



# 6 TIPS

## For Conducting Election Audits

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 that help you to run efficient and effective elections.

There is no single national auditing standard and methods can vary from risk limiting, fixed percentage, tiered audits, or a combination of one or more types. The best audits use statistical techniques to determine the amount of auditing required to limit the possibility that an election is incorrectly decided.



### 1


### Start Strong – End Strong

The election administration system is based on a set of interconnected parts; each part can influence what comes after. To ensure that you complete your election with integrity, transparency and the confidence of your voters, consider the following steps:

#### At the beginning:

- Work with your state election office and vendors to develop a test deck that will reveal programming errors in your equipment.


- Label each voting system with the precinct number or location where it will be used and create a delivery checklist.
- Test e-poll books according to state statute or local jurisdiction regulations.
- Create a contingency plan for failure of e-poll books, poll workers who fail to appear, voting sites failing to open or weather related issues.
- Review and update disaster contingency plans frequently, with an emphasis on voting machine repair or replacement.
- Plan for technology failure emergencies and ballot or supply shortages.
- Establish rigorous chain of custody procedures and instruct staff, warehouse personnel, moving companies, polling places and poll workers.
- Insert mismarked and blank ballots during pre-election logic and accuracy testing to ensure scanners correctly process those ballots.

**REMEMBER** 

Develop chain of custody procedures and checklists to require the two-person review and signature rule for all proofing and ballot verifications.



Tip 1 continued

**REMEMBER** 

Create a file of documents relating to each specific voting machine or central count scanner, including logic and accuracy testing and delivery, for each election.

**Leading up to the election:**


- Develop a master checklist to verify and store, in chronological order, all your documentation for every election.
- Use your operations calendar to update critical reports.
- Collect and use statistical data as part of auditing activities, including data from your voter registration system.
- Keep copies of all public notices and reports distributed to the public, candidates or media.
- Retain and organize all documents required by statute, including candidate documentation.
- Organize ballot proofs and final approved copies sent to the printer.
- Create validation reports of all precincts assigned to correct districts.
- Document the assignment of privacy booths at each polling site.

**REMEMBER** 

Retain all documents relating to polling place inspections and compliance with accessibility requirements, including parking and supply distribution that are signed and verified by two of your staff.

**After the Election:**

- Keep a complete audit trail of mailed, returned and rejected absentee ballots.
- Keep a detailed accounting log for all returned and rejected absentee ballots, and use to balance when absentee ballots are tabulated.
- File reports on early voting, including spoiled or provisional ballots, for each election.

**REMEMBER** 

Create precinct data reports and examine them to gain insight into:

- A high rate of under votes or spoiled ballots may indicate poor ballot design or the need for additional voter education.
- Excessive provisional ballots in a precinct may indicate a need for stepped up voter education and poll official training.
- Shortages of adequate ballots and supplies at voting sites.

**Quick Clicks**

- .....  
<http://www.nmclerks.org>  
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- .....  
<http://cuyahogaelectionaudits.com>  
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- .....  
<http://www.bouldercounty.org/elections/tests/pages/2012primaryelectionlat.aspx>  
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- .....  
<http://www.in.gov/sos/elections/4059.htm>  
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- .....  
[http://www.michigan.gov/sos/0,4670,7-127-1633\\_11976\\_60889--,00.html](http://www.michigan.gov/sos/0,4670,7-127-1633_11976_60889--,00.html)  
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**2** **Polling Place Actions Affect Post-Election Audits**

During the training of your poll officials stress the importance of how their work contributes to successful elections. Inattention or failure to follow established procedures and statutes can affect all your post-election activities, from ballot reconciliation to audits.

**Prepare Poll Workers:**

- Train poll officials to carefully confirm correct ballot styles and the number of paper, provisional or emergency ballots delivered to the polling location and other supplies.
- Institute special training using exact copies for end of day ballot reconciliation procedures.
- Instruct your poll officials in the two-person rule for checking all auditing documents.
- Train your troubleshooters to assist at end of day ballot reconciliation.

**Double Check:**

- Use checklists at the polls for each procedure in creating an audit trail.
- Encourage poll officials to use balancing checks during slow periods during the day.

Tip 2 continued

- Make sure poll officials check machine serial numbers, zero tapes, ballot box seals and protective counter numbers and sign appropriate documentation.
- Develop a checklist for your staff to document receipt of all election returns.

Keep Track:

- Record all spoiled ballots when using on-demand ballot printers and pre-printed ballots.
- Make sure the correct pens are provided for optical scan systems.
- Use a two-person return system from the polling place to your office at the end of Election Day.
- Use stringent and documented chain of custody procedures for returns leaving the polls, at your office on election night and until returns are placed in a secured storage facility.

REMEMBER



Always ensure that your ballot and machine storage facility is equipped with:

- A functioning alarm system.
- Video recording devices.
- Sign in/out sheets.
- A two-person rule at all times for anyone on the premises, including your staff.

Quick Clicks

<http://electioncenter.org/checklists.html>

<http://www.ocvote.com/volunteer/poll-worker-resource-center/online-poll-worker-training/explore-more/>

# 3 Reconciling and Accounting for Ballots are Fundamental

Always count and document the total numbers and types of blank ballots received from your printer and are then sent to the polling location. If you use multiple styles in one location, document each style separately.

Educate Poll Officials:

- Train poll officials to ensure that ballot boxes and machine bins are empty at the beginning of the day.
- Teach poll officials to balance the number of signatures in the roster to the total number of votes cast and explain any differences.
- Instruct poll officials to document voters who, after signing the roster, may have left the polling location without voting.
- Stress to your poll officials the importance of posting returns in a prominent location prior to leaving, if required by state law.

REMEMBER



Train poll officials to document all unused ballots at the polling place, whether destroyed or returned to the election official.

Counting Matters:

- Document the number of ballots distributed to each site.

- Compare total votes cast on machine tapes to total signatures and explain any difference.
- Balance totals on each machine with aggregated totals, if there are multiple voting systems and totals are aggregated at the polling location.
- Count and record each type of ballot cast, spoiled, provisional, emergency, absentee or replacement ballots at the end of the day.
- Count and record total number of unused ballots.
- Count and record any absentee ballots delivered to the polling place, if applicable in your jurisdiction.

REMEMBER



Balance the total number of ballots assigned to the polling place with voted, spoiled, emergency, provisional and replacement ballots and explain any differences.

Don't Forget to Document:


- The zero tapes printed and signed by poll officials.
- Keep unused ballots well separated from used ballots until all voted ballots are safely secured.
- Record all emergency paper ballots issued when using touch screen or direct-recording electronic voting systems and record the serial number of the machine.
- Document the total number of voters signing the roster, with a separate count for provisional voters.

**4** **Vote Aggregation and Reconciliation at Your Office**

Laws and regulations for vote aggregation, reconciliation or canvass of an election will vary from state to state. Universally, however, every absentee, early voting, provisional ballot, military or overseas ballot, qualified write-in ballot, challenged and spoiled ballot must be accounted for.

Begin planning your post-election tasks well before election returns are delivered to your office.

- Set assigned duties for your staff.
- Carefully ensure that all memory cards are correctly read when aggregating election night totals.
- Compare precinct totals to machine tapes.
- Account for ballots not included in total tapes, such as provisional or challenged ballots or absentee replacement ballots.
- Examine the calculations performed at polling locations if discrepancies arise.
- Validate the total votes cast in each precinct to ensure that they are equal or less than the registered voters in each precinct.
- Establish procedures for ballot duplication if used in your jurisdiction.

**REMEMBER** 

Issue a press release and prominently post on your webpage information explaining the difference between unofficial and official results. Always double check.

**5** **Conducting Your Canvass**

The canvass serves as a validation of the election results and may be conducted by precinct boards, county election officials or the official canvassing board.

When conducting a canvass:

**Take Time to Prepare**

- Review your state laws and regulations in advance of the canvass and remember to make copies of your state's voter intent statutes or regulations available.
- Develop an operations calendar that will keep a record of all tasks and timelines.
- Provide an orientation for observers and candidates.
- Remember to include all legal notices and notices to candidates or other observers.
- Prepare rules of conduct for all observers and issue necessary identification badges.
- Review the physical space where the canvass is to be conducted and delineate observer areas that will protect voter privacy.
- Request the presence of your legal counsel.

**Collect and Keep**

- Electronic printouts from all precincts, early voting sites, vote centers and absentee ballot tabulations.
- All qualified write-in ballots.
- Tallies of, or ballots from, military and overseas voters.
- All rosters or signature cards from precincts, early voting sites or vote centers.
- Spoiled ballots and challenged ballots.
- Provisional ballot information as required by state statute.
- Duplicated ballots, if used.
- Documentation for any replacement ballots issued.

**Don't Forget to Document**

- Provide documentation on ballot duplication procedures, if used.
- Document precinct exceptions such as over votes or voter errors for each voting site.
- Document and separate the provisional ballots eligible to be counted from those ineligible to be counted.
- Verify military and overseas ballots.
- Document all exceptions noted.
- Present all documentation to the canvassing board, prepare detailed minutes of the meeting and forward results to your state election office, if required.
- Post the completed canvass on your webpage.



Tip 5 continued

**Quick Clicks**

- .....  
<https://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/official-canvass.htm>  
 .....  
<http://recorder.countyofventura.org/elections/election-resultscanvass-of-the-vote/vote-canvass/>  
 .....  
<http://www.elmorecountyelections.org/results.html>

6

## Conducting Your Post-Election Audit

Carefully conducted post-election audits can mitigate error and check the accuracy of election results. Comprehensive and transparent post-election audits raise the level of public confidence in the electoral process.

For transparency, meaningful observation and public notice:

**Create**

- A workflow diagram for officials conducting the audit.
- A checklist of tasks to be accomplished during the audit.
- A rigorous security and chain of custody procedure, including sign in/out logs and a security video.
- Identification badges for everyone present at the audit.
- Procedures for sorting early, absentee or vote center ballots by precinct, if required by state statute or regulation.

- Tally sheets used in the audit, if required.
- Procedures to address and explain discrepancies, if found.

**Double Check**

- That those counting ballots are not aware of an expected result.
- The secrecy of the ballot by never comparing the order of votes to the order of signatures in the roster.
- The transport of ballots and other materials to the audit location by using stringent chain of custody procedures and permitting witnesses.
- That all memory cards, rosters and permits are secured.
- That the number of ballots removed and replaced in each ballot box are counted and documented.
- That, if necessary, court orders are obtained to access ballots.

**Inform**

- Distribute information on your state’s voter intent laws to those conducting the audit and to observers.
- Provide copies of any rules and regulations for the conduct of observers.
- Explain any rules on the use of cellphones, audio or video recording.
- Explain the procedures for addressing discrepancies and if additional targeted samples must be counted.

**Communicate**

- Designate a key staff member to interact with observers and media, to answer questions or take comments.
- Post the final results promptly on your website and transmit the results to your state election office, if required.
- Communicate the results of the post-election audit to the media and your canvassing board.
- Issue a report including an analysis of any discrepancies and recommendations for improvement.

REMEMBER

To achieve additional transparency create a public archive of audit documents and reports.

**Quick Clicks**

- .....  
<http://citrus.electionsfl.org/Election-information/Post-Election-audits.aspx>  
 .....  
<https://www.ocvote.com/election-library/?topic=3>  
 .....  
<http://www.sos.state.mn.us/index.aspx?page=1156>  
 .....  
<http://vote.caltech.edu/content/new-mexico-2006-post-election-audit-report>



**U.S. ELECTION ASSISTANCE COMMISSION**

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.