

About the Quick Start Guides: The EAC's Quick Start Guides are intended to familiarize local election officials with various topics they will likely encounter in election administration. The guides are a starting point to identify areas of concern and give officials a broad idea of factors they should consider in approaching a given topic.

What is ballot reconciliation?

Ballot reconciliation is the method in which election officials keep track of each ballot that has been printed or issued to a voter. Tracking the number of ballots printed, used, and unused during an election cycle ensures that election officials have accounted for every ballot created. When results are certified, election officials can be confident that the results include every valid ballot cast. This guide's suggestions focus mainly on reconciling early in-person ballots.



What is early voting?

Early voting is voting prior to Election Day where the voter completes the ballot in person at an elections office or other designated voting site. Depending on the state, voters may be able to cast a ballot in person as early as 45 days before Election Day, and jurisdictions may employ one or more early voting locations. Election officials must account for and track every ballot issued during early voting.

Preparation

Typically, all voters throughout the jurisdiction can opt to vote at any early voting center during early voting. All ballot styles must be available. Staff must check in voters on electronic poll books or directly through the voter registration database so check-in information updates in real-time across the early voting locations and elections office—where staff may be processing mail ballot requests and returns.

Direct Electronic Recording (DRE) machines, Ballot Marking Devices (BMD), and precinct scanners:

Election officials must record the machine and electronic memory device (as applicable) serial numbers for each device sent to a location.

- For BMDs that use blank ballot stock, record the number of ballots sent to each location.

Hand-Marked Paper Ballots:

Election officials may either supply locations with pre-printed ballots or blank ballot stock and print the necessary ballot style as voters check-in.

- Record the number of ballots sent to each location.

Reconciliation

As early voting typically goes on for several days or weeks, staff must reconcile early voting ballots every day of early voting. Reconciliation should include the following steps:

Before opening the early voting location:

- Verify the number of ballots provided
- Document the machine counts on any DREs, BMDs, or precinct scanners
 - Starting on the first day of early voting, machine counts should be zero and will accumulate over the course of early voting
- Verify ballots and equipment were properly secured

During early voting hours:

- Document voter check-ins, any spoiled ballots (retaining them in a secured ballot container), and any issues that arise

At the end of each day:

- Document the total number of voters checked in and ballots cast and verify they match
- Account for all ballots spoiled and ensure the number of ballots provided less the spoiled and cast ballots equals the number of unused ballots remaining
- Seal all ballots in tamper-evident containers and transport ballots to the elections office for secure storage



Physical Security

Election officials must ensure early voting locations remain secured throughout the early voting period—especially if election materials will remain in the location overnight. Materials left at the location should be moved to a secured room or equipment cart, accessible only to necessary early voting staff.