

**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 are Provisional Ballots?

Provisional or fail-safe ballots are ballots cast by voters whose eligibility cannot be determined at the time of voting. Typically, the voter places their ballot in an envelope they have completed with personal information and signed. Election officials keep provisional ballots separate from all other ballots cast and, after investigation, determine or make a recommendation on whether the voter is eligible and the ballot is to be counted after election night.



## Sample Procedure for Administering Provisional Ballots

### Establish Standard Operating Procedures

- Based on federal and state requirements, establish standard operating procedures for processing and tracking of provisional ballots. What personal information may be released on provisional voters to candidate representatives or political parties is often an area of dispute and may be resolved by local or state counsel interpreting federal and state law.
- Use historical data to estimate the likely number of provisional ballots and the number of supplies required.

### Train Staff on Provisional Voting Procedures

- Train office staff, poll workers, and canvass board members on provisional ballot processing and eligibility.
- Highlight the importance of maintaining the chain of custody for provisional ballots.

### Administer Provisional Voting During the Early Voting Period and on Election Day

### Election Night

- Reconcile the number of provisional ballots cast and secure them for post-election processing.

### Review Each Provisional Ballot

- In teams, office staff or canvass board members research the eligibility of each provisional ballot. Follow state law for determining whether each ballot should be counted or rejected.

### Certification

- Proofread official results and ensure that official results include the vote totals for all counted provisional ballots. An accounting of all provisional ballots cast, counted, and rejected should be included in the final canvass report.
- Review why provisional ballots were counted or rejected and use this information to improve internal procedures and voter education.