes these functions with four bipartisan Commissioners and support from under 80 staff members.

EAC leadership is committed to the responsible stewardship of federal taxpayer funds and providing support to states and territories in the administration of elections. However, growing needs in the election community continue, driven by increased interest in elections, intensified demand on election workers, and new and growing risks such as artificial intelligence. To ensure mission success, EAC must align its resources accordingly.

Budget

The process of executing the budget is central to EAC’s ability to deliver on its mandate. As shown in Figure 1 below, EAC’s appropriation for operations has trended upward in recent years, from a low of \$7.95 million in FY 2019 to over \$26 million in FYs 2023 and 2024.⁵

Figure 1. EAC Appropriation for Operations, FY 2015 – FY 2024 (Millions \$)



³ Help America Vote Act of 2002, Public Law 107–252 §§ 201.

⁴ Congressional Research Service, Federal Role in U.S. Campaigns and Elections: An Overview (September 2018).

⁵ Amounts exclude funds transferred to the National Institute of Standards and Technology for election reform activities, as well as funds appropriated for relocation in FY 2020.

With this increased funding, EAC has built and expanded programs, which includes extending election technology testing for electronic poll books and a newly established field services program that verifies EAC-certified systems in the field on an ongoing basis.

EAC's FY 2025 budget request was built with three strategic goals in mind:

1. Strengthen American elections through the development and implementation of responsive and dynamic voting system guidelines and cyber resources for election officials.
2. Encourage improvements to election administration through the development and distribution of resources that assist election officials in modernizing American elections.
3. Create operational excellence throughout agency management and programming.

Accompanying each goal is a series of objectives, designed to meet growing election needs. For example, one of the Commission's FY 2025 objectives is to expand its Cyber Access and Security Program, which would include implementing "a voting system vulnerability management and disclosure policy as well as an independent security research program for election technology."

EAC's challenge will be to ensure that its funding is strategically allocated among the FY 2025 objectives to maximize its benefit to the election community, especially if the Commission does not receive its requested appropriation.⁶ The challenge is increased when faced with continuing resolutions that leave EAC with less time to initiate new programs and obligate its single year funding.

Human Resources

The success of EAC's mission relies on the Commission's ability to align its human resources with mission needs. As a small agency, even minimal vacancies can be impactful. Thus, as we identified in previous Top Management Challenges reports, human capital management remains a challenge for EAC, driven by external limitations on pay and the residual effects of inconsistent human capital management.

Limitations on Pay. HAVA allows the Executive Director, General Counsel, and staff of the Commission to be appointed without adhering to competitive service restrictions, but they must not be paid more than the annual rate of basic pay for level V of the Executive Schedule,⁷ or \$180,000 for 2024.⁸

⁶ As of September 2024, both the Senate and House Appropriations Committees had approved amounts for EAC's salaries and expenses in FY 2025 that were below the requested \$38 million, by 47 and 21 percent respectively.

⁷ Help America Vote Act of 2002, Public Law 107-252 § 204.

⁸ U.S. Office of Personnel Management, Salary Table No. 2024-EX., [SALARY TABLE 2024-EX \(opm.gov\)](#).

In a competitive market for talent, HAVA’s pay limitation disadvantages EAC. While key vacancies that existed in prior years have been filled with qualified candidates, and attrition is reportedly down, HAVA’s salary cap continues to create challenges. In particular, according to EAC, attracting and retaining employees with federal government experience can be difficult, since candidates can apply for positions with other agencies that are able to offer more money. The General Counsel position, for example, has been vacant since February 2022, despite several advertisements for the position that reportedly yielded unqualified applicants. Also, while the position was ultimately filled with a someone who meets the necessary requirements, multiple offers for a supervisory contracting officer position were reportedly declined in early 2024 due to salary considerations. Difficulties hiring for these and similar positions factors into EAC’s challenges in other areas—such as improving internal controls.

EAC offers remote work and established a college tuition repayment program in FY 2024 to help to attract and retain staff in key positions.

Another potential threat to the stability of EAC’s operations is a lack of Commissioner quorum. EAC has four full-time Commissioners, who are presidentially appointed, and senate confirmed, and no more than two Commissioners may belong to the same political party. Certain actions, such as updates to the Voluntary Voting System Guidelines, require approval by a three-vote quorum of the four Commissioners. Vacancies in the Commissioner role have, in the past, created issues with EAC’s ability to take official action.

The current Commissioners remain dedicated to public service. However, maintaining a quorum of Commissioners is a potential challenge because restrictions on these positions limit their appeal. The Commissioners’ salaries are impacted by a freeze on pay rates for senior political appointees, which has not provided even a cost-of-living adjustment since originally taking effect in 2014.⁹ The freeze also does not allow for bonuses, discretionary awards, and similar types of pay. Moreover, HAVA specifically states that a Commissioner may not engage in any other business, vocation, or employment while serving as a member of the Commission and requires Commissioners to terminate or liquidate any pre-existing business, vocation, or employment before sitting as a member of the Commission.¹⁰

Strengthening Human Capital Management. At the same time, EAC needs to continue to strengthen its human capital management—the process of acquiring, training, managing, and retaining employees to effectively execute the agency’s mission. As noted by GAO, this is a longstanding challenge governmentwide.¹¹

In 2024, for example, OIG found that EAC had opportunities to improve its personnel practices to address issues such as the circumventing of established hiring policies and the inconsistent

⁹ Public Law 113-76.

¹⁰ Help America Vote Act of 2002, Public Law 107-252 § 203(d)(2).

¹¹ GAO, [High-Risk Series: Efforts Made to Achieve Progress Need to Be Maintained and Expanded to Fully Address All Areas](#) (GAO-23-106203, April 2023).

completion of performance appraisals and payout of bonuses.¹² Doing so would help to ensure that the best qualified candidates are hired, morale remains high, and the attrition rate remains manageable. In response, and with the hiring of a Human Resources Manager, EAC has made recent strides in this area, which we encourage them to continue. Remaining actions include the closure of an open recommendation from the FY 2023 financial statement audit management letter report associated with improvements needed in maintaining official personnel files.¹³

In line with its own goal of creating operational excellence throughout agency management and programming,¹⁴ we also urge EAC to complete comprehensive workforce planning and analysis that aligns with federal regulations.

EAC has made recent strides in its human capital management by:

- *Approving a revised organizational chart, which increases opportunity for career progression.*
- *Filling key vacancies, including the HR Manager position.*
- *Creating and filling a HR support specialist position.*
- *Transitioning toward use of a new HR service provider.*
- *Issuing new and revised policies, such as those governing performance management.*
- *Offering training to supervisors.*
- *Increasing communication with staff.*

2 | Coordinating to Meet Customer Needs

Priority Areas

- Collecting timely and relevant information from stakeholders in order to meet their needs.
- Collaborating effectively with federal partners.

HAVA mandates that EAC serve as a national clearinghouse and resource for the compilation of information with respect to the administration of federal elections. EAC has numerous stakeholders and partners, and for EAC to fulfill its role as a customer service agency supporting critical infrastructure, it must continue to navigate challenges related to partnerships and coordination efforts at the state and federal levels.

State Coordination

The Commission attempts to address the needs of election administrators across states and territories without interfering with the way each runs its elections. As a result, EAC provides *voluntary* standards, guidance documents, best practices, and toolkits to assist election

¹² EAC OIG Memorandum 24-01 "[Opportunities to Improve Personnel Practices](#)," January 2024.

¹³ EAC OIG, [Management Letter Report Related to the Audit of the U.S. Election Assistance Commission's Financial Statements for Fiscal Year 2023](#) (F23HQ0044-24-03, November 2023).

¹⁴ U.S. Election Assistance Commission "[Fiscal year 2025 Congressional Budget Justification](#)."

administrators in running elections. To do this effectively, EAC must understand these stakeholders' needs.

EAC has several mechanisms to obtain information from the states and territories, including:

- **Advisory boards.** HAVA mandates three federal advisory committees to help EAC complete its mission: the Standards Board, the Board of Advisors, and the Technical Guidelines Development Committee. In 2021, EAC also established the Local Leadership Council.
- **Professional organizations.** EAC coordinates with the National Association of State Election Directors (NASED) and the National Association of Secretaries of State (NASS).
- **The Election Administration and Voting Survey (EAVS).** The Commission conducts this survey, which also fulfills the HAVA mandate to collect and analyze such information, every 2 years.
- **Public meetings.** Periodically, as called for in HAVA, EAC hosts public meetings on specific topics (e.g., accessibility in the voting process) that include panel discussions with election officials, EAC staff, subject matter experts, and other key stakeholders.
- **One-on-one meetings.** EAC's Commissioners travel throughout the U.S. and its territories to share information and get feedback from election officials. Increasingly, EAC's subject matter experts also make such trips.

Each mechanism is effective to a different degree, both hampered and amplified by personalities, partisan concerns, federal regulations, and the unique circumstances of the represented jurisdictions. Combined, officials report that the feedback received from these efforts help EAC to circulate timely, nonpartisan materials that benefit the maximum number of stakeholders. However, as noted in EAC's FY 2025 Congressional Budget Justification, "[t]he election administration space continually moves at a fast pace as it is increasingly interconnected due to increased scrutiny from the media and national security efforts..."¹⁵ EAC's challenge is to keep pace with stakeholder needs, or manage stakeholder expectations, when available resources are limited.

Federal Coordination

While other federal agencies have roles in elections, EAC is responsible for the broad scope of improving election administration. To serve effectively and efficiently in this role, EAC needs to coordinate with those federal agencies working in the election space. Such coordination is important to deconflict similar initiatives, capitalize on each agency's core competencies, and avoid taxing state and local jurisdictions with requests.

To stay current on other agencies' elections work, EAC participates in the National Security Council and interagency council and task force meetings.

¹⁵ U.S. Election Assistance Commission "[Fiscal year 2025 Congressional Budget Justification.](#)"

However, as noted by GAO, interagency coordination is a longstanding challenge in the federal government, particularly when agencies are coordinating crosscutting missions.¹⁶ While EAC has made significant progress cultivating relationships with federal partners over the last year, EAC reports continued challenges coordinating with the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST). While NIST received \$1.25 million of EAC's FY 2024 appropriation to implement election reform activities, EAC officials report little visibility into the agency's efforts. EAC will be challenged over the next year to improve coordination with NIST, while maintaining the momentum built in other partnerships.

3 | Effective Management of Grants

Priority Areas

- Working closely with grantees to ensure the appropriate use of funds.
- Providing regular grant training and technical assistance to grantees.

Since FY 2003, EAC has awarded over \$4 billion in formula grants authorized by Congress under HAVA to the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and five U.S. territories to improve the administration of elections.¹⁷ Additionally, EAC has awarded more modest discretionary grants during this period, to include \$1 million in funding to accredited colleges and universities, nonprofit organizations, and local and state election offices to support the Help America Vote College Program in FY 2024.

Weekly meetings between the Office of Grants Management and the Office of General Counsel have led to more robust and consistent guidance for grantees.

For example, in July 2024, EAC updated its [website](#) to include guidance for grantees to help ensure that HAVA funding is used to supplement rather than supplant existing programming.

EAC's Office of Grants Management is responsible for awarding, distributing, and monitoring these grant funds. Historically, this office has been challenged by low staff numbers and turnover, but with a current staff of five and a more stable outlook for FY 2025, the office can work more closely with grantees to ensure the appropriate use of funds and provide regular grant training and technical assistance to grantees. For example, in August 2024, a grant specialist traveled to American Samoa to provide technical assistance to its Territorial Election Office.

¹⁶ GAO, [Managing for Results: Barriers to Interagency Coordination](#) (GAO/GGD-00-106, March 2000).

¹⁷ EAC, [2023 Grant Expenditure Report](#) (June 28, 2024).

Such activities are important to ensure the effective use of HAVA grants for several reasons:

- Most HAVA grant funds are distributed based on predetermined formulas and eligibility requirements, meaning that grantees do not have to demonstrate their ability to meet performance standards and comply with applicable requirements before receiving their funds.
- HAVA grants have specific requirements that differ from other types of grants. For example, some funds must be put in a separate interest-bearing account.
- The majority of HAVA grant funds remain available until expended. With frequent turnover in election offices, the grants often outlast the employees administering them.

These difficulties are reflected in recent OIG audit reports. In FY 2024, OIG issued 10 audit reports related to grant administration. The audits generally found that grantees accounted for HAVA funds in accordance with applicable requirements, accounted for and controlled property purchased, and used funds in a manner consistent with the informational plans they had submitted. However, the reports contained a combined 48 recommendations to improve grant administration.¹⁸

EAC has worked with grantees to close all the grant-related recommendations made by OIG in FY 2023 and is currently working with grantees to close the FY 2024 recommendations.

4 | Strengthening Internal Controls

Priority Areas

- Assessing risk.
- Developing policies and implementing procedures.
- Improving recordkeeping.

The Commission is a small, independent agency that has had historically uncertain funding. In fact, less than a decade ago, EAC had fewer than 20 employees. During this period, long-tenured officials report, EAC chose to direct its resources toward the implementation of strategic programs rather than compliance and operations. As a result, EAC has been challenged to sustain an effective system of internal controls—a matter exacerbated by frequent turnover in senior leadership positions.

This has been evident in recent OIG work. For example, an audit conducted by OIG in FY 2024 found that EAC's internal procurements did not comply with selected requirements of the Federal Acquisition Regulation, and that EAC did not post procurement information to

¹⁸ Recently issued reports related to the administration of grants can be found at <https://oig.eac.gov/reports/grant-audit>.

USASpending.gov, as required by the DATA Act.¹⁹ Likewise, a memorandum issued by OIG in January 2024 identified inconsistent personnel practices.²⁰ And, OIG’s September 2024 report on EAC’s compliance with Federal Information Security Modernization Act (FISMA), made seven new recommendations to improve EAC’s security posture, while three recommendations from prior years remained open.²¹

Aided by consistent funding, a stable cadre of Commissioners, and new leadership in senior roles, EAC has made internal control improvements within the last year. However, strengthening internal controls will remain a continued challenge for the Commission in FY 2025.

As of September 30, 2024, EAC has 23 open audit recommendations related to internal controls in its financial reporting, procurement, and information security processes, as well as its testing and certification program.²² The recommendations call for the assessment of risk (e.g., “Identify, measure, and assess risks related to its testing and certification program, ideally as part of a broader risk management program.”), the development of policy (e.g., “Update the EAC Procurement Handbook to reflect current requirements in the Federal Acquisition Regulation.”), the implementation of processes and procedures (e.g., “Implement an acquisition planning process for the Commission.”), and improvements in recordkeeping (e.g., “Perform periodic reviews of records to ensure that all relevant documentation is appropriately stored and accessible.”).



EAC reports:

. . . the teams responsible for administrative functions have been restructured to improve transparency and accountability.

. . . an assessment of shared services is taking place to optimize their utility.

. . . there have been improvements in the records management program following the hiring of a records specialist in September 2023.

. . . a contracting officer onboarded in August 2024 to help improve procurement processes.

¹⁹ EAC OIG, [Audit of the U.S. Election Assistance Commission’s Internal Procurements](#) (P23HQ0025-24-05, January 2024).

²⁰ EAC OIG, 24-01.

²¹ EAC OIG, [Audit of the U.S. Election Assistance Commission’s Compliance with the Federal Information Security Modernization Act for Fiscal Year 2024](#) (P24HQ0052-24-15, September 2024).

²² A list of open recommendations can be found at <https://oig.eac.gov/open-recommendations>.



U.S. Election Assistance Commission
633 3rd Street NW, Suite 200
Washington, DC 20001

DATE: November 15, 2024
TO: Sarah Dreyer, U.S. EAC Acting Inspector General
FROM: Brianna Schletz, U.S. EAC Executive Director *Brianna Schletz*
RE: Response to Inspector General’s Statement Summarizing the Major Management and Performance Challenges Facing the U.S. Election Assistance Commission for Fiscal Year 2025

The Election Assistance Commission (EAC) appreciates the top management challenges presented by the EAC Inspector General. The statement highlights areas that most impact the Commission’s ability to help election officials improve the administration of elections and help Americans participate in the voting process. The EAC has demonstrated significant progress addressing these areas and is dedicated to continuous improvement.

Resources: As noted in the Inspector General’s assessment, the growing needs in the election community continue to be driven by increased interest in elections, intensified demand on election workers, and new and evolving risks in areas such as [artificial intelligence](#). The EAC continues to assist as a federal partner in election administration and is committed to the responsible stewardship of federal taxpayer funds and providing support to states and territories in the administration of elections.

EAC has taken steps to ensure mission success by aligning its resources to strategically address goals and objectives, and to maximize the benefit to election workers and American voters. This includes strengthening internal operations at the EAC, as well as the closure of 72 audit recommendations in FY 2024. Further, the EAC has worked diligently to leverage the input from stakeholders to ensure the agency provides the most impact. EAC has responsibly utilized [pilot programs](#) to test the viability and impact of a program before fully expanding it. This has been very effective when operating with limited funding.

Regarding the appropriations process, the EAC has diligently worked to align resources with mandates while simultaneously assessing expectations and risk—this includes requesting multi-year funds to reduce risk. The EAC believes that lifting the pay cap restrictions would allow the agency to recruit and retain highly skilled employees, specifically cybersecurity experts and other election specialists. The EAC agrees that retention of employees and EAC Commissioners is especially critical in maintaining institutional knowledge and organizational success.

Customer Service: The EAC has successfully improved coordination efforts with the Commission’s numerous stakeholders and federal partners to fulfill its role as a customer service agency supporting critical infrastructure. At the most recent EAC Advisory Board meetings, the agency received praise for providing excellent training and resources, as well as being responsive and effective partners to election officials across the nation. The EAC will continue to navigate

the challenge of keeping pace with stakeholder needs, as well as managing stakeholder expectations, even when available resources are limited.

The statement notes the broad scope of responsibilities the EAC has regarding the improvement of election administration and general challenges with federal coordination in the government. In addition to participating in the National Security Council and interagency task force meetings, the EAC has published documents with other federal agencies and hosted a federal partners hearing. Joint work product includes: [Enhancing Election Security Through Public Communications](#), [2024 U.S Federal Elections: The Insider Threat](#), [Election Mail Handling Procedures to Protect Against Hazardous Materials](#), and a [Federal Partners public hearing](#). While EAC has made significant progress in coordinating with federal agencies, the EAC will work diligently over the next year to improve coordination with the National Institute for Standards and Technology (NIST), and maintain the momentum built in other federal partnerships.

Grants Management: The EAC agrees that consistent staffing levels within the Office of Grants Management allows the agency to work more closely with grantees to ensure the appropriate use of funds. Appropriate resources also allow EAC to provide regular grant training and technical assistance to grantees. The statement acknowledges that HAVA grants contain specific requirements that differ from other types of grants, such as requiring funds to be held in separate interest-bearing accounts, and that recent updates to the EAC website provide [guidance](#) for grantees to ensure funding is used appropriately.

As the Inspector General states, the EAC has worked with grantees to close all grant-related recommendations made by OIG in FY 2023 and is currently working with grantees to close the FY 2024 recommendations. The EAC will continue providing regular grant training and technical assistance to grantees as it did in 2024 when the agency deployed grant specialists alongside OIG staff to American Samoa and South Dakota to provide technical assistance to the election office in support of safeguarding federal funds. The EAC notes that an exemption to the Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA) would enable the agency to better understand and rapidly respond to the pressing needs of our stakeholders and provide increased oversight of grant funds.

Internal Controls: As the statement describes, the EAC is a small, independent agency that has had historically uncertain funding. The EAC is grateful to the Inspector General for understanding the way in which recent consistent appropriations, a stable cadre of Commissioners, and new leadership in senior roles have all aided the Commission in making internal improvements over the past year.

The EAC has made material progress to improve internal controls at the agency. In addition to restructuring the organization to improve transparency and accountability, EAC has established a functioning records management program following the hiring of a records specialist in 2023, as well as a contracting officer onboarded in 2024 who has helped to improve procurement processes. The EAC has updated policies and will continue to diligently address open audit recommendations related to internal controls. The Commission appreciates the oversight and input on EAC operations and looks forward to making continued progress toward addressing the noted challenges.



Visit our website at oig.eac.gov.

U.S. Election Assistance Commission
Office of Inspector General
633 3rd Street, NW, Second Floor
Washington, DC 20001

Report Waste, Fraud, and Abuse
eacoig@eac.gov | [Online Complaint Form](#)