



CASE STUDY

*A More Responsive  
Government*  
**GRANT PROGRAM**

# INTRODUCTION

When government is responsive to the needs of everyday Americans, democracy thrives. Few institutions embody this principle better than local election offices. Yet far too often, local election offices are severely underfunded.

Because of a lack of adequate federal funding, states and local governments are expected to shoulder the vast majority of the costs of running secure, efficient, and accessible elections. In nearly every case, it is local governments – who are already stretched thin – that bear the heaviest financial burden.

At the same time, over the past few years states have taken bold steps to make elections more secure, more efficient, and more accessible for voters by adopting innovative, pro-voter policies. Elections offices were left to implement those improvements while still preparing for the 2024 election cycle. These changes – like expanded early voting, stronger cybersecurity, or risk-limiting audits – strengthen democracy and often save money in the long run. But they also require upfront investment.

We believe that no state should have to choose between implementing new, voter-focused reforms and giving election officials the baseline resources they need to run elections.

That is why the Institute for Responsive Government launched **A More Responsive Government Grant Program** in 2024. The nonpartisan program offered direct, flexible support to local election offices in the seven states that have led the way in

modernizing elections – Colorado, Delaware, Michigan, Minnesota, New Mexico, Nevada, and Washington, D.C. These jurisdictions were eligible for grants based on their scores on our [Election Policy Progress Reports](#), which found those states took the most significant steps towards making their election laws more responsive and user-friendly for voters and election administrators over the past three years.

This program is about more than funding – it is about fairness. Every voter deserves an election system that is secure, accessible, and trustworthy, no matter where they live. By filling urgent gaps today, we are working toward a future where sustainable, reliable funding for elections is the norm, not the exception.

Investing in elections is investing in people. It means shorter lines, stronger security, better-trained staff, and a system worthy of public trust. Through this program, the Institute is proud to stand alongside election officials who keep democracy running every single day. But we also see this work as a call to action: Our policymakers must commit to treating election funding as the essential investment in democracy that it is.

Together, we can build a government that is truly responsive – one where every election office has the tools to meet the moment, and every voter has confidence that their voice will be heard.



*In the face of chronic underfunding, the Institute for Responsive Government is proud to step up and support jurisdictions that have demonstrated a commitment to improving our elections. Election officials around the country are on the frontlines of our democracy, and it's only right that we provide them the resources they need to make our elections more secure, efficient, and accessible.*

**SAM OLIKER-FRIEDLAND**

Chief Executive Officer



**FUNDING:**  
*The Cornerstone to  
Safe, Secure, and  
Efficient Elections*

As local election offices faced chronic underfunding coupled with rising demands on election administrators, the **A More Responsive Government Grant Program** provided critical support to election offices ahead of the 2024 election and beyond. With an initial \$6 million investment – and an additional \$1 million added later in the program – the Institute awarded grants to more than 200 local elections offices, collectively serving over 6 million eligible voters.

Grant amounts were exclusively based on the voting age population in each jurisdiction. Election offices in all types of jurisdictions were awarded support – rural, urban, suburban; small, medium, and large; red, blue, and purple.

Importantly, the Institute did not control how election offices used their funds. As long as funds were used for the nonpartisan purpose of planning and operationalizing secure, efficient, and accessible election administration, election offices decided how to allocate their funds among their offices' needs. The Institute also worked to streamline the grant application and grant reporting process, aiming to enable election officials to complete both forms in a half hour or less.

### Examples of how election offices decided to use their funds included:

- Poll worker salaries
- Enhanced physical security measures
- Up-to-date computer hardware and software
- Electronic pollbooks
- Voting booths and other polling place supplies
- Disability access improvements for voting locations



Hudson City, MI: "New signs for our polling location"

The impact was immediate. Roughly two-thirds of grant recipients reported that the additional funding would have "a massive impact" on their offices' abilities to safely, effectively, and securely run elections.

By partially filling these urgent resource gaps, Responsive Gov's grant program demonstrated how relatively modest, flexible investments can empower local election offices to meet the needs of their voters and build public trust in the electoral process.

**Total amount given:** \$6,886,194

**Grants given:** 240

**Applications:** 300

**States Eligible:** CO, MI, MN, NM, NV, DC  
(DE eligible, but didn't apply)

# **ON THE GROUND IMPACT:**

## *Responses from Grantees*



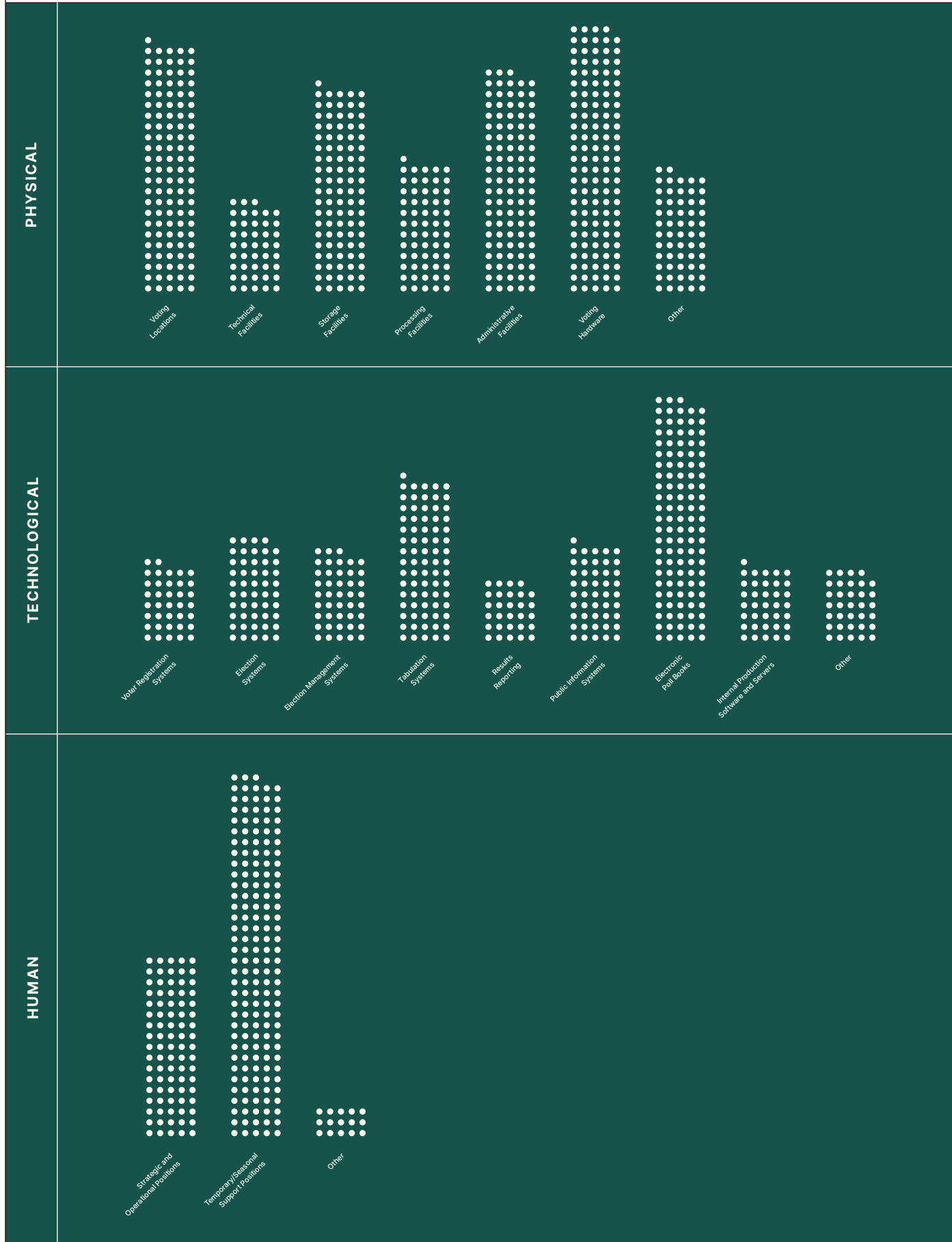
## Without this funding, what would you have had to cut?

*Buying new voting booths which included handicap booths. Our old voting booths were very old and breaking. I would also not have been able to purchase all the supply boxes and supplies to run a smooth and organized election. I had many of my election inspectors who have worked elections for years, compliment me on how much more organized everything was, and they felt appreciated. So again, thank you!*

ALMONT TOWNSHIP, MI

# How Were Grant Funds Used

In August, grantees received a survey from the Institute for Responsive Government to ask about how funds were used. Below outlines use of funds, reasons for applying to the grant program, and direct quotes from elections offices around why the grants were critical to their work.





# If you got this funding every year you would:

*Buy election supplies. It seems each year there are changes with the election law and new supplies are needed from absentee ballot envelopes and absentee secrecy sleeves. We are anticipating new voting machines and any additional funding would help Ray Township as we are a small rural community.*

RAY TOWNSHIP, MI

# Reasons for Applying?

WE HAVE UNFUNDED MANDATES



WE NEED TO PURCHASE A BIG-TICKET ITEM



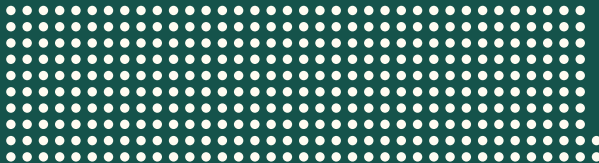
WE HAVE ONE-TIME COSTS THAT WON'T REPEAT IN FUTURE YEARS



WE'RE PILOTING SOMETHING NEW, AND IF IT WORKS, WE'LL INCLUDE IT IN FUTURE BUDGETS



WE LACK SUFFICIENT FUNDING, WITH A THIRD OF US UNABLE TO AFFORD BASIC NECESSITIES



OTHER



## Without this funding, what would you have had to cut?

*“Without this funding I wouldn’t have been able to purchase a laptop, which allowed me to register voters in the polling location on Election Day, vs. requiring the voter to leave the polls, travel to city hall to get registered, then back to the polling location to vote.”*

BELDING CITY, MI

*“Extra workers, extra voting spaces for voters producing longer lines and wait, pray our 12-year-old poll books would have made it through another election without incident.”*

BLISSFIELD TOWNSHIP, MI

*“We would have had to cut an employee.”*

COLFAX COUNTY, NM

## If you got this funding every year you would:

*“We still have ADA concerns that were beyond the scope of our most pressing needs like ADA accessible concrete work at polling locations as well as line striping for handicap parking spaces.”*

BRIGHTON CITY, MI

*“Right now we only have one tabulator, so we have to put absentee ballots through our tabulator on voting day. It looks bad to the public that our workers are putting ballots through during voting hours. We have been accused of stuffing the ballot box, as the public doesn’t understand how the absentee ballots work. I would love to have another tabulator to have an absentee tabulator so we can have it separated.”*

FORD RIVER TOWNSHIP, MI

*I'm so grateful for this grant  
and everything you have done  
for us and this little town. This  
has been a God send for us.  
Thank you so much!*

HUDSON CITY, MI

