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# **June 2022 TiGER Civic Federation General Membership Presentation**

Arlington County Civic Federation

# Executive Summary

We believe Arlington County has a good system of government that can be improved upon to achieve better citizen representation and improved government accountability. TiGER's work is intended to promote better citizen representation and through voting, election, governance, and citizen engagement reform.

TiGER is recommending **changes** to our current system of government and to Arlington's **method of elections**. These recommendations have the support of at least a majority of the Task Force and many are supported unanimously.

TiGER is still considering potential recommendations for **citizen engagement reform**. Based on feedback from the membership and committees, the draft resolution presented at the May Membership meeting is withdrawn for now. TiGER will be focusing on community education and engagement over the summer, and will present an updated resolution in the Fall.

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# Our Process

# What is TiGER?

- Task Force in Governance and Election Reform (TiGER)** is a ACCF-chartered effort to re-examine our county's governing bodies and electoral system given that it has been over 90 years since Arlington established its current form of government. As a result, we have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to improve Arlington County's electoral and governance systems to help ensure that the County Board and School Board best represents our diverse community and promotes effective citizen engagement with our county government.
- Areas of Inquiry**
  - The size of the County Board and the School Board
  - Alternatives to at-large elections and first-past-the-post voting systems, including district representation (utilizing either single or multi-member districts) and proportional representation (via multi-member, synchronous elections)
  - Remuneration of County Board and School Board members
  - Length of Board terms (including the term of Board Chair) and frequency of elections
  - The role of primaries and caucuses
  - The role and design of community engagement mechanisms

# TiGER's Membership

- Nancy Tate
- John Vihstadt
- Michael Beer
- Dave Schutz
- Chanda Choun
- Sangita Sigdyal
- Beth Grossman
- Kris Brown
- Kevin Appel
- Whytni Kernodle
- Tannia Talento
- Duke Banks
- Chris Wimbush, Chair
- Allan Gajadhar, Civic Federation President

TiGER would like to extend our appreciation to Sharon Valencia and Keith Fred for their service to the Task Force

# Workplan Overview

<b>Phase</b>	<b>Phase Description</b>	<b>Desired Outcomes</b>	<b>Timing</b>
<b>Phase 1: Task Force Establishment</b>	The Task Force will assemble, determine its internal organizational structure, and adopt a workplan, including a communications plan.	A clear work plan that provides TiGER members and the public a clear understanding of how the Task Force will complete its work.	January – March 2021
<b>Phase 2: Survey Research and Expert Forums</b>	The Task Force will hold a series of forums to receive further information from experts in each area under consideration. These sessions will be public and include government, community stakeholders, academics with expertise in local government and electoral system, and viewpoints from beyond Arlington County. The Task Force will also conduct survey research to support its work.	Provide the Task Force and the public with the information to determine what changes are necessary (if any) and the potential forms of those changes.	April – August 2021
<b>Phase 3: Adoption of Preliminary Recommendations Guidelines</b>	The Task Force will adopt a Preliminary Recommendations Guidelines, which will detail the Task Force's Preliminary Recommendations on the matters within its purview. The Preliminary Recommendations Guidelines will guide the subject matter subcommittee's implementation proposals, which will be drafted in Phase 4.	A clear, high-level understanding of the set of recommendations (if any) the Task Force plans to advocate for in its final report.	September 2021
<b>Phase 4: Subcommittees Draft Implementation Proposals</b>	Additional Task Force Subcommittees will be formed and will draft implementation proposals for consideration by the Task Force	Detailed proposals to implement the Task Force's recommendations (if any) as defined in Phase 3.	October – November 2021
<b>Phase 5: Review and Adopt Subcommittees' Proposals</b>	The Task Force will review and adopt subcommittee proposals for incorporation into the Task Force's final report.	A detailed and clear understanding of the Task Force's recommendations and how to implement them.	December 2021
<b>Phase 6: Final Public Report Drafting</b>	The Task Force will designate specific individuals or a subcommittee to draft a final report based on approved proposals.	A final report that reflects the majority of the Task Force and its members.	January 2022 – March 2022
<b>Phase 7: Adoption of Final Report</b>	The Task Force will consider, revise, and adopt a final report.	A final report that is supported by the Civic Federation Membership.	April 2022
<b>Phase 8: Advocacy and Outreach</b>	Task Force will advocate for its final recommendations before the County Board, School Board, and the Virginia General Assembly	The adoption of the Task Force's recommendations by the relevant government body.	May 2022 through End of 2023 Regular Virginia General Assembly Session

# TiGER's Public Engagement

- TiGER held seven virtual public forums during the Summer of 2021, adding up to approximately 14 hours of expert and community learning and questioning
  - Lessons from Other Local Government, Electoral, and Governance Reforms Processes: Fort Worth, Texas
  - Lessons from Other Local Government, Electoral, and Governance Reforms Processes: Portland, Oregon
  - Perspectives on Arlington's Government Roundtable
  - Current State of Arlington County's Electoral System and Models of Reform: Overview of Voting Systems and RCV
  - Current State of Arlington County's Electoral System and Models of Reform: Experiences with Voting System
  - Current State of Arlington County's Mechanisms of Public Input and Models of Reform: Current Forms
  - Current State of Arlington County's Mechanisms of Public Input: Models for Reform

Watch Our Virtual Forums at <https://www.civfed.org/tiger>

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# Our Problem Statements and Recommendations

# Our Problem Statements

- The County and School Boards remain the same size as they were in 1930 despite a growing and more dense population. This reality has resulted in overworked elected officials, inadequate representation, and insufficient community engagement.
- Arlington County does not have sufficient political influence in the region in light of its population and geography and so many of our policy challenges are strongly influenced by our regional neighbors. Yet, Arlington has a County Board and School Board chair that changes each year, limiting the influence of the respective chairs compared to other regional leaders.
- Arlington's elected bodies do not adequately reflect the county's diversity, including but not limited to racial and ethnic diversity, socioeconomic diversity, and viewpoint diversity. As a result, many Arlington residents, particularly those outside the dominant or majority groups, may not feel represented, and the County Board and School Board may not benefit from the full and robust range of perspectives and experiences of Arlington residents.
- Our electoral system does not ensure proportional representation in Arlington, encourage the most qualified best, and most diverse candidates to run and get elected to office, or provide strong competitive races in general elections.
- Arlington election system's reliance on primaries and caucuses discourages candidate participation and voter turnout and presents significant barriers, including the discriminatory candidate impacts as a result of the application of the Hatch Act on federal employees
- The current system (both structures and processes) for obtaining and utilizing community input is inadequate in informing decision-makers and making many residents feel that they have been heard. The government is not transparent, leading to a lack of accountability. Participants feel that engagement is not authentic and does not make a difference in outcomes. High-time requirements for participation limit the number of people able to participate.

# **The recommendations addressing Arlington's form of government are:**

1. Expand the County and School Boards to at least seven members
2. Maintain At-Large Seats for the election of the County Board and the School Board
3. Increase the term of the Chairs of the County and School Boards from the current one-year term to a term of a minimum of two years, with the ability to extend the term for up to another two years if the fellow Board members concur
4. Increase the salaries of County Board and School Board members to attract a wider range of candidates:
  - a) For the County Board – support the implementation of the phased increase of salaries to the statutory pay caps of \$89,951 for County Board members and \$95,734 for the Chair;
  - b) For the School Board – increase their salaries substantially over the current levels of \$25,000 for members and \$27,000 for the Chair;

# **The recommendations addressing Arlington's method of elections are:**

5. Replace the current plurality method of electing both boards with multiseat ranked choice (also known as proportional ranked choice) voting method.
6. Stagger the elections for both boards every two years, with one set of elections to be composed of 4 County Board seats and 3 School Board seats, followed by an election two years later to fill 3 County Board seats and 4 School Board seats, with a continued rotation biennially, maintaining 4-year terms for all County and School Board members.

# Recommendation: Enlarge County and School Boards

Recommendation	Rationale	Intended Outcomes
Expand the County and School Boards to at least seven members	<p>Arlington's elected boards remain the same size as they were in 1930, despite a growing and more dense population, resulting in overworked electeds, inadequate representation, and insufficient community engagement.</p>	<p>Provide the voices, values and contributions of two additional Arlington citizens to the elected bodies of Arlington County government and Arlington Public Schools.</p> <p>Afford Arlingtonians an enlarged opportunity to serve in public office and the greater opportunity to interact with and feel connected to their elected officials.</p> <p>Bring Arlington more closely in balance with the size of governing bodies relative to population in surrounding DMV localities and in counties across the Commonwealth of Virginia.</p> <p>Allow the large and growing amount of day-to-day Board work, as well as the large and growing number of regional and local liaison responsibilities, respectively, to be divided among a greater number of Board members, thus helping to ensure that that work is adequately addressed, as well as assisting individual Board members in meeting their responsibilities and providing better work/life balance through broader sharing of responsibilities.</p> <p>Facilitate opportunities for individual Board members to focus more deeply on certain policy areas and operational concerns, rather than being stretched so thin that only broad, general knowledge of County and APS government is feasible.</p> <p>Mean modest increased costs (relative to overall respective budgets) to the annual County Board and School Board office budgets as a result of salary, benefits and office supplies for two additional County Board and two additional School Board members. Additional office space will also be needed for each new member, consistent with the practice of each body.</p>

# **Recommendation: At-Large Elections for Boards**

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Rationale</b>	<b>Intended Outcome</b>
Maintain At-Large Seats for the election of the County Board and the School Board	Considering how geographically small Arlington County is, along with concerns about gerrymandering and the potential for board members representing separate districts to compete against each other to acquire resources for their respective districts and focus on parochial concerns at the expense of the County as a whole, the group determined that elections by district or a hybrid system would hinder the ability to move forward policies and actions that benefit the whole County versus individual districts of the County.	Since candidates for elected office in Arlington County are currently elected at-large, there is no expected change in outcomes from this recommendation

# Recommendation: Longer County and School Board Chair Terms

Recommendation	Rationale	Intended Outcome
Increase the term of the Chairs of the County and School Boards from the current one-year term to a term of a minimum of two years, with the ability to extend the term for up to another two years if the fellow Board members concur	<p>TiGER reviewed the term periods of other elected officials in areas contiguous to Arlington County and in the region. While the Arlington County Board Chair is selected by their peers for a one-year term, other neighboring governmental entities (e.g., Fairfax County, the City of Alexandria, D.C., Montgomery County, MD, etc.) have multi-year terms and are able to wield more significant influence in regional discussions because of their longer tenure and positional authority.</p> <p>The shorter term for the Arlington County Board chair also limits their ability to form stronger, more meaningful partnerships and strategic relationships with fellow elected officials that could benefit Arlington County residents.</p> <p>This also holds true for the Arlington School Board Chair which position is also elected annually by their peers and tradition holds that board members rotate into this position, changing the Chair every year. This is not the case in other neighboring jurisdictions.</p>	<p>Extending the length of office of the County Board and School Board chairs will facilitate the chairs forming longer and stronger relationships with other local elected leaders, facilitating longer term projects that are regional in nature but have dividends and benefits for Arlington County, and perhaps exercising more influence in regional discussions because the role is on more of an equal footing with other elected leaders who are serving longer terms.</p> <p>Maintaining an indirect election of the Board Chair will help to ensure that the Chair, who generally serves as the spokesperson of the Board and sets the agendas for the meetings, is generally supported by their colleagues, resulting in a more collaborative and potentially effective Board.</p>

# **Recommendation: Increased Salaries for County Board Members**

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Rationale</b>	<b>Intended Outcome</b>
Implement a 3-year phased increase of County Board member and chair salaries to the current statutory pay caps of \$89,951 for County Board members and \$95,734 for the Chair	<p>The scope and complexity of managing the County are already large and continue to grow. Yet, the resources provided to attract diverse and high caliber individuals to fill the local elected positions have lagged behind.</p> <p>Although County Board membership has historically been considered “part time”, Board members are responsible for making and overseeing the County policy decisions that the County Manager administers. The Board also makes land use and zoning decisions, sets real estate, personal property and other taxes, approves an annual budget, and adopts the 10-year Capital Improvement Plan every two years.</p> <p>In addition, Board members have liaison responsibilities to 82 separate groups. These include Standing Advisory Commissions (38), Ad Hoc Advisory groups (4), Quasi-judicial groups (7), regional bodies and their sub-bodies (15), Business Improvement Districts and Partnerships (6), Community groups (11) and miscellaneous (1). Group assignments are generally split equally among the Board members, with the Chair taking somewhat fewer. With 5 Board members, that represents about 16 groups per person; with 7 members that averages about 11 per member.</p>	<p>Ensure salary levels are more consistent with similar roles in the DMV area, make these elected positions more attractive and feasibly available to a wider cross-section of residents.</p> <p>Enable the County to attract and retain candidates and elected officials from a wider band of backgrounds and financial circumstances.</p>

## **Recommendation: Increased Salaries for School Board Members**

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Rationale</b>	<b>Intended Outcome</b>
Increase the salaries of School Board members substantially over their current levels of \$25,000 for members and \$27,000 for the chair	<p>The scope and complexity of managing the County's school system are already large and continue to grow. Yet, the resources provided to attract diverse and high caliber individuals to fill the local elected positions have lagged behind.</p> <p>Although School Board membership has also historically been considered "part time", Board members have a broad range of responsibilities. Those include setting system policies, appointing the Superintendent and monitoring implementation of the policies, adopting an annual budget and a 10-year Capital Improvement Plan every two years (in concert with the County Board), and maintaining links with all Arlington parents and relevant organizations pertaining to public education in Arlington, in addition to other responsibilities.</p> <p>School Board members have liaison responsibilities to 118 separate groups. These include Standing Advisory Committees (13), School Board Subcommittees (2), Individual Schools and Programs (43), and Arlington Civic Associations (60). As with the County Board, group assignments are generally split equally among the Board members, with the Chair taking fewer assignments. With 5 Board members, that represents on average 23 assignments per member; with 7 members that would average about 16-17 assignments per member.</p>	<p>Ensure salary levels are more consistent with similar roles in the DMV area, make these elected positions more attractive and feasibly available to a wider cross-section of residents.</p> <p>Enable the County to attract and retain candidates and elected officials from a wider band of backgrounds and financial circumstances.</p> <p>Encourage greater equity in line with our County's values as it is inequitable to pay School Board members so much less than County Board members, when all these positions are much closer to being full-time than they were in earlier years.</p>

# **Recommendation: Replace the current plurality method of electing both boards with multiseat ranked choice (also known as proportional ranked choice) voting**

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Rationale</b>	<b>Intended Outcome</b>
Replace the current plurality method of electing both boards with multiseat ranked choice (also known as proportional ranked choice) voting method.	<p>Multi-seat RCV is the election system most likely to increase diversity of candidates and Board members.</p> <p>It promotes majority rule and fair representation for all voters. Fair representation means that nearly all voters will help elect a candidate they support, and that different groups of voters will elect winners in proportion to their share of the votes cast.</p> <p>Voters can honestly rank their favorite candidate first, their second-favorite candidate second, and so on, without needing to think tactically about who is most 'electable' or whether their vote will be 'wasted.'</p> <p>Proportional RCV ends winner-take-all politics and lowers the threshold number of votes needed to win.</p> <p>By lowering the threshold number of votes to win, it is likely easier for minority communities to elect candidates who represent them.</p> <p>Multi-seat RCV also allows candidates to seek support from communities of interest across the County, whether or not they are geographically concentrated.</p> <p>Research shows that women will win election at higher rates in multi-winner districts. Multi-seat RCV also decreases barriers to running for elections. Although seats are at large, lower election thresholds mean an ability for candidates to focus campaigning on groups or specific communities of interest.</p> <p>Multi-seat ranked choice voting dramatically lowers the threshold for election (the more seats the lower the threshold) and thus, makes more likely the election of members of currently underrepresented communities</p>	<p>1-Replacing the current plurality method of electing both boards with multi-seat or proportional ranked choice voting will provide a higher chance of electing diverse candidates.</p> <p>2-Multi-seat ranked choice voting is expected to engage more minority voters because it provides an incentive for more minority candidates.</p> <p>3-20% and 25% thresholds for elected seats are expected to attract more voters from marginalized communities increasing voter turnout.</p> <p>4-Campaigns will be less negative and less personality focused, and more positive and issue focused, since campaigns will not want to run "against" each other because they will want an opportunity to be a voter's 2nd choice candidate on the ballot.</p> <p>5-Positive campaigns are expected to lead to greater voter engagement.</p> <p>6-There will be no changes to primaries or caucuses; however, opportunities for reform may emerge as a consequence of moving to a multi-seat ranked choice election system.</p>

## **Recommendation: Stagger the elections for both boards every two years**

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Rationale</b>	<b>Intended Outcome</b>
<p>Stagger the elections for both boards every two years, with one set of elections to be composed of 4 County Board seats and 3 School Board seats, followed by an election two years later to fill 3 County Board seats and 4 School Board seats, with a continued rotation biennially, maintaining 4-year terms for all County and School Board members.</p>	<p>Elections with 4 seats will require a 20% threshold to get elected, while elections with 3 seats available will require 25% of the electorate to win office if we use multi-seat ranked choice voting. This still allows for multiple seats at any given election to increase choice and diversity in candidates and lower the threshold for election for better representation, as well as limits turnover potential for each board. This would provide some constant of institutional knowledge and experienced board members serving at any given time (we are not recommending any changes to the 4-year term of service). It also allows voters to weigh in and hold Boards accountable every two years, through votes, on how each Board is performing. This solution allows all voters to focus on both the County Board and School Board candidates at each biennial election and allows for questions from voters regarding the understanding and need for County and School Board collaboration. This does mean abandoning our current practice of electing County Board and School Board members every year.</p> <p>Finally, it reduces the number of candidates for each Board that a voter must learn about (compared to other multi-seat options), while still allowing for an easier ranked choice voting allotment and process (ranking minimum of 4-5 at any given election and, if each seat is contested, a possibility of 8-10 candidates for each respective Board). It also moves us from one seat open every year to multiple seats open every two years, allowing for more choice and diverse perspectives to seek elected seats.</p>	<p>1- Four-year terms for County Board and School Board Members remain the same, so no new outcomes are expected for term service.</p> <p>2-This recommendation would also provide opportunity for more candidate choice and diversity leading to better community representation due to multi-seat elections for each board at each election cycle without overwhelming voters as they study and learn about candidates.</p> <p>3-Running County Board seats and School Board seats at the same time will engage voters who have interest in funding and capital improvement and other areas of overlap between both boards.</p> <p>4- This may provide relief from election fatigue as it reduces the local elections to every two years from every year.</p> <p>5-Some Board Members will get elected with 20% of the vote, while their colleagues 2 years later get elected with 25% of the vote.</p>