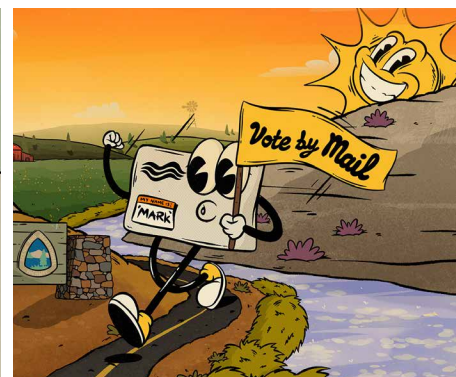
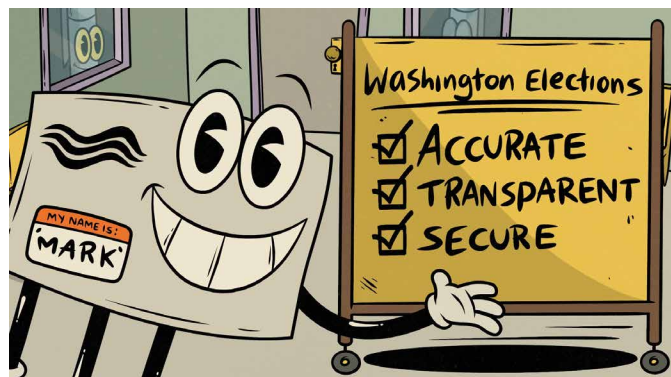
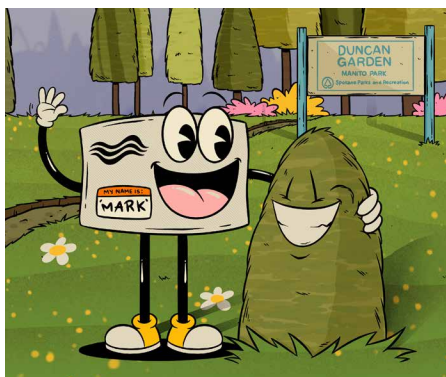
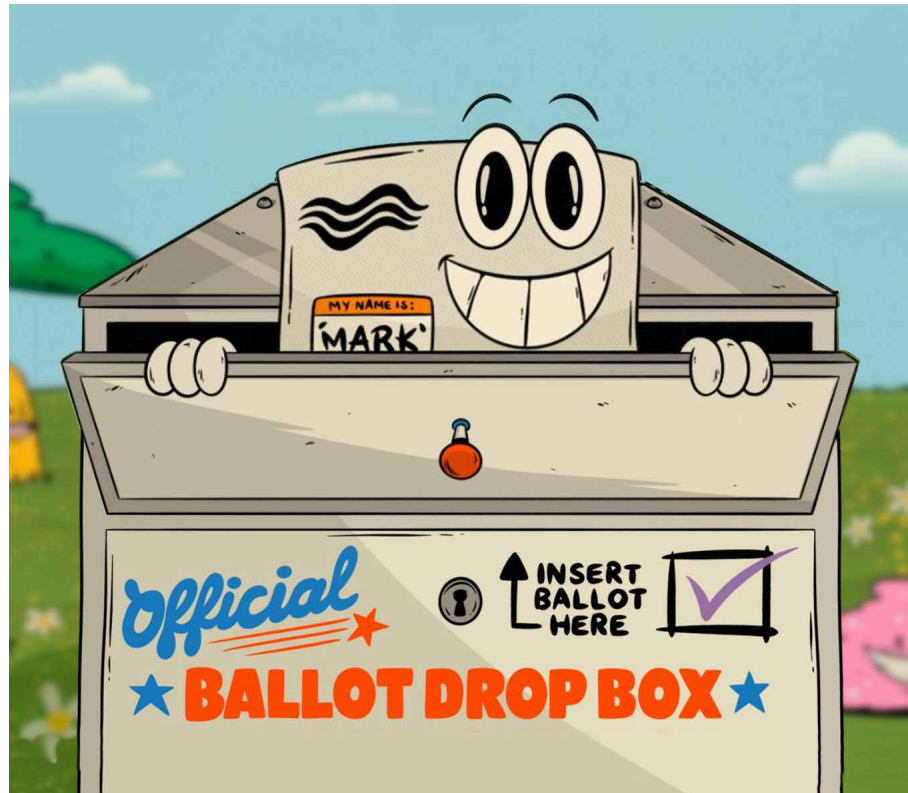


Elections 101

Election Administrator Certification Training Manual



WASHINGTON
Secretary of State
Elections Division



Introduction

Purpose

The Elections 101 (E101) manual is a support tool and reference guide for the E101 course. Reviewing the manual, or any training videos is not considered equivalent to a complete training.

Elections 101 orients new elections administrators and personnel to:

- Their role and duty to common elections values and rule of law.
- The breadth of election law.
- The expectation and skills required to identify applicable laws and execute policies that are consistent with state election law and policy.

Elections 101 does not:

- Contain answers to all elections questions or topics.
- Replace law, rule, or court rulings.

Generally, this manual should be used as a reference guide — a starting point for investigating and identifying correct election practices. It is not the law but should direct and orient election personnel in the proper direction for further research or basic answers.

Updates to the Manual

This manual is periodically updated to reflect changes in state election laws and policies. New versions of this manual will be released on the Office of the Secretary of State website. Revision dates appear at the bottom of each page of the manual.

Please submit suggested corrections and clarifications of the Elections 101 Manual to CTSupport@sos.wa.gov.

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Chapter 1: Election Administrator Roles

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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.”

Notes

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.

Notes

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

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.



Chapter 2: Security

Chapter 2 Contents

- 27 *Section 2.1: Physical Security*
 - Layers of Security
 - Secure Storage Requirement

- 32 *Section 2.2: Cybersecurity*
 - Core Security Principles
 - Vendor Security
 - Social Engineering

- 34 *Section 2.3: Device Security*

Section 2.1: Physical Security

 [RCW 29A.40](#), [RCW 29A.60](#)

Election security comprises both physical and cybersecurity components. Physical security serves as the base for robust cybersecurity measures. These combined efforts are aimed at safeguarding against unauthorized access to election sites and computerized systems.

Unfortunately, simply the appearance of unauthorized access will cast doubt on an election’s integrity. Keep this in mind when making decisions about security.

Complex security methods, such as security cameras and electronic badge access, alone do not usually meet the requirements of secure storage, and they can provide a false sense of physical security.

Physical security refers to all policies, procedures, and actions taken to protect voting systems, equipment, required documentation, ballots, and related facilities from natural hazards, tampering, vandalism, and theft from both internal and external sources.

Secure storage includes the use of numbered seals and logs or other security measures that: “documents appropriate access and detects inappropriate access” of ballots, ballot images, and systems used to count and tabulate votes. (See [WAC 434-256-045](#))

To ensure the most effective security measures, it's essential to have multiple layers of safeguards in place. Evaluate the security of your office and storage areas by considering the following six questions:

- How does the elections department restrict public access to sensitive areas?
- Are digital data, tabulation systems, storage areas, processing areas, and ballots in custody adequately secured?
- Do you utilize tamper-evident seals and maintain detailed logs to document access?
- Who is responsible for and how frequently are logs/documentation reviewed?
- Are staff members trained to identify signs of seal tampering?
- Have trainings been conducted on your security policies and procedures?

The answers to these questions are informed by RCW and WAC, along with individual county policies and procedures. By addressing these questions, you can better assess and enhance the security measures in your office and storage areas.

Notes

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Layers of Security

- ❑ **Access Control** — Implementing access control measures such as gates, locks, and security personnel to restrict entry to authorized personnel only.
- ❑ **Surveillance Systems** — Installing security cameras, motion sensors, or other monitoring devices to detect and deter suspicious activity.
- ❑ **Security Guards** — Employing trained security personnel to patrol election sites and respond to security threats.
- ❑ **Alarms and Alerts** — Installing alarm systems or panic buttons to alert authorities in case of emergencies or security breaches.
- ❑ **Visitor Management** — Implementing procedures for easy identification of visitors, issuing visitor badges, and monitoring their activities while on site.
- ❑ **Emergency Preparedness** — Developing and implementing protocols for responding to emergencies such as natural disasters, protests, or security incidents.
- ❑ **Training and Awareness** — Providing training to election staff and volunteers on security procedures, emergency response protocols, and recognizing and reporting suspicious behavior.
- ❑ **Collaboration with Law Enforcement** — Establishing partnerships with local law enforcement agencies to coordinate security efforts, share intelligence, and respond to security threats effectively.



When implementing a new security measure, ask yourself: What happens when the battery dies, or the power goes out? Can your system maintain secure storage when the unexpected happens?

Secure Storage Requirement

[WAC 434-256-045](#)

While greater physical security can be implemented in varying degrees based on available resources, seals and logs are the simplest and most cost-effective

way to assure proper storage of ballots and voting systems. There are three required elements for effective use: seals, logs, and policies and procedures.

- Seals must be:
 - Uniquely numbered
 - Tamper evident
 - Logged when applied or removed
- Logs must included:
 - Dates of application and removal
 - Seal number
 - Identifying information of persons attaching or removing seal
 - The reason a seal was removed after tabulation
- Policies and Procedures
 - Written procedures should stipulate how seals are to be installed, tested upon installation, and how to identify tampering before removal. Training should include identifying tampering on each type of seal that’s used

Notes

What Materials Must Be Secured?

Ballots

The term “ballots” is not restricted to printed ballots. Ballots may mean:

- Any voted ballot
- Scanned ballot images
- Any electronic record of the choices of an individual voter, such as a cast vote record
- All emails containing voted ballots
- Data such as mobile ballot boxes on removable storage devices
- Programmed tabulators

Voted ballots and ballot images must be in secure storage except when two staff are present during:

- Initial and final processing
- Duplication
- Inspection by the canvassing Board

Whenever ballots are not in secure storage, two elections officials must be present for all steps of ballot processing.

Following tabulation, seal ballots in containers that identify the primary or election. Only open containers sealed after tabulation for the following reasons:

- Canvass of ballots prior to certification.
- Recounts conducted per Canvassing Board directive.
- Manual audit per [RCW 29A.60.170\(3\)](#).
- Order of the superior court.
- Consolidation into one container for storage purposes.

Be sure to document access. This can be included on the seal log. When the Canvassing Board opens a ballot container, include a full record of the additional tabulation or examination of ballots in the Canvassing Board documents.

Notes



Unsealing ballots during an election must be open to public observation.

Voting Devices

Preparation of a voting device for a primary or election must include:

- Complete test logs which indicate precincts tested.
- Sealing the device with a uniquely numbered seal to verify the programming has not been altered.

Ballot Deposit Sites

During an election, keep ballot deposit boxes locked and sealed at all times. Document each time a box is sealed and/or a seal is broken. Two people, either employees or appointees of the County Auditor, must empty ballot deposit boxes together (see [WAC 434-250-100](#)).

At exactly 8:00 p.m. on Election Day, all ballot boxes must either be:

- Emptied, or
- Secured with a numbered seal to prevent deposit of ballots after 8:00 p.m.

Transport ballots to the counting/processing center by either:

- At least two authorized people together, or
- One person with the ballots in containers secured by two authorized people with seals and logs.

Ballot Tabulation Programming

Secure storage is required of all tabulation equipment including:

- Scanners
- Printers
- AVUs
- Data and Databases

Your practices should include:

- Never allowing a vendor or employee uncontrolled access to equipment.
- Limiting access to authorized personnel only and documenting all access.
- Showcasing your procedures when the public observes logic and accuracy tests, ballot processing, recounts, and other election activities.
- Including these in your procedures: use of seals/logs, employee monitored entrances/exits, a sign-in/sign-out log, and visitor name tags, badges, colored lanyards, etc.

Best Practices for Physical Security

Seals

Seals are only as good as their use protocol.

- Use written procedures that stipulate how seals are to be installed, tested upon installation, and how to identify tampering before removal.
- Training should include identifying tampering on each type of seal that’s used.
- Logging an entire inventory of seals and seal numbers to be used in each election.

Notes

Seal Types


Select a type of seal that is compatible with the application.


- Sticker seals should generally be sold as no residue or low residue stickers. Leftover residue can impede tamper evidence if not cleaned before the new seal is applied.
- A low strength plastic pull tight seal should be reserved for indoor controlled environments. Plastic seals are susceptible to heat, cold and prolonged outdoor exposure.
- Seals utilizing aluminum and steel construction are best when applied to outdoor ballot drop boxes. These seals are designed to resist exposure to the elements and add an increased barrier to entry. Tampering with these seals requires a much higher threshold of effort.
- It’s preferable, but not necessary, that the vendor for seals will sell only to governmental agencies and not the public.

Locks

When possible, locks should:

- Be made of durable material. Outdoor locks should be weather-resistant.
- Employ proper key control. All keys should be tracked and kept to a minimum.

 **By design, locks do not detect or document access. Locks alone do not meet the requirements of secure storage.**

 *For more information about election security best practices, contact the Certification & Training or Information Security and Response programs at the Office of the Secretary of State. See also the [Election Security](#) page on the U.S. Election Assistance Commission website.*

Section 2.2: Cybersecurity

Cybersecurity is the practice of reducing the risk of cyberattacks. Computers, mobile phones, servers, electronic systems, and networks are at risk for attack. Systems critical for election security include:

- IT infrastructure and systems used to manage elections.
- Voter registration databases (VoteWA) and associated IT systems.
- Voting systems (tabulation equipment).
- Storage facilities for election and voting systems.
- Vendor Security.

Cybersecurity is important for everyone because digital products play a central role in our daily lives.

Core Security Principles

One of the basic principles of providing a secure system is to manage risk and protect sensitive information. The goal is to keep data private, unchanged, and available. This concept is known as the Confidentiality, Integrity, and Availability (C.I.A.) Triad. Each attempted cyberattack seeks to violate one or more of the triangle’s attributes.

Confidentiality — Private information is kept private by preventing unauthorized access.

Integrity — Protecting data from unauthorized changes.

Availability — Ensuring data and services are available only to authorized users when needed.



Vendor Security

Attackers may attempt to bypass security in a state or county government facility by targeting a vendor first. For this reason, there is a need to address cyberthreats associated with vendors and other third-parties that have trusted permissions.

Conduct thorough assessments and use due diligence before engaging with vendors to ensure they have appropriate security measures in place. This includes reviewing their security policies, procedures, certifications, and past security incidents.

For assistance or questions regarding vendor security please contact cybersecurity@sos.wa.gov and for policy questions ctsupport@sos.wa.gov.

Social Engineering

Social engineering is when cybercriminals trick individuals into breaking normal security procedures and best practices to gain access into systems, networks, or physical locations.

Social engineering is accomplished in many ways (online, telephone, shoulder surfing, simple persuasion). Social engineering is one of the hardest attacks to protect against, and it is the most prevalent.

Phishing

Phishing is a social engineering tactic used to persuade individuals to provide sensitive information and/or take action through seemingly trustworthy communications. Phishing emails may attempt to appeal to a recipient’s fear, duty, obligation, or curiosity.

Distributed Denial of Service

Distributed denial of service (DDoS) uses multiple compromised computers to overwhelm a network causing network traffic to stop, much like a traffic jam causing a gridlock on a highway. Computers are often infected through phishing attacks that trick the user into downloading malicious files.

Ransomware

Ransomware is an advanced form of malware that can encrypt all data saved on a computer. To unlock the data, a payment is demanded. In elections, cybercriminals seek not only monetary gain but to cast doubt on the democratic process and integrity of elections.

Ransomware uses social engineering tricks to exploit potential victims. Spam emails are a typical method to send out attacks to potential victims. They are designed to look like they are from a legitimate source. Once a user clicks a malicious link or attachment, the ransomware is downloaded and installed on the computer. It then begins to encrypt data so only the hacker can read it.

Section 2.3: Device Security

External Storage Devices

Whether you are building your ballot, uploading election results, or importing information from a sorter that isn't connected to a network, you will eventually need to securely transfer data with an external memory device. Whenever you are connecting a device to any computer, there is the risk of compromising that computer. It is, therefore, critically important that only secure devices are connected to your systems.

A new, securely wiped and tamper-evident sealed USB should be used to import or export data to or from the air-gapped tabulation system networks.

Read-only USB Drives

Reusable read-only USB drives are an alternative to sealed one-time-use USB drives. The read-only feature, activated by a clearly-visible switch on the outside of the device, gives users control over whether or not their tabulator or computer can exclusively pull (read) data from the device or if they can also add (write) new data to it.

To maintain proper security, you must first wipe (format) the USB drive just before inserting it into your air-gapped tabulator. This further ensures that no data will be introduced to your tabulator.



The Office of the Secretary of State has a program to supply each county elections office with suitable devices and formatting equipment.

Mobile Devices

Have you addressed your mobile device security? What people are targeting on a desktop can now be accessed on mobile devices. "Mobile Device Security" refers to the measures taken to protect sensitive data stored on portable devices, such as smart phones and laptops. It prevents unauthorized users from using mobile devices to access your network.



For support and questions regarding security please contact cybersecurity@sos.wa.gov

Notes



Chapter 3: Voter Registration

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Section 3.1: Voter Registration



State policy. It is the policy of the state of Washington to encourage every eligible person to register to vote and participate fully in all elections, and to protect the integrity of the electoral process by providing equal access while guarding against discrimination and fraud. The election registration laws and voting laws of the state of Washington must be administered without discrimination based upon race, creed, color, national origin, sex, or political affiliation. No voter may be required to disclose political faith or adherence in order to vote.

Notes

Voters' Rights

The rights of Washington voters are protected by its constitution and laws.

- The right of qualified voters to vote in all eligible elections.
- The right of absolute secrecy of the vote.
- The right to cast a vote in eligible races without limitation based on party preference or affiliation.

i *Voters who participate in the presidential primary must make declare a party affiliation for that election only. For more information about the presidential primary, see [“Presidential Primary Ballots”](#) on page 70 and the [Presidential Primary Resources & Training Materials](#) page on the Office of the Secretary of State website.*

Discrimination and Fraud

[RCW 29.84](#)

What constitutes discrimination or fraud?

- Knowingly altering, destroying, defacing, concealing, or discarding a completed registration form, signed ballot declaration, or voted ballot, except for the voter who completed the form, declaration, or ballot, or the County Auditor acting as authorized by law.
- Refusing or neglecting to perform any duty required by law.
- Destroying, mutilating, concealing, changing, or altering any voter registration record except as authorized by voter registration law.
- Registering or allowing someone to register a person who is not entitled to be registered to vote.
- Intentionally denying any person eligible to vote the right to register.
- Canceling a voter registration except as authorized by voter registration law.
- Knowingly using or altering the statewide voter registration database inconsistent with the performance of job duties.
- Examining or assisting another person examining any voter record, ballot, or election material for the purpose of unlawfully identifying the name of the voter and how they voted, or revealing such information.
- Removing a ballot from a voting center or drop box except as authorized by law.
- Providing unauthorized access to the statewide voter registration database.
- Deliberately failing to return a registration form in a timely manner.
- Knowingly providing false information on a voter registration application.
- Offering to pay another person a fee per registration.
- Accepting payment based on a fixed amount per registration.

Penalty: “A person who willfully violates any provision of this title regarding the conduct of mail ballot primaries or elections is guilty of a class C felony punishable under [RCW 9A.20.021](#).”


Notes

Voter Eligibility

 [Washington State Constitution, Article VI, Sections 1 & 3](#)

An “elector” is any person qualified to vote. To register to vote, the person must meet these requirements:

- United States citizen.
- Legal resident of Washington State.
- 18 years old at time of voting. Voters who pre-register to vote starting at age 16 are Future Voters. Voter pre-registrations are pending until they become eligible to vote.
- Not currently serving a sentence of total confinement in prison under the jurisdiction of the Department of Corrections (DOC) for a Washington felony conviction.
- Not currently incarcerated for a federal or out-of-state felony conviction.

 *If a Future Voter is pre-registered to vote and will be 18 years old by the November general election, they may vote in state, local, and presidential primaries. For more information about issuing ballots to primary-only voters, see [“Creating Primary-Only Voter Ballots” on page 101](#) and [“Issuing Primary-Only Voter Ballots” on page 110](#).*

Notes

Voter Registration Deadlines

 [RCW 29A.08.140](#)

Voters must register in order to participate in an election. The date of receipt by an election official, including the Office of the Secretary of State, is the date of registration for mail-in applications.

Eight-Day Deadline

New applications, address changes, name changes, and voluntary cancellations that are submitted by mail, online, email, or fax must be received by an election official by the eighth day before an election.

Same-Day Voter Registration

After the eight-day deadline, new applications, address changes, name changes, and voluntary cancellations may be submitted in person at any County Auditor-designated location until 8:00 p.m. on Election Day to update the registration record and receive a current ballot.


Notes

Exception — Service and Overseas Voters

If members of the Armed Forces (as defined by [RCW 29A.04.163](#) and [WAC 434-235-010](#) as a service voter) and overseas electors (defined in [RCW 29A.04.109](#) and [WAC 434-235-010](#) as an overseas voter) consider Washington State their residence, new applicants are exempt from the in-person requirement and may submit their application remotely (online, email, fax) until 8:00 p.m. on Election Day.

If they are already registered in Washington State, current same day registration and eight-day deadlines apply.

This exception does not automatically apply to dependents and spouses of military and overseas voters. If a spouse or dependent is away from their place of residence because of the service or overseas status of the voter, they may also register to vote as a service or overseas voter.

 *For more information about service and overseas voters, see the [Service and Overseas Voters](#) clearinghouse notice on the Office of the Secretary of State website.*

Public Access to Voter Registration Records

[RCW 29A.08.710](#)

Following items are public information and available upon request:

- Name
- Address
- Political jurisdiction (precinct/district)
- Gender
- Year of birth
- Voting record
- Date of registration
- Registration number

Following items are not available to the public:

- Source of registration (Department of Licensing, state agency, etc.)
- Declination of registration
- Date of birth
- Phone number, email address
- Status as a service or overseas voter
- Anything else on the registration form that isn't specified as public information
- All 16- and 17-year-old Future Voter registrants — once a 17-year-old is eligible to vote, their voter registration information becomes public information and available upon request.

Section 3.2: Voter Registration Applications

 [RCW 29A.08, WAC 434-324](#)

Notes

Acceptable Applications and Methods of Registration

- Washington State mail-in/paper form
- Online voter registration (OLVR)
- Department of Licensing
- Agency-based form
- Health Benefit Exchange
- In-person (registration drives, over the counter)
- Federal applications

Required Information for New Applicants

New applications to register to vote must include five required pieces of information:

- Name
- Residential address within the state of Washington (may be a non-traditional address)
- Date of birth
- Affirmation of U.S. citizenship or presentation of documents as part of another government transaction confirming citizenship
- Signature attesting to truth of information provided on the form

Required Information for Registration



Note: Identification **is not required** information to register an applicant., but **it is required** before accepting a ballot.

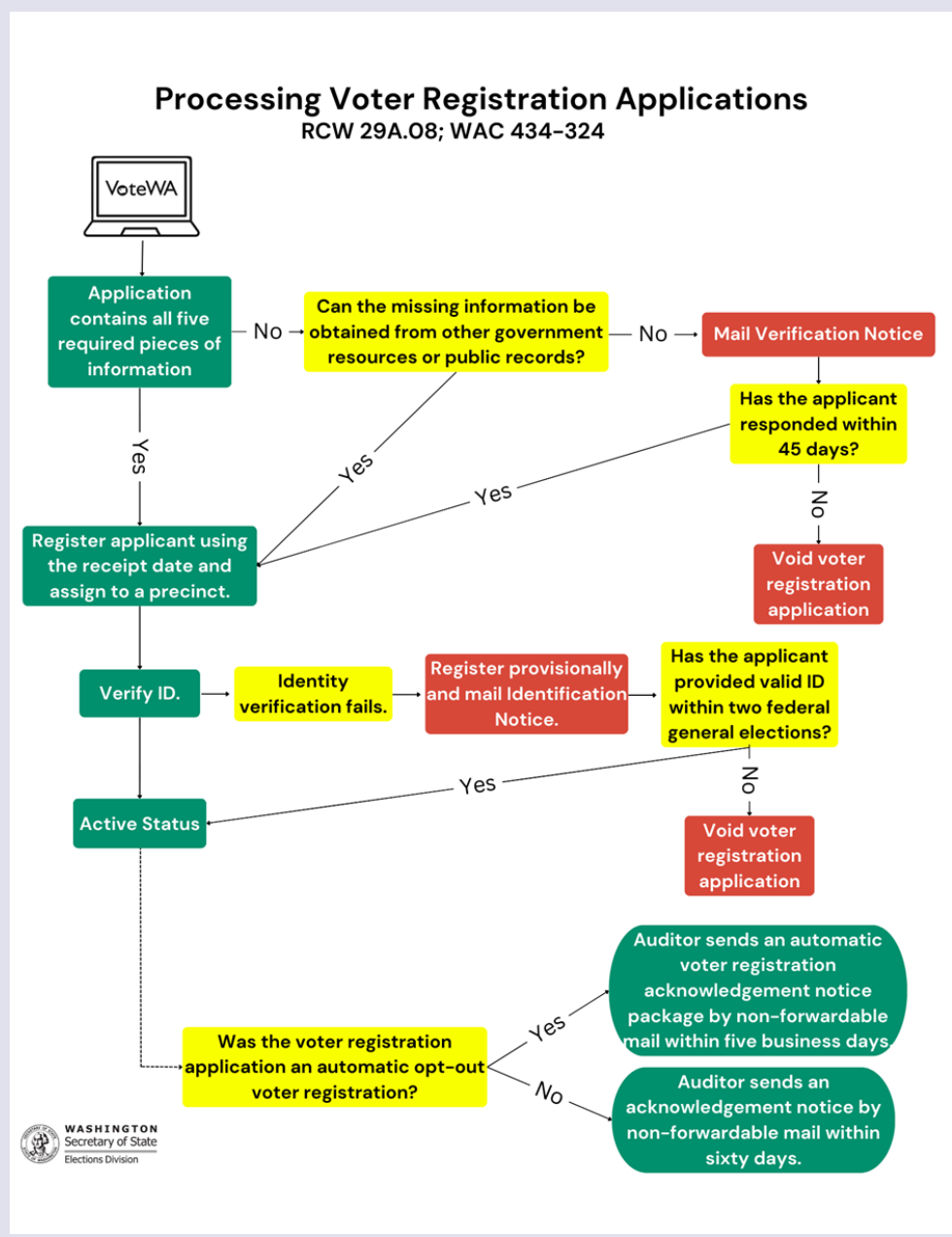
Processing a Completed Voter Registration Application

After confirming an application contains all five pieces of required information, register the voter:


- Enter the applicant's information into VoteWA.
- If it is a paper form, scan it and save an image of the signature.
- Verify the state driver's license, learner's permit, state ID, tribal ID, or Social Security Number. (When the ID is not confirmed or provided, register the voter provisionally.)
- Send an Acknowledgment Notice (voter ID) to the voter within 60 days of receiving the application.


Notes

Processing Voter Registration Applications



- If the voter was registered to vote automatically upon completing a transaction for an enhanced card from the Department of Licensing, send an automatic voter registration acknowledgment notice package within five business days.
- Automatic voter registrants who decline registration within 15 days from the acknowledgment notice package’s date of mailing shall be removed from the voter registration database and deemed never to have been registered. If a declined registration is received after this deadline, the registration shall be canceled.

 For more information about provisionally registered voters, see [“Identity Verification” on page 44.](#)

 For more information about automatic voter registration, see [“Automatic Voter Registration Acknowledgment Notice Package” on page 50.](#)

Processing a Voter Registration Application that is Missing Information

When the application is missing one of 5 required pieces of information:


- Do not register the applicant.
- Send a Verification Notice to the applicant requesting only the missing information.
- Hold the application until the missing required information is received or the deadline of 45 days has passed.

If the applicant responds within 45 days:

- Finish processing the voter registration application, change the voter’s status to Active, and send an Acknowledgment Notice.
- The date of registration for the voter is the date the original application was received.

When an applicant fails to respond within 45 days, the applicant cannot be registered, and the registration application is not valid.

The Verification Notice must not be used for requesting identification.

 **Never send a Verification Notice to a voter who is already registered!**

Notes

Identity Verification

The [Help America Vote Act of 2002 \(HAVA\)](#) requires ID verification. The ID numbers requested on the form are from the Department of Licensing (DOL) or the last four digits of the Social Security Number (SSN).

Is ID required to register a new voter?

ID is not a required piece of voter registration information.

When an application is missing ID, or the ID cannot be verified, the voter must be registered provisionally and issued a ballot.

- A provisional registration (temporary) is dependent on receiving ID eventually.
- All provisionally registered voters must receive ballots; however, the ballots cannot be counted until the voter provides identification.



Exception: Overseas and service voters are not required to provide ID when registering to vote, meaning they are never registered provisionally.

If the voter does not provide a DOL or SSN, or the County Auditor is unable to verify the ID number(s) provided, follow these steps:

- Provisionally register the applicant and flag the registration as needing ID.
- Use other public records and other government sources and databases (e.g., DOL records and LexisNexis) to confirm the voter's ID. If confirmed, remove the provisional status from the registration.
- If unable to verify using other sources, you may contact the voter by phone, email, text, or other means. If the voter provides valid ID, remove the provisional status from the registration.
- If, after these attempts, you are unable to verify the voter's identity, send an Identification Notice.
- When the voter provides ID, remove the provisional registration status and change to Active.

The county elections department shall cancel any provisional voter registration that has been flagged as provisional through two federal elections.

Section 3.3: Special Circumstance Voter Registration

Notes

Registering Service and Overseas Voters (UOCAVA)

[RCW 29A.08](#), [WAC 434-235](#)

Citizens overseas or on active duty service are protected by the [Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act \(UOCAVA\)](#).

To qualify as a UOCAVA voter in our state, the voter must use their most recent residential address in Washington, or the most recent residential address in Washington of a family member.

An overseas voter, as defined in [RCW 29A.04.109](#), is any elector of the state of Washington outside the territorial limits of the United States on Election Day.

Deadlines for new voter registrations do not apply to citizens overseas; active-duty service electors; dependents and spouses of service members that are away from their residence due to the member's active-duty assignment.

A service or overseas voter may register to vote by providing one of the following items:

- A voter registration application issued by Washington State.
- A federal post card application (FPCA) issued by the [Federal Voting Assistance Program \(FVAP\)](#).
- A federal write-in absentee ballot (FWAB) issued by FVAP.
- A national mail voter registration form issued by the [Election Assistance Commission \(EAC\)](#).
- A ballot (envelope), the ballot declaration signed by a service or overseas voter.

Deadlines for voter registration updates apply to currently registered UOCAVA voters.

Processing Applications for Service and Overseas Voters

If an application from a service or overseas elector lacks a Washington State address, contact the applicant to request the address of the applicant's last known residence in Washington State. An address of a relative may be used if the applicant has never lived in the United States.

If there is insufficient time to obtain the missing registration information prior to an election, or the voter does not respond to your attempt to make contact,


precinct the registration using the County Auditor’s Office address. Only offices that are countywide or in the courthouse Congressional District can be counted for the voter.

After the election or primary, if the voter does not provide a Washington address, the County Auditor must place the voter on inactive status and send a confirmation notice to obtain the voter’s correct residential address.

A service or overseas voter is not required to provide ID when registering. Service and overseas voters’ dependents who do not qualify as a UOCAVA voter are not included in the exemption and must provide valid identification.

Service and overseas voters must be offered the option of receiving ballots electronically or by postal mail. If the registration application does not indicate a choice, you must try to contact the voter. Send the ballot by mail if the voter has not responded by the UOCAVA ballot mail date.

Rules for processing service and overseas (UOCAVA) voter registrations and issuing ballots are located in the Service and Overseas Voters clearinghouse notice.

 For more information about ballots issued to service and overseas voters, see [“Issuing Ballots to Service and Overseas Voters \(UOCAVA\)” on page 106.](#)

Registering ACP Voters

 [RCW 40.24, WAC 434-840](#)

Address Confidentiality Program (ACP) voters must not be entered into VoteWA.

The Address Confidentiality Program protects victims of domestic violence, participants in the legal system, and election officials facing harassment or stalking. Participants of the program may register to vote, but their registration and balloting information is strictly confidential. Their information is exempt from public disclosure and must never be entered into VoteWA.

A special voter registration form is used for ACP participants. ACP participants applying to register to vote must provide documentation they are in the program. Each County Auditor’s office should have staff designated to accept and process these registrations as well as send and process the ballots.

The County Auditor sends a ballot to the registered program participant at the substitute mailing address provided by the ACP.

Notes

ACP participants who are 16 or 17 years old may pre-register to vote as ACP voters.

Registering Future Voters

[RCW 29A.08](#), [WAC 434-232](#)

Notes

An applicant can pre-register to vote as long as they are at least 16 years of age, a US citizen, and a Washington State resident. Pre-registrations can be submitted by mail, online, or through the Department of Licensing. These registrations are pended as Future Voters until they are eligible to vote.

Information on pre-registered individuals are exempt from public disclosure and cannot be released or included on any official list of registered voters, until

- The person reaches 18 years of age, or
- Until the person is eligible to participate in the next presidential primary, primary, or election.

This information is exempt from public inspection and copying under [Chapter 42.56 RCW](#). Information may be disclosed for the purpose of processing and delivering ballots.

i *Future voters who will be 18 before a general election are eligible to participate as primary-only voters in the preceding primary or presidential primary. For more information about primary-only voters, see [“Voter Eligibility” on page 39](#).*

Section 3.4: Notices to Voters

 [National Voter Registration Act \(NVRA\)](#),
[Help America Vote Act \(HAVA\)](#), [RCW 29A.08.030](#)

Whenever a voter’s registration is accepted or updated in any way, the voter receives a notice.

Applicants must be notified when an application is incomplete, a residence address appears to be incorrect, or an ID check fails. For these purposes, we use:

- Acknowledgment Notices
- Automatic Voter Registration (AVR) Acknowledgment Notice Packages
- Verification Notices
- Confirmation Notices
- Identification Notices

Each type of notice serves a distinct purpose. To understand which notice to send, start with the application.

- Is required information missing?
- Did the ID check fail?
- Did you receive undeliverable mail or an undeliverable ballot from a registered voter?
- Did the voter update a name?

Each answer requires a different notice.

Acknowledgment Notice

When a voter registers, transfers (address change), changes their name, or reactivates an inactive registration, the County Auditor must mail a notice to the voter.

The County Auditor sends an acknowledgment notice whenever a voter is assigned to “active” status. It must be:


- Sent by first-class, non-forwardable mail; and
- Mailed to the voter within 60 days of receipt of the application.

A voter registration card may serve as the Acknowledgment Notice. It must list:

- Voter’s full name
- Mailing address
- County name
- Precinct name and/or number
- Registration date

Notes

The County Auditor may include additional information.

 *After redistricting, voters must be notified of any precinct changes. For more information about redistricting, see [“Redistricting” on page 64.](#)*

Notes

Automatic Voter Registration Acknowledgment Notice Package

An Automatic Voter Registration (AVR) Acknowledgment Notice Package as a type of acknowledgment notice sent to voters who are registered automatically registered to vote when obtaining an Enhanced Driver License or ID. Acknowledgment Notice Packages include all of the elements of an Acknowledgment Notice as well as information about how to opt out.


Verification Notice


A registration is not valid until it contains all five of the required pieces of information.

A Verification Notice must be sent when the form is missing a signature, a citizenship affirmation, or when you’re unable to obtain missing information any other way. The purpose of the notice is to obtain the missing piece of information and to notify the applicant that a 45-day deadline exists in which the application is viable. The notice must:

- Be sent by forwardable mail.
- Include a postage paid, preaddressed return form/envelope.
- Notify the applicant that they must respond within 45 days or the application is void.

Request missing information only. Applicants are not obliged to provide required information more than once. The Verification Notice must only ask for the information missing from the original registration application.

 **Exception: If a voter is missing a signature or a mark confirming citizenship, the voter must provide this.**

 *For more information about the minimum requirements for voter registration, see [“Required Information for New Applicants” on page 41.](#)*

Section 3.5: Voter Registration Status

[RCW 29A.08](#), [WAC 434-324](#)

Notes

A voter's registration status falls into one of the following categories:

- Active** — Voter is fully qualified to vote.
- Inactive** — When notification is received from the USPS or a state agency that provides voter registration services, such as the Department of Licensing (DOL) and Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS), that a voter has moved out of county or out of state, or when election mail sent to the voter is returned undeliverable.
- Pending** — The record is processing or an issue must be resolved (this includes Future Voters)
- Provisionally Registered** — The voter is registered and issued a ballot but must provide ID prior to the ballot being counted.
- Canceled** — The voter is no longer registered.

Active and Inactive Status

The default status for voters is active — meaning, they are eligible to vote.

A voter's status changes from active to inactive when:

- USPS provides an out-of-county change of address.
- Any undeliverable document mailed by the County Auditor is returned by the USPS without address correction information.
- Any official state agency that registers voters reports an out-of-state address for an active voter.

In these cases, send a Confirmation Notice.

Reactivate a voter by changing the status from inactive to active when the voter:

- Attempts to vote.
- Requests a ballot.
- Updates registration information.
- Responds to a Confirmation Notice by providing a residence address located within the same county.

Unless specified by law, only the number of active registered voters determine qualifying numbers such as voter turnout or the number of votes needed to validate.



For more information about validation of election results, see [“Determine Taxing District Turnout for Validation” on page 152.](#)

Inactive Voter – Response to a Confirmation Notice

When an inactive voter responds to the notice by providing a residential address within the county or confirms the current address is correct, update the voter’s address and status to active.

When an inactive voter responds to the notice by providing a residential address outside of the county, but within Washington, the voter’s status remains inactive:

- The former county of residence does not cancel the registration; and
- Should immediately forward the notice to the new county.

The new county confirms the transfer and activates the voter.



The law related to voters who transfer to another county will change on June 1, 2025.



For detailed requirements for transferring voters between counties, see the [Voter Registration Transfers](#) clearinghouse notice on the Office of the Secretary of State website.

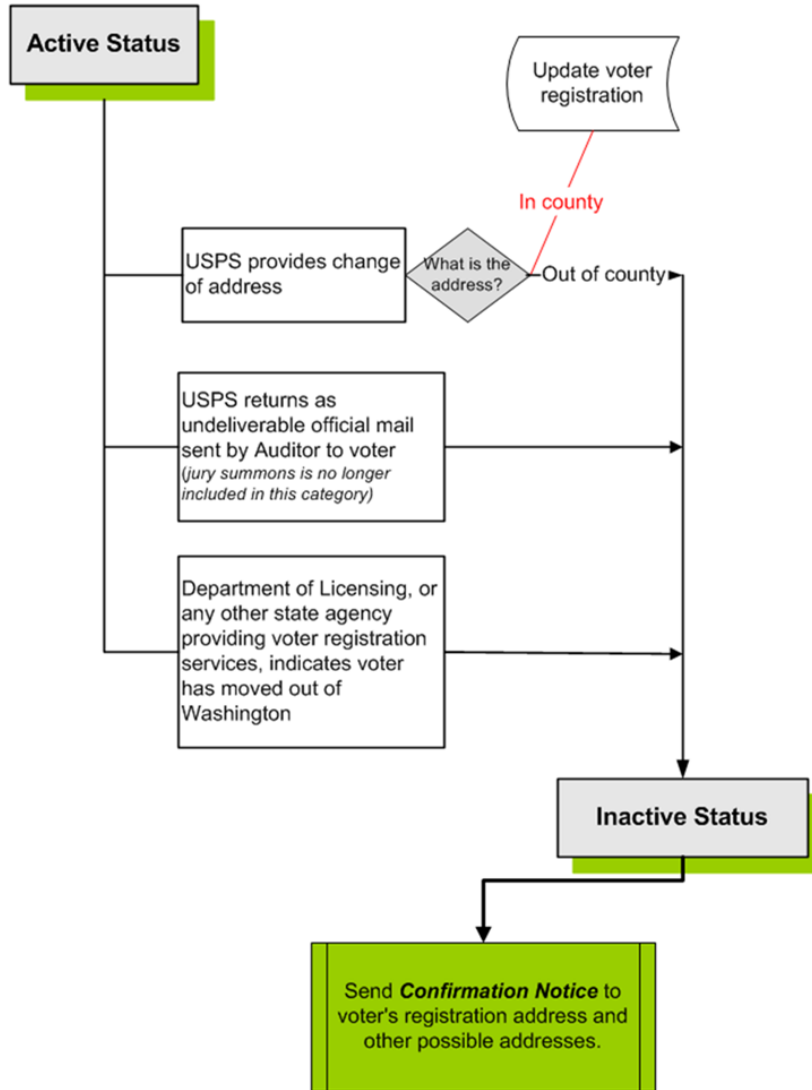
Inactive Voter – No Response to a Confirmation Notice

The County Auditor must wait for the inactive voter to take any of the following actions:

- Voter attempts to vote — change status to active.
- Voter confirms the address or provides a new residential address within the state — follow procedures for transfers.
- Voter makes no contact through two federal elections – cancel registration.

Notes

Processing Voter Registration Applications



Data Integrity Processes & Daily Data Maintenance

[WAC 434-324-040](#), [WAC 434-324-045](#)

Notes

Integrity checks, and duplicate checks identify potential issues. The county must research and resolve each of the flagged records.

- Validate Voter ID:** If the ID verification fails, the voter record must be assigned a status of provisionally registered, pending verifiable ID. County Auditors may verify voter ID using other governmental information or the acceptable documents listed in [WAC 434-324-045](#).
- Duplicate Voter Search:** Review and resolve duplicate and transfer reports daily and whenever new registrant information is added.
- Cancellations:** The voter registration database allows a comparison lists of deceased voters with the Department of Health, and Social Security Death Index. The county must research those matches for potential cancellations.
- Felony Screening and VoteWA:** The Office of the Secretary of State handles the cancelation of all felons through our voter registration database and the Washington State Department of Corrections. For more information, see the “Restoration of Voting Rights After Felony Conviction” clearinghouse. If you receive notification of a felony conviction, contact the Office of the Secretary of State. Voters with felony convictions should not be canceled at the county level.

Voter Registration Transfers



The law related to voters who transfer to another county will change on June 1, 2025.

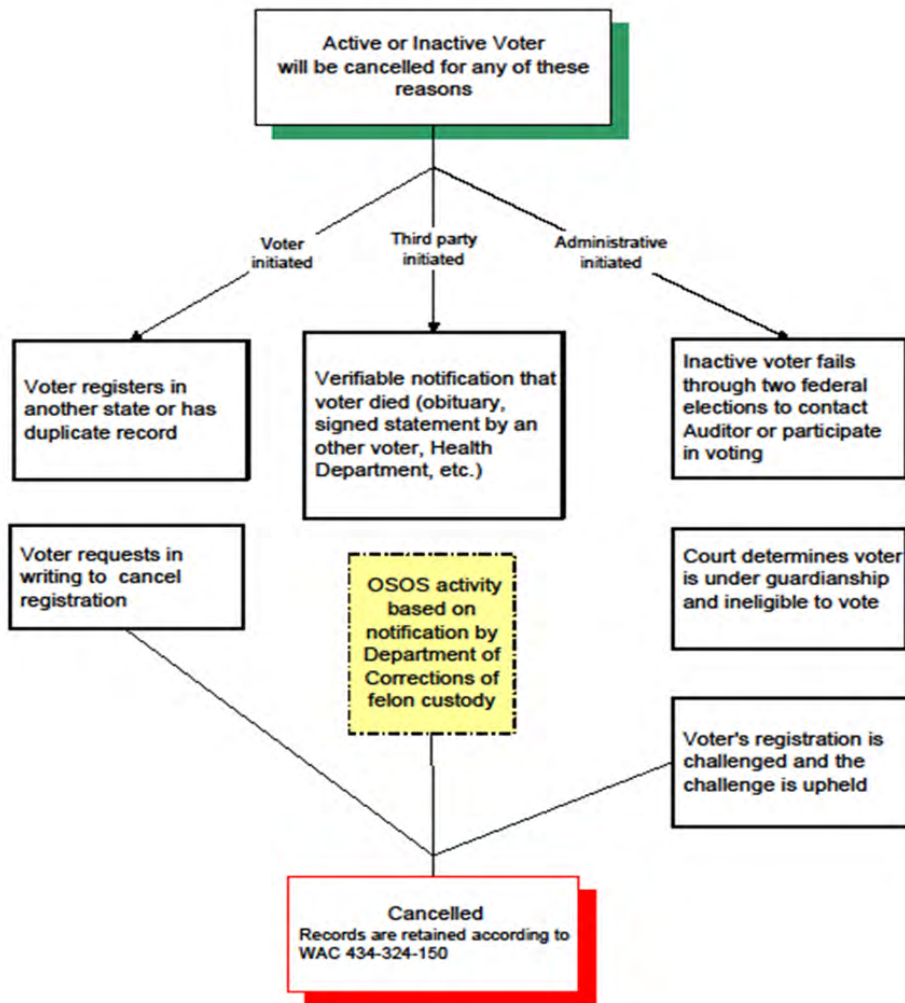
Transfers Within the Same County

To transfer (change residential address) within the county, the voter may:

- Update their address by contacting the County Auditor in writing, in person, by phone, or by email.
- Submit an update through the VoteWA online portal, DOL, Health Benefit Exchange, or other designated agencies.
- Submit a voter registration application.
- Respond to a Confirmation Notice with a new address within the county.
- The US Postal Service provides a new address within the county.

Activation, Inactivation & Cancellation

Notes



Transfers to Another County

To transfer into a new county, the voter may:

- Submit a new paper registration application.
- Submit an update through VoteWA online portal, DOL, Health Benefit Exchange, or designated agencies.
- Respond to a signed Confirmation Notice that will be forwarded by the former county to the new county of registration.

The County Auditor of the new county will use VoteWA to verify whether the registration is a transfer.

Notes

For county-to-county transfers, a voter is only required to provide the minimum information necessary to complete the transfer:

- Name.
- Residential address.
- Signature to the oath in [RCW 29A.08.230](#).
- Either the voter’s DOB or voter ID number.

Affirmation of citizenship is not required because the voter is already registered to vote in our state.

The County Auditor must not transfer a voter out of another county without first obtaining the minimum information listed above. If the minimum information is not supplied, correspondence may be sent to the voter to obtain it, but the voter’s registration record in the current county shall not be flagged or pended in such a way that will trigger a void/cancellation after 45 days. For detailed procedures regarding Confirmation Notices and transfers, refer to the Voter Registration Transfers clearinghouse notice.

Name Changes

Voters must provide the following information to the County Auditor in writing (written note, voter registration application, etc.):

- Name on current registration
- New name
- Residence
- New signature

A signed ballot envelope or Confirmation Notice containing all the required elements is acceptable for updating a voter’s name. Retain a copy of the envelope or notice for updating the record.

Canceling Voters

What cancels a voter’s registration record?

Active & Inactive Voter Registrations:

- A signed request for cancellation from the voter
- A completed transfer out of your county into another county
- Official information from another state shows that the voter has registered to vote in their state
- Notification from the Office of the Secretary of State that the voter has registered to vote in another state through a dual registration program, such as ERIC
- A signed confirmation notice from the voter confirming the out-of-state address change
- An email from the email address on file with the voter’s registration record, if any, that they have moved out-of-state.
 - If the voter does not have an email address on file, or the email is sent from a different email address than the one on file, the emailed request to cancel their voter registration record cannot be accepted.
- An electronic image of a hand-signed cancellation request, such as a PDF or JPG
- Duplicate records in VoteWA
- Successful challenge to a voter’s registration
- Deceased
 - Notification of death from the registrar of vital statistics, Social Security Administration, or published obituary information
 - Notification of death with signature from another registered voter
 - Copy of official death certificate
- The Office of the Secretary of State receives information from the Department of Corrections (DOC)
- Official notice from court of guardianship or incapacitation status

Inactive Voter Registrations Only:

- Failure to vote or confirm registration address for a period of two federal general elections

Cancellation Due to Felony Conviction

 [RCW 29A.08.520](#)

The Office of the Secretary of State compares records in VoteWA with records from the Department of Corrections (DOC). The Office of the Secretary of State places the voter on a “Pending — Potential Felon” status and sends a letter to the voter. The voter has 30 days from the date of the letter to respond before the registration is canceled by the Office of the Secretary of State.

Notes

How Are Voting Rights Restored?

[RCW 29A.08.520](#)

Notes

For the purposes of this section, a person is under the authority of the DOC if the person is serving a sentence of total confinement in the custody of the DOC.

Voting rights are automatically restored whenever that person is no longer in total confinement under the custody of the DOC. The person with a felony conviction must register to vote after leaving total confinement to receive ballots again.



Chapter 4: Election Preparation

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 - Precinct Boundary Rules
 - Making Changes to Precinct Boundaries
 - Redistricting

- 66 *Section 4.2: When Are Elections Held?*
 - State Primary
 - General Election
 - Special Election
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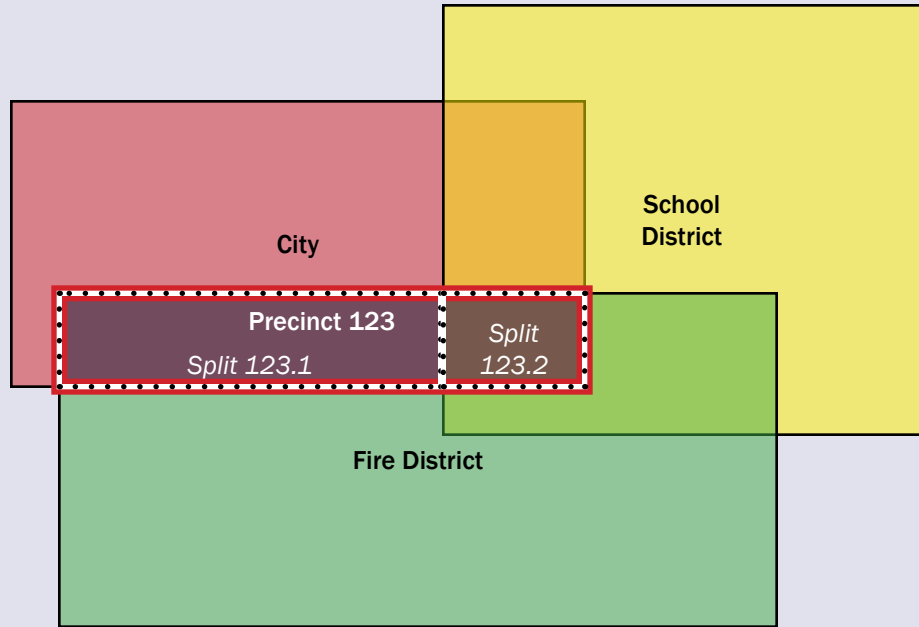
- 69 *Section 4.3: What Is on the Ballot?*
 - Election Races & Measures
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 - Pre-filing Considerations
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 - Where to File
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 - Notices Published in the Newspaper of General Circulation
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Notes

Example of Precincts and Precinct Parts/Splits



In this example, a city, a school district, and a fire district all partially overlap. The area where the city and fire district overlap has been identified as Precinct 123. This precinct is further divided into two “precinct parts” or “precinct splits.” Precinct Part 123.1 includes portions of the city and fire district only. Precinct Part 123.2 also includes a portion of the school district.

Precinct line changes must follow certain rules:

- Changes cannot be made starting seven days before candidate filing through the general election.
- Permanent changes may be adopted as long as sufficient time exists to make the changes.
- Temporary precinct changes may accommodate a city or town annexation of unincorporated territory. The changes must be limited to the minimum changes necessary to accommodate the annexation and remains in effect only until the precinct modifications are adopted by the county legislative authority.
- Cities and towns may annex at any time. If the annexation affects an election, the voters are eligible to vote in the city or town election even if the annexation is just a few days before Election Day.

Redistricting

[RCW 29A.76](#)

Redistricting apportions congressional, legislative, and internal director/commissioner districts’ population based on the US Census. This happens at least every 10 years to guarantee equal representation and starts the year after the U.S. Census is taken. The county legislative authority must adopt

new precinct lines to comply with the state redistricting plan and the county commissioner or council internal district boundaries.

The changing of internal district lines is not limited to this ten-year event; for example, county commissioner districts may be changed as often as every four years. ([RCW 36.32.020](#))

The County Auditor has the responsibility to maintain voter registration records, which includes adjusting precinct lines, creating new maps, updating voter registration records, and notifying voters of their new districts and precincts. These procedures take place every year in some form.

i After redistricting, voters must be notified of any precinct changes. For more information about notifying voters of changes to their registration, see [“Acknowledgment Notice” on page 49](#)

Section 4.2: When Are Elections Held?

[RCW 29A.04](#), [RCW 29A.52](#)

Notes

Elections in Washington include the state primary, the general election, and special elections. There are also some special circumstance elections, such as the presidential primary and recall elections.


State Primary

The state primary is held the first Tuesday in August.


A primary winnows the number of candidates in a race to two for the general election ballot. Voters may vote for any candidate in a race.

Nonpartisan races skip the primary to appear only on the general election ballot:

- When it is a cemetery district or park and recreation district;
- When it is an unexpired county partisan race with one candidate;
- When it is a PCO race with one candidate; and
- When fewer than three candidates file for office. This applies to all nonpartisan positions, including Superintendent of Public Instruction and judicial offices.

 **Partisan races have a primary regardless of the number of candidates filed unless the office is an unexpired county race and only one candidate filed for the position.**

In even-numbered years, the state primary also includes precinct committee officers (PCOs); however, when there is only one PCO candidate for a party in a precinct, the candidate is deemed elected without appearing on the ballot.

 *For more information about precinct committee officers, see [“Precinct Committee Officers \(PCOs\)” on page 77.](#)*

General Election

The general election is held the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November. A general election is scheduled at regular intervals for a specific purpose, such as electing the officers for any of these jurisdiction types.

General elections include:

- Federal offices
- State offices
- County offices
- Municipalities
- Special purpose districts (school, fire, water, etc.)

If a voter must own land to participate in a district election, there may be a different election date. Refer to the jurisdiction-specific RCW titles specific to the jurisdiction

i For more information about jurisdiction-specific laws, see [“Election-Related RCW Chapters” on page 10.](#)

i For information about elections not covered in Title 29A RCW, see the [Diking, Drainage, and Flood Control District Elections clearinghouse notice on the Office of the Secretary of State website.](#)

Notes

Special Election

Issues or races not regularly scheduled may appear on a special election ballot. There are four dates available for special elections:

- Second Tuesday in February
- Fourth Tuesday in April
- First Tuesday in August (primary)
- The Tuesday after the first Monday in November (general election)

Special elections may be held in conjunction with the primary in August or the general election in November.


Issues concerning levies, bonds, levy lid lifts, annexations, changes in government structure, and even local advisory issues may appear on the ballot on any of these dates.

Notes

What Triggers a Special Election?

A county or district submits a resolution or measure to the County Auditor by the deadline specific to the election. Depending on their laws, districts may have different deadlines.

- Spring special elections — 60 days prior to the election date
- August primary — Friday before regular candidate filing
- November general election — the day of the preceding primary


 *For more information about jurisdiction-specific laws, see [“Election-Related RCW Chapters” on page 10.](#)*

Special Circumstance Elections

 [RCW 29A.56](#)

Presidential Primary

The presidential primary is held on the second Tuesday in March. [RCW 29A.56.020](#) permits selection of an alternate date.

 *For more information about the presidential primary, see [“Presidential Primary Ballots” on page 70](#) and the [Presidential Primary Resources & Training Materials](#) on the Office of the Secretary of State website.*

Recall Election


Respond to all requests for information on recalling elected officials by providing copies of [RCW 29A.56.110 through RCW 29A.56.270](#). Notify the Office of the Secretary of State whenever your office files a recall charge.

Section 4.3: What Is on the Ballot?

The races and measures that appear on the ballot are determined by:

- The type of election
- The year of the election
- The type of office
- The term of office
- The number of candidates in a race
- Jurisdiction resolutions requesting measures (issues) appear on a ballot

Notes

 For more information about candidate filing, see the [Filing for Office](#) clearinghouse notice on the Office of the Secretary of State website.


Election Races & Measures

 [RCW 29A.36](#), [RCW 29A.52](#), [WAC 434-230](#)

Each election type serves a different purpose. The races and measures on the ballot will vary.

Election Type	Appearing on the Ballot
Primary ¹	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Scheduled nonpartisan races with three or more candidates <input type="checkbox"/> Partisan races <input type="checkbox"/> Local district measures <input type="checkbox"/> Some charter county offices <input type="checkbox"/> Precinct committee officer (PCO) races with two or more candidates
General election	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Top two vote-getters in the primary (partisan and nonpartisan) <input type="checkbox"/> Nonpartisan races that skipped the primary <input type="checkbox"/> State initiatives and referenda <input type="checkbox"/> Local district measures <input type="checkbox"/> President and Vice President
Special election	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Local district measures: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Advisory votes ■ District formations ■ Changes in government structure ■ Levies and bonds

¹ The following races skip the primary: park & recreation districts, cemetery districts, some judicial districts, any unexpired county partisan race with one candidate, and PCO races with fewer than two candidates.


 Internal districts representing a geographical sub-district (often defined as “District No.”) may require different primary ballots within that jurisdiction. Refer to the statutes relevant to that jurisdiction for more information.

Presidential Primary Ballots

[RCW 29A.56](#)


The presidential primary does not determine the actual presidential candidates appearing on the general election ballot. It operates under different rules than the state top two primary.


- A political party may choose to use, or not use, the results of the state’s presidential primary to determine the delegates sent to the national conventions.
- Only major political parties may participate.
- If a party requests an oath, the voter is required to declare a major political party by signing an oath written by the political party.

 *For more information about the Presidential Primary, see the [Presidential Primary Resources & Training Materials](#) on the Office of the Secretary of State website.*

Elections Requiring Property Ownership

Some special purpose district elections require voters to own property in the district, such as diking, drainage, and flood control districts. When conducting a general election for one of these types of these districts, always refer to that jurisdiction’s statutes.

 *For more information about jurisdiction-specific laws, see [“Election-Related RCW Chapters” on page 10](#).*

 *For more information about elections not covered in Title 29A RCW, see the [Diking, Drainage, and Flood Control District Elections](#) clearinghouse notice on the Office of the Secretary of State website.*

Notes


Election Year

 [RCW 29A.04](#), [RCW 29A.52](#), [RCW 29A.80](#)

The year of an election determines the jurisdictions participating. For example, U.S. President and Vice President appear only on the general election ballot every four years. Charter counties may adopt different schedules for county or special purpose elections.

Notes

Year of Election	Scheduled Jurisdictions	Primary	General Election
Odd Year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> City, town and special purpose districts <input type="checkbox"/> Vacant partisan offices <input type="checkbox"/> Vacant judicial offices (other than district court) <input type="checkbox"/> Regularly scheduled charter county and judicial offices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Nonpartisan offices (except cemetery and park & recreation districts) with three or more candidates <input type="checkbox"/> Partisan offices except unexpired term county offices with a single candidate <input type="checkbox"/> Judges – refer to the use the jurisdiction’s statutes and the Judicial Elections clearinghouse notice as a reference <input type="checkbox"/> Local measures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> The top two vote-getters from the primary <input type="checkbox"/> Any races skipping the primary <input type="checkbox"/> State initiatives and referenda (provided by the Office of the Secretary of State) <input type="checkbox"/> Judges – refer to the use the jurisdiction’s statutes and the Judicial Elections clearinghouse notice as a reference <input type="checkbox"/> Local measures
Even Year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Federal and state offices <input type="checkbox"/> Judicial offices <input type="checkbox"/> Partisan county offices <input type="checkbox"/> Public utility districts (PUDs) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Partisan offices – all races <input type="checkbox"/> Nonpartisan offices with three or more candidates <input type="checkbox"/> Judges – refer to the use the jurisdiction’s statutes and the Judicial Elections clearinghouse notice as a reference <input type="checkbox"/> Local measures <input type="checkbox"/> PCO with two or more candidates in major party race 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Presidential nominees (every four years) <input type="checkbox"/> The top two vote-getters from the primary <input type="checkbox"/> Any races skipping the primary (except PCO) <input type="checkbox"/> State initiatives and referenda (provided by the Office of the Secretary of State) <input type="checkbox"/> Judges – refer to the use the jurisdiction’s statutes and the Judicial Elections clearinghouse notice as a reference <input type="checkbox"/> Local measures

 For more information about when judicial offices appear on primary and general election ballots, see the [Judicial Elections](#) clearinghouse notice on the Office of the Secretary of State website.

Office Types

 [RCW 29A.04](#)

Classifications of Elective Offices

Two classifications apply to elective offices.


Partisan — Any public office where a candidate may indicate political party preference on the ballot. State executive officials, federal senators and representatives, state senators and representatives, and most county officials hold partisan offices.

Candidates may indicate a party preference when filing, but this declaration is not a political party affiliation. Candidates are not nominees of that party.

President/Vice President and precinct committee officers affiliate with political parties. These candidates have the party affiliation printed on the ballot; the presidential and vice-presidential candidates are nominees of their party.

Nonpartisan — Any public office where a candidate does not indicate political party preference on the ballot. Includes the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, justices and judges, cities, towns, special purpose districts (school, fire, water, etc.) and some charter county officials.

Designation of an office as partisan or nonpartisan will determine when, or if, an office appears on the ballot.

 *For more information about when judicial offices in primary and general elections, see the [Judicial Elections](#) clearinghouse notice on the Office of the Secretary of State website.*

Notes

Office Terms



The term of office describes the length of time an elected official will serve.

Regular Term

Also described as full term.

- For most offices, the regular term is two, four or six years.
- The length of regular terms does not need to be printed on the ballot.
- Winners assume the office at the official beginning of the new term which is usually:
 - Second Monday in January for state offices.
 - January 1 for other elected officials unless determined by statute or charter.

Unexpired Term

An unexpired term is caused by a vacancy occurring more than one year before candidate filing for the regularly scheduled election.

- An appointee may temporarily fill the vacancy.
- Unexpired terms are at least one year in length. If the unexpired term is less than one year, the unexpired term is considered a short term.
- It is required to list the length of the unexpired term on the ballot.
- Winners assume office immediately following certification of the general election.

PCOs do not have elections for unexpired or short terms. All vacancies are filled by party appointment, not by election.

Short Term

A short term is the brief period starting upon certification of the general election and ending with the start of the next full term. (Short terms last about one month.) By definition, an appointee should be filling the office or the office is vacant at the time of candidate filing.

- A short term appears on the ballot in conjunction with a full term and is printed on the ballot as a single phrase (short and full term).
- The winning candidate fills both the short and regular term. The same candidate swears to an oath and takes office immediately after certification of the general election and again when the regular term begins.

School directors never have a short-term position. All school director regular terms begin as soon as the election is certified.

Notes

Candidates

[RCW 29A.04](#), [RCW 29A.24](#)

The number of candidates filing for an office may determine if a race appears on the primary ballot, the general election ballot, or skips to the next scheduled election. For more information on when elections appear on the ballot, see [“Election Year” on page 71](#)).

Notes

Office Type	Skips the Primary	Skips the General Election
Partisan office – Unexpired term	<input type="checkbox"/> County office with only one candidate <input type="checkbox"/> No candidates filed in a regular filing period	<input type="checkbox"/> No candidates filed in a regular filing period
Partisan office – Regular term	<input type="checkbox"/> No candidates filed in a regular filing period <input type="checkbox"/> Fewer than two PCO candidates file for a party position	<input type="checkbox"/> No candidates filed in a special filing period
Nonpartisan offices (other than judicial)	<input type="checkbox"/> Fewer than three candidates file <input type="checkbox"/> Parks and recreation district <input type="checkbox"/> Cemetery district <input type="checkbox"/> No candidates filed in a regular filing period	<input type="checkbox"/> No candidates filed in a special filing period
Judicial	<input type="checkbox"/> Use the jurisdiction’s statutes as necessary and the Judicial Elections clearinghouse notice as a reference	<input type="checkbox"/> Use the jurisdiction’s statutes as necessary and the Judicial Elections clearinghouse notice as a reference
Charter county offices	<input type="checkbox"/> Refer to county charter	<input type="checkbox"/> Refer to county charter

You must notify any candidate when their race skips the primary ballot and moves directly to the general election.


Judicial Elections in Washington State

The chart below explains the framework for judicial elections.

Candidates	Municipal Court District Court; Court of Appeals; Supreme Court		Superior Court	
	Primary	General Election	Primary	General Election
One	<input type="checkbox"/> No ¹	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes ²	<input type="checkbox"/> County population less than 100,000: No ¹ <input type="checkbox"/> County population 100,000 or more: No; certificate of election is issued after candidate filing. ³	<input type="checkbox"/> County population less than 100,000: Yes ² <input type="checkbox"/> County population 100,000 or more: No; certificate of election is issued after candidate filing. ³
Two	<input type="checkbox"/> No ¹	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes ²	<input type="checkbox"/> No ¹	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes ²
Three or more	Yes	Yes ²	Yes	Yes ²

¹ [RCW 29A.52.220\(1\)](#)
² [RCW 29A.36.170\(1-2\)](#)
³ [WA Const. Art. IV § 29](#) (Note: When applied to multi-county jurisdictions, all counties in the jurisdiction must meet the population threshold.)

Notes


 For more information about when judicial offices in primary and general elections, see the [Judicial Elections clearinghouse notice](#) on the Office of the Secretary of State website.

Measures

 [RCW 29A.24](#), [RCW 29A.36](#)

Ballot measures requires a ballot title. Ballot titles include the name of the jurisdiction, a concise description of the measure, and a question. Upon accepting a resolution, request a ballot title from one of the following:

- The city attorney, if a city or town passed the resolution.
- The county Prosecuting Attorney for all other local jurisdictions.

 **When sending the resolution to your Prosecuting Attorney, set a deadline for receiving a ballot title.**


After receiving the ballot title, you must send a copy to the jurisdiction for review even if there were no changes to the title submitted with the resolution. The jurisdiction has 10 working days to appeal to the Superior Court.

Section 4.4: Candidate Filing

[RCW 29A.24](#), [WAC 434-215](#)

In order to appear on a ballot, candidates must file an official declaration of candidacy with the designated filing officer. Filing officers may only accept declarations of candidacy during specific periods.

Notes

 For more information about candidate filing, see the [Filing for Office](#) clearinghouse notice on the Office of the Secretary of State website.

Pre-filing Considerations

Public Disclosure Commission

[RCW 42.17A](#) (will be recodified as [RCW 29B.05](#) in January 2026)

The [Public Disclosure Commission \(PDC\)](#) monitors state and local candidate campaign financing, financial compliance with state law, and political advertising. Candidates running for US Congress or President/Vice President report directly to the [Federal Election Commission \(FEC\)](#).


County election administrators must notify the PDC of the following information:

- The names of incumbents and the number of registered voters in each jurisdiction based on the last general election. The PDC requests counties provide this information each January.
- Names of all candidates filing for, or withdrawing from, the ballot/election. (Filings for cemetery districts and districts where voters must meet special qualifications such as ownership of land are exempt.)

Retention of Public Disclosure Commission Reports

The County Auditor must retain any copies of PDC reports provided by candidates according to the County Auditor Retention Schedule.

PDC contact information:
<https://www.pdc.wa.gov> or (360) 753-1111.

 **The Office of the Secretary of State will use information in VoteWA to notify the PDC of candidate filings and withdrawals. Ensure complete and timely data entry into VoteWA.**

Candidate Packets

The PDC provides candidate packets electronically and online. Printed forms are available if requested by the County Auditor around January 1 of each year.


Precinct Committee Officers (PCOs)

 [RCW 29A.80, WAC 434-230](#)

Precinct committee officers (PCOs) are political party positions voted upon and elected in the Primary of every even-numbered year. Candidates compete against other candidates of the same political party within a single precinct.


- Each major political party has an elected position in every precinct. Minor political parties do not have elected precinct committee officers.
- If a single candidate files for a PCO position in a precinct, the candidate is considered elected. The position does not appear on the ballot.
- If no candidates file for a PCO position in a precinct, the party fills the position by appointment.
- PCOs may not submit a Voters’ Pamphlet profile and do not appear in pamphlets.
- Write-in candidates are not permitted for PCO races.


Do not open a special filing period for voided or vacated PCO positions.

 For more information about precinct committee officers, see the [Precinct Committee Officer Elections](#) clearinghouse notice on the Office of the Secretary of State website.

Special Purpose Districts

Districts requiring land ownership may conduct candidate filing according to that jurisdiction’s laws, and it may occur at a different time of the year. The district may also require use of a different candidate declaration form and have different qualifications.

 For more information about jurisdiction-specific laws, see [“Election-Related RCW Chapters” on page 10](#).

 For more information about elections not covered in Title 29A RCW, see the [Diking, Drainage, and Flood Control District Elections](#) clearinghouse notice on the Office of the Secretary of State website.

Notes

Lists of Offices Open for Election

[WAC 434-215-005](#)

Information from Jurisdictions

Prior to **February 1**, the County Auditor sends a questionnaire to each local jurisdiction scheduled to elect officers in the next general election. The questionnaire confirms information regarding open offices. At a minimum, jurisdictions need to confirm:

- The offices open for the general election of that year, including vacancies.
- The names of incumbents currently in those offices, including appointees.
- The annual salary for each office at the time of candidate filing.

Additional information may be included.


The questionnaire should request response from jurisdictions prior to March 1.

Offices Open for Filing

Prepare a list of offices sorted by jurisdiction. This list must include office positions or district designations and filing fees. Post the list online or distribute to the public at least two weeks before candidate filing.

Offices open for filing during the regular filing period:

- An office regularly scheduled for the ballot that year.
- A vacancy open prior to the first day of candidate filing and the jurisdiction notifies the County Auditor of the vacancy prior to the last three days of candidate filing.

 For more information about voids and vacancies, see [“Special Three-Day Filing Periods” on page 80.](#)

Filing Fees & Filing Fee Petitions

Some offices require a filing fee. The salary at the time of filing determines the filing fee for an office. Salary does not include compensation based on meetings attended or expenditures covered as per diem.

A candidate lacking sufficient funds to pay a fee at the time of filing may submit a filing fee petition with the declaration of candidacy.

A sufficient filing fee petition must have one valid signature of a registered voter in the jurisdiction for each dollar of the filing fee. The filing officer is responsible for checking each petition signature against the voter registration

Notes

signature. A signature is not required for portions less than one dollar. Do not round the amount up or down.

Amount of Annual Salary	Filing Fee	Filing Fee Petition Sufficiency Requirement
No salary	No filing fee	No petition signatures required
Less than \$1,000	\$10.00	10 signatures
\$1,000 or greater	1 percent of the annual salary	Signatures equal to whole dollar amount of the filing fee

Notes

Example: The filing fee is \$406.98, so the petition must have 406 valid signatures of voters registered within the jurisdiction of the office.

May I accept a combination of money & signatures?

No. The candidate either pays the full filing fee or submits a petition with the required signatures. Candidates filing with a filing fee petition may not file online.

May I accept a copy of petition signatures?

Petitioners must submit the original signatures.

May a candidate bring in more signatures after submitting a declaration?

The candidate must submit all signatures at the time of filing the declaration of candidacy. Do not accept additional signatures later.

Who may sign the filing fee petition for candidates of an internal nominating district?

If voters of the entire jurisdiction are allowed to vote on the position in the general election, any voter in the jurisdiction may sign the filing fee petition. For example, port commissioner races are restricted in the primary to voters of the internal district, but all voters of the port district may sign the petition because they will all vote on the position in the general election.

No voter may sign two petitions for the same office.

 **Petition sheets are subject to public records requests.**

Notes

Where to File

Office of the Secretary of State

Candidates file with the Office of the Secretary of State for:

- Federal offices
- Statewide offices
- State Legislature
- Supreme Court Justices
- State Senators
- State Representatives
- Court of Appeals Judges
- Superior Court Judges

Notification to the Public Disclosure Commission

VoteWA may be used to notify the Office of the Secretary of State and joint jurisdictions upon approval of a candidate's filing.

County Auditor

All other offices not filing with the Office of the Secretary of State file with the appropriate County Auditor. These offices include but are not limited to:

- City and town elected offices
- Minor taxing district offices

In multi-county districts (joint districts) other than school districts, the county with the most registered voters for that district is the filing officer. The Superintendent of Public Instruction designates the county filing officer for all shared school districts.

When to File

Regular Filing Week

The filing office must be open all five days of candidate filing week, even if the office is not regularly open all five days. Candidate filing:

- Begins at 8:00 am the first Monday in May.
- Ends at the 5:00 pm the following Friday.
- Filing offices maintain regular business hours (8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.)

Special Three-Day Filing Periods

When there are no candidates who file for an office during the regular filing week, a void in candidacy occurs. A void happens if no one has filed for an office after the end of the official filing period.



PCO vacancies do not trigger a special three-day filing period. The parties are responsible for filling any PCO vacancies.

If no one files for an office during the regular filing period, provide a second opportunity for that office by opening a three-day special filing period.

If a vacancy occurs prior to the first day of regular filing week and was not open for filing during regular candidate filing, this can also result in a special three-day filing period.

The County Auditor determines when to open a special three-day filing.

i For more information about publication of notices for special three-day filing periods, see [“Targeted Notices” on page 92](#).

Notes

Lapsed Election

If an office has no candidates after the regular and special filing periods, the election lapses and office skips the current year’s ballot.

- The office is not printed on the ballot.
- No write-in votes will be counted.
- The incumbent remains in office until the election of a successor in the next regularly scheduled election for such offices.
- At the next regularly scheduled election, the office will appear on the ballot for the remainder of the term.

These vacancies appear in the next election scheduled for that type of office, either as an “unexpired” or “short term.” The incumbent stays in office until then.

If the incumbent resigns after the special filing period, an appointee fills the position until the next election for that position. Appointments to fill vacancies are the responsibility of each jurisdiction.

i For more information about voids in candidacies or lapsed elections, see the [Filing for Office elections clearinghouse notice on the Office of the Secretary of State website](#).

How to File

Candidates may file a Declaration of Candidacy in person, by mail, electronically, or online.

Deadlines and rules apply to regular filing and special filing periods. A declaration received after the filing period has closed must be denied.

i Declaration of Candidacy forms are available on the [Candidate Filing Forms](#) page on the Office of the Secretary of State website.

In Person


A candidate may submit an official Declaration of Candidacy form in person or by messenger. Candidates should fill out their own declaration forms; refrain from doing it for them.

By Mail

By mail means delivery through the USPS or other commercial mailing service.

- Declarations submitted electronically (fax, email) are not considered by mail.
- Do not accept declaration forms that are received earlier than 10 business days before the first day of filing week. Return these to the candidate with a notice that it was received too early to be processed.
- Wait until the first day of the filing period to process and publicize mailed declarations.

The filing office must receive declaration forms no later than 5:00 p.m. on the last day of candidate filing. Delivery to another department in the county or state does not qualify as valid delivery.

 For more information about filing offices, see [“Where to File” on page 80.](#)

Electronic (Fax, Email)

[RCW 29A.04.255](#)

With the exception of filing fee petitioners, candidates may submit declarations of candidacy electronically. The filing officer should accept faxed or emailed declaration forms during the filing period.

- The same deadlines apply.
- If payment of a fee is required, electronic filing is not complete until receipt of the fee.

Online Filing

The VoteWA online candidate filing function is available for all candidates. Post a link on your county website for candidate access.

Notes

All online filing systems must be available 24 hours a day.

- Online filing begins exactly at 8:00 a.m. on the first day of filing and ends precisely at 5:00 p.m. on the day filing closes.
- Online candidate filings must be reviewed and approved prior to publication on your website.
- Candidates filing online must pay any applicable filing fee before the filing is complete.

Notes



Online candidate filing is not available for Address Confidentiality (ACP) participants. ACP voters who wish to run for office must file by mail, fax, email, or in-person.

Contingency Planning



[WAC 434-215-040](#)

If there is an Internet outage or disruption to the online candidate filing system, candidates can submit their declarations of candidacy and filing fees in person to any County Auditor during the last two hours of the filing period. All filing information must be sent to the Office of the Secretary of State as soon as possible after it is accepted.

Filing Procedures



[WAC 434-208, RCW 434-230](#)

At the time of filing, a candidate must be:

- Registered to vote in the district of the office and any applicable internal district. You must confirm the candidate’s voting residence lies within the jurisdiction and internal district, if applicable, of the office prior to approving the declaration.
- Qualified to serve if elected. It is the responsibility of the candidate to know if they have all the qualifications required for the office (e.g., residency). The County Auditor does not determine if the candidate is qualified.

Prospective candidates may register to vote or update their voter registration at any time prior to filing.



Remember to confirm internal taxing district boundary lines with the taxing districts prior to filing week.



Future Voters who will be 18 years old at the time of the primary are eligible to be PCO candidates. They are not eligible to run as candidates for other offices.

Notes

Processing a Declaration

For each declaration, you need to:

- Verify the receipt of the filing is within the filing period, particularly if the candidate files online, electronically or by mail.
- Confirm the applicant is currently a registered voter within the jurisdiction of the office. The information on the declaration must match the information on the voter registration. If the candidate has moved, process any applicable voter registration update for the candidate before accepting the declaration.
- If the office requires a candidate registration in an internal sub-district (e.g., county commissioner district or school director district) you must verify this also. Possible resources: maps, assessor’s lookup system or other county geographic information system.
- If necessary, accept and receipt the filing fee.
- Make any notations on the declaration required by your office procedures.
- Notify the candidate of the deadline for withdrawing from the ballot and that filing fees are not refundable.

Party Preference

Candidates for partisan office, other than US President/Vice President and PCO, may indicate a party preference. This is the candidate’s preference and does not indicate if the candidate is endorsed by or affiliated with that political party.

- If no choice is indicated, apply the default phrase “States No Party Preference” to the candidate’s ballot information.
- Except as described in [WAC 434-215-120](#), there are no restrictions to the name of a political party.
- If a candidate indicates both a party preference and “States No Party Preference,” use the party preference written in.

President/Vice President and PCOs Must Declare a Party Affiliation.

- Political supporters nominate candidates for US President/Vice President using a convention process. These candidates affiliate with a political party or convention. In this case, party preference language is not used.
- PCO, a political party office, requires candidates indicate political party affiliation when filing. Party preference language is not used.



Exception: While nominated by convention, independent Presidential candidates do not affiliate with a political party.

Write-in Candidates


Declared Write-in Candidates

Any qualified person may become a declared write-in candidate by filing a Declaration of Write-in Candidacy with the appropriate filing officer.

Write-in candidates must file a declaration to have votes tallied for a race. They may file a declaration of candidacy form up until 8:00 p.m. on Election Day.

Write-in candidates who file more than 18 days before an election do not pay a filing fee. Those that file 18 days or less before an election must pay a filing fee. For offices with a fixed annual salary of more than \$1,000, the filing fee is 1 percent of the annual salary. For offices with a fixed annual salary of \$1,000 or less, the filing fee is \$25. Candidates for offices without a fixed annual salary must also pay the \$25 filing fee, including those paid on per diem or per meeting basis.

Declared write-in candidates may submit a filing fee petition in lieu of the filing fee.


 *Write-in Declaration of Candidacy forms are available on the [Candidate Filing Forms](#) page on the Office of the Secretary of State website.*

Who May Not File as a Write-In Candidate?

 [RCW 29A.24.311](#)


Do not accept a write-in declaration when:

- The candidate filed as a regular candidate or a declared write-in candidate for the same office in the primary. This candidate may file a write-in declaration for a different office in the general election.
- The candidate has already filed for another position on the ballot.

 **Exception: Candidates for the offices of precinct committee officer, charter review board member, and freeholder may run for other offices in the same election.**

Undeclared Write-in Candidates

Voters may cast votes for a person simply by writing in the name on the ballot; however, votes for these names will not be tallied without a timely declaration of write-in candidacy filed by the candidate.

 **State law prohibits write-in candidates for PCO elections.**

Processing Filing Fee Petitions

[RCW 29A.24.101](#) and [WAC 434-215-025](#) prescribe filing fee petition formats. Process filing fee petitions in four steps.

Notes

1. Verify each voter signing the petition is a valid voter in the district (not the sub-district if all voters in the district vote on the general election ballot).
 - Count the first valid signature — Reject any subsequent signatures of a voter on the same petition.
 - No voter may sign two different petitions for the same office. Reject all signatures from a person if they sign more than one petition.
 - You may stop checking signatures when the number of valid signatures equals the number required.
2. Certify the petition as:
 - Sufficient — If the number of valid signatures equals or exceeds the number of filing fee dollars required.
 - Insufficient — Reject the petition because there are not enough valid signatures. Once submitted, do not accept additional signatures.
3. Notify the candidate of the sufficiency or insufficiency of the petition.
4. Sufficient and insufficient filing fee petitions have different retention schedules (See the [Records Retention Schedules for County Auditors on the Office of the Secretary of State website.](#))

What Happens When a Petition Is Missing Essential Information?

Filing fee petitions may be rejected if:

- The petition is not in the proper form.
- The petition clearly bears insufficient signatures.
- The petition did not accompany a declaration of candidacy.
- The petition did not meet the filing deadline.

May I Reject a Candidate’s Declaration?

Yes, but only if the declaration is “defective as to face.”

- Example 1: A candidate lists an address outside the district on the declaration form.
- Example 2: The candidate is not a registered voter.
- Example 3: A candidate has already filed for another office on the ballot (with the exception of PCO or temporary position).

May a Candidate Submit Two Declarations?

A candidate’s name may not appear more than once on a ballot unless one of the positions is for the following:

- Charter review board
- Freeholder
- Precinct committee officer

Additionally, a filed candidate cannot also be a declared write-in candidate for another office appearing on the same ballot.

A candidate must withdraw the initial candidate filing before filing for another position. This rule applies to all instances including candidates filing for the wrong office, or candidates submitting more than one filing electronically. Filing fees are not refundable.

A candidate may not reactivate or resubmit any withdrawn declaration of candidacy. In this instance, the candidate must file a new declaration and pay the filing fee (if any) again before candidate filing ends.

May an individual hold more than one office?

A person may serve in more than one office during the same time as long as there is no conflict of interest as determined by the courts.

Withdrawals



Candidates wishing to withdraw from the ballot may do so no later than close of business the Monday following the regular candidate filing period. Special three-day filing periods do not have withdrawal periods.

At the time of filing, candidates must be informed that:

- The deadline to withdraw is 5:00 p.m. the Monday following regular candidate filing.
- The filing officer must receive a signed request for withdrawal.
- A candidate may not revoke a withdrawal.
- Filing fees are not refundable.

When a candidate withdraws, unless using the VoteWA candidate filing module, you must notify the Public Disclosure Commission.

If a race has no candidates after the last day for withdrawals, a void in candidacy exists and you must conduct a special three-day filing period.

Notes

Can a filing officer accept a withdrawal after the deadline?

No candidate may withdraw from the ballot after the close of business on the Monday following the last day of filing week.

If a candidate wishes to withdraw after the deadline:

- A court must remove the name from the ballot.
- The candidate may contact the PDC to declare that, if elected, they will not serve.

Notes

Lot Draw & Ballot Order

[RCW 29A.36](#)


Determine the order of candidate names on the primary ballot by lot draw. A lot draw randomizes the order of the candidates’ names on the ballot so they do not inherently appear in their filing order. Order of the lot draw also applies to the ballot order for primary sample and provisional ballots.

Conduct the lot draw immediately following the close of Candidate Filing Week.

The Office of the Secretary of State conducts a lot draw to determine the order of names for:

- Federal offices
- Statewide offices
- State legislative and judicial offices

County Auditors conduct a lot draw to determine the order of names for all other contests.

 For more information about filing officers, see [“Where to File” on page 80.](#)

Primary Ballots

The County Auditor determines the order of names:

- Cities, towns, and minor taxing districts** — The lead county (the county with the majority of voters) determines ballot order for shared jurisdictions. Notify joint counties of the ballot order.
- School districts** — The lead county is determined by State Superintendent for Public Instruction.

General Election Ballots

The top vote-getter of a primary race appears first, followed by the second-place vote-getter.


Exceptions are:

- If an office did not appear in the primary, the names appear in lot draw order.
- Presidential/Vice Presidential nominees' order is determined by political party. The candidates from the major party which received the most votes in the last presidential election are listed first, then the candidates from the major political party with the second most votes are listed second. Minor party and independent candidates are listed in the order that the nominations were received by the Office of the Secretary of State.
- If the top two vote-getters have the same number of votes in a primary, determine the order of names for the general election ballot by lot.

Special Cases

Judicial Offices

Judicial offices are generally managed in the same was other nonpartisan offices. However, there are exceptions, especially for superior court judges.

 For more information, refer to the jurisdiction's statutes as necessary and the [Judicial Elections](#) clearinghouse notice on the Office of the Secretary of State website.

Precinct Committee Officer (PCO)

- Only PCO races with two or more candidates for the same party office appear on the ballot.
- The order of the PCO races depends on the number of votes cast statewide in the last Presidential election for each major political party. PCO offices are listed in the same order as presidential candidates.

The Office of President and Vice-President

 [RCW 29A.04](#), [RCW 29A.56](#)

Declarations of candidacy and filing fees are not required.

Major Political Party — A major political party is one whose nominees for President and Vice President received at least 5 percent of the total votes cast at the last preceding Presidential election. For major political parties:

- National conventions nominate candidates and submit official nominations to the Office of the Secretary of State.
- Nomination certificates must include names of official electors to serve at the Electoral College.

Notice of Availability of Services

 [RCW 29A.04.220](#)

Deadline

- Publish no later than 13 days before Primary or election. (Linked to the deadline to publish the Notice of Election)

Required content

- Assistance information to the elderly and persons with disabilities.
- Availability of voter registration aids.
- Availability of voting aids.
- Procedures for voting calculated to reach the elderly and persons with disabilities.

Notification

- Either** publish separately or incorporate into the Notice of Election.

Targeted Notices

You must notify the listed persons in some fashion. You may use a combination of press releases, announcements on your web pages, letters, or email to get the word out.

Notice Type	Deadline	Must Include	Recipients
Notice of Logic & Accuracy Test ¹	24 hours before testing.	<input type="checkbox"/> Date and time of test	<input type="checkbox"/> Press <input type="checkbox"/> Political parties <input type="checkbox"/> Public <input type="checkbox"/> Candidates
Notice of Special Filing Period ²	No later than 24 hours prior to conducting special filing period	<input type="checkbox"/> List of offices open for filing <input type="checkbox"/> Dates, times, and location for beginning and ending of filing period	<input type="checkbox"/> Newspapers <input type="checkbox"/> Radio <input type="checkbox"/> Television in the county <input type="checkbox"/> Post online (optional)
Notice of Recount ³	At least one day before recount	<input type="checkbox"/> Dates, times, and location of the recount ⁴ <input type="checkbox"/> County's observer rules ⁵	<input type="checkbox"/> Applicant or affected parties ⁶ <input type="checkbox"/> Candidates for that office ⁶ <input type="checkbox"/> Media

¹ [WAC 434-335-320](#). See also "[Official Logic & Accuracy Tests](#)" on page 103.

² [RCW 29A.24.171](#), [RCW 29A.24.181](#). See also "[Special Three-Day Filing Periods](#)" on page 80.

³ [RCW 29A.64.030](#). See also "[What Initiates a Recount?](#)" on page 154.

⁴ Recounts begin when you begin sorting ballots by precinct ([WAC 434-264-090](#)).

⁵ [WAC 434-264](#)

⁶ Each person entitled to receive notice may attend accompanied by counsel

Notes

Less Frequently Used Notices

Not all required notices are found in RCW 29A. The following are some of the notices required for special purpose elections:


- Notice of election for organization/reorganization of school districts ([RCW 28A.315.275](#))
- Election on question of incorporation ([RCW 35.02.100](#))
- Notice of election to disincorporation ([RCW 35.07.050](#))
- Election of charter adoption for first class cities ([RCW 35.22.070](#))
- Notice of election for annexation by code city ([RCW 35A.14.070](#))
- Petition and notice of election for transfer of city harbor ([RCW 36.08.010](#))
- Notice of election for removal of county seat ([RCW 36.12.030](#))
- Notice of election for bonds to fund roads and bridges ([RCW 36.76.100](#))
- Notice of special Primary and special election to fill congressional vacancy ([RCW 29A.28.050](#))

Notes


Staffing

Base staffing on the anticipated number of returned ballots. Increased staffing for an election requires:

- Training** — Signature verification has a mandatory training requirement. Workers need training in public information, office procedures and policy, document management and specific tasks.
- Oaths** — Signature checkers and ballot box attendants require oaths.
- Equity** — If possible, appointees working at voting centers and staffed deposit sites should represent both major political parties. Obtain a list of potential workers from each party.

 Do not forget to allow for unplanned absences.

Official Observers

 [RCW 29A.40.100](#), [RCW 29A.12.130](#), [WAC 434-261-020](#),
[WAC 434-250-110](#)

Major political parties may appoint official observers to watch the election process. Prior to every election, the County Auditor must submit to the major political parties in writing:

- A request for observers to observe all mail ballot and counting center activities.
- The request must state the maximum number of observers allowed to observe ballot processing for each processing location.



Chapter 5: Sending Ballots to Voters

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Section 5.1: Ballot Preparation

Appearing on the Ballot

Primary Election

The County Auditor determines the ballot order for local jurisdictions:

- ❑ **Cities, towns, and minor taxing districts:** The lead county (the county with the majority of voters) determines ballot order for shared jurisdictions. Notify joint counties of the ballot order.
- ❑ **School districts:** The lead county is determined by state Superintendent of Public Instruction.

General Election Ballot

The top vote-getter of the primary race appears first, followed by the second-place vote-getter.


Exceptions are:

- ❑ If an office did not appear in the primary, the names appear in lot draw order.
- ❑ If the top two vote-getters have the same number of votes in a primary, determine the order of names for the general election ballot by lot.
- ❑ The order of the Presidential/Vice Presidential nominees is determined by political party. The candidates from the major party which received the most votes in the last presidential election are listed first, then the candidates from the major political party with the second most votes are listed second. Minor party and independent candidates are listed in the order that the nominations were received by the Office of the Secretary of State.

Special Cases

Judicial Offices

Judicial offices are generally managed in the same was other nonpartisan offices. However, there are exceptions, especially for superior court judges.


 For more information about when judicial offices in primary and general elections, see the [Judicial Elections](#) clearinghouse notice on the Office of the Secretary of State website.

Notes

Precinct Committee Officer (PCO)

Only PCO races with two or more candidates for the same party office appear on the ballot. The order of the PCO races depends on the number of votes cast statewide in the last presidential election for each major political party. PCO offices are listed in the same order as presidential candidates’ party order.

Notes

 For more information about precinct committee officers, see [“Precinct Committee Officers \(PCOs\)” on page 77.](#)

The Office of President and Vice-President

[RCW 29A.04](#), [RCW 29A.56](#)

Declarations of candidacy and filing fees are not required.

Major Political Party — A major political party is one whose nominees for President and Vice President received at least 5 percent of the total votes cast statewide in the last preceding presidential election. For major political parties:

- National conventions nominate candidates and submit official nominations to the Office of the Secretary of State.
- Nomination certificates must include names of official electors and alternates to serve at the Electoral College.

Minor Political Party — A political organization other than a major political party. Requirements include:

- Holding state conventions with at least 100 attendees nominate candidates and submit official nominations to the Office of the Secretary of State.
- Filing petitions signed by at least 1,000 valid Washington registered voters must be signed at the conventions.

Nomination certificates must include names of official electors and alternates to serve at the Electoral College. Candidates may hold multiple conventions to collect signatures.

Independent Candidate — A candidate nominated by convention without a party affiliation. Independent candidates must submit the same paperwork as minor political parties.

Ballot Design

 [RCW 29A.36](#), [WAC 434-230](#)


Every primary and election needs the following types of ballots:

- Official ballots
- Accessible ballots (Accessible voting units (AVUs) must be programmed and available for voters)
- Provisional ballots
- Sample ballots
- Special absentee ballots

Notes

All ballot types and styles must use the same format and must include:

- Title — Name of election, date of election, county name.
- Ballot instructions — including specific instructions for:
 - Partisan primary
 - Partisan general election
 - General election for office of U.S. President and Vice President
 - PCO races
 - How to mark the ballot
 - Casting a write-in vote
 - How to correct a vote
- Races and candidates
- Ballot style or precinct identifier
- Clear delineation between instructions and the first measure or office

 *For more information about ballot formatting and design requirements, refer to the “Election Preparation” clearinghouse notices and the Ballot Format & Ballot Packet Materials Checklist on the [Clearinghouse Notices & Election Advisories page](#) of the Office of the Secretary of State website.*

Order of Offices, Measures & Candidates

RCW and WAC specify the order for federal, state, and countywide races and measures. Written county procedures determine placement of local jurisdiction measures and offices on the ballot.

Measures for creating a district by resolution of the county legislative authority appear as a county measure. Following creation of a district, measures and offices will appear according to county policy.

Policies and procedures should provide instruction for placement when receiving more than one measure or type of measure from a district.

Order of Candidates Within a Race

Top Two Primary

 [RCW 29A.36.131](#)

Notes

Order Of:	Determined By:
Partisan candidates	Lot Draw results
Nonpartisan candidates	Lot Draw results
(PCO) Precinct Committee Officer	Lot Draw results

General Election


 [RCW 29A.36.131](#), [RCW 29A.36.161](#), [WAC 434-230-045](#)

Order Of:	Determined By:
Partisan candidates	Highest vote-getter in primary
Nonpartisan candidates with a primary	Highest vote-getter in primary
Nonpartisan and partisan candidates without a primary	Lot draw results
President & Vice President	<input type="checkbox"/> Major political parties are listed in the order of votes cast statewide in the last presidential election. <input type="checkbox"/> Minor political parties and independent candidates are listed in the order the petition was received by the Office of the Secretary of State.

Creating the Perfect Ballot

 [WAC 434-230](#)

A ballot must meet specific design standards set by the type of voting system and state standards. Comply with [WAC 434-230-012](#) in font size and style, alignment, capitalization, spacing, and use of color and shading.

 For more information about preparing the ballot and other materials included in the ballot packet, see [WAC 434-230-012](#) and the [Ballot Format & Mail Ballot Packet Materials Checklist](#) on the Office of the Secretary of State website.

The perfect ballot relies on functional design and careful proofing. Try the following proofing techniques:

- Maintain a checklist for every proofing session.
- Proof from the original documents, such as online candidate filings in VoteWA, hard copies of candidate filings received outside of VoteWA, and the certified lists from the Office of the Secretary of State for federal and state candidates and measures.
- Check the candidates and races on the ballot against the VoteWA list or report.
- Isolate proofreaders from distractions or move to a different room or location.
- Use two or more people and switch roles.
- Read to each other. This makes you concentrate on each word.
- Repeatedly proof using an entirely different set of eyes.


Creating Primary-Only Voter Ballots

 [WAC 434-232](#)

In primaries, including the presidential primary, 17-year-old Future Voters who will be 18 years old in time for the next general election are eligible to vote in primary contests.

Primary-only voters must receive a ballot that only includes eligible contests and excludes all ballot measures and any candidate races elected during the primary, such as precinct committee officer, freeholder, charter review, and commissioners elected to a newly formed jurisdiction.

For a primary that includes contests prohibited to primary-only voters, create primary-only voter ballot styles as needed. Primary-only voter ballots should be issued at the same time as other ballots: 30 or 45 days before the day of the primary for service and overseas voters, and 18 days before the day of the primary for other voters.

 *For more information about registering primary-only voters and other Future Voters, see [“Voter Eligibility” on page 39](#) and [“Issuing Primary-Only Voter Ballots” on page 110](#).*

Sample & Provisional Ballots

 [RCW 29A.36, WAC 434-230](#)


Use the same design principles and layout for sample and provisional ballots.

Notes

Sample Ballots

Sample ballots contain all issues and/or races within the county. If a county's population is 1 million or more, sample ballots may represent a region.

- A printed copy must be available through the County Auditor's Office.
- Same format as official ballot.
- Easily distinguishable from regular ballots (e.g., different color or paper size).
- Available 15 days prior to election.
- If the county provides a local voters' pamphlet with a sample ballot, separate sample ballots are not necessary.

 Review [RCW 29A.36.151](#) and [WAC 434-230-010](#) for "sample ballot" rules, [WAC 434-250-105](#) for an "example of an actual ballot," and [52 USC § 21082](#) for "a sample version of the ballot."

Provisional Ballots

Provisional ballots must differ from the official ballot by being:


- Visually distinguishable from the official ballot.
- Incapable of tabulation by a voting system.

You may use sample ballots as provisional ballots, provided the sample ballot complies with both requirements.

Tabulation Equipment

[RCW 29A.12](#), [WAC 434-335](#)

Good maintenance is essential to proper tabulation. County Auditor are responsible for the preparation, maintenance, and operation of voting systems.

 **Best practice: Have maintenance service on the tabulation equipment every year.**

Pre-Testing

You must pre-test all programming and tabulation equipment before the official logic and tests. Thorough pre-testing of the tabulation system (including AVUs) includes testing:

- Hardware
- Software
- Reporting results (look at all reports)
- Retesting following any changes in programming
- Sending results reports to VoteWA Support to verify upload to VoteWA

Test and verify all:

- Ballot styles
- Formats (alternative languages, electronically duplicated, ballot on demand)
- Voting responses
- Printers (from any printing source you will use)
- AVU-specific considerations include proofing the text and audio


Official Logic & Accuracy Tests

The logic and accuracy (L&A) test is an official test of a tabulation system. The test must verify that the system will correctly count and report the votes as cast.

The event is open for public observation. The County Auditor conducts the test prior to each election. For primaries and elections that include a federal or state office or measure, a representative of the Office of the Secretary of State must attend, and the Office of the Secretary of State will schedule the test date and time.

To prepare, the county shall:

- Provide the official test matrix and a sample ballot to the Office of the Secretary of State at least 14 days before the test.
- Mark test ballots in the manner required in [WAC 434-335-323](#).
- Invite political party observers.
- Draft, review, and distribute all observer conduct rules.
- Notify the press, political parties, candidates, and public of the date and time of testing.

 For more information about publication of notices for official logic and accuracy tests, see [“Targeted Notices” on page 92](#).

Logic & Accuracy Test Requirements:

- Conduct the test exactly as you count ballots during the election.
- Use the same machine operators.
- Issues, offices, and candidates must appear in all appropriate precincts.
- The system must accumulate votes accurately.
- Test the system reporting of votes against the test matrix.
- Verify the upload of test results to the statewide VoteWA system.

AVUs & Electronic Ballot Duplication Systems:

Test AVUs prior to the official testing of the tabulation system. You may not use any untested AVU in the election.

Test the programming on one AVU. Test every other AVU once the base programming has been loaded.


- Test functionality of every machine.
- Test reporting and accumulation of votes.

The County Auditor must provide a log of the testing at the official L&A test. The AVU test log must be completed before the official L&A test can be certified.

All tabulation equipment used in an election must pass the L&A test before tabulating ballots for that election.

Counties auditors who utilize an electronic ballot duplication system must test the electronic ballot duplication system functionality prior to the official L&A test, and the County Auditor must provide a log of the testing at the official L&A test. This electronic ballot duplication test log must be completed before the official L&A test can be certified.

Notes

 For more information about processing duplicated ballots, see [“Duplication, Resolution & Adjudication” on page 136](#) and [“Duplicated Ballot Audit” on page 141](#).

What if a Tabulation System Fails the Official Logic & Accuracy Test?

Take the following steps if the system fails:

1. Identify and correct the issue.
2. Pretest to verify that all issues are corrected.
3. Conduct an emergency L&A test.

Emergency Logic & Accuracy Test

For any failure, the County Auditor must schedule an emergency L&A test pursuant to [WAC 434-335-310](#). At least one additional County Canvassing Board member or a representative of the Office of the Secretary of State must be present.

Section 5.2: Issuing Ballots

 [RCW 29A.40](#), [WAC 434-250](#), [WAC 434-235](#)

In Washington State, a ballot packet is mailed to every active registered voter.

A voter may request their ballot be delivered to:

- The voter’s residence,
- A mailing address, or
- An address specific to the election (may be delivered and returned electronically if the voter will be overseas or on active duty assignment away from their address of registration).

The County Auditor must record the ballot issue date and report the total number of ballots issued and returned by precinct for every election.


Notes

Deadlines for Mailing Ballots

Days Prior to an Election	Type of Ballot Mailing	Requirements for Requests Received After Deadline
90 days before a primary or general election	<input type="checkbox"/> Special absentee ballots	<input type="checkbox"/> Requests outside of 90 days: Return application or hold until deadline. <input type="checkbox"/> Requests inside 90 days: Issue immediately. Provide write-in ballots if official ballots are unavailable.
45 days before a primary or general election	<input type="checkbox"/> Primary and general election ballots to service and overseas voters	<input type="checkbox"/> Requests for ballots from service and overseas voters inside 45 days: Issue immediately.
30 days before a special election	<input type="checkbox"/> Special election ballots to service and overseas voters	<input type="checkbox"/> Requests for ballots from service and overseas voters inside 30 days: Issue immediately.
18 days before all primaries and elections	<input type="checkbox"/> Ballots for all elections are available and mailed to regular voters <input type="checkbox"/> Ballots mailed to ACP voters <input type="checkbox"/> AVUs available for use	<input type="checkbox"/> Ballots requested inside 18 days: Issue as soon as possible.
8:00 p.m. Election Day for all primaries and elections	<input type="checkbox"/> Ballots issued for requests received prior to 8:00 p.m.	<input type="checkbox"/> Requests received after 8:00 p.m. will be declined.

an address, place the voter in the precinct encompassing the County Auditor’s Office for the current election.

- If the ballot is returned, count only federal races and countywide offices/ issues.
- If the voter’s precinct is still undetermined following the primary or election, place the voter on inactive status and send confirmation notices to obtain the voter’s correct Washington residential address.

 For more information about registering service and overseas voters, see [“Processing Applications for Service and Overseas Voters” on page 46.](#)

Issuing Special Absentee Ballots

 [RCW 29A.40.050](#)

Issue a special absentee ballot for a state primary or general election when:

- A voter submits a [Special Absentee Ballot Application](#) (available in the [Forms for Voters page](#) on the Office of the Secretary of State website) or provides information indicating they will be unable to vote and return a regular ballot by normal mail delivery within the period provided for regular ballots, and
- The election is within 90 days. If the application is received more than 90 days prior to the election, the County Auditor must either return the application to the voter or hold it for processing at the 90-day mark.

If a regular ballot is not available, issue a paper ballot with blank lines for each office and provide the voter a list of known candidates and measures. The voter will write their choices on the blank lines.

- Do not wait to issue special absentee ballots; provide the voter with something as soon as you receive a complete request. If the voter did not indicate they are unable to vote and return a ballot by normal mail delivery on a special absentee form, you may contact the voter to verify they qualify for a special absentee ballot.
- Include a list of known candidates and measures for that election at the time of the application.
- Instructions accompanying a special absentee ballot must state the voter may also cast a regular ballot that, if received, will count in lieu of the special absentee ballot.

The voter is entitled to request a regular ballot in addition to the special absentee ballot. County Auditors can have a policy to always send regular ballots to all special absentee voters or only those who request a regular ballot. Consistent with each County Auditor’s policy, send the regular ballot to voters when other ballots are mailed at least 18 days prior to the primary or election.

Issuing Ballots to Inactive Voters

When an inactive voter requests a ballot, issue an official ballot (not a provisional).

An inactive voter may submit a change of address using any non-in-person method up to eight days prior to the day of the primary or election and receive a current ballot based on that new precinct.

Starting seven days prior to Election Day and until 8:00 p.m. on Election Day, inactive voters may update their voter registration in person at a county election office, voting center, or auditor-designated location and receive a current ballot based on their new residential address.

A voter who fails to update their residential address by the eight-day registration deadline and does not appear in-person at an auditor-designated location to make the update may still vote according to their previous registration address. Address changes received after the applicable deadline will be effective following the election.

Inactive voters shall be placed on active status when a request for a ballot or registration update is received.



For more information about active and inactive status for voters, see [“Active and Inactive Status” on page 52.](#)

Issuing Ballots to Provisionally Registered Voters



[RCW 29A.08](#), [WAC 434-250](#)

When the County Auditor has not yet verified a voter’s identification, issue the provisionally registered voter an official ballot.

The voter record shall be flagged in such a way that indicates a ballot shall not be processed until identification is provided. The return ballot envelope may also indicate that the voter is provisionally registered. Send an Identification Notice in compliance with [WAC 434-250-045](#) at the time of the election or with the official ballot (this is not the Acknowledgment Notice).

The notice informs the voter:

- How to include a driver license or permit number, state ID card number, tribal ID of a federally-recognized tribe in Washington state, the last four digits of a Social Security Number, or a photocopy of valid identification (include the list of alternative identification in [RCW 29A.08.107](#)) with the voted ballot.
- How to return the required identification without compromising the security of the ballot.
- Notify voter, “If you fail to provide identification, your ballot will not be counted.”
- Be sure to open any ballots received from provisionally registered voters to determine if the voter provided identification in the return or security envelopes or sleeve.

i *Don't get confused! Provisionally registered voters do not receive a provisional ballot. They get an official ballot, but it cannot be counted until they provide identification. For more information about provisionally registered voters see [“Identity Verification” on page 44.](#)*

Issuing Replacement & Reissued Ballots

When a ballot is requested and a ballot has not yet been accepted for that voter, you will need to determine if a replacement or reissued ballot is required:

- Replacement Ballot means a ballot that is the same type or style and precinct as the most recently issued ballot. The ballot contains the same races and measures.
 - Voters may request replacement ballots by telephone, in writing, electronically, or in person by the voter or a family member.
 - Issue replacement ballots to voters until 8:00 p.m. on Election Day.
 - Keep a record of each replacement ballot issued, including the date requested.
- Reissued Ballot means a new ballot issued to a voter as a result of a residential address update and the voter’s ballot has changed — different precinct, different races, and/or different measures. This update can be a result of an in-county address change or a registered voter transferring into a new county.
 - Voters may receive reissued ballots by submitting registration updates by telephone mail, online, electronic submission, or in-person no later than eight days prior to Election Day. After the eight-day deadline, voters must appear in person at a county election office, auditor-designated location, or voting center to update their address and receive a reissued ballot.

If you are unable to find a voter’s record, or if the voter indicates this is their first registration, register the voter and issue a ballot.

Notes

Issuing Ballots to Protected Record Voters

Send official ballots to Address Confidentiality Program (ACP) participants as soon as possible but no later than 18 days before the election. It takes longer for ACP ballots to reach the voters as the ballots are mailed to ACP mailbox at the Office of the Secretary of State, who then repackage the ballots and mail them to the voters. This process adds at least 2-3 days to the mail time. Mailing these ballots first class and putting all ballots for a household in an envelope or box can reduce the mailing time.

Mark the return envelope for delivery to authorized county personnel. Only authorized county personnel may process ACP ballots.

Issuing Primary-Only Voter Ballots


In primaries, including the presidential primary, 17-year-old Future Voters who will be 18 years old in time for the next general election are eligible to vote in primary contests. They are not active registered voters until 90 days prior to an eligible primary.

Balloting

- Only allowed to vote in winnowing contests for candidates
- Not allowed to vote in deciding contests: initiatives, precinct committee officers, freeholders, etc.
- Separate styles of ballots must be made for this voter

Notices & Disclosure

- All registration data are exempt from disclosure for those under 18 until 90 days prior to the primary.
- Ballot issuance data are disclosable once produced.
- Do not send any notice to Primary-Only Voters until 90 days before the primary.

 *For more information about registering primary-only voters and other Future Voters, see [“Voter Eligibility” on page 39](#) and [“Creating Primary-Only Voter Ballots” on page 101](#).*

Ballot Packets

 [WAC 434-230](#), [WAC 434-235](#)

Postal Mail Packets

Notes

For All Voters

- Ballot — specific to a voter’s precinct
- Security envelope/sleeve
- Pre-addressed, postage-paid return envelope with ballot declaration
- Date of the election in 20-point font or larger
- Outer mailing envelope with postal endorsements that forward ballots, send updated address information, and return undeliverable ballots to the County Auditor
- Instructions — specific to the election, how to mark the ballot, and type of ballot

For Service & Overseas (UOCAVA) Voters

Packets mailed to overseas and service voters have additional requirements.

Use return envelopes with the federal prepaid return postage account when mailing through the USPS — do not use the business reply account meant for regular ballots.

Two additional items must be included:

1. A ballot privacy (secrecy) sheet; election information printed on this sheet must not verify or identify the voter in any way.
2. A space for the voter to provide a telephone number.

UOCAVA voting instructions must specify:

- How to return the ballot by email, fax, or postal mail.
- How to use the ballot privacy sheet when returning a voted ballot electronically.
- The need to sign the ballot declaration on or before Election Day.
- How to obtain information about the election — e.g., county website and email addresses.
- How the voter confirms their ballot arrived at the elections office.
- County Auditor’s complete contact information: website, mailing address, email address, phone number, and fax number.

Electronic Ballot Issuance (Online Ballots)

 [RCW 29A.40.091](#) / [WAC 52 USC § 20302](#), [WAC 434-235](#)

Overseas & Service (UOCAVA) Voters

Service and overseas voters may choose to receive ballots via email or fax. All ballot packets must include:

- Information required for every mail ballot packet.
- A ballot declaration.
- Voting instructions specific to voting an email/fax ballot.
- A privacy sheet to separate the voted ballot from the signed declaration.
- County Auditor website information.
- Instructions for returning the ballot electronically by 8:00 p.m. Pacific Time on Election Day, or by mail and postmarked on or before Election Day.

Non-UOCAVA Voters

Any voter may request to have their ballot delivered to them electronically. Except for service and overseas voters, who are allowed to return ballots electronically, all other voters must return a paper ballot by mail, ballot drop box, a voting center, or another location established by the County Auditor. They may not return their ballots electronically.

Undeliverable Ballots

Inactivating Voters after Receiving Returned Mail

An undeliverable ballot is one that the USPS could not deliver to the voter. The USPS may return mailed ballots to the election office as “undeliverable.”

You must request address change information from the USPS and use that information to update voter registration records. This information qualifies under the federal National Voter Registration Act (NVRA) for changing the status of a voter.

Notes

If a ballot is returned as “undeliverable” or forwarded, the County Auditor must process these ballots following certification of the election.

- If the updated address is within the state, update the voter registration and the voter’s county of residence will send the voter an acknowledgment notice, or
- If no updated address information was received or the updated address is outside the state, place the voter on inactive status and send the voter a confirmation notice to all known addresses.

Notes



Reconciliation Tip: Undeliverable ballots are not reported as “ballots returned” in election reports. They are blank forms that did not reach voters as intended.

Certificate of Mailing

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

Before a primary or election, counties must certify ballot-mailing dates to the Office of the Secretary of State. The certification verifies your county mailed ballots no later than:

Service & Overseas (UOCAVA) Voters:

- The 30th day prior to special elections.
- The 45th day prior to primaries and general elections.

All Other Ballots:

The day all other ballots are sent to the USPS to be delivered, no later than the 18th day prior to all primaries and elections.



Blank certification forms are available on the [Certification, L&A Tests, and Recounts page](#) of the Office of the Secretary of State’s website.



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Chapter 6: Processing Returned Ballots

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Section 6.1: Receiving Ballots

 [RCW 29A.40](#), [RCW 29A.60](#), [WAC 434-235](#), [WAC 434-250](#),
[WAC 434-261](#)

You may receive voted ballots by mail, electronically (overseas and service voters only), or at a ballot drop box. From the time of receipt until opening, place all received return envelopes in secure storage.


Notes

 For more information about the requirements for ballot drop boxes and voting centers, including a detailed table showing the requirements for each, see the [Voting Centers and Ballot Deposit Sites](#) clearinghouse notice on the Office of the Secretary of State website.

Ballot Drop Boxes

Eighteen days before every election, the County Auditor must open a minimum of two ballot drop boxes in different geographical locations. However, each county must provide and open at least one ballot drop box in each city, town, and census-designated place with a post office as well as one ballot drop box for every 15,000 registered voters. These locations may be either a ballot drop box or a voting center.

State law prohibits electioneering, campaigning, petitioning, or interfering with the voting process within 25 feet of any ballot drop box, in a voting center, or within 100 feet of the designated entrance of a voting center.

 For more information about the requirements for ballot drop box locations, see the [Ballot Drop Boxes in All Communities](#) clearinghouse notice on the Office of the Secretary of State website.

Notes

Procedures for managing ballot drop boxes are the same at drop boxes and voting centers:

- Secure ballot drop boxes at all times with a lock and uniquely numbered seal. The seal, in conjunction with a seal log, documents access to the ballots. Seal logs must record when the ballot drop box was opened and by whom.
- Deposited ballots must be accessible only to the County Auditor or people appointed by the County Auditor, such as staff or designated volunteers.
- At exactly 8:00 p.m. on Election Day, empty or seal all ballot drop boxes to prevent late ballot delivery.
- One person may close a ballot drop box by recording the seal number on a log and placing the log inside the ballot drop box before closing and sealing the deposit slot. The person must not be able to access the ballots. A team of two will later remove the ballots from the box and verify the seal and log.
- Allow voters in line at 8:00 p.m. to vote (or finish voting) and accept their ballots.
- Transport ballots to the counting center. Two authorized people can do this together or one person can transport ballots in a container already secured with a seal and log by two people appointed by the County Auditor.



Review ballot drop box seal logs immediately following Election Day. Are you missing a log or is the log incomplete? It is important to verify that the ballot drop box is empty.

Unstaffed Ballot Drop Boxes

Availability

Unstaffed ballot drop boxes are available beginning 18 days prior to the election. The County Auditor may set specific hours of availability. Many unstaffed boxes are available 24 hours per day.

Secure an unstaffed ballot drop box located in a building with a lock, seal, and seal log.

Outdoor unstaffed drop boxes must be:

- Tamper-proof
- Weatherproof
- Anchored to prevent removal
- Located in convenient, well-lit areas
- Accessible to persons with disabilities

Operations

Empty the drop boxes:

- Frequently enough to prevent damage to ballots
- Frequently enough to prevent the box from becoming too full
- Frequently enough to prevent unauthorized access
- With no fewer than two staff members or appointees

Notes

Staffed Ballot Drop Boxes

Availability

The County Auditor establishes the dates and times that staffed ballot drop boxes are available to voters. If staffed ballot drop boxes are open on Election Day, they must remain open until 8:00 p.m.

Operations

At least two people must staff the box and subscribe to an oath regarding the discharge of duties. They must be:

- Employees of the County Auditor’s Office; or
- Representatives of different major political parties appointed by the County Auditor.

Staff must record the seal number of the box before the box is opened for voters to deposit ballots. The seal must be intact when returned to the County Auditor.

Ballots returned after 8:00 p.m. Election Day must be placed in a separate container and sent to the Canvassing Board for rejection.

Deliver the sealed, unopened ballot box or ballot transport container to the County Auditor upon closing.

Student Engagement Hubs




Each state university, regional university, and The Evergreen State College, as defined in [RCW 28B.10.016](#) must provide both voter registration services and ballots via the Public Voter Portal (VoteWA) to Washington citizens. Higher education campuses as defined in [RCW 28B.45.012](#) (branch campuses) only need to provide ballots via the Public Voter Portal.

Student engagement hubs may be open during county business hours starting up to eight days before an election through 8:00 p.m. on Election Day or until all voters in line at 8:00 p.m. have voted and deposited their ballots. Hubs are only required to be open during November general elections.

A list of all student engagement hubs must appear in the printed state Voters’ Pamphlet and the printed local Voters’ Pamphlet produced by the applicable counties. Institutions must contract with the county for Student Engagement Hub operation.

Notes


 For further information, refer to the [ESB 6313 Advisory #2 – Student Engagement Hubs](#) advisory on the Office of the Secretary of State website.


Voting Center Requirements

[RCW 29A.40.160](#), [WAC 434-250-105](#)

Availability

At least one voting center, typically the County Auditor’s Office, must be open during regular business hours during the entire voting period, starting 18 days prior to the election and ending at 8:00 pm Election Day. In addition to the location requirements outlined in [RCW 29A.40.160\(2\)](#), the County Auditor may determine the days and hours of any additional voting centers.

 For more information about accessibility in voting centers, see [“Accessibility Awareness” on page 13](#).

 For more information regarding voter registration and issuing ballots for out-of-county voters, refer to the [ESB 6313 Advisory #1 – Universal Registration](#) advisory on the Office of the Secretary of State website.

Operations

Voting centers must:

- Be in an accessible location (ADA).
- Prohibit electioneering within 100 radial feet from a voting center and post signage.
- Prohibit the carrying of weapons in the voting center and post signage.
- Be located in a public building or building leased by a public entity including, but not limited to, libraries.
- Be marked with signage outside the building indicating it is a place for voting.
- Issue ballots, including all appropriate ballot packet materials (ballot declarations), for all Washington voters both in and out-of-county.
- Offer disability access voting, ensuring voter privacy.
- Provide provisional ballots.
- Provide voters’ pamphlets — state and local.
- Provide real-time voter registration services via VoteWA for all Washington voters both in and out-of-county (universal registration). Offer conditional registration and balloting services if the system is unable to process applications.
- Display voter information required by the Help America Vote Act (HAVA), including election-specific information and an example of an actual ballot or a sample ballot in substantially the same format as an actual ballot.
- Display appropriate partisan office notice.
- Provide instructions on how to mark the ballot properly.
- Provide election materials in alternative languages, if required.
- Assist voters (See [RCW 29A.04.220](#)).
- Provide a ballot drop box.
- Secure the ballot drop box at exactly 8:00 p.m. on Election Day, or after all voters in line have cast a ballot.

Notes

i *Ballot drop boxes in voting centers must meet the requirements for ballot deposit sites. Refer to [“Unstaffed Ballot Drop Boxes” on page 118](#) and [“Staffed Ballot Drop Boxes” on page 119](#), as applicable.*

Notes

How to Vote on an AVU

Accessible voting units (AVU) allow a voter to mark and print a paper ballot. The voter places the ballot into a security envelope and a signed ballot return envelope. Some systems require the voter to bring the ballot they received in the mail while others print the ballot on blank paper.

- Voters do not need to provide identification, nor do they sign a declaration other than the one on the envelope.
- If the system requires the voter to bring their ballot with them, the voter simply uses the device to mark the ballot.
- If the system prints the ballot, election staff must consult VoteWA for the correct ballot style and load the ballot into the system for the voter.
- For either system, marked ballots are placed in a security envelope and a signed ballot return envelope, then deposited in the ballot drop box.
- The ballot is processed the same as ballots returned through the mail or ballot drop box.

Issuing Provisional Ballots



Do not confuse a provisional registration with provisional ballots they are not connected. For more information about provisionally registered voters, see [“Identity Verification” on page 44](#).

When to issue a provisional ballot

- The voter’s record shows an accepted ballot, but the voter asserts they have not yet voted and requests a new ballot.
- A voter is registered in another state.
- The voter does not meet the qualifications to register to vote, or is unwilling to become a registered voter, and requests a ballot.
- Any other time a voter’s eligibility to cast a ballot is in question.

A provisional ballot packet includes:

- A ballot that cannot be read by the tabulation system.
- A secrecy envelope.
- A provisional ballot outer envelope.
- Written notice about the free access system.

The voter must:

- Sign the declaration.
- Provide addresses (present and former registered address if applicable).
- Include date of birth.
- Insert the ballot inside the secrecy and outer envelopes and return to the elections staff.

Elections staff will verify that all required information is on the outer envelope.



For more information about receiving provisional ballots, see [“Receiving Provisional Ballots” on page 131](#).

Section 6.2: Initial Processing

[RCW 29A.40](#), [RCW 29A.60](#), [WAC 434-250](#), [WAC 434-261](#)

Notes

The three phases of ballot processing are initial processing, final processing, and tabulation.

Initial processing refers to all steps taken to prepare ballots for tabulation.

Initial processing begins upon receipt of the ballot, including:

- Postmark verification
- Signature verification
- Adding voter credit to individual voter records
- Opening and separating envelopes
- Manual inspection of ballots
- Scanning (if applicable)
- Duplication, resolution, or adjudication
- Any additional steps required to prepare the ballots for tabulation

Postmark Verification

A valid mailed ballot requires a postmark date of Election Day or before. Ballots deposited in a ballot drop box do not have postmarks, but ballot drop boxes are closed at 8:00 p.m. Election Day. The fluorescent barcode printed on the ballot envelope and a date of mailing through a commercial mailing service (i.e. FedEx, UPS) qualifies as a postmark. Refer any ballot envelope postmarked after Election Day or deposited later than 8:00 p.m. to the county Canvassing Board.

Exceptions to the postmark requirement for mailed ballots:

- Instead of a postmark, UOCAVA ballots require a signature date on or before Election Day.
- When the postmark is illegible or missing on non-UOCAVA ballots, use the date the voter signed the declaration.
- Postage that prints a date (metered or printed stickers) does not qualify as a postmark — use the date the voter signed the declaration.

Signature Verification

Every valid ballot requires a signed declaration. Staff verifies that the signature accompanying the ballot matches the signature on the voter’s registration record. Before verifying signatures, staff must:

- Attend signature verification training.
- Sign an oath.

Signature verification training is required for Canvassing Board members, and information about Canvassing Board members' completion of the training must be posted on the County Auditor's website.

Every county should have written procedures for accepting or challenging ballots based on signature verification.

Notes

i For more information about signature verification requirements, see the [Signature Verification and Compliance Tool Training Manual](#) and the [Missing and Mismatched Signatures on Ballot Declarations](#) clearinghouse notice on the Office of the Secretary of State website.

What if the voter is unable to sign?

If a voter is unable to sign the declaration, they may make a mark witnessed by two people. The return ballot envelope must have spaces for the signatures of the witnesses.

What if the voter uses a common nickname or signs a different name?

Accept common nicknames, variations of the voter's name, or initials as long as the handwriting is the same.

If the signature on the declaration does not match the signature on the registration record because the voter's name has changed, the ballot may be counted as long as the handwriting is clearly the same.

The signature may not be rejected solely for being a variation of the voter's name. Send the voter a name of change or voter registration form and direct them to complete and return the form with their updated signature.

If it appears the voter has changed their name, and the information required under [RCW 29A.08.440](#) to complete a name change is not provided or legible, send the voter a change of name form or voter registration form and direct the voter to complete the form.

What if the voter uses a power of attorney (POA)?

POA does not apply to voting. Do not accept signatures using the voter's POA and treat the ballot envelope as unsigned.

Can the signature on a replacement ballot be used to correct for a missing or mismatched signature?

No. A current ballot signature issue cannot be "cured" by a signature on a suspended ballot.

Notes

What if the voter returns a ballot that was not issued to the voter who signed?

Count the ballot for the registered voter who actually signed the ballot declaration when:

- The voter who signed the declaration can be identified.
- The signature on the declaration matches the signature on the voter registration record.
- The voter who signed the declaration has not returned another ballot.



Check the precinct! You must count only the races and measures for which the voter is eligible to vote.

Challenged Ballot Processing

Ballots that are not accepted during the initial signature verification must be reviewed by a second person who is also trained in signature verification. If the second signature reviewer agrees that the ballot should not be accepted, the ballot shall be challenged, separated from the accepted ballots, and held from further processing.

As soon as practicable, but no later than three business days following receipt the ballot, voters must be notified and given the opportunity to “cure” ballots that have been challenged for missing or mismatched signatures.

Voters must be notified of their challenged ballot by first class mail, email, phone call (must leave a voicemail if available), and text message and provided instructions on how they may cure their ballot no later than the day before certification.

Keep a record of the following items:

- The date of contact attempts to the voter and when the notice was sent.
- The date the voter submitted the cure notice.



A voter may not cure a signature after certification of the election just to qualify for recount.



For more information about curing missing and mismatched signatures, see the [Missing and Mismatched Signatures on Ballot Declarations](#) clearinghouse notice on the Office of the Secretary of State website.

Cure an Unsigned Declaration (Missing Signature)

When a returned ballot envelope lacks a signature or a mark to the declaration, the ballot is challenged as “unsigned.”

Notes



Do not send a copy of the voter’s signature with the form. A voter’s signature is not public information and cannot be released.

To cure an “unsigned” challenged ballot the voter must take one of the following actions:

Appear in Person

- Sign the ballot declaration no later than close of business the day before certification of the primary or election;

Complete a Missing Signature Form

- Sign a copy of the ballot declaration or mark in front of two witnesses
- The form may be returned electronically (e.g., by email and fax), by mail, or in person and must be received by the County Auditor no later than close of business the day before certification of the primary or election.

The signature provided on the form must be compared to and match the signature(s) already on file.

Five business days prior to the certification of the election, all voters who have not responded to cure notice must be contacted again by:

- Telephone, leaving a voicemail if the voter doesn’t answer and voicemail is available;
- Text message, if the voter has opted into text messages; and
- Email, attaching a copy of the cure form to the email, if the voter has provided an email address.

Cure a Signature that Does Not Match (Mismatched Signature)

When a signature provided on the returned ballot envelope does not match the signature(s) in the voter’s registration record, the ballot is challenged as “signature does not match.”



Do not send a copy of the voter’s signature with the form. A voter’s signature is not public information and cannot be released.

To cure a “signature does not match/mismatched” challenged ballot the voter must take one of the following actions:

Notes

Appear in Person

- Sign a new voter registration form no later than close of business the day before certification of the primary or election.

Complete a Signature Update Form

- Sign a signature update form that includes both the ballot declaration required by [WAC 434-230-015\(3\)\(c\)](#) and the voter registration oath required by [CW 29A.08.230](#).
- The form may be returned electronically (e.g., by email and fax), by mail, or in person and must be received by the County Auditor no later than close of business the day before certification of the primary or election.

The signature provided on the form must be compared to and match the signature(s) already on file.

Provide Valid Secondary Identity Verification:

- A voter may cure a mismatched ballot declaration signature by providing valid secondary identity verification to the county auditor no later than the close of business the day before certification of the primary or election.
- Secondary identity verification may be provided by the voter by email, telephone, in person, or through the multi-factor authentication process set forth below.
- Valid secondary identity verification may be:
 - Last four digits of the voter’s Social Security Number;
 - Full driver’s license, instruction permit, or state identicard card number;
 - Alternate ID other than a voter registration card that shows the name and address of the voter
 - Photo ID;
 - Valid enrollment card of a federally recognized Indian tribe in Washington state;
 - Copy of a current utility bill or bank statement;
 - Copy of a current government check;
 - Copy of a current paycheck; or
 - Another government document.
 - A multifactor authentication code the county auditor sent to the voter’s phone number or email address on record.

Multifactor Authentication Code:

- The multifactor authentication code sent from the County Auditor to the voter must be from a system approved for use by the Office of the Secretary of State.
- The code may only be sent to a phone number or email address already on file for the voter at the time the ballot was received.
- After providing the multifactor authentication code, the voter must confirm to the county auditor orally or in writing that they were the person to sign their ballot declaration.

If a voter signs and returns the ballot of another voter, the ballot may be counted for the signer if they can be identified.

- The signature on the envelope must match the signer’s voter registration record.
- The voter who signed must not have returned another ballot.
- Only issues that the voter is qualified to vote upon will count.

Processing Special Circumstance Ballots

Replacement Ballots

Any voter may request a replacement ballot. If the voter returns two ballots of the same type/style and precinct, process the first valid ballot received for their current registration.

If the voter returns additional replacement ballots, they shall be assigned suspended/canceled status and considered informational or invalid.



Reconciliation Tip: “Informational/invalid ballots” should not be sent to the Canvassing Board for rejection nor be included in your reconciliation report.

Reissued Ballots

If the voter moved from one precinct to another, or if the voter’s ballot style changed to include or exclude contests, this is a reissued ballot. If the voter returns more than one reissued ballot, the current ballot (the ballot that matches the voter’s current residential information) should be counted. All other ballots received from that voter are considered informational and are neither rejected nor counted.



Informational ballots that are received by the County Auditor are usually marked as “Invalid” in VoteWA.

Federal Write-in Absentee Ballots (FWAB)

FWABs are intended for military or overseas voters who did not receive a regular ballot. Any military or overseas elector may use a FWAB for any election.

UOCAVA voters may also be registered from a voted ballot when a signed declaration accompanies the ballot.

Prior to processing a Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot (FWAB), refer to the [Service and Overseas Voters](#) clearinghouse notice on the Office the Secretary of State website.

Notes

The clearinghouse notice answers the following questions:

- Who qualifies as a service voter?
- What should I do if the voter is not registered?
- What should I do if the voter also returns an official ballot?
- What should I do if a military or overseas voter does not provide a Washington state residential address?

UOCAVA Ballots Submitted Electronically


Accept voted UOCAVA ballots returned by electronic transmission no later than 8:00 p.m. Pacific Time on Election Day.

Only UOCAVA voters may return a ballot electronically.

- A copy of the signed declaration must be included.
- The original ballot is not required.
- Process the ballot (duplicate if necessary) if the signature on the declaration matches the voter registration record.

Secrecy of the ballot:


- Print the ballot and attachments.
- Separate the declaration from the voted ballot by a privacy sheet or envelope.
- Apply public disclosure exemptions.

 For more information about processing ballots submitted electronically, see the [Processing Ballots Returned Electronically](#) clearinghouse notice on the Office of the Secretary of State website.

Not an Official Ballot?

The state of Washington allows voting responses on something other than the official ballot.

- Confirm the voter did not already return a ballot.
- The voter must still sign a ballot declaration and it must accompany the voting responses. If a signed declaration is not included, treat it as an unsigned ballot.
- Count only the votes for offices and measures for which the voter is eligible.

 **Exception: Responses on ballots from prior elections do not count.**
See [WAC 434-262-031](#).

Duplicate the valid votes onto the correct precinct ballot.

i For more information about voter intent, see [“What Constitutes a Vote?” on page 147](#) and the [Statewide Standards on What is a Vote](#) publication available on the Office of the Secretary of State website.

Receiving Provisional Ballots

When you receive a provisional ballot, first check VoteWA to see if the voter is registered anywhere in the state.

If registered in another county:

- Send the ballot to that county.

If registered in your county and there is not already an accepted ballot for the voter:

- If the correct ballot was voted, process the provisional ballot.
- If the incorrect ballot was voted, process and duplicate the ballot to the correct ballot style with the offices and issues for which the voter was eligible.

If not registered to vote in Washington:

- If the voter was canceled in error, reinstate registration and process.
- If the voter was canceled correctly or was not registered anywhere in Washington before the 8:00 p.m. election deadline, ballot does not count.
- If the voter is registered in another state, treat the ballot as if the voter is not registered; do not send ballot to the other state.

i For more information about issuing provisional ballots, see [“Issuing Provisional Ballots” on page 122](#).

Crediting Voters

Credit all voters with valid ballots before certifying the election or primary. Crediting voters for voting usually occurs automatically when logging receipt of valid ballots into VoteWA.

Do not credit voters with rejected ballots.

Notes

Opening & Separating Envelopes

To protect the secrecy of ballots, use a two-step process:

- Separate the security envelopes/sleeves from the outer declaration envelopes.
- Isolate the declaration envelopes prior to removing ballots from the security envelopes/sleeves.
- Confirm ballots are not in the envelopes by doing one of the following:
 - Look through the envelope hole, or
 - Insert an object through the hole, such as a zip tie.



Be prepared: Envelopes do not always contain the correct ballot or any ballot at all! Anticipate problems when writing office procedures.

Store the declaration envelopes in a logical manner — you may need to find them later.



For more information on protecting the secrecy of voted ballots, see the [Protecting Secrecy of the Vote](#) clearinghouse notice on the Office of the Secretary of State website.

Manual Inspection

Ensure correct tabulation by manually inspecting ballots for voter intent issues. All ballots must be manually inspected prior to scanning or tabulation.


Inspect all ballots manually:

- Both sides of the ballot.
- Each response position.

Training for ballot inspectors should include:

- An explanation of what the county tabulation system will and will not read.
- A copy of and thorough explanation of the Statewide Standards on What is a Vote ([WAC 434-261-086](#)). The publication [Voter Intent: Statewide Standards on What is a Vote](#) is available on the Office of the Secretary of State website.
- Any special rules that apply to the specific primary or election (e.g., the presidential primary rules contained in [WAC 434-219-235](#)).
- Office procedures for write-in votes.

When manually inspecting ballots, look for anything that prevents correct tabulation of the ballot or any reason the ballot may need to be duplicated.

 For more information about voter intent, see [“What Constitutes a Vote?” on page 147](#) and the [Statewide Standards on What is a Vote](#) publication on the Office of the Secretary of State website.

Notes


Duplicating & Resolving

Duplication is the process of creating a true, readable (by the tabulation system) copy of valid votes onto an official blank ballot, paper or electronic.

A readable ballot is any ballot that the county vote tabulation system can accept and read as the voter intended. When a ballot is unreadable by the tabulation system, you must duplicate the votes to a blank ballot.

Duplication must include:

- A two-person team
- An audit trail and log
 - A unique control number on the original ballot and the duplicated ballot, linking the two together
 - Initials of the two individuals conducting duplication
- All ballots kept in secure storage

 **Include your ballot duplication situations and procedures in the County Canvassing Board manual.**

Resolving ballots is the process of telling a digital scan voting system how to interpret how a voter marked their ballot, known as “adjudication” in some counties.

Whether a county is duplicating or resolving, there are specific requirements that apply:

- Teams of at least two staff members.
- An audit of all duplicated ballots, both paper and electronic, by another team of two staff members.
- A unique control number must be assigned to the original ballot and corresponding copy.
- For ballot duplication, the duplication log must include the total number of ballots duplicated and the initials of the duplication team members.
- For ballot resolution/adjudication, a log from the system is printed and signed by the two staff members who resolved/adjudicated the ballots.

Notes

When using an electronic ballot duplication program, election officials must compare the duplicate ballot to the original ballot to ensure the votes match the original ballot.

i For more information about the requirements for auditing duplicated ballots, see [“Duplicated Ballot Audit” on page 141](#)

Overseas & Service (UOCAVA) Ballots

Duplication of FWABs and Electronically Received Ballots

These ballots are not typically ready to scan and tabulate. Sometimes the user is unable to print the whole ballot or you’ll receive a copy that’s difficult to read.

In all cases, honor the voter’s intent.

i For more information about voter intent, see [“What Constitutes a Vote?” on page 147](#) and the [Statewide Standards on What is a Vote](#) publication on the Office of the Secretary of State website.

FWABs (Federal Write-In Absentee Ballots)

Some UOCAVA voters will vote on a generic federal write-in ballot that doesn’t provide candidate names or measures. These voters may not know the exact name of a candidate and will simply write in the position and name of a political party. The FWAB allows them to indicate a party preference that applies to all the positions on the ballot. When this happens, count votes according to voter intent Rule R.

If you are unable to determine the voter precinct, duplicate the ballot as if the voter resides at the County Auditor’s Office. In this case, only the votes for countywide issues and congressional district in which the County Auditor’s Office is located can be counted.

i For more information about courtesy registrations for service and overseas voters who do not provide a residential address, see [“Processing Applications for Service and Overseas Voters” on page 46](#).

Section 6.3: Final Processing

 [RCW 29A.60](#), [WAC 434-250](#), [WAC 434-261](#)

Notes

Final processing begins with scanning ballot images into the voting system and ends before votes are tabulated by the tabulation system. Final processing of voted ballots may begin after 7:00 a.m. on the day of the election. Final processing may begin after 7:00 a.m. the day before the election if the County Auditor follows a security plan that has been submitted by the County Auditor and approved by the Office of the Secretary of State.



At no time should observers handle ballots or photograph/record voted ballots. Only authorized staff may handle ballots.

Duplication, Resolution & Adjudication

During final processing, ballots may need duplication, resolving, or adjudication if:

- The tabulator damages the ballot.
- Manual inspection did not detect final processing issues.

Whether discovering a ballot reading issue during initial or final processing, apply the duplication or resolution/adjudication procedures consistently.

At all times, seal original and duplicate ballots in secure storage, except during duplication, tabulation, or inspection by the County Canvassing Board.

Write-in Votes

To promote consistency statewide, there are rules pertaining to write-in votes. To help you manage the complex aspects of write-in voting, refer to the clearinghouse notice, [Write-in Voting](#).

- Election results must include the total number of write-in votes for each office.
- Manage ballots with write-in votes, overvotes, and undervotes during tabulation so you can easily revisit these ballots.
- Write-in votes cast for a candidate whose name does not appear on the ballot are not individually tallied unless the candidate has filed a timely write-in candidate declaration.



For more information about processing ballots with write-in votes, see the [Write-in Voting](#) clearinghouse notice on the Office of the Secretary of State website.

votes. To avoid this situation, some digital scan counties record the individual names of declared write-in candidates during the process of resolving.

Are write-in vote totals included in the official results of the election?

Yes, usually as a total for the write-in category. A write-in vote is a valid, recordable vote.

Should declared write-in candidates be included in the voters' pamphlet?

Not for the election or primary for which they have declared. If the candidate declared as a write-in for the primary and qualified for the general election, then the candidate is no longer a write-in and will be printed on the ballot and included in the general election Voters' Pamphlet.

Notes

Tabulation

Tabulation is the production of election results in a format that can be read by a person, whether precinct totals, partial cumulative totals, or final cumulative totals.

Tabulation, regardless of the type of vote tallying system, may not begin before 8:00 pm on Election Day.



Prior to every election, confirm that all computer and support systems accurately display the correct times and dates.

Post-Election Ballot Processing & Tabulation

Ballot counting continues after Election Day through to the final day of canvassing because you may receive valid ballots any time during that period.

Valid ballots are defined as:

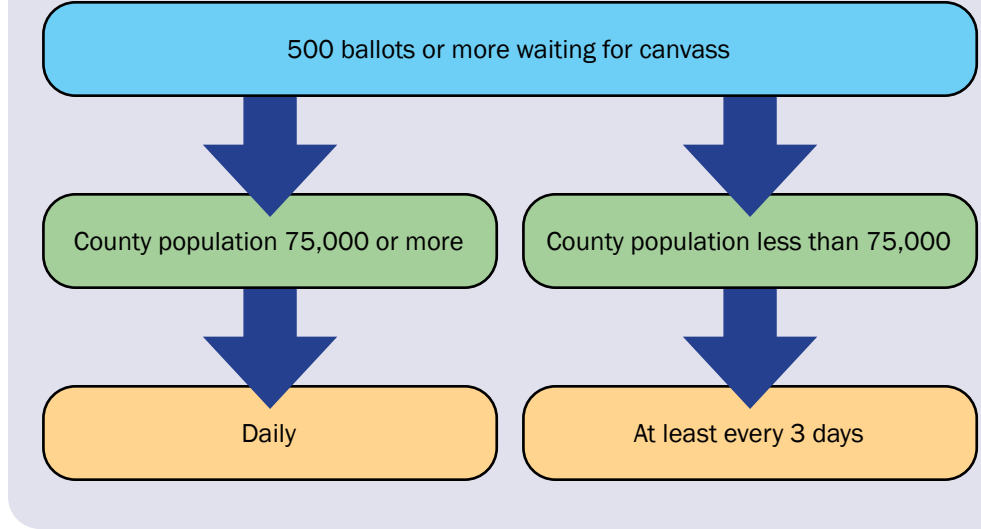
- Ballots with a valid postmark received between Election Day until the close of business the day prior to certification.
- Ballots from UOCAVA voters signed no later than the day of the election and received by close of business the day prior to certification.
- Valid provisional ballots, including those from other counties.
- Ballots canvassed and determined to be valid by the County Canvassing Board.
- Ballots duplicated after Election Day.

When to Tabulate After Election Day

The number of ballots, the length of time, and the population of the county determines when to tabulate following Election Day.

Notes

Minimum Frequency for Tabulation



[RCW 29A.60.160](#) mandates, "...the county auditor, as delegated by the county canvassing board, shall process ballots and canvass the votes cast at that primary or election on a daily basis in counties with a population of seventy-five thousand or more, or at least every third day for counties with a population of less than seventy-five thousand, if the county auditor is in possession of more than five hundred ballots that have yet to be canvassed."



Important — Update results in VoteWA immediately following every count and send a PDF of the results and your tabulator file to the Office of the Secretary of State.

Results

Report election and primary results as:

- Cumulative
- By precinct

After every tabulation session is completed, results are:

- Uploaded to the VoteWA system before you leave for the day.
- Checked to make sure they are showing on your public website.
- A PDF copy of the results file is transmitted to Office of the Secretary of State.
- Printed out for the record.
- Transmitted by email/fax to media and other interested parties.

Review Results

Within two days after Election Day, review results for anomalies by comparing precinct-by-precinct results for each race, measure and jurisdiction. ([WAC 434-261-110](#))

Look for any anomalies such as:

- Abnormal number of overvotes
- Abnormal number of undervotes
- Odd vote distribution (especially within a jurisdiction)
- Unlikely patterns of voter turnout

Investigate and document the cause of any anomaly. Correct any identified errors.

Notes

Post-Election Audits

 [RCW 29A.60.170](#), [RCW 29A.60.185](#)

An audit of duplicated ballots and an audit using one of the following methods are required:

- An electronic voting machine audit,
- Random check / random precinct or batch audit, OR
- Risk limiting audit.

Duplicated Ballot Audit

A separate team of two must audit ballots duplicated during final processing. This audit compares the duplicated ballot to the original ballot and maintain an audit trail.

Some voting systems include functionality that allows unreadable ballots to be scanned into the system or represented by placeholder cards and then reviewed using processes similar to what is used for adjudication and resolution. This functionality is known as electronic ballot duplication. The audit of duplicated ballots must include electronically duplicated ballots.

Random Check of Counting Equipment — Random Precinct or Batch Audit

A random check of the ballot tabulation equipment is required and must be completed no later than 48 hours after Election Day.


The random check compares the manual count of the ballots to the machine count on the tabulation system. The random check/batch audit must:

- Include three precincts or six batches depending on ballot counting procedures in the county.
- Be limited to one office or issue on the ballots selected for the check.
- Include procedures adopted by the county Canvassing Board prior to processing ballots.
 - Procedures must specify under what circumstances a discrepancy will lead to an audit of additional ballots and the method to determine how many additional ballots will be selected.
 - Procedures must establish how the random precinct/batches to be checked shall be selected.

Notes

Risk Limiting Audit

A risk-limiting audit (RLA) uses statistics to sample ballots appropriately for review. In a risk-limiting audit, ballots are randomly selected and hand-tallied one by one until enough have been sampled confidently determine whether the correct winner was found the first time. If the winner won by a lot of votes, the sample needed to confirm the outcome may be quite small; if the race was close, the audit will examine more ballots.

 For more information about post-election audits, see the [Auditing Ballots and Equipment](#) clearinghouse notice on the Office the Secretary of State website.


Final Storage

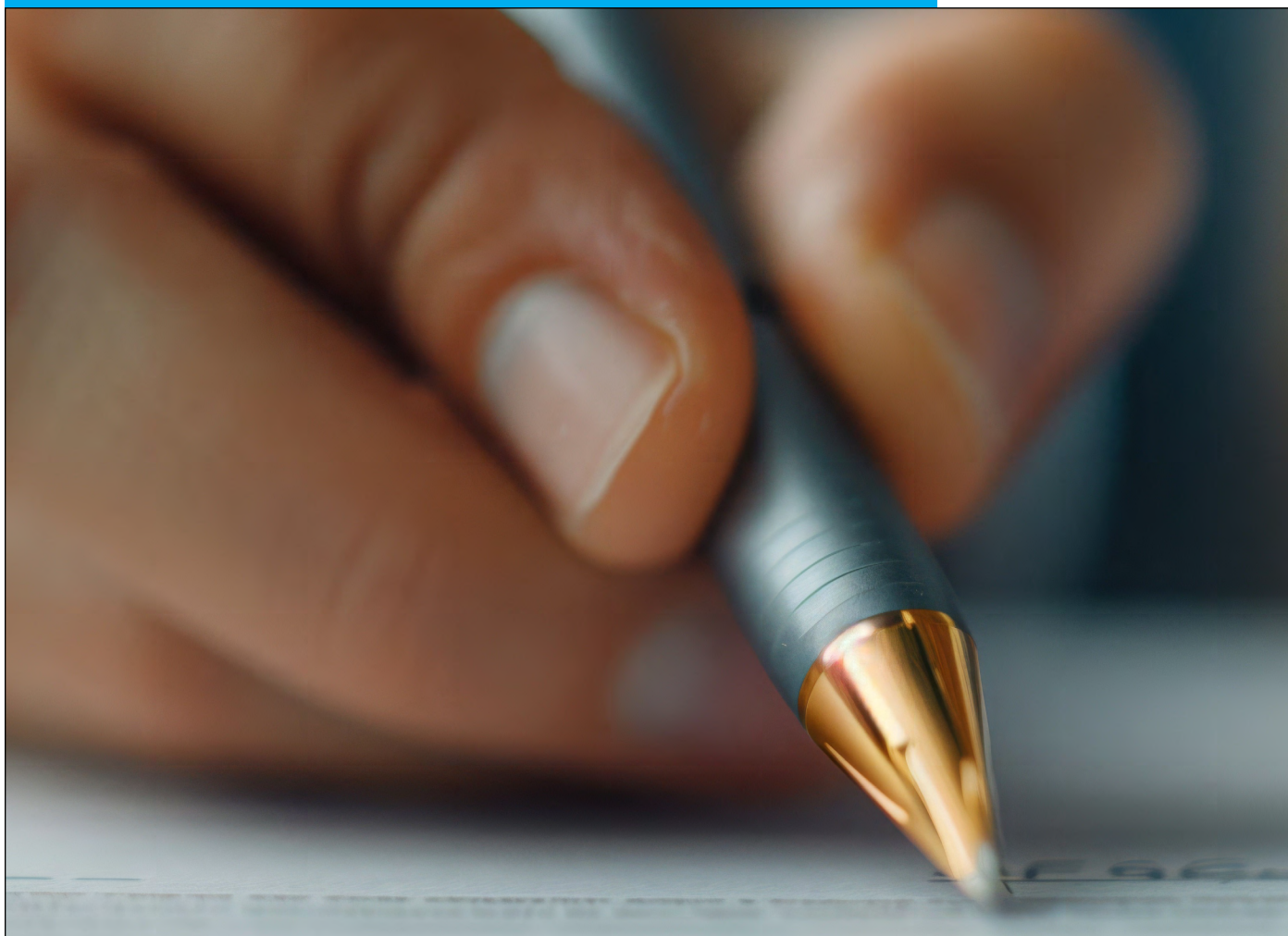
Secure all ballots immediately after tabulation. You may separate ballots according to precinct or batch.

If a single container stores multiple precincts or batches:

- Clearly separate the precincts or batches (e.g., with a piece of colored paper).
- Note which precincts or batches are in the box on the outside label.

Only open the storage containers when directed by the Canvassing Board or court order.

 In a close race, it may be necessary to re-examine ballots with undervotes, overvotes, and write-in votes. Consider this when storing ballots.



Chapter 7: ***Canvassing & Certification***

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Section 7.1: County Canvassing Board & Voter Intent

[RCW 29A.60](#)

Notes

County Canvassing Boards are required by law to canvass ballots and certify the election. The County Canvassing Board is a three-member board that makes final determinations before certifying an election. Two of the three members, otherwise known as a quorum, must agree in order for any decision to be valid. All three members are required to certify an election.

 For a handbook with laws, citations, and visuals, see the [Introduction to County Canvassing Boards](#) publication on the Office of the Secretary of State website.

Who Serves on the County Canvassing Board?

The three-member Board consists of:

- County Auditor (or deputy county auditor). In King County, the elections director.
- Prosecuting attorney (or deputy prosecuting attorney).
- Chair of the legislative authority (or another member of legislative authority). In King County, this can be delegated to an employee of the legislative body who reports directly to the chair.

The members of the County Canvassing Board listed in statute may designate in writing an alternate to serve on their behalf. The designee for each position must have a separate designation on file in the County Auditor’s Office prior to undertaking Canvassing Board duties. These written designations must be completed at least one day before the designee performs Canvassing Board duties. The authority of the designee to serve as a County Canvassing Board member continues for the time specified in the written designation: the duration of an election, until a specified date, or until revoked.

What if a Canvassing Board Member Is Also a Candidate?

If possible, candidates appearing on the ballot should not serve on the Canvassing Board for that election or primary. The candidate may designate an **alternate** to serve in their place.

If no one is available to serve on the Canvassing Board who is not a candidate at that election or primary, the candidate may serve on the board, but may only make decisions on votes cast for other offices, an entire ballot, or groups of ballots.

Notes

Candidates must never make decisions on their own races.

- If a question involves the candidate’s race, the two remaining members make the determination.
- If the two disagree, the vote in question is not counted unless the vote could affect the outcome of the race. In that case, a representative of the Office of the Secretary of State shall break the tie.

What Does a Canvassing Board Meeting Look Like?

The board is required by law to adopt written procedures.

All County Canvassing Board meetings fall under the Open Public Meetings Act.

A public notice must be published for every meeting. The meeting agenda must be posted on the County Auditor website.

In the course of a meeting, decisions are made by quorum. Two members of the board must agree.

Records must be kept of all meetings (written minutes, audio recording, and/or video recording). Audio and video recordings have the same retention as written minutes.

See [RCW 42.30](#) for more details.

Which Canvassing Board Duties May Be Delegated to Staff?

County Canvassing Boards may delegate duties in writing to County Auditor staff. Duties that may be delegated:

- Processing incoming ballots (signature verification)
- Emergency logic and accuracy tests
- Determining the validity of provisional ballots in certain situations
- Breaking tied races
- Verifying the County Auditor’s abstract of votes
- Processing special absentee ballots
- Administering recounts
- Voter registration challenges
- Determining voter intent according to rules outlined in “Statewide Standards on What is a Vote” and [WAC 434-261-086](#).

Which Canvassing Board duties may not be delegated to staff?

- Determining the validity of challenged ballots
- Determining the validity of provisional ballots presented to the board
- Rejecting ballots
- Certifying the election

Notes

When Does the Board Certify the Election?

The Canvassing Board must certify elections:

- 10 days after a special election held in February or April and Presidential Primaries
- 14 days after a primary
- 21 days after a general election

What Constitutes a Vote?

The Help America Vote Act in 2002 (HAVA) mandated that states adopt uniform standards defining what constitutes a vote and what counts as a vote for each voting system in the state.

What Is the Standard?

Refer to the [Statewide Standards on What is a Vote](#) publication available on the Office of the Secretary of State website.

This guide is published by the Office of the Secretary of State's Certification & Training Program in cooperation with the County Auditors and Canvassing Boards. It is adopted into the Washington Administrative Code.

Included in this guide:

- Examples of voted ballots representing all voting systems currently used in Washington state
- Rules for the Canvassing Boards
- Statewide consistency



For more information about voter intent, see the [Statewide Standards on What is a Vote](#) publication available on the Office of the Secretary of State website.

Section 7.2: Completing the Election


[RCW 29A.60](#), [WAC 434-262](#)

Notes

Before Certifying a Primary or an Election

You must complete the following before a primary or election may be certified. Be sure to allow time between producing final results and the Canvassing Board certification to finalize all of these tasks:

- A random check of ballot counting equipment using a random batch audit, a risk limiting audit
- An audit of all duplicated ballots
- Credit all voters whose ballots were valid and counted
- A complete reconciliation report of ballots

 For more information about audits, see [“Post-Election Audits” on page 141.](#)

Crediting Voters

Crediting voters’ records for casting a ballot is part of ballot processing. Credit the voter’s registration record in VoteWA only if a ballot was successfully processed and counted for that voter, or in other words, an “accepted” ballot.

When suspending a ballot for Canvassing Board determination, also suspend voting credit for that voter. If the Canvassing Board decides to count all or part of the ballot, give the voter credit for voting.

Complete all crediting before certification of the election or primary.

Ballot Reconciliation

Reconciliation starts when the first ballot is sent. Account for all sent and received ballots in the final reconciliation of every election. Daily reconciliation is critical to successful final accounting of ballots.

Reconcile the numbers of:

- Ballots received — as documented in initial ballot processing.
- Signatures checked — found in VoteWA, and Canvassing Board documentation/actions.
- Challenged ballots (signature issues, returned too late, etc.) — compare to challenged ballot report/list from VoteWA.
- Ballots rejected by the Canvassing Board, including unresolved signature challenges, late postmarks, etc., from the Canvassing Board minutes and daily records.
- Ballots counted — from tabulation reports.
- Any other categories needed to account for every ballot received in your office.

Ballot reconciliation is not complete until all ballots are processed and reported, including provisional ballots, and ballots sent to the Canvassing Board for rejection.

We use a simple equation to reconcile ballots:

Ballots received = ballots counted + ballots not counted

If the numbers do not reconcile, document the steps taken to resolve the discrepancy.



VoteWA does not contain all reconciliation information. VoteWA does not typically include information about processes that happen after signature verification, such as empty envelopes, multiple ballots in a single envelope, and ballots from other elections. VoteWA also does not ballot information for Protected Record Voters (ACP). It is important to track and reconcile any information that is not recorded in VoteWA.

Reconciliation Report

When certifying an election or primary, present a complete reconciliation report to the Canvassing Board.

Notes

State law requires reconciliation reports to document the number of:

- Active registered voters, inactive voters
- Total ballots issued, received, counted, and rejected
- Total replacement ballots requested, issued, and received
- Total provisional ballots issued, received, counted, rejected, and sent to other counties
- Total federal write-in absentee ballots received, counted, rejected, and sent to other counties
- Overseas and service (UOCAVA) ballots issued, received, counted, rejected, and sent to other counties. These numbers need to be broken out by mail, email, website link or fax
- Non-overseas and non-service (non-UOCAVA) ballots sent by email, website link or fax; received by email or fax; rejected for failing to send the original hard copy or rejected for any other reason
- The number of voters credited with voting
- Additional information needed to account for all ballots, such as the number of ACP and special absentee ballots
- Ballots returned by email, fax, and deposited in county ballot boxes
- Ballots issued through VoteWA, other online programs, or PDF generated by the county

If you are unable to balance the number of ballots, document the efforts to find the discrepancy on the report. The reconciliation report and discrepancy documentation must be included in the official election certification.

The reconciliation report must be sent to the Office of the Secretary of State for every election and be publicly available at the County Auditor’s Office and/or on the County Auditor’s website.

The Office of the Secretary of State shall review the reconciliation for each county and work with the County Auditor to resolve discrepancies. If a discrepancy is resolved, the County Auditor shall submit a correct reconciliation report to the Office of the Secretary of State within seven days following the certification of the election. The corrected report then becomes the official reconciliation report for that election. The County Auditor shall post the corrected report on the County Auditor website.



Do not wait until the day of certification to complete the report. Use your daily reconciliation data to complete what you can in advance and make final adjustments just prior to certification.


Certification

Responsibilities of the County Canvassing Board

The Canvassing Board must certify elections:

- 10 days after a special election held in February or April and Presidential Primaries
- 14 days after a primary
- 21 days after a general election

Notes

 **Important — Canvassing Board must certify on Certification Day.**


Certification is an open public meeting and must be posted on your website.

All three Canvassing Board members, or designees, must certify the election.

Certification documents include the County Auditor’s Oath and Canvassing Board Certificate (must include the signatures and original seals of the County Auditor), written narrative of errors and discrepancies discovered, if any, and a verified Abstract of Votes. The reconciliation report is submitted to the Office of the Secretary of State with the certification documents for state primaries and general elections.

Plan Ahead

- Schedule Canvassing Board members well in advance of the election certification meeting.
- Conduct the final count the day before or very early on the day of certification.
- Finish as early on certification day as possible.
- Prepare all reports and forms, set up, and schedule support staff to cover.

 *The election certification oaths form is available on the [Certification, L&A Tests, and Recounts](#) page on the Office of the Secretary of State website.*

Results

Upload all election results to VoteWA.

Email a scanned copy of results for state offices/measures and the results export file from your tabulator to VoteWA Support.

Notes

Responsibilities of the Office Secretary of State

No later than 17 days after a primary, the Secretary of State will certify results for:

- All statewide offices
- U.S. Senators
- U.S. Congressional Representatives
- Legislative and judicial offices encompassing more than one county.

No later than 30 days after a general election, the Secretary of State will certify the results of the general election for:

- All statewide offices
- U.S. Senators
- U.S. Congressional Representatives
- Legislative and judicial offices encompassing more than one county
- All state measures

Post-Certification

Following certification:

- Issue ceremonial certificates of election to all winners for offices elected by the voters within a single county.
- Prepare to answer questions about oaths of office and where to file. Refer to the clearinghouse “Oaths of Office” for further information.
- For general elections only: Report to each special taxing district the voter turnout for their district in the general election.
- Wait to change data in VoteWA until after certification and/or determination of the voter turnout in each special taxing district.
- Organize and label records by election type and date.



When storing documents, include the “hold until” retention date and the document retention number on the label.



For more information about oaths of office, see the [Oaths of Office](#) clearinghouse notice on the Office of the Secretary of State website.

Determine Taxing District Turnout for Validation

Districts use general election turnout to determine the validation requirements for their bond and levy measures. The County Auditor must provide a report that lists the number of voters that participated in the general election for each taxing district in their county.

Section 7.3: Recounts

[RCW 29A.64](#), [WAC 434-264](#)


A recount is re-tabulating the votes, including write-ins, for a specific office or issue on all valid ballots cast in a primary or election. If a ballot has been duplicated, the duplicate ballot (not the original) shall be counted.

Notes

What Initiates a Recount?

Recounts can be mandatory or by request. State law requires a recount if the number of votes for each candidate is within a specified range. By law, you cannot recount a race or issue more than twice.

Jurisdiction	Requested Recount	Mandatory Recount	Hand Recount
Statewide Race	Written request within 2 business days after state certification, by candidate or political party	<input type="checkbox"/> Less than 2,000 votes, AND <input type="checkbox"/> Less than 0.5 percent difference between candidates	<input type="checkbox"/> Less than 1,000 votes, AND <input type="checkbox"/> Less than ¼ of 1% difference between candidates
State Measure	Written request within 2 business days of state certification by 5 or more registered voters	<input type="checkbox"/> Less than 2,000 votes, AND <input type="checkbox"/> Less than 0.5 percent difference between measure positions	<input type="checkbox"/> Less than 1,000 votes, AND <input type="checkbox"/> Less than 0.25 percent difference between measure positions
Congressional, Legislative, Judicial or Local Race	Written request by candidate or political party within 2 business days of state or county certification, depending on the office	<input type="checkbox"/> Less than 2,000 votes, AND <input type="checkbox"/> Less than 0.5 percent difference between candidates	<input type="checkbox"/> Less than 150 votes, AND <input type="checkbox"/> Less than 0.25 percent difference between candidates
Local Measure	Written request within 2 business days of county certification by 5 or more registered voters	No mandatory recount	No mandatory recount


 For more information about publication of notices of recounts, see [“Targeted Notices” on page 92.](#)

Requested Recounts

State law determines who may request a recount in writing.

- For an office:** by a candidate of that office or officer of a political party only.
- For a measure or question:** by any group of five or more registered voters only.

The requester must submit a request for a recount within two business days of certification of the election. Applications for requested recounts are filed with the filing officer.

 For more information about filing officers, see [“Where to File” on page 80.](#)

Included in a recount request:

- The office or issue for which the recount is requested.
- Whether the recount is a machine or manual count.
- If all or only a portion of the precincts are to be recounted.
- A deposit depending upon the way the recount is conducted.
 - Machine recount \$.15 per ballot.
 - Manual recount \$.25 per ballot.

The requester is responsible for the entire cost of the recount and will receive a bill or refund for the difference.

Conduct a requested recount in the same manner as a mandatory recount.

The requester may stop the recount at any time; however, a recount cannot be stopped before completion if the result would reverse the outcome.

If a partial recount reverses the outcome of the election, recount all the ballots for that race or measure. If a full recount reverses the outcome of the race or question, the deposit is refunded.

Mandatory Recounts

Mandatory recounts occur when the votes for offices or statewide measures fall within the statutory range. State law does not provide for a mandatory recount of a local issue.

Mandatory recounts of any office or state measure, by machine or by hand, occur when the difference between the two candidates or state measure choices is:

- Less than 2,000 votes difference, AND
- Less than one-half of 1 percent (0.5%) of the total votes cast for the office or issue.

Notes

For statewide offices or measures, you must recount votes by hand if the difference between the two candidates or choices is:

- Less than 1,000 votes, AND
- Less than one-quarter of 1 percent (0.25%) of the total votes cast for the office or issue.

Notes

For all other offices, you must recount votes by hand if the difference between the two candidates is:

- Less than 150 votes, AND
- Less than one-quarter of 1 percent (0.25%) of the total votes cast for the office or issue.

Alternative method — If an alternative recount method is proposed, all candidates must agree to it.

Which candidates are recounted?

The type of election determines which candidates meet the recount threshold and require a recount.

In a primary, the second and third highest vote getters may require a recount.

- The highest vote getter automatically advances to the general election.
- If the top two are the close candidates, no recount is necessary.

In a general election, the top two vote getters may require a recount.

Who pays for a mandatory recount?

The district that pays for regular election costs is also responsible for mandatory recount costs.

Conducting a Machine Recount

You may choose to recount by hand or machine if the vote difference does not require a hand recount.

The County Canvassing Board sets the date and time of the recount.

The Office of the Secretary of State may set the certification date in a multi-county recount.

The applicant and affected people are officially notified one day before the recount.

Observers are allowed. Different types of observers are prioritized in WAC when space will not accommodate all observers.

Assemble the ballots to be recounted in the presence of observers.

Votes previously determined by the County Canvassing Board are counted as directed by the Board.

Ballot issues found during the recount, not previously addressed or included in the original count, are determined by the County Canvassing Board.

Recount results are by precinct and only include the office or issue recounted.

Digital Scan Systems

In a machine recount, program digital tabulation equipment to identify all ballots that include an undervoted office or ballot measure subject to the recount. Inspect for valid votes not correctly counted by the tabulation equipment. Refer votes not correctly counted to the County Canvassing Board.

Optical Scan Systems

In a machine recount, optical scan tabulation equipment must be programmed to out-sort all ballots that include an undervoted and overvoted office or ballot measure subject to the recount. For digital scan systems with adjudication, all overvotes and undervotes that were not previously adjudicated must be reviewed.

Inspect for valid votes not correctly counted by the tabulation equipment. Refer votes not correctly counted to the County Canvassing Board.

May a Canvassing Board determine if a recount is conducted by machine or by hand?

Yes, as long as a hand recount is not required. Coordination with other counties may be necessary for joint districts.

Conducting a Hand Recount

The original paper ballots are used for hand recounts, except for ballots where votes were duplicated onto another ballot. In that case the duplicate ballot is recounted.

Voter intent previously determined by the County Canvassing Board is counted as directed by the Board.

Ballot issues found during the recount, not previously addressed or included in the original count, are determined by the County Canvassing Board.

Votes are tallied by counting board(s), comprised of at least two members:

- One representative from each of the two major political parties; or
- Two staff members from the County Auditor’s Office.

Notes

Recount only the votes for the office or issue.

Each board will receive one precinct or batch at a time.

Note: You may use batches only if the County Auditor produces election results by batch for comparison. However, you must produce final recount results by precinct.

Counting boards:

- Sort ballots into separate stacks, one for each candidate or response, undervotes, overvotes, and write-ins.
- Each board member manually counts each stack to confirm the number of votes in each stack.
 - Report results if the members' counts match.
 - Count ballot stacks again if the counts do not match.
 - Send ballots to another counting board if the counts still do not match after a second count.

When conducting a machine recount, counting boards must inspect each undervote and procedures followed that conform to WAC 434-264.

Certifying a Recount

The County Auditor prepares an amended abstract of the recounted ballots for the County Canvassing Board, even if the results did not change. The abstract includes results only for the recounted office or measure:

- A revised cumulative summary.
- The number of votes cast in each precinct.

The County Canvassing Board must review and approve the amended results. If the results do not match the original results, the board will verify that all the ballots have been recounted and all discrepancies are resolved.

Tied Races

If the recount results in a tie, the winner is determined by lot.

Depending upon the office, the County Canvassing Board or the Office of the Secretary of State designates the time and place for the lot draw, notifies the affected candidates, and certifies the winner.

Measures are not subject to lot draws — they either have enough votes to pass or they fail.



Reference Materials

Washington State Election Officials' Pledge

We the Elections Officials of Washington State, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish accurate vote counts, ensure electoral transparency, provide for the common defense of the electoral process, promote voter access, and secure the blessings of democracy. We do commit ourselves to the faithful execution of our duties...

I uphold the Constitution of the United States and the laws, policies and court decisions of federal, state and local jurisdictions;

I encourage every eligible person to register to vote and to participate fully in all elections;

I administer elections without discrimination based upon race, creed, color, national origin, sex, or political affiliation;

I protect the integrity of the electoral process by providing equal access to the process while guarding against discrimination and fraud;

I commit to excellence and competence by maintaining the highest level of knowledge and expertise in the elections process through continuing education and self evaluation;

I am accountable for maintaining public confidence in honest and impartial elections which I conduct in a fair, efficient and accurate manner;

I manifest a positive role in community relations by being accessible and receptive to both individuals and groups;

I am flexible and innovative within the framework of the law when carrying out my duties on behalf of the public's interest;

I conduct all fiscal responsibilities with wisdom and integrity, and I am accountable for all funds and resources committed to my charge;

I endeavor to maintain the highest level of integrity in performing all duties of my profession.



Name: _____

Signature: _____

Glossary of Election Terminology

For a complete list of election terms and definitions generally standardized nationwide, see the Election Assistance Commission’s [Glossary of Election Terminology](#).

Abstract of Votes The official statement of votes cast for an election or primary as prepared by the County Auditor. A preliminary abstract must be prepared prior to certification, corrected and presented to the Canvassing Board at certification of the election.

Address Confidentiality Program (ACP) A program implemented by the Office of the Secretary of State which allows certain voters' registration data to be kept out of public record for their protection. At least two election administrators in each county maintain the county program for these voters.

Adjudication Electronic determination of voter intent on a digital scan tabulation system, similar to ballot duplication.

Accessible Voting Unit (AVU) Any voting device that complies with the American Disability Act and Help America Vote Act and is certified at the state and federal level to provide independent voting to persons visually and/or manually challenged (see “[Direct Recording Electronic voting device \(DRE\)](#)”).

Automatic Voter Registration (AVR) When citizens are automatically registered to vote by government agencies they interact with (Department of Licensing, Health Benefit Exchange, etc.).

Ballot Accountability Sheet A form completed by election workers at a voting center recording the number of ballots issued (including provisional ballots).

Ballot Deposit Site A location that only receives ballots. A site may be staffed by two people or unstaffed.

Ballot Box A box provided by the county for voters to deposit ballots that is secured using seals and seal logs. An unstaffed ballot box is secured so that envelopes, once deposited can only be removed by authorized staff. If located outdoors, it must be constructed of durable material able to withstand inclement weather and be sufficiently secured to prevent removal. Unstaffed boxes are available 18 days prior to Election Day.

Ballot Duplication Making a true copy of valid votes from ballots that may not be counted by the tabulation system as the voter intends. Ballots may be duplicated on blank ballots or by making changes to an electronic image (resolving/adjudication). The original ballot may not be altered in any manner. A signed duplication log must be retained as part of this record.

Ballot Duplication Log A numerical record of the relationship between original ballots and duplicate ballots. The log shows the number assigned to a duplicated set and the two people who duplicated the ballot.

Notes

Notes

Ballot Marking Code The coded patterns printed on the ballot intended to identify the ballot style to the ballot counting system.

Ballot Path The process ballots follow from the ballot box until final storage upon certification of the election.

Ballot Tabulator A system or machine used to tally votes from ballots.

Canvass, Canvassing The process of examining ballots, subtotals, and cumulative totals in order to determine the official returns of a primary or election. This process includes the tabulation of any votes that were not tabulated at the counting center in the initial results reported on the day of the primary or election.

Canvassing Board The County Auditor, the County Prosecuting attorney, and the Chair of the county legislative authority or their designee. The board is responsible for canvassing ballots and certifying elections. Some duties may be delegated.

Canvassing Board Designee A person designated in writing by a member of the Canvassing Board to serve in place of the Canvassing Board member.

Counting Center The location where ballots are processed and counted.

Disability Advisory Committee (DAC) / Accessible Community Advisory Committee (ACAC) Each county shall establish and maintain an advisory committee that includes persons with diverse disabilities and

persons with expertise in providing accommodations for persons with disabilities. The committee shall assist election officials in developing a plan to identify and implement changes to improve the accessibility of elections for voters with disabilities

Direct Recording Electronic voting device (DRE) DREs are a type of AVU (see "[Accessible Voting Unit \(AVU\)](#)"). DREs record votes electronically. They do not use a paper ballot. Instead they store votes digitally, while also creating and printing a paper record of the votes cast by a voter, verifiable by the voter.

Digital Scan System A voting system that creates a scanned image of the voted ballot. Responses are recorded by reviewing the image and voter intent issues are resolved digitally.

Election Assistance Commission (EAC) The federal commission charged with developing voting system guidelines; providing a national program for testing, certification, and decertification of voting systems; maintaining federal registration information; reporting to Congress the effects of the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA); administering Help America Vote Act (HAVA) funds at the federal level; and studying best practices and other matters relevant to the effective administration of federal elections.

Elections Official When pertaining to voter registration includes any staff member of the Office of the Secretary of State, staff of state agencies or offices providing voter registration services, or a staff member of a County Auditor’s Office.

Official Election Observer A person officially designated by a major political party to observe election procedures.

Final Processing The reading of ballots by an electronic vote tallying system to produce election returns of votes cast, but does not include final tabulation.

Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) A postage-free postcard distributed by the Federal Voting Assistance Program for use by voters covered by the Uniformed and Overseas Citizen Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA).

Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) Provides information for US citizens covered by the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA). The FVAP website is <http://www.fvap.gov>.

Future Voter A United States citizen and Washington state resident, age 16 or 17, who has provided information related to voter registration to the appropriate state agencies.

Future Voter Program The Future Voter Program allows preregistration of applicants at least 16 years old.

Help America Vote Act (HAVA) Federal legislation enacted in 2002.

Header Card A card fed into a ballot scanner indicating the beginning of a batch of ballots. It is used to tell the ballot tally system the precinct or batch that is being counted.

Initial Processing The preparation of ballots for tallying. It includes verification of signatures and

postmarks, separation of ballots from envelopes, manual inspection, scanning, and resolution/adjudication or duplication of ballots.

Logic & Accuracy Test (L&A Test, LAT) An official test to verify the ballot tabulator and programming is correctly counting each style of ballot and accurately producing cumulative vote totals. L&A tests are required prior to every election and may be observed and certified by the Office of the Secretary of State for each primary and general election.

Manual Count A manual tally of an office or issue.

Manual Inspection The process of inspecting each voter response position on each voted ballot. Inspection is performed as part of the initial processing.

National Voter Registration Act (NVRA) Federal legislation enacted in 1993. Commonly known as the "Motor Voter" act because it established voter registration through state licensing agencies.

Online Voter Registration (OLVR) Allows voters to register and update a registration online using the VoteWA Public Portal. The system integrates Department of Licensing (DOL) services for information sources and validation.

Online Candidate Filing Allows candidates to file online through the VoteWA candidate filing portal.

Optical Scan System Mechanical tabulation system utilizing optical scan technology to tabulate votes on printed ballots.

Notes

Precinct A geographical subdivision for voting purposes established by a county legislative authority.

Primary-Only Voters A seventeen-year-old Future Voter who will be 18 by the November general election, eligible to vote for candidates in the primary election.

Provisional Ballots Ballots issued when there is a question regarding a voter's eligibility to vote. A provisional ballot may be issued by a voting center or by election officials at the County Auditor's Office for any reason. Validity of provisional ballots is researched using a voter's registration information and is subject to final decision by the County Canvassing Board.

Receiving Board A group of election workers that receive the ballots at the counting center on Election Night.

Recount The process for retabulating the votes on all valid ballots cast for a specific office or issue.

Resolution Using a scanned image to resolve questionable votes. After each session, a log of the resolutions must be printed and signed by the team that resolved those ballots.

Risk-limiting Audit (RLA) A risk-limiting audit (RLA) uses statistics to confirm election outcomes. In a risk-limiting audit, ballots are randomly selected for review. Ballots are hand-tallied one by one until enough have been sampled to confirm that the correct winner was found the first time. If the winner won by a lot of votes, the sample needed to confirm the outcome may be quite small; if the race was close, the audit will examine more ballots.

Same-day Registration (SDR)

Voters may update their voter registration or register to vote until 8:00 p.m. on Election Day. In the eight days before the election, they must appear in a voting center in person to register and receive a ballot.

Seal Numbered seal used to secure containers of ballots. The seal, once applied to the container, must be broken to access the contents.

Seal Log A list recording the seal numbers used, the two people applying or breaking a seal, the date applied and removed, and the reason for removing the seal.

Service Voters Voters (or electors) who are members of the armed forces, a US Military Academy, a group officially attached to the armed forces or a spouse/dependent absent from their place of residence by reason of the service of the member. Depending on the election type, service voters are issued ballots 45 days or 30 days before each election. Service voters are not held to the postmark requirement; the date of signature is used to validate the ballot.

Student Engagement Hub Sites located on higher education campuses that provide online access to electronic ballots and, as required by RCW or by contract, voter registration services. Student Engagement Hubs are only required to be open during a General election.

Tabulation The process of tallying votes into a readable format, whether as precinct totals, partial cumulative totals, or final cumulative totals. Tabulation may not begin until after 8:00 p.m. on the day of the election.

Tally The process of producing results for individual candidates by hand,

Test Deck The group of ballots used in a Logic and Accuracy test to verify the accuracy of the vote tallying system.

Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA)

The act specifically defines voting services to U.S. citizens who reside outside the United States, U.S. citizens who are members of the Uniformed Services and their family members. The term UOCAVA is refers to these citizens or any special service provided to these citizens.

Uniformed Services U.S. Armed Forces (Army, Navy, Marines, Air Force and Coast Guard), merchant marine, commissioned corps of the Public Health Service and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Also known as service voters.

United States Postal Service (USPS) The U.S. Postal Service is an independent federal agency that delivers mail and packages to individuals and businesses in the United States. The USPS also delivers mail to U.S. territories, military installations, and diplomatic locations around the world.

Universal Registration A voter may go to any county election office or vote center in the state of Washington to register to vote and receive a current ballot for their county of registration at any time.

Valid Signature 1) A signature on a ballot envelope verified against the registered voter’s signature on

file, or 2) a mark with two witness signatures.

Voter Verified Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT)

This is an independent verification system for direct recording electronic (DRE) voting machines designed to allow voters to verify that their vote was cast correctly, to detect possible election fraud or malfunction, and to provide a means to audit the stored electronic results.

VoteWA The statewide voter registration and election management system, 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.

VoteWA Public Portal An online voter registration and information tool maintained by the Office of the Secretary of State. Allows voters to register, make updates to their registration, check the status of their registration, view a customized voter’s guide, find a drop box or voting center, print a replacement ballot, and view their voting history.

Voting Center A county location that provides voter registration services and materials, ballots, provisional ballots, accessible voting units, sample ballots, instructions on how to properly vote the ballot, a ballot drop box and voters’ pamphlets, if available. Each county must have at least one voting center for each primary and election.

