

April 2026

You can't have fair elections in NC without funding them

Adequate funding is essential to running our democracy. Elections involve more than what takes place on Election Day. They require year-round administrative work to maintain election infrastructure and prepare for future elections. Election funding makes it possible to:

- Keep voters informed about voting laws, polling sites, and key deadlines
- Develop and maintain voter registration systems
- Prevent, detect, and respond to cybersecurity and election fraud threats
- Provide documents, information, and training needed for candidates to file and run for office
- Keep key technology like ballot scanners up to date
- Print ballots and related election materials
- Secure and operate polling locations
- Pay and train year-round election staff and temporary poll workers

Our democracy depends on these investments. Yet, lawmakers have overlooked the true cost of running elections and have left them underfunded for far too long.

Counties Are Most Responsible for Funding and Running Elections in NC

Where does election funding come from and how is it used?

Most election administration is funded by state and local governments, though responsibility for specific costs varies by state. In NC, counties fund most aspects of elections, with the state providing limited support for materials and training.

Federal: Congress provides sporadic and unpredictable funding to states. The Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA) is the [single biggest source](#) of federal funding in recent years. Between 2003 and 2025, NC received a little over \$108 million in HAVA grant funding. However, [no federal funding was awarded](#) from 2010 and 2018, and this funding is not guaranteed for the future.

[Federal agencies](#) primarily support election security by monitoring national-level threats and sharing intelligence across states rather than administering or funding elections directly.

State: Through the annual state budgeting process, the NC General Assembly appropriates funding for the NC State Board of Elections (NCSBE) operations and staff. Though the General Assembly can provide funding to county boards of elections (CBOEs) as well, they typically reserve this for emergencies. (For example, the state provided funding to county boards of elections in states affected by Hurricane Helene.)

The [NCSBE](#) supervises all elections conducted across the state. This includes enforcing election and campaign finance laws, standardizing and printing many election materials, and certifying election results. The NCSBE also provides guidance and training to local election officials.

Local: Through the county budgeting process, county commissions appropriate election funding to their CBOE, which is responsible for the major costs of running elections, like staff pay and voting equipment. Election funding varies from county to county because it depends on factors such as their revenue and population density.

State law requires counties to allocate “reasonable and [adequate funds](#)” for their CBOEs to carry out their legally mandated duties but does not define what that level of funding entails.

Why does election funding matter?

[Election experts in NC](#) identify inadequate funding as a “major barrier to improving NC’s election administration.” Without adequate funding, CBOEs struggle to support the essential functions that keep elections running effectively, including:

- Offering competitive salaries, professional development, and security measures to retain and recruit qualified election workers
- Providing enough accessible voting sites, which can otherwise lead to [longer wait times and discourage voter turnout](#)
- Maintaining sufficient staff and up-to-date technology to meet time-sensitive ballot verification requirements

Beyond the baseline costs of administering elections, recent policy changes have made adequate funding even more urgent.

North Carolina counties face new administrative burdens without additional state support. In recent years, the General Assembly has imposed more barriers to voting, including requiring voter ID and tightening absentee ballot deadlines, and [shortened the time](#) counties have to help voters fix issues with their ballots so their votes can count. Counties must increase staff and training capacity, and thus overall costs, to meet these new standards.

Federal cuts have shifted cybersecurity responsibilities onto state and local governments. In 2025, the Trump administration [reduced staff and funding](#) for the federal Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, which is responsible for defending election infrastructure and sharing security intelligence with state officials. The administration’s proposed 2027 budget would make [deeper cuts](#). As a result, state and local governments are taking on [greater election cybersecurity responsibilities](#) without the infrastructure or systems they previously relied on the federal government for.

Better election funding supports our democracy.

Research shows that stronger election funding [improves voter confidence](#) and reduces concerns about election fraud. This may be because more funds allow election officials to invest in voter education and higher quality polling places.

When funding is used to increase voting sites in strategic locations it can also improve voter access and participation. For example, adding an early voting site at Western Carolina University in Jackson County [increased same-day registrations](#) and youth turnout in the county.

Key Takeaways

- Adequate election funding is critical for making our elections more accessible, reliable, and fair — thereby supporting our democracy.
- County governments are largely responsible for funding elections and doing the day-to-day work to run elections in NC.
- Given that the state and federal government are adding onto the responsibilities of county boards of elections, counties will require additional state funding to ensure they can continue to run elections effectively.