



# 4 TIPS

## For Managing Provisional Ballots

The U.S. Election Assistance Commission has collaborated with local election officials to develop a series of helpful tips for election management. This series provides tips and suggests best practices to help you run efficient and effective elections.

Provisional ballots provide voters with a fail-safe method for casting a ballot in any voting location – early voting in-person, by mail, vote centers, or on Election Day at a polling place. Laws and procedures vary state to state so understanding why you have provisional ballots is key to managing how they are used in your jurisdiction.



### 1 Communicate with Voters

Providing voters with information about registering to vote, updating their voting record prior to the state deadline and where to vote on Election Day, can help decrease the issuance of provisional ballots.

Using a variety of tools to communicate with voters and the general public:

- Conduct voter registration drives to educate voters about the importance of updating their registration information—including their address and party affiliation. Provide handouts containing information on registration deadlines.
- Mail each voter a postcard containing information about the dates, hours and locations for early voting in-person and the deadlines for requesting and returning a mail ballot.
- Use your webpage and other types of social media to communicate voter registration deadlines, early voting dates and vote-by-mail procedures and deadlines.

### REMEMBER



In a mailing to voters:

- Include deadlines for registering to vote.
- Deadlines for changing party affiliation.
- Deadlines for change of address or a name change.
- Notify the voter of his or her current registration status.
- Notify the voter of his or her polling place location.
- Provide information or Web links on how to update their registration status.



Tip 1 continued

## REMEMBER

Explain the definition and use of provisional ballots on your webpage and set up a separate Web link on provisional ballots. Use the link to provide information on:

- The reasons for using provisional ballots.
- Your state's rules and policies for provisional ballots.
- The rules for determining whether the provisional ballot can be counted.
- To tell the voter who to contact to find out if his or her provisional ballot was counted in the final election results.

- Provide a link on your webpage to your state or jurisdiction's voter look up website so the voter can determine his or voter registration status and if necessary, print out and mail an updated form. If it's available in your state the voter may be able to update his or her information and register to vote online.
- Some states require voter identification at the polling voting location or when voting by mail. Post this information on your website including a listing and picture of the documents so the voter brings the correct documentation on Election Day.
- Some jurisdictions have developed a smartphone application to give the voter access to voting information at any time. Email and text messaging is also used to notify the voter of deadlines, and to communicate polling place and voter registration information.

## Quick Clicks

<http://www.sos.state.oh.us/sos/elections/Voters/FAQ/provisional.aspx>

[http://www.sos.wv.gov/elections/voterinformation/VotingInWV/Pages/Provisional\\_Ballots.aspx](http://www.sos.wv.gov/elections/voterinformation/VotingInWV/Pages/Provisional_Ballots.aspx)

[www.sos.ks.gov/forms/elections/A\\_Guide\\_to\\_Provisional\\_Voting.pdf](http://www.sos.ks.gov/forms/elections/A_Guide_to_Provisional_Voting.pdf)

## 2 Make the Process and Procedures Voter-Friendly

Voting is not an everyday occurrence for citizens or for poll workers who only work a few days each year. It's critical that procedures are easy-to-follow so voters are encouraged to vote in every election and poll workers are willing to return for future elections.

- Provide picture flow charts to poll workers to visually show the steps on how to process a voter and how to determine if the voter must vote a provisional ballot.
- Have a separate location for provisional voters. Assign specially-trained poll workers to this area.
- Ensure that the voter has completed all sections of the provisional ballot forms/ballot envelope. Provide a handout describing provisional balloting, and how the voter can learn if his or her ballot was counted.

- Some jurisdictions include a voter registration form on the reverse side of the provisional ballot envelope. This encourages the voter to register to vote in future elections if he or she was not registered on Election Day.
- Provide a follow-up mailing to every provisional voter. The mailing can be used to provide good news to the voter if the ballot was counted or information on why the provisional ballot was not counted. Provide details on how to be prepared for the next election and, if the voter was not registered, include a voter registration form.

## REMEMBER

In poll worker training also include details about the Help America Vote Act requirements that mandate when a judge has ordered the polls to remain open after the normal closing time – provisional ballots must be issued to any voter who votes during that time period. Those ballots must be separated from the other provisional ballots that were cast during that election.

## Quick Clicks

[www.sos.ks.gov/forms/elections/A\\_Guide\\_to\\_Provisional\\_Voting.pdf](http://www.sos.ks.gov/forms/elections/A_Guide_to_Provisional_Voting.pdf)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dmKTBrORFik&index=4&list=PL8eHtLEzT3tCg6\\_2jrVyxWFnSMz94UBgK](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dmKTBrORFik&index=4&list=PL8eHtLEzT3tCg6_2jrVyxWFnSMz94UBgK)

[www.sos.state.oh.us/sos/upload/elections/pollWorker/training/chart.pdf](http://www.sos.state.oh.us/sos/upload/elections/pollWorker/training/chart.pdf)

<http://www.sos.wv.gov/elections/administrators/forms/Documents/Polling%20Place/Provisional%20Ballot%20Envelope%20-%20Paper%20-%20Optical%20Scan.pdf>

### 3 Use Technology to Help Voters and Poll Workers

Technology is critical at every stage of the voting process and plays a key role in provisional voting.

- With live access to the statewide voter registration software, experienced poll workers are able to verify the voter’s eligibility, determine their current precinct and ballot style, and instantaneously update the voter record to show that the voter has cast a ballot.
- Live access to the statewide voter registration database also provides a poll worker “read only” access to voter information jurisdiction-wide. This allows poll workers to help any voter regardless of where the voter lives, find the correct polling place or determine if the voter has already voted early in person or by mail.

**REMEMBER** ↓

The ability to know immediately if the individual is registered to vote provides the poll worker the correct information to direct the voter to the provisional ballot table, if necessary.

- Many electronic poll books are designed to easily walk the poll worker through the voter look up process. In some jurisdictions the software prints out a label with the voter information, which can eliminate poll worker error or difficulty in reading handwriting.

**REMEMBER** ↓

The use of electronic poll books with access to jurisdiction-wide voter information can reduce the number of provisional ballots issued on Election Day.

**REMEMBER** ↓

Always have a backup plan in the event that the electronic poll book or the statewide voter registration is not working. Consider providing a paper copy of the voter list so that poll workers can continue to process voters.

- New technology also is available to streamline processing and issuing ballots by mail. Based on state law, voters may have access to enter their information and electronically send an application for a mail ballot, eliminating the need for paper, envelope and postage.
- Vote centers can eliminate the use of provisional ballots. In jurisdictions where all voters can vote in any location, poll workers can access information for any voter rather than just the voter in a particular precinct.

- Voters with smartphones can access the state or local jurisdiction’s website to determine if they are registered and their correct polling place location. This allows voters to independently access their information prior to entering the polling place.
- Posting the main election office voter hotline number at the polling place entrance allows voters with a cellphone to speak directly with the main office and determine their voter status prior to entering the polling place.

**REMEMBER** ↓

Many jurisdictions don’t allow the use of a cellphone inside the polling place. Be sure to post that rule next to the voter hotline number at the entrance.

**REMEMBER** ↓

Simple technical tools, such as a high speed automated envelope opener saves valuable time in processing provisional ballots.

**Quick Clicks**

<http://recorder.maricopa.gov/provisionalballotstatus>

<http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/voting-resources/provisional-voting/>

## 4 Understanding and Using Provisional Voting Data

Data can provide important feedback about how the processes and procedures are working. Reports can be generated to show when, where and why provisional ballots were issued, the number that were counted and the reasons why any provisional ballots were not counted by precinct.

- Collect statistics throughout Election Day on the number of voters processed during certain periods of time, as well as the number of provisional ballots issued by precinct. This information can determine if certain polling places have processed more voters than the election office predicted and may require additional support and resources.
- Track the number of provisional ballots issued/returned from each polling place and the reason why. This may also highlight the need to improve poll worker training or to reassign poll workers.
- The number of provisional ballots issued can signal poll worker error, complicated instructions for issuing or completing the provisional ballot envelope/paperwork, or problems with the electronic poll book or voting equipment.

**REMEMBER** ↓

Data on provisional ballots can be used to verify the need for additional voter education or to make changes in poll worker training. It can also be used during the budget process to justify that need.

**REMEMBER** ↓

Inform poll workers and internal staff of the chain-of-custody for all provisional ballots. Locked and sealed containers should be issued to every polling place. Upon receipt at the main office on election night, the seals should be verified and the number of provisional ballots balanced to the precinct polling place sign in sheet, or electronic poll book.

**REMEMBER** ↓

Provide refresher training to all staff involved in processing provisional ballots. Consider distributing a flow chart detailing the steps used to determine each ballot's eligibility.

- Collect these provisional voting data for each election and compare similar elections. These data can support the need to use technology in the polling place and the need for additional funds to send mailers to voters prior to every election cycle, or to enhance your office website.

- Quick Clicks**
- .....  
<http://vote.minneapolismn.gov/www/groups/public/@clerk/documents/webcontent/wcms1p-101223.pdf>  
 .....
  - .....  
[http://michigan.gov/documents/sos/Prov\\_Bal\\_Rpt\\_Form\\_County\\_217318\\_7.pdf](http://michigan.gov/documents/sos/Prov_Bal_Rpt_Form_County_217318_7.pdf)  
 .....
  - .....  
[www.votescount.com/jun12/provstats.pdf](http://www.votescount.com/jun12/provstats.pdf)  
 .....
  - .....  
[www.chicagoelections.com/dm/general/document\\_490.pdf](http://www.chicagoelections.com/dm/general/document_490.pdf)  
 .....
  - .....  
[http://ballotpedia.org/State\\_by\\_State\\_Provisional\\_Ballot\\_Laws](http://ballotpedia.org/State_by_State_Provisional_Ballot_Laws)  
 .....

- Isolate, separate and securely store provisional ballots away from voted ballots. Sort them by precinct and by reason in order to determine which ballots are eligible to be counted.
- Establish internal procedures to confirm that all valid provisional ballots have been counted. Consider stamping the outside of the ballot envelope to indicate if the ballot was either ACCEPTED or REJECTED.



The U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC) is an independent bipartisan commission created by the Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA). EAC is charged with administering payments to states, adopting voluntary voting system guidelines, accrediting voting system test laboratories and certifying voting equipment, maintaining the National Voter Registration form, conducting election data research, and administering a national clearinghouse for information on election practices.