



Board of Elections

Media Partnership & Transparency Initiative

EAC Clearinghouse Award Submission:

Category: Communications – Distinguished Voter Education and Communications Initiatives

Written by the staff at the Wake County Board of Elections
1200 N. New Hope Rd., Raleigh, NC 27610

Introduction

Wake County, located in central North Carolina and home to the state capital of Raleigh, is one of the fastest growing and most highly mobile counties in the state. With nearly 850,000 registered voters – the largest voter population in the state – the county administers elections for a diverse and rapidly expanding population.

Like many growing jurisdictions across the country, Wake County serves a large number of voters who have relocated from other counties and states with different voting procedures and laws. At the same time, North Carolina election laws frequently change from one election cycle to the next. Updates to voter photo ID requirements, absentee voting deadlines, reporting procedures, and eligibility rules can create confusion not only for voters, but also for media outlets responsible for communicating accurate information.

As the seat of state government, Wake County also receives heightened public and media attention during elections. This visibility underscores the importance of clarity, consistency, and transparency in election administration.

In a jurisdiction of this size and complexity, transparency cannot be improvised. During Early Voting and on Election Day, election officials must prioritize ballot security, chain of custody, equipment testing, and voter assistance. Transparency must, therefore, be planned in advance.

Beginning in 2018, the Wake County Board of Elections (BOE) implemented a structured Media Kit model to proactively equip journalists with comprehensive, accurate election information. Over seven years and fifteen elections, this effort evolved into the Media Partnership & Transparency Initiative – a structured framework grounded in anticipatory transparency: planning, publishing, and communicating information before confusion arises. As a result, the initiative strengthens voter education and trust, reduces misinformation, and preserves operational capacity during high-volume election periods.

The Challenge: Growth, Mobility, and Legal Change

Wake County's voting population reflects challenges faced by many large and growing jurisdictions:

- A substantial population of voters who previously voted in other counties and states with different election procedures and laws.
- Frequent statutory changes to state election laws and administrative directives.
- Continued voter registration increases and voter turnout variability.
- Significant public and media attention due to Wake County's size and its position at the center of statewide political and governmental activity.

Many voters arrive with expectations shaped by other states' laws (e.g., same-day party changes, ballot receipt grace periods, differing photo ID requirements). When North Carolina procedures differ, confusion and misinformation can spread quickly.

The Wake County BOE recognized that voter education must be proactive and structured and, furthermore, that local media are essential partners in disseminating accurate and trusted information.

Program Overview and Implementation

The Media Partnership & Transparency Initiative integrates three core components:

- Comprehensive Informational Media Kits
- Structured Media Availability Events and Relationship Building
- Operational Transparency Planning

Together, these components institutionalized transparency while maintaining security and efficiency.

Comprehensive Media Kits (2018–Present)

Foundational Model (2018)

Wake County's first formal Media Kit was released for the May 8, 2018 Primary Election. Even in its early form, the [2018 Primary Media Kit](#) included:

- Dedicated media contacts
- Voter statistics and historical turnout data
- Early Voting and Election Day media opportunities
- Statutory guidance regarding media access and photography
- Explanations of procedural changes to Election Night reporting

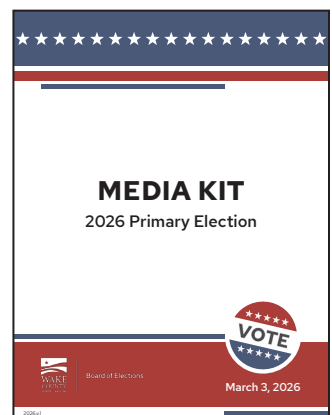
From its inception, the Media Kit was designed not simply to inform, but to anticipate and preemptively answer voter and, therefore, media questions.

Evolution and Institutionalization (2020–2025)

Over time, the Media Kit expanded significantly in both structure and depth. As election laws evolved and voter mobility increased, the BOE refined the Media Kit to address recurring areas of confusion and to provide media outlets with more comprehensive operational context.

By [2024](#) and [2025](#), it had evolved into a comprehensive operational reference document that included:

- Expanded voter photo ID guidance
- Detailed maps and district information
- Security explanations and infographic
- Structured navigation and formalized table of contents
- Detailed Election Night reporting timelines explaining expected delays and tabulation processes
- Transparent absentee review and board meeting schedules
- A centralized website index for election resources
- Election-specific candidate lists and ballot information



Each election cycle builds upon lessons learned from prior elections, including trends identified by voter-facing staff and common areas of confusion. As a result, the Media Kit has transitioned from a basic informational packet into a fully developed anticipatory transparency manual that addresses procedural, legal, and operational questions before they arise.

2026 Modernization: Digital Accessibility

Leading up to the 2026 Primary Election, Wake County further enhanced accessibility by converting the Media Kit into a [digital, interactive flipbook](#) format using Publuu. The [printed version](#) now includes a QR code linking directly to the online version.

The flipbook format:

- Is mobile-friendly and desktop-compatible
- Allows updates without changing the URL
- Increases accessibility for a highly mobile population, including journalists
- Reduces printing costs while increasing reach

To further strengthen distribution, Wake County is implementing a two-page [Media Guidelines](#) handout for all Board meetings where media are present. The handout includes:

- Media observation expectations
- A layout of the Board room illustrating pre-designated camera zones
- A QR code linking to the Media Kit
- Notification that a new Media Kit is issued for every election

This approach creates a built-in redundancy in the distribution process. While the Media Kit is sent directly to outlets, newsroom internal distribution can vary depending on staffing changes, assignment rotations, or editorial workflows. By providing the QR code directly to individual journalists at Board meetings, the BOE ensures that every reporter present has immediate and reliable access to the most current version of the Media Kit.

This safeguard helps bridge potential internal communication gaps and ensures consistent access to accurate election information across media organizations.

Impact of the Media Kit’s Evolution

The Media Kit’s evolution has produced two measurable operational impacts:

First, media outlets are equipped to report earlier and more accurately because they receive comprehensive, ready-to-use information in advance of peak election periods.

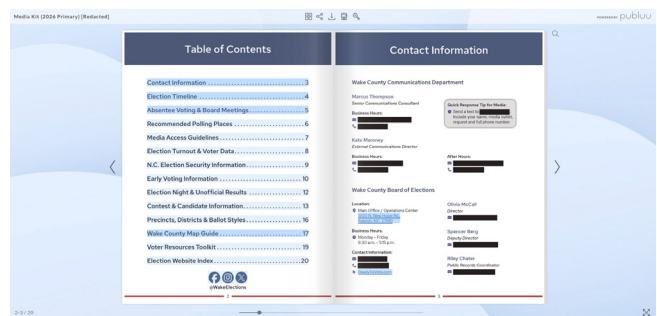
Second, election officials experience fewer urgent, time-sensitive inquiries during Early Voting and on Election Night, allowing staff to maintain focus on ballot security, voter assistance, and statutory compliance.

Table of Contents	
Contact Information	3
Election Timeline	4
Absentee Voting & Board Meetings	5
Recommended Polling Places	6
Media Access Guidelines	7
Election Turnout & Voter Data	8
N.C. Election Security Information	9
Early Voting Information	10
Election Night & Unofficial Results	12
Contest & Candidate Information	13
Precincts, Districts & Ballot Styles	16
Wake County Map Guide	17
Voter Resources Toolkit	19
Election Website Index	20

Scan the QR code to view the Media Kit online.

@WakeElections

Print version of the 2026 Primary Media Kit with flipbook QR code



Digital flipbook of the Media Kit for the 2026 Primary Election

Anticipatory Transparency: Planning for Predictable Questions

Every election cycle generates recurring questions. Rather than addressing these questions individually during high-volume periods, Wake County embeds detailed explanations into the Media Kit in advance.

Internal Feedback Loop: Informing Messaging Through Voter Trends

Wake County's anticipatory transparency model is informed directly by voter feedback. The BOE coordinates closely with its Voter Services Team, which answers public phone calls, and the Early Voting Team, which manages the Early Voting Help Line.

These teams are often the first to identify recurring questions and misunderstandings. By monitoring these trends in real time, the BOE identifies patterns and proactively integrates clarifications into the Media Kit and pre-election media briefings. This ensures that messaging reflects what voters are actually asking, not merely what election officials assume voters need to know.

This anticipatory transparency is designed to:

- Reduce repetitive inquiries
- Improve accuracy in media reporting
- Minimize confusion for voters accustomed to other jurisdictions' laws and procedures
- Preserve staff bandwidth during operationally intense periods

Structured Media Availability Events

Wake County hosts structured media availability events prior to each election cycle, typically during Early Voting site setups, and include:

- Attendance by the Director and Deputy Director
- Dedicated interview availability for local television, print, radio, and digital outlets
- Controlled filming opportunities during site preparation
- Clear visual access to voting equipment setup
- Explanation of election-specific information, law changes, and any other media questions

These events serve multiple purposes:

- Provide high-quality footage for news outlets
- Offer a controlled, secure environment for interviews
- Reinforce accurate messaging before in-person voting begins
- Reduce last-minute, high-volume media requests



BOE hosts a structured media availability event during an Early Voting site setup at John M. Brown Community Center in Apex, NC. Deputy Director Spencer Berg coordinates media access as outlets capture footage, while Director Olivia McCall provides an interview to Spanish-language outlet Enlace Latino.

When possible, Spanish-speaking BOE staff attend these events to provide interviews to outlets (e.g., Univision, Enlace Latino). When unavailable, outlets are notified in advance to plan accordingly.

Over time, these structured events have built strong working relationships with media outlets, creating a predictable, collaborative, and mutually beneficial communications cycle each election.

Operational Transparency: Designing Secure Observation

Transparency is embedded not only in the BOE's messaging, but also in the design of its physical spaces.

In 2021, the BOE operations center was renovated to enhance transparency while protecting security. Two features maximize observation without interference with administrative processes:

- Sliding glass doors allow observation and controlled movement between the Board room and ballot processing areas.
- A wall of windows allows observation into the high-speed tabulator room.

Prior to Board meetings and public-facing processes during which media presence is expected (e.g., logic and accuracy testing of voting equipment, absentee and Early Voting tabulation, Election Night reporting, recounts, sample hand-to-eye counts), the following measures are implemented:

- Specific areas are designated for media and public observation.
- Camera placement zones are defined.
- Movement pathways are structured to avoid interference with election processes.
- Staff workflow and chain-of-custody procedures remain protected.
- Ballot and voter confidentiality are strictly enforced.

By pre-designating observation areas, Wake County ensures that transparency and security coexist without conflict.



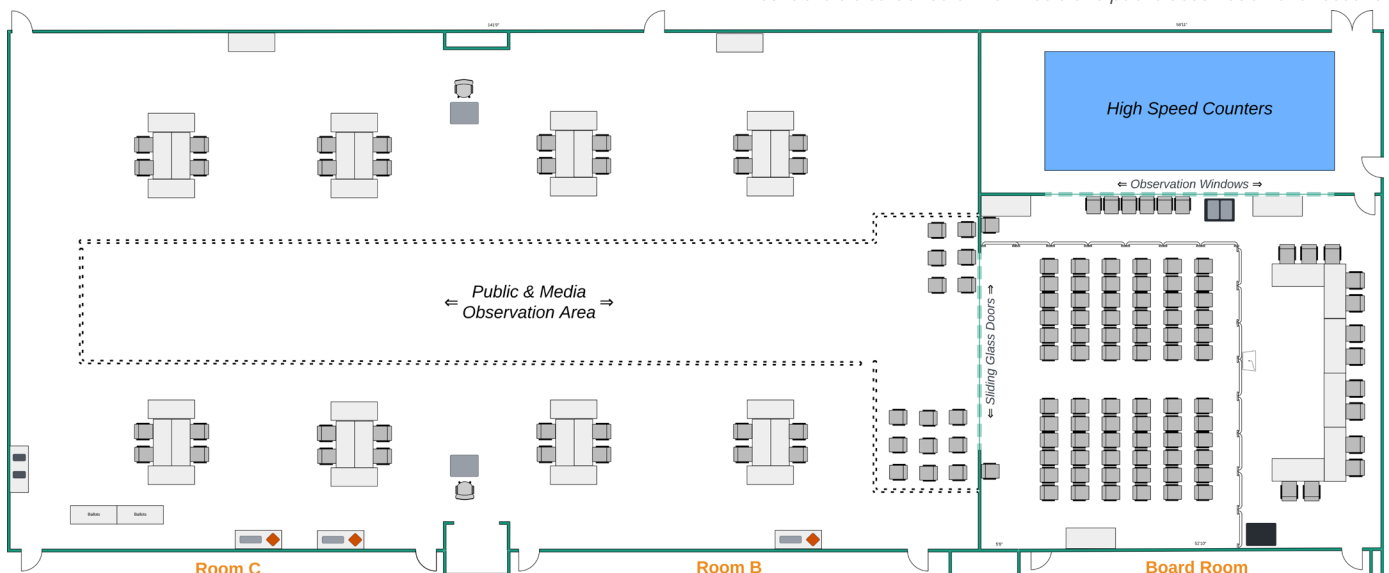
Pictured Above: BOE operations center Board room. Sliding glass doors (left) lead to the ballot processing room, while a wall of windows (right) divides the Board room from the high-speed tabulator room



Pictured Above: L&A testing with cordoned off public observation area



Pictured: Image (above) and diagram (below) of processing room with central aisle cordoned off for media and public observation of a recount



Results and Impact

While many outcomes of this initiative are qualitative, its operational impact has been consistently observable across election cycles since 2018. Since formal tracking began in 2024, the Wake County Board of Elections has conducted more than 150 media interviews and structured media availability events. This sustained level of engagement reflects both the demand for accurate election information and the formal integration of structured media coordination within the BOE's operations.

Improved Media Preparedness and Reporting

Media outlets now receive comprehensive election information in advance of Early Voting and Election Day. As a result, journalists are able to report earlier, with greater procedural accuracy and fewer last-minute clarifications. Common topics such as voter photo ID requirements, absentee ballot deadlines, Election Night reporting timelines, and certification procedures are frequently covered accurately and consistently across outlets without the need for follow-up clarification.

Informed Media Coverage and Operational Balance

By consolidating statutory requirements, procedural timelines, common voter questions, and links to official election resources into the Media Kit, the BOE provides media outlets with a concise and authoritative reference point before peak election activity begins. As a result, journalists approach coverage with a clearer understanding of election processes, such as voter photo ID requirements, Election Night reporting timelines, and certification deadlines.

During high-volume periods, media inquiries are more focused and informed. Because foundational information has already been published and distributed, interactions between staff and media shift from basic clarification to more substantive discussion, and reporting remains consistent across outlets. This structured, proactive approach enables election officials to achieve a sustainable balance between public communication and core administrative responsibilities, even during the most demanding phases of the election cycle.

Operational Focus During Critical Phases

By anticipating common questions in advance, election officials are better able to maintain focus on ballot security, chain-of-custody procedures, equipment testing, and voter assistance during peak activity. The initiative does not eliminate media engagement but, rather, structures it in a way that prevents reactive disruption during critical processes.

Stronger Media Relationships and Predictable Engagement Cycles

Over time, structured media availability events and consistent Media Kit distribution have created a predictable communications rhythm each election cycle. Media outlets increasingly anticipate the release of the Media Kit and pre-election availability events. This consistency has strengthened working relationships and improved coordination across multiple outlets.

Cross-Team Communication Improvements

The feedback loop between the Voter Services Team, Early Voting Help Line staff, Wake County Communications department, and BOE leadership has institutionalized internal information sharing. Trends identified through public inquiries are routinely incorporated into future Media Kits and briefings, resulting in continuous refinement.

Increased Visibility of Official Information Channels

Wake County strategically utilizes simplified, easy-to-remember website domain names that redirect to official sub-pages within the county's primary website (i.e., wake.gov). These domains are prominently featured in the Media Kit and shared with reporters in interviews.

- ReadyToVote.com → BOE website home page
- WakeVotesEarly.com → BOE Early Voting information page

Because these URLs are concise and easily displayed on television graphics, referenced verbally in news coverage, or published in articles, media outlets routinely include them in election-related reporting. By lowering the barrier to accessing official information, this approach makes it easier for voters to navigate directly to authoritative sources.

Consistent use of clear, memorable domains reinforces a reliable pathway to official information. Over time, this accessibility strengthens voter familiarity with the Board of Elections as the primary source of accurate election information. In this way, simplified domain strategy functions as an extension of active, anticipatory transparency.

EAC Clearinghouse Award Criteria

Creativity and Innovation

This initiative demonstrates innovation by institutionalizing anticipatory transparency within election administration. Wake County proactively answers predictable voter and media questions before operational pressure begins.

By integrating communications planning, legal guidance, media coordination, digital accessibility tools, and physical observation design into a cohesive framework, the initiative transforms transparency from a reactive obligation into a structured, active administrative practice.

The integration of a cross-team feedback loop – incorporating trends identified by Voter Services, Early Voting staff, and Communications personnel – ensures messaging is responsive, data-informed, and voter-centered.

Cost-Effectiveness

Although the initiative was developed to strengthen transparency and voter education – not as a cost-saving measure – it has proven to be highly cost-effective. By leveraging existing staff expertise, facilities, and digital tools, Wake County has been able to implement and sustain the initiative without significant additional operational expense.

- **Media Kit:** Developed in-house and distributed primarily in digital formats, reducing printing costs and eliminating reliance on paid advertising. The template-based approach allows the Media Kit to be expanded or streamlined depending on election size and available resources.
- **Media Availability Events:** Conducted within existing operational environments, such as Early Voting site setups, requiring no additional venue costs or infrastructure expansion.
- **Operational Observation Planning:** While Wake County's 2021 renovation enhanced facility workflow and visibility, the transparency practices described in this submission do not require structural renovation to implement. Similar observation areas can be created in existing spaces using simple, inexpensive supplies (e.g., signage, crowd control chains, designated seating) to clearly separate media and public observers from active work areas.

As a result, the initiative achieves substantial communications impact while minimizing financial burden and reducing time spent on basic clarifications during peak election periods.

Replicability

This model is structured to scale across jurisdictions of varying sizes, staffing capacities, and resources. Because the initiative relies on structured planning rather than specialized infrastructure, it can be adapted to both large urban counties and smaller rural jurisdictions.

Any election office can:

- Develop a standardized, election-cycle Media Kit template that preemptively answers common questions, publishes clear Election Night reporting timelines, and provides statutory media access guidance.
- Build working relationships with local media outlets and host pre-election media availability events.
- Pre-designate observation zones within existing facilities to maximize transparency while ensuring operational organization and security.
- Monitor trends in recurring public questions and voter feedback to refine messaging each election cycle.

Sustainability

Active since 2018 and refined through multiple federal and municipal election cycles, the initiative is embedded into standard operating procedures. Lessons learned from each election – including trends identified by voter-facing teams – are incorporated into subsequent Media Kits and media briefings. The transition to a digital flipbook format and the implementation of a Media Guidelines handout demonstrate continued refinement and adaptability.

Rather than functioning as a one-time project, anticipatory transparency has become a recurring component of each election cycle. The initiative is intentionally designed to incorporate feedback, respond to changing legal requirements, and adapt to emerging communication needs. Because refinement is built into its design, the model sustains itself through continuous improvement.

Improves Outcomes for Voters and Election Officials

This initiative produces tangible benefits for both voters and election administrators by increasing voter access to information while preserving operational focus.

For Voters:

- Clearer understanding of evolving North Carolina voting laws and procedures
- Increased access to authoritative information through trusted local media outlets
- Reduced confusion for voters new to the state or county
- Transparent explanations of election processes, timelines, and statutory requirements
- Improved access to multilingual coverage through structured media coordination
- Greater confidence in the administration of elections through visible, proactive transparency

For Election Administrators:

- More informed and focused media engagement during peak election periods, reducing repetitive clarifications and enabling staff to balance public communication efforts with core responsibilities
- Expanded reach to voters through established media partnerships
- Greater ability to focus on statutory compliance, ballot security, and core administrative responsibilities
- Lower risk of misinformation due to consistent, coordinated messaging
- Predictable and structured media engagement each election cycle
- Continuous refinement of communications informed by voter-facing team feedback

Conclusion

In a rapidly growing and highly mobile county with frequently changing election laws, the Wake County Board of Elections recognized that transparency must be intentional, structured, and continuous.

The Media Partnership & Transparency Initiative is fundamentally about reaching voters where they are – through trusted local media – and ensuring they receive accurate, clear, and timely information directly from election administrators.

Elections are complex, and many required processes – such as absentee ballot review, statutory deadlines, and certification timelines – can appear unclear without context. In today’s fast-moving information environment, transparency cannot wait until questions arise during peak operational periods. It must be planned in advance and built into the structure of election administration itself.

By embedding explanations into comprehensive Media Kits, hosting structured media availability events, cultivating working relationships with media outlets, designing secure observation spaces, and incorporating feedback from voter-facing teams, Wake County makes transparency operationally feasible – even during the most demanding phases of the election cycle.

Voters consistently seek clarity about how elections function and why procedures exist. This initiative reflects a commitment not only to provide that clarity, but to offer it deliberately and visibly at every opportunity.

When transparency is intentional, accessible, and consistently demonstrated, it strengthens public understanding of lawful election processes and reinforces confidence in their administration.

Through this initiative, the Wake County Board of Elections affirms a simple principle: voters deserve clear information, accessible processes, and an election system they can understand and trust. Planned, active, and anticipatory transparency makes that possible – and defines the foundation of the Media Partnership & Transparency Initiative.