



# Maricopa County

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## Internal Audit Department

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**To:** Maricopa County Board of Supervisors

**From:** Mike McGee, County Auditor

**Subject:** FY21 Interim Update for STAR Call Center – Election Readiness

**Date:** July 22, 2020

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The Maricopa County Internal Audit Department (Internal Audit) is assessing the STAR Call Center's (STAR) preparations for Arizona's August 4, 2020, primary election. The purpose of this interim update is to summarize the work conducted thus far and to share key observations. Our work will continue past the primary election in order to assess whether improvements are needed prior to the November 3, 2020, general election.

This interim update is based primarily on employee interviews, observations, data analysis, and document review. Our work includes election support activities in the following areas:

- Recruiting and training call agents
- Automated phone messaging system and scripts
- Call tracking system and reporting
- Interagency communications (STAR & Elections Department)
- COVID-19 protocols in the workplace

We are continually discussing potential recommendations with STAR management, and they are proactively exploring options to address key challenges leading up to the August primary election.

### **Key Observations**

**Recruiting and Training** – Staffing consists primarily of temporary staff, hired and trained leading up to the election. The Elections Department is responsible for recruiting the temporary workers, and STAR provides the training and supervision.

While challenges exist, STAR management is optimistic they will have enough temporary workers for the August primary election. Internal Audit agrees that reaching the needed level of trained staff is attainable; however, many more temporary workers need to be recruited and trained in a short amount of time.

- As of 7/17/20 - STAR had 9 temporary workers out of the 36 needed for the August primary election. An inability to recruit enough temporary workers could result in longer call wait times.
- As of 7/17/20 - Approximately 75% of temporary workers recently hired either didn't show up for work or left the position within the first week. Challenges with recruiting and retention are primarily due to (1) a recent spike in COVID-19 cases, (2) unemployment benefits exceeding the pay rate, (3) the short-term nature of the position, (4) complexity in answering election-related questions, and (5) an increasingly competitive call center market.
- Until recently, candidates were advised that their position terminates after the August primary election with an option to return for the November general election. This model could have impacted recruiting and may require STAR to repeat the challenging recruiting and training process rather than retaining competent, trained workers until after the November general election. Management has obtained approval from the Recorder's Office to recruit temporary workers with a longer assignment through November.

**Automated Phone Messaging System** – We reviewed the options and communications that callers receive through the system and found them to be adequate.

**Call Tracking and Reporting** – The tracking system has robust capabilities. Opportunities exist to provide customized reports toward improving service delivery in future elections.

**Interagency Communications** – STAR has procedures for notifying the Elections Department of reported issues and any urgent matters. The Elections Department updates STAR with any changes to the election plan or information contained in the automated messaging system.

**COVID-19 Protocols** – Protocols at STAR include pre-shift temperature checks, providing masks, access to hand sanitizer, physical distancing, and individually assigned equipment.

### **Additional Information**

Our work was performed as a consulting engagement as defined by the International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing, set forth by the Institute of Internal Auditors. This is not an audit and may not detect all deficiencies, errors, and irregularities that may exist. This memo is intended primarily for the County Board of Supervisors, County leadership, and other County stakeholders. However, this memo is a public record and its distribution is not limited. If you have any questions about this report, please contact me at 602-506-1585.