Developing an Audit Trail

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 an audit trail?

An audit trail consists of all documentation completed during the course of an election. These documents can reconstruct the steps followed, or verify the actions taken, with respect to the accuracy of election procedures and voting systems. Documenting every step of the election ensures the election is fair, accurate, and transparent. Additionally, this documentation can prove the accuracy of the election in a court of law and resolve questions around the integrity of the election.

Pre-Election Documentation

The election administration system is based on 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:

Pre-Election:

- Review and update established **chain of custody procedures** before every election to ensure all measures for documenting the election process are up-to-date and comply with rigorous best practices.

- Publish written chain of custody procedures on your website and ensure copies are available on-site in election offices for public inspection.

- Instruct staff, inter-agency personnel, shipping companies, election workers, vendors, facility managers, third-party contractors, and any other individual or agency responsible for an election process in your jurisdiction about chain of custody and documentation procedures.

- Develop a master checklist to verify and store, in chronological order, all your documentation for every election.

- Retain and organize all reports, communications, audit logs, and other documentation required by statute.

Physical Security

Always equip your ballot and machine storage facility with:

- Alarm system

- Security cameras

- Sign-in and sign-out sheets

- Policies to require at least two people (preferably bipartisan) be present at all times

Post-Election Documentation

Post-Election:

- Keep a complete audit trail of sent, returned (voted and undeliverable), accepted, challenged, and rejected mailed ballots.

- Keep a detailed accounting log for all mailed ballots and use it to balance when mailed ballots are tabulated.

- Keep a detailed log of early and election day in-person voting, including spoiled, provisional, challenged, and unused ballots, for each election.

- At each point of pre-election testing, during tabulation, and post-election it is imperative that vote tabulation software be backed up and stored in a secured offsite location.