



Chapter 1: Election Administrator Roles

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Elections 101 Manual
Chapter 1

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Section 1.1: Elections Division

Contact Information

Main Elections Office

- ☐ (360) 902-4180
- ☐ elections@sos.wa.gov
- ☐ <https://sos.wa.gov/elections/>
- ☐ Training resources: <https://osos.service-now.com/county/>

Notes

State Elections Division Staff Members

- ☐ VoteWA → Help → Elections Contacts

Certification & Training Program Staff

- ☐ Dave Piersma, Program Manager: dave.piersma@sos.wa.gov, (360) 902-4172
- ☐ Jeneva Apolito: jeneva.apolito@sos.wa.gov, (360) 790-0949
- ☐ Les Bowen: les.bowen@sos.wa.gov, (360) 902-4187
- ☐ Victoria Donahue: victoria.donahue@sos.wa.gov, (360) 725-5788
- ☐ Paul Prociv: paul.prociv@sos.wa.gov, (360) 902-4177
- ☐ Dietrich Romero: dietrich.romero@sos.wa.gov, (360) 764-3916
- ☐ Lisa Tuerk: lisa.tuerk@sos.wa.gov, (360) 902-4167

C&T Support

- ☐ CTSupport@sos.wa.gov

VoteWA Support

- ☐ (360) 902-4194
- ☐ VoteWASupport@sos.wa.gov
- ☐ <https://osos.service-now.com/votewa>

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Elections 101 Manual
Chapter 1
Section 1.2

Section 1.2: The Role of Elections

 [RCW 29A.04.205](#), [U.S. Constitution](#), [Washington State Constitution](#)

Notes

The foundation of American democracy starts with the vote. This begins with you! Legislative, judicial and executive branches of government all spring both directly and indirectly from the people through the vote.

We conduct our duties within the executive branch of government. We carry out laws adopted by the state and federal legislative branches of government and interpreted by the judicial branch (courts).

It is our solemn duty to apply election law without personal or partisan bias, ensuring equal opportunity and treatment under the Constitution of the United States; the Washington State Constitution; state laws and rules; and federal, state, and local court decisions.

Our duty is to the law, never one person(s).

The Three Branches of Government



Legislative

- Makes Laws
- U.S. Congress
- State Legislature
- County Council or Board of County Commissioners



Judicial

- Interprets Laws
- U.S. Supreme Court and Federal Courts
- State Supreme Court
- State Courts of Appeals
- Superior Courts
- District and Municipal Courts



Executive

- Applies Laws
- US President
- US Cabinet/ Other
- State Governor
- Attorney(s) General
- Secretary of State
- County Auditors
- County Canvassing Boards
- Election Administration

How Do the Three Branches of Government Apply to Me?

Understanding, navigating, and applying the three-branch system is crucial to applying the law and the will of the voter. It is also critical to avoiding lawsuits and informing the public of your action with transparency. Review [“The Three Branches of Government” on page 4](#) and [“Election Laws” on page 8](#), when engaging this scenario.

Notes

Example Scenario

A voter appears at your county to protest, asking, “Why did you take out the 30-day residency requirement for voter registrations? [RCW 29A.08.020](#) states that the oath state a resident live in Washington ‘at least 30 days immediately before the next election.’ You are violating the law!”

Questions

- What will you say?
- Is the voter right?
- Did you ask the proper questions when you printed or provided your voter registration forms?

Finding the Answer: Ask yourself some simple questions to get answers.

- Is the law quoted accurate?
- If accurate, is this law in effect?
- Has the law been changed pending new legislation? (legislative branch)
- Has the law been the subject of court action/interpretation? (judicial)
- At what level or jurisdiction (county, state, federal) has any action been taken on it?

Answer

Election staff/auditor: “Let’s see the RCW you are referring to. I think this may have conflicted with other US constitutional laws and/or had a court ruling. Have you checked those other branches for references?”

Concerned voter: No

Staff/auditor: “Okay—Let me get the details for you.”
(Provide a time frame to get back to them.)

“Ah yes, it looks like this law was found to conflict with the federal Voting Rights Act, and the First and Fourteenth Amendments of the US Constitution by the US District Court.”

Concerned voter: “This should only apply to federal elections then, right?! Right!!”

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Staff/auditor: “Not necessarily and not according to the US District Court interpretation.”

Concerned voter: “You should know better! This is wrong. You are wrong”

Staff/auditor: “The voter’s system of government includes the authority of the court to interpret. This process is the law. I am not above it. And this is the court interpretation. Further court decisions or legislation may change, but my duty is to the law as set forth by the constitution as interpreted by the courts.”

The Roles of Election Personnel

Assistants and Deputies

 [RCW 36.22.220](#), [RCW 29A.04.540](#), [WAC 434-250-100](#),
[WAC 434-261-051](#)

Whether full time or part time, each County Auditor appoints assistants or deputies.

- Staff checking ballot signatures or manning deposit sites must take an oath** (regarding the discharge of their duties).
- At least two deputies or assistants must receive training** (general and specific) within 18 months of undertaking responsibilities.

Our Oath

Oaths may vary by county. Specific wording is not prescribed. An oath template and suggested wording can be in the Reference Materials sections at the end of this manual for all election officials. Further templates may be found through the National Association of Elections Officials.

County Auditors must take an oath of office when elected before an authorized officer and affirm to faithfully and impartially discharge their duties. See [RCW 36.16.040](#).

Training

Each county must have at least two staff trained in the administration or conduct of elections within 18 months of assuming their responsibilities.

- General training can include Elections 101 or comparable county training.
- Specific training are those detailed duties and procedures at the county level.

Though not a requirement of the 18 month training requirement for every staff member, auditors’ offices are required to have no less than two Certified Elections Administrators.

Election Administrator Certification

 [RCW 29A.04](#), [RCW 36.22](#), [WAC 434-260](#)

State law requires at least two certified election administrators on staff in each county.

Notes

Initial Certification Requirements

- Complete the mandatory certification course provided by the Office of the Secretary of State (Elections 101) within five years prior to the date of application. Note: E-101 does not qualify toward training hours for initial certification
- Two years of service as an election administrator in a state or county elections office during the three years prior to the date of application.
- Take and pass the written elections administrator exam.
- Participate in at least 40 hours of conferences and workshops during the five years prior to the date of application.
 - At least 30 of the required 40 hours must be election-specific training.
 - At least 20 hours must specifically address Washington state elections.
 - Training must include attending the Washington State Elections Conference.
 - Up to four hours may be for observing election procedures in other county election departments.
 - Up to two hours may be for participating in elections panels or committees.
 - Up to 10 hours may be for professional development courses, subject to approval by the County Auditor or Elections Director.
 - Have a high school diploma or equivalent.

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Certification Renewal

Administrators must apply for renewal every two years. Applicants for renewal certification must meet the following requirements during the renewal period:

- Continuous service as an election administrator in a state or county elections office.
- Participate in at least 40 hours of conferences and workshops.
 - At least 30 of the required 40 hours must be election-specific training.
 - At least 20 hours must specifically address Washington state elections.
 - Training must include attending the Washington State Elections Conference.
 - Up to four hours may be for observing election procedures in other county election departments.
 - Up to two hours may be for participating in elections panels or committees.
 - Up to 10 hours may be for professional development courses, subject to approval by the County Auditor or Elections Director.

Applications for renewal must be submitted by December 31 of odd-numbered years and included training completed between January 1 of an even-numbered year to December 31 of the following odd-numbered year.

Election Laws

State Constitution

The State Constitution consists of 32 Articles. Each Article is denoted by a Roman numeral. Example: Article VI

Articles are divided into Sections. When referring to a specific section, you will see either:

- Article VI, Section 4, or
- Art. VI, Sec. 4, or
- Art. VI, § 4

Articles I, II, III, IV, VI, VII, XI, XIV, XXII, and XXIII all contain provisions related to elections.

State Statutes

The official name is the Revised Code of Washington, commonly known as “RCW.”

- Numbered Titles divide state statutes by subject.
Example: RCW **29A**
- Titles are divided into chapters and the chapter numbers appear after the title number, separated by a period.
Example: RCW **29A.24**
- Chapters are divided by sections and the section number is listed after the chapter number, separated by a period.
Example: RCW Title 29A, Chapter 24, Section **031** would read as RCW **29A.24.031**.

Notes

You will find most election laws in [Title 29A RCW](#), however many other chapters associated with specific offices and issues outside of Title 29A also contain election-related laws. For a list of these chapters and sections see [“Election-Related RCW Chapters” on page 10](#).

State Rules

The official name is Washington Administrative Code, commonly known as “WAC,” and it is are organized in a manner similar to RCW.

- Numbered titles divide state rules by subject.
Example: WAC **434**
- Titles are divided by chapters and the chapter numbers appear after the title number, separated by a dash.
Example: WAC **434-250**
- Chapters are divided by sections and the section number is listed after the chapter number, separated by a dash.
Example: Washington Administrative Code Title 434, Chapter 250, Section 030 would read as WAC **434-250-030**.

Rules for the Secretary of State are located in [Title 434 WAC](#). Election rules are found in WAC chapters 434-208 through 434-381.

Federal Election Laws

Federal election laws affect the administration of elections, including, but not limited to:

- MOVE Act — Military and Overseas Voter Empowerment Act of 2009
- HAVA — Help America Vote Act of 2002
- NVRA — National Voter Registration Act of 1993 (Motor Voter)
- UOCAVA — Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act of 1986
- Voting Accessibility for the Elderly and Handicapped Act of 1984
- Voting Rights Act of 1965

Notes

Litigation & Attorney General’s Opinions

- An opinion is requested when the interpretation of an existing law is in question. Attorney General Opinions are not binding as law, but these opinions may affect election administration.
- Supreme Court and Court of Appeals decisions override current law.
- State and federal court cases affect the administration of election law for the jurisdiction in question. Such decisions, while may or may not be binding for the entire state, influence interpretation of state law.

Search Tools

- Annual Washington Elections Law Books <https://www.sos.wa.gov/annual-elections-law-books>
- Most election-related RCW and WAC may be found on the Office of the Secretary of State website at https://www.sos.wa.gov/elections/election_laws.aspx.
- The state also provides a search option for RCW, WAC, and the State Constitution at <https://search.leg.wa.gov/search.aspx#document>.
- A list of [election-related RCW outside of Title 29A](#) on the Office of the Secretary of State website. (See also the following table).

Election-Related RCW Chapters

Election-Related Topics	RCW Title
Vacancies in Office	42.12
Eligibility to Hold Office	42.04.020
Motor Voter	46.20
Mental Competency	11.130
Public Disclosure Commission	42.17A (to be re-codified as 29B in 2026)
Redistricting	44.05
Legislative Districts	44.07F
General Government	RCW Title
Public Records	42.56
Records Retention	40.14 & 36.22
Open Public Meetings Act	42.30
Legal Notices & Publications	65.16
Debt Limits for Taxing Districts	39.36
General Obligation Bonds	39.40 & 39.46
Excess Property Tax Levies	84.52
Property Tax Limitations	84.55
Property Tax Exemptions	84.36
Taxing District Boundaries	84.09
Judicial Offices	RCW Title
Supreme Court	2.04
Court of Appeals	2.06
Superior Court	2.08
District Court	3.34 & 3.38
Municipal Court	3.46 & 3.50
Municipal Court > 400,000	35.20

Notes

State Offices	RCW Title
Governor	43.06
Lieutenant Governor	43.15
Secretary of State	43.07
State Treasurer	43.08
State Auditor	43.09
Attorney General	43.10
Commissioner of Public Lands	43.12
Superintendent of Public Instruction	28A.300
Local Government	RCW Title
Counties	36.16, 36.22, 36.32 & 36.89
Cities and Towns	35.02, 35.17, 35.18, 35.22-35.27
Code Cities: Charter and Non-charter	35A.01-35A.13 & 35A.29
Incorporations	35.02
Dis-incorporations	35.07
Annexations and Reductions	35.10, 35.13, 35.16, & 35A.14-35A.16
Special Purpose/Junior Taxing Districts	RCW Title
Dissolution of Special Purpose Districts	36.96
School Districts	28A.315, 28A.320, 28A.323, & 28A.343
Fire Districts	52.02-52.10, 52.14-52.16, & 52.26
Port Districts	53.04, 53.12-53.16, 53.36 & 53.46-53.48
Hospital Districts	70.44
Library Districts	27.12
Regional Transit Authorities	81.112
Transportation Benefit Districts	36.73
Regional Transportation Benefit Districts	36.120 & 82.80
Roads and Bridges	36.76, 36.83, & 36.88
Park and Recreation Districts	35.61
Public Utility Districts	54.04-54.12, 54.32, & 54.40
Water and Sewer Districts	35.13A, 57.02-57.04, 57.12, 57.20, & 57.24-57.36
Diking & Drainage Districts	85
Flood Control Districts	86.09 & 86.15
Irrigation Districts	87.03, 87.28, 87.52-87.56, & 87.84
Conservation Districts	89.08
Mosquito Control Districts	17.28
Weed Districts	17.04 & 17.06
Public Facilities Districts	36.100
Major Public Energy Projects	80.52
Cemetery Districts	68.52 & 68.54

Section 1.3: Accessibility Awareness

 [RCW 29A.12](#), [RCW 29A.40](#), [WAC 434-250](#)

Notes


HAVA (Help America Vote Act)

[HAVA, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 \(ADA\)](#) and state law require election officials provide voters with disabilities the same access to voting as other citizens. These laws give voters a more accessible opportunity to vote privately and independently.

How Do You Make Voting by Mail Accessible?

Every county must provide:

- An Accessible Voting Unit (AVU) in each voting center and at least one of the other locations designated by the County Auditor to allow people to register in-person. The unit must be wheelchair-accessible.
- Election materials in alternate formats, e.g., audio and larger fonts.
- Voting centers that meet all requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The AVU must be positioned in a way to protect voter privacy. The voting screen of the AVU should not be viewable by staff or voters in the center.

 For more information about determining the accessibility of voting locations, see [“ADA Checklist for Event Accessibility” on page 15.](#)

Disability Advisory Committee

 [RCW 29A.04](#)

All counties are required to establish and maintain a Disability Advisory Committee (DAC) or a County Accessible Community Advisory Committee (ACAC). The committee must include persons of diverse disabilities and persons with expertise in providing accommodations for persons with disabilities. Counties may also choose to partner with each other and share a committee, known as a Joint Disability Advisory Committee, as long as no more than one of the participating counties has a population greater than seventy thousand.

What Does the Committee Do?

The committee must work with the County Auditor to create a plan, update the plan at least annually, and implement changes to improve the accessibility of elections for voters with disabilities with regard to:

- The number and location of voting centers and ballot deposit sites and/or ballot drop boxes. (Example: locate drive-up ballot deposit boxes on the driver’s side of a car and pedestrian boxes at wheelchair height.)
- Outreach to voters regarding the availability of accessible voting accommodations.
- Transportation of AVUs to locations convenient to voters with disabilities.
- Implementation of the Help America Vote Act.
- Reviewing and updating the plan on a yearly basis.

Accessibility Awareness

Voter Assistance

A voter has the right to request assistance from whomever the voter chooses. Staff members may assist voters upon request or offer assistance when it appears that a voter is having difficulty casting a vote.



Maintain voter privacy — always ask the voter if assistance is needed prior to approaching.

Interacting with People with Disabilities

Be Respectful — A person with a disability is a person like anyone else. Treat people with the same respect and consideration.

Meeting Someone — Try to avoid actions and words that suggest the person should be treated differently. People who use wheelchairs may have a variety of different disabilities. When you meet someone, extend your hand to shake if that is what you normally do. A person who cannot shake hands will let you

Online resources for accessibility awareness

- The YouTube video, “Disability Sensitivity Training” produced by the District of Columbia (<https://youtu.be/Gv1aDEFIXq8>) addresses communication with members of the disabled community.
- The “Voting with a Disability in Oregon” video produced by Disability Rights Oregon (<https://youtu.be/NOuGDrlcdos>) illustrates ways to help people vote privately and independently at home.
- Disability Rights Washington’s YouTube voting series (<https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLLSb3deWSkYyHjsWFdeMYGmJTHf-tou-z>) explains to viewers that voters in various communities retain voting rights and how to exercise those rights.

Notes

know. If you are meeting a blind person, identify yourself. Use a normal tone of voice. Do not raise your voice unless requested.

Helping — Do not automatically give assistance. Ask first if the person wants help. Offer assistance, quietly and tactfully, but do not overdo it or insist on helping. Respect the person’s right to reject help or to indicate the kind of help needed.

- If the offer is accepted, listen to instructions. The person may refuse your offer of assistance or may not wish to discuss their disability.
- If you cannot assist in the way that is requested, discuss it with the person. You have a right to set limits on what you can and cannot do. Your relationship with a person with a disability should be, like any other relationship, a reciprocal one.
- Appreciate what the person can do. Remember that difficulties the person may be facing may stem more from society’s attitudes and barriers than from the disability itself.

Communicating — Talk directly to the person, not to an aide, friend, or interpreter. When talking with a person in a wheelchair for more than a few minutes sit down and converse at the same level. Offer to make basic information available in large print, Braille, electronic or audio formats.

- Relax. If you do not know what to do or say, allow the person who has a disability to help put you at ease.
- Do not assume anything. If you have a question about what to do, how to do it, what language or terminology to use, what assistance to offer, ask the person with the disability. That person should be your first and best resource.
- Talk about the disability if it comes up naturally, without prying. Let the person guide you. Be considerate of the extra time a person with a disability may need to say or do things. Let the person set the pace in walking or talking.
- Give whole, unhurried attention to the person who has difficulty speaking. Don’t talk for the person, but give help when needed. Keep your manner encouraging rather than correcting. When necessary, ask questions that require short answers or a nod or shake of the head.
- Don’t pretend to understand a person with a speech difference when you do not. Don’t be afraid to let the person know that you do not understand. Be patient, not only with the person with the disability but also with yourself.
- Speak calmly, slowly, and distinctly to a person with a hearing problem or other difficulty understanding.
- Stand in front of the person, speak directly to the person, and use natural gestures to aid communication.
- When full understanding is doubtful, try writing notes.

Touching — Do not pat or touch a person with a disability unless there is a good reason (such as shaking hands in greeting or if the person has requested assistance).

- Gently touching a deaf person to get their attention is permissible.
- Do not touch someone’s cane, wheelchair or other device.

Environments — Provide wide & clear paths of travel for people who use wheelchairs or are blind.

- Be alert to architectural barriers. Inadequate lighting is difficult for those with hearing and sight problems.
- Be aware that some people may be sensitive to smoke, perfumes, or any other irritants that may be in the air.


Wheelchairs or mobility aides — Never push a wheelchair without first asking the occupant if you may do so. Do not move wheelchairs, crutches, or other mobility aids out of the reach of the owners.

Do not invade personal space by leaning on a wheelchair. Do not patronize a person in a wheelchair by patting them on the head.

Service Animals — A service animal is NOT required to have any special certification. Federal law protects the civil rights of persons with disabilities who are accompanied by their service animals in all public places.

- Do not make noises at the service animal; it may distract the animal from doing its job.
- Never touch a service animal, or the person it assists, without permission.
- Do not pet or otherwise distract dog guides — they are working.

ADA Checklist for Event Accessibility

 For a detailed checklist for polling places, voting centers, and public access, see the [ADA Checklist for Polling Places](#) on the U.S. Department of Justice website.

Is this Location/Event Accessible?

Answer the following questions. If any answer is negative, or needs qualification, select a new location or make accommodations.

Notes

Parking

- The required number of parking spaces are designated as accessible with signs using the access logo.
- One out of every six accessible parking spaces is designed with an access aisle for van parking.
- The accessible parking is located as close as possible to the entrance.
- If accessible parking is not visible from the street, directional signs with the access logo are pointing the way.
- Voters can be dropped off at a curb cut providing adequate and direct access to the building.

Pathways

- Paths are no less than 48 inches wide.
- Pathway slopes are no more than a 1-inch rise for every 20 inches of run.
- There is at least 80 inches of clearance over the pathway at all points.
- All thresholds are no more than one-half inch for interior or three-quarters of an inch for exterior doors.
- Carpets are no thicker than one-half inch.
- If there are gratings in the walking surface, the grating is no more than one-half inch in width.
- Directional signs are visible along the accessible route and at the entrance.
- All doorways are at least 32 inches wide.
- If the location requires movement between floors, an elevator access is in close proximity to the entrance and the training room.
- All stairs are supplemented with ramps of no more than a 1-foot rise for every 20 feet of run.

Building/Training Room

- Doors to building and rooms are designed with lever handles, automatic openers and room to move to the side.
- Drinking fountains, telephones and other convenience facilities are designed for wheelchair users or those with mobility issues.
- The restrooms include wide stalls and grab bars, and are in close proximity to the meeting room.
- The room arrangement is such that all persons will be able to participate visually and physically.
- The room can accommodate additional space requirements by those with mobility issues.
- If computers are to be used, computer stations are designed to accommodate wheelchairs.

Meeting Announcements

- Accommodations such as interpreters, handouts, and presentation copies are available in alternate formats.
- There is a statement regarding availability of accommodations in all publicity for the meeting.
- There is a statement that alternate formats are available upon request.
- Videos/films have closed captions.
- A contact person has been identified for accommodation issues.

Section 1.4: Election Administration Toolkit

Tools

Every election administrator should assemble a “toolkit” consisting of items to keep the office running smoothly. Take time to assemble your “toolkit” to include:

- County office procedures (written)
- Contact information
- Policy and training resources
- Election tools and resources
- Continuity of operations plan
- Elections forms and templates
- Helpful online resources
- Accessibility guidelines and resources
- “ADA Checklist for Polling Places [Vote Centers]”
- Your county Disability Advisory Committee plan

Office Procedures

Written procedures ensure consistency in completing a task, provide a timeline for processes, and give direction to new employees or for infrequent activities. Procedures also document compliance with state laws and office policy. Written procedures may include:

- Title with initials of author and date of last review.
- Brief statement of the purpose for the procedure.
- List of controlling statutes, rules, or policies.
- List of forms used in the procedure.
- List of records created during the process.
- Step by step instructions necessary to complete the procedure.
- Times and deadlines (including retention schedules)
- Actions to take in special circumstances, e.g. lack of compliance or an emergency.
- Position responsible for the completion of each task or procedure.

Be sure to:

- Test procedures with inexperienced staff.
- Adopt procedures only after testing.
- Review and update office procedures annually.

Contact Information

Gather your own quick reference guide or an updated set of contacts with the following:

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Notes

Example of Written Procedure Form

Title Ballot Packing for Storage	Document No. and Revision TB – 002
Written and Last Updated by and Date: D.F. 4/21/2008	Effective Date: 6/30/2008
Approved by and Date: WM 6/30/2008	

Purpose

To maintain and track how and where tabulated ballots are packed for storage after tabulation.

References

RCW 29A.60.110	Ballot containers, sealing, opening
WAC 434-261-045	Secure Storage

Forms

	Batch slips
	Storage box label

Records

Ballot storage location.xls	Batch locations are recorded in each election's ballot location spreadsheet
Batch Accountability Sheet	Tabulation accountability paperwork completed by machine operator for each batch of ballots

Procedure

1.0 Pre-Election storage inventory

Action By	Action
Election Technician	1) Review supply check sheet and order any needed supplies at least 4 weeks before election

2.0 Pre-tabulation packing preparation (prior to Election Day tabulation)

County-Specific Contacts:

- Equipment Vendors, ex: voting system/tabulation equipment, office printers
- Service Vendors, e.g., ballot and ballot packet materials printer, Local Voters' Pamphlet print vendor
- County political parties

Statewide Contacts:

- VoteWA Support, C&T Support, and all State Elections Division staff (see the VoteWA 'Help' tab)
- US Post Office representatives (participate in daily election calls)

Your Elections Community & Government Entities

One of our best tools and resource for elections is usually a phone call or email away. Do not be shy to contact your government partners to ensure elections are conducted well:

- Any County Auditor’s Office or secretary of state official
- Local government sites, e.g., cities, ports, schools

Notes

Policy Resources

Law, policy, and advisories are your first and ultimate authority and responsibility:

- RCW & WAC
 - [Title 29A RCW](#)
 - [Title 434 WAC](#)
- [“Administrators” tab on the Elections homepage](#)
 - Certification Requirements
 - E101 Manual
 - Certification Test
- [Elections Resources](#) (must first log in to VoteWA)
 - Videos
 - Training Course Modules
 - Training Calendar
- [Clearinghouse Notices & Elections Advisories](#)
- [Department of Justice Voting Section](#)
- [NVRA and UOCAVA](#)
- [Federal Voting Assistance Program \(FVAP\)](#)
- [Public Disclosure Commission](#)
- [US Postal Service](#)
 - [USPS Election Mail](#)
- [Budgeting, Accounting and Reporting System \(BARS\)](#)

Election Tools & Resources

Election tools are driven by policy, not the other way around. They help you execute the law.

VoteWA

VoteWA is our statewide voter registration and election management system.

- Live Production Link: <https://admin.votewa.gov/>
- QA or Practice Link: <https://qa-admin.votewa.gov/>
- VoteWA Manual (located in the “Help” menu in VoteWA).

Notes

VoteWA includes:

- Increased access to election results
- Online voter registration
- Individual voter information
- Online ballot access
- Standardized voter education notices
- Online voter guides
- Archived election information
- Candidate Filing Management

Voting Systems

Your county voting (tabulation) systems is the tool that allows you to build and count ballots and produce election results. You will need to ensure compliance with state law. Be sure to identify your:

- Voting System equipment manual
- Software, security “keys”, and/or programming files saved to external discs, drives, or other hardware
- Contact information for your vendor
 - Include name and information for the specific contact person for your county if applicable
 - Contact for maintenance requests

Forms & Templates

The following resources are available on the Office of the Secretary of State website:

- [Voter Registration Challenges](#)
- [Agency Based Registration Forms](#)
- [Voter Registration Form](#)

The [Online Voter Registration](#) is available through VoteWA.

Helpful Online Resources:

Research Tools

- [WA Department of Licensing query](#) — Secure Access Washington (requires licensed login)
- [USPS ZIP code locator](#)
- [LexisNexis](#) (requires licensed login)

Section 1.5: Election & Voter Registration Costs

Costs & Expenditures

Elections cost money. Participating minor taxing jurisdictions and the state pay their share of election costs. Some examples of recoverable expenditures are:

- Printing costs for ballots and envelopes.
- Postage for mailing outbound ballots and charges for undeliverable ballots.
- Staff time dedicated to the election.
- Annual maintenance for the tabulation system software and hardware.
- A portion of annual maintenance for VoteWA software and hardware.
- Examples of voter registration costs:
 - The voter registration system (VoteWA) maintenance.
 - Printing or postage for required NVRA notices.
 - Staff time dedicated to voter registration.
 - A portion of annual maintenance for election management hardware.
 - Cost of producing a local voters’ pamphlet.

Do not include expenses covered by federal and state grants.


Bill voter registration expenses to the county and cities/towns based on voter registration totals. The county is responsible for its share based on the number of voters in unincorporated areas.

Tracking Expenses

There are several methods for tracking expenditures:

- Using budget line items attached to warrants.
- Retaining copies of all invoices.
- Maintaining an itemized spreadsheet during the election.

You may use any combination of these methods to document your expenses that is approved by the State Auditor. Track registration expenses separately from election costs.

 *Billing information and rules for cost recovery are available in the [Budgeting, Accounting and Reporting System \(BARS\) Manual](#) available on the Washington State Auditor’s Office website.*

Section 1.6: Public Information and Record Requests

 [RCW 42.56](#)

Notes

Public Information


The Public Records Act ([RCW 42.56](#)) helps to define and determine if a document is a public record. Most of the records created and maintained by election administrators are considered public records and are subject to the laws of this section.

Public records may consist of a number of formats including, but not limited to: letters, memos, emails, chat/instant messages, text messages, voicemails, meeting transcripts, films, videos, photographs, audio recordings, symbols, discs, etc.

State and local retention schedules determine how long documents and records must be retained. Retention schedules are found on the Office of the Secretary of State website under Archives.

Counties use two schedules:

- [Local Government Common Records Retention Schedule \(CORE\)](#)
- [County Auditors Records Retention Schedule](#)


 *For more information about retention schedules, see the [Local Government Records Retention Schedules](#) and [State Government Records Retention Schedules](#) on the Office of the Secretary of State website.*

Keep documents without a prescribed retention period indefinitely.

Except when specific exemptions apply, if a record is considered public it must be made available for public inspection and copying upon request.

For example, there are exemptions related to:

- Ballots and ballot images
- Voters' signatures
- The content of a voter's registration record

 *For information about records that are not subject to disclosure, see ["Are There Any Exempt Records?"](#) on page 24.*

Requests for Public Information

There are many things to consider when receiving and processing a request for public records. It is best practice to have an assigned person in each office who is trained to respond to public records requests, but all staff members should know the general guidance:

Public Records Request Resources

- Public Records Act: [Chapter 42.56 RCW](#)
- Public Access to Registration Records [RCW 29A.08.710-775](#)
- [Washington State Archives](#)
- [Basics of Records Management – Advice and Resources](#)
- [Managing Public Records Requests](#)

- Any member of the public may request a document and the request can be made verbally or in writing.
- An agency must provide the fullest assistance to the requester.
- Respond to records requests within five business days and during normal business hours.
- Fulfill the request in as short a period of time as possible.
- Do not require a reason for a public records request.
- The law restricts the use of public lists for commercial purposes, but not the release of information.
- Unless exempted, agencies must provide a record if it exists. This includes records held beyond the retention period.

Do not charge a fee for viewing or searching for documents. You can charge the actual cost for copying documents up to 15 cents per page or for scanning paper documents into electronic format provided you meet all conditions of [WAC 44-14-070](#).

What Should You Do When You Receive a Public Information or Record Request?

Respond no later than five business days after the request by:

- Checking to see if the record is subject to disclosure
- Providing the record, or
- Notifying the requester with an estimate of when the document(s) will be provided, or
- Seeking clarification of the request, or
- Denying the request with an explanation why you cannot or will not comply.
- If the record request is related to voter registration refer them to the Office of the Secretary of State.

Notes

Are There Any Exempt Records?

The Public Records Act exempts records disclosure, such as:

- Personnel files that are closed.
- Ongoing investigations by law enforcement agencies.
- Preliminary drafts or notes expressing opinions or formulating policies.
- Create an exemption log that identifies denied records by date, author, title, and exemption statute and reason.
- Cybersecurity and physical security plans to prevent or mitigate threats to the office.
- Voter signatures, phone numbers, and email addresses on ballot return envelopes, declarations, and signature correction forms.
 - The requester may inspect these records in person but may not take photographs or recordings.

A denial may lead to a lawsuit, so keep good records.

Retention of records is separate from records exemptions. An exempt record must still be kept for the required time frame as directed by the retention schedules.