



3. Election Fellowship

Description of issue and how recommending the agency's request furthers the agency's mandates: Many Arizonans live in counties where the 2024 elections will be managed by different officials than those who oversaw the 2020 and 2022 elections. Challenges such as threats, intimidation, stress and other factors have made it difficult to replace these election officials and to attract new talent to election administration roles.

In response, AZSOS utilized one-time federal funding in 2024 to launch the County Election Administration Fellowship Program. This initiative offers college students and recent graduates a five-month opportunity to work alongside county election officials, gaining valuable hands-on experience while supporting secure, transparent, and accessible elections. Since its inception, 15 fellows have been deployed to eight counties, contributing to election operations. Initial feedback from both fellows and county officials has been highly positive. Many participants have indicated a desire to make election administration their career, reinforcing the program's value in meeting the state's election workforce needs.

To sustain and grow this initiative, AZSOS believes it is essential to secure continued funding and expand the program in future years, ensuring Arizona maintains a skilled, resilient election workforce.

Proposal: Appropriate \$500,000 from the state general fund and two FTEs in FY2026 and thereafter. This funding would support:

1. Salaries and stipends for Election Fellows to work with county election officials, providing critical support in election operations while developing future leaders in election administration.
2. Operational costs associated with the program, including training, travel, and coordination between counties and state officials.

Alternatives considered and reasons for rejection: Several alternatives were considered, but none adequately addressed the urgent need to develop a reliable and sustainable pipeline of talent for Arizona's election administration:

1. Relying on temporary or seasonal staff: This was rejected due to the lack of continuity and limited opportunities for skill development. Relying on temporary workers alone would not address the long-term challenges of turnover and recruitment in election administration.
2. Expanding duties for current staff: Increasing the workload of existing staff was considered but ultimately rejected as it would strain current resources and hinder other

essential functions within AZSOS. Moreover, the expertise required to manage an election fellowship program exceeds the current capacity.

Impact of not funding this fiscal year: If funding is not secured for FY2026, the Election Fellowship Program will not continue beyond its current cycle. The state will lose the opportunity to develop a trained pipeline of future election administrators, making it more difficult to address staffing challenges in county election offices. Additionally, without new talent entering the field, existing gaps in election administration could widen, increasing the risk of errors, delays, and operational inefficiencies. Ultimately, failing to fund the program could jeopardize the security, accessibility, and transparency of Arizona's elections.

Statutory reference:

Equipment to be purchased: Computers and office equipment as required.

Classification of new positions:

- Election Fellowship Program Manager
- Election Fellowship Coordinator
- (20) Election Fellows (temporary employees receiving stipends)

Annualization: \$500,000