



OBSERVER TRAINING 2023

SAN JUAN COUNTY ELECTIONS

Why are you participating?

- An Election Observer's role is to protect the integrity of the election by impartially observing the election process and activities.
- Observers provide an independent observation and maintain confidence in the accuracy and integrity of the election process.

Who are Observers?

- *Candidate Observers* are individuals designated by each candidate to observe the ballot processing on their behalf. Candidate Observers may include legal counsel, staff, friends, family, or the candidate themselves. A candidate may designate many Candidate Observers, but only one may be present at any time in the ballot processing area. Candidate Observers are given priority over any other type of observer.
- *Political Party Observers* are individuals chosen by each of the two major political parties. Only one Political Party Observer from each party may be present in the ballot processing area at any time. Should the Auditor or Election Manager determine that the space is too crowded, Political Party Observers will be asked to withdraw or move to another location for viewing.
- The general public may also observe, but a public viewing area is designated, and the public is not allowed in the ballot processing area.

What is the Observer's Job?

- Candidate Observers and Political Party Observers are permitted to closely observe ballot processing. Typically, observers are present to:
 - Verify that election procedures are followed.
 - Pose questions or raise concerns to designated Election staff (Auditor, Election Manager, Elections Specialist).
 - Report progress back to the candidate or party.
- Observers are not allowed to participate in this process. All decisions regarding the ballot process are made by the Elections Manager.
- It is important for observers to understand the election process.

When are Observers Present

- Election Observers are welcomed at every step of the elections process.
 - Official Logic and Accuracy testing
 - Emptying ballot boxes
 - Ballot intake – bundling batches
 - Signature checking
 - Ballot processing
 - Post-Election Audit
 - Ballot duplication
 - Canvass Board meetings
 - Recounts (if applicable)
- Different election observers may be assigned to each part of the process.

Observer Rules

- Respect and professional courtesy is expected at all times and by all parties. Disrespectful or discourteous behavior shall not be permitted.
- All observers must sign in and out on the attendance log.
- Observers must be identified with ID badge provided by the designated election staff.
- Observers may not directly question workers. Questions must be directed to the Elections Manager.
- Conversations shall be kept to a minimum and at a level that will not disturb the process.
- Note taking, or the use of cell phones, PDA's, laptops, cameras, video, or audio recordings will not be permitted inside the ballot processing area.

Observer Rules - Continued

- Observers are to leave the secured area of the Election Center when not actually observing the verification and canvassing process.
- Observers may not touch ballots or equipment.
- Observers shall stand no closer than 6-feet to a worker. Observers may not hover or crowd election workers.
- Observers must minimize behavior that may distract election workers.
- The ballot process will proceed even if no observers are present. Election workers will not slow down, speed up or otherwise alter their work to accommodate observers.
- The Auditor, or Elections Manager may eject an Observer if an Observer's actions compromise the integrity or efficiency of the ballot processing, or if these rules are violated.

Official Logic and Accuracy Test

- This test is completed before every election. It verifies the ballot counting system and programming. It tests every ballot style (including ballots from the Accessible voting unit), responses of all candidates/issues, under and over votes and write-ins. It also ensures that all candidates/issues appear on the right ballot style.
- The County is solely responsible for L&A testing for special elections.
- The Secretary of State Office certifies tests for the Primary and General elections when there is a State or Federal office/measure on the ballot.

Post-Election Audit

- A random check of the ballot counting.
- The random check process involves a comparison of six batches manually counted to an electronic count from the original ballot counting equipment.
- The random check is limited to one office or issue on the ballot.
- The check must be completed no later than forty-eight hours after election day.

Stages of Ballot Processing

Ballot Assembly

- Ballot packets include a precinct-specific ballot, security envelope, return envelope, and any election-specific inserts.
- Ballot packets are assembled approximately four to six weeks prior to election day.

Types of Voters

Military and Overseas Voters (UOCAVA)

- Ballots are mailed 30 - 45 days before an election.
- Military and overseas civilians may request an emailed ballot.
- Ballot may be returned by mail, official ballot drop box, email or fax.

Vote by Mail Voters

- Ballots are mailed 20 days before the Election.
- Ballots may be returned by mail or official ballot drop box.

Types of Voters

Future Voters

- Registrants who are 17 at the time of ballot creation but will be 18 by the Election.
- Ballots are mailed 20 days before the Election.
- Ballots may be returned by mail or official ballot drop box.

Primary Only Voters

- Registrants who are 17 at the time of a primary but will turn 18 on or before general election day.
- Can only vote on contests that will not be decided in the Primary Election.
- Ballots are mailed 20 days before the Election.
- Ballots may be returned by mail or official ballot drop box.

Ballot Packets are Mailed

- Ballot packets are sent to military and overseas voters (UOCAVA) 45 days prior to a primary or general election and 30 days prior to a special election to allow for the longer transit time.
- Ballot packets are mailed to voters at least 20 days before election day.
- Local Voters Pamphlets will be mailed to each registered voter in San Juan County.
- A state Voters Pamphlet will also be mailed to each residence for a General Election.

Vote: It's up to the Voter

- Once the ballot packet is in the voter's hands, they have until election day to vote their ballot, seal it in the return envelope, read, sign and date the declaration on the return envelope.
- Mail postage is prepaid, or they may drop off their ballot at an official ballot drop box.
- Voted ballots must be postmarked by the U.S. Postal Service by the date of the election or be received at an official ballot drop box by 8 p.m. on election night.

Ballot Return

- Ballot envelopes that are mailed are picked up from the Post Office daily.
- Ballot envelopes that are dropped off at official ballot drop box locations are picked up each week by teams of Election Office employees.
- There are 3 official ballot drop box locations available in San Juan County. The official drop boxes are open 24 hours a day during the 18-day voting period.
 - San Juan Island – Court House
 - Orcas Island – Senior Center
 - Lopez Island – Fire Station

Elections Security

- Storing and securing ballots: Ballots are stored in a metal cage with numbered seals and locked padlock. The seal numbers are recorded on a seal log and verified by the two people that sealed it. When the seals are removed two people verify that the seals match and sign the log.
- Other election material that is secured by a numbered seal:
 - Official L&A Test
 - Official Ballot Drop Boxes
 - Tabulator
- Election Management System – HART Verity version 2.5
 - Stand-alone (air gapped), no internet connection
 - Certified by the Office of Secretary of State

Processing Returned Ballots

Signature Verification

- Once at the Elections Office, envelopes are counted and bundled in batches 50.
- Before any ballot is processed, law requires that we verify the signature on every returned ballot envelope with the voter's signature on file. Election staff are trained by the Secretary of State's Office to perform this review.
- If the signature matches, the ballot is approved to move forward to ballot processing.
- If the signature does not match or a signature is missing, the ballot is "challenged".
- For challenged ballots we contact voters by phone and letter with instructions on how to resolve the issue. Voters have until the day before election certification to resolve the issue before their ballot may be processed.
- Unresolved challenged ballots are sent to the Canvass Board for review.
- Less than 1 percent of ballots returned are challenged in each election. The majority of challenges are simply because the voter did not sign the envelope.

Opening the Returned Envelopes

- Processing of ballots begins approximately two weeks before the Election (depending on the quantity of ballots returned).
- Teams of two complete the opening and review process.
- First, return envelopes are hand counted twice to confirm the envelopes received match the quantity that is on the Ballot Inspection Accountability form.
- Next, the security envelope containing the voted ballot is removed from the return envelope and separated.
- Then, the voted ballot is removed from the security envelope and separated.
- The voted ballots are hand counted twice to confirm the count matches the number of envelopes on the Ballot Inspection Accountability form before voted ballots are reviewed.

Reviewing Voted Ballots

- Ballots are reviewed for one vote per race/measure, marked in black or blue pen and unmarked bar codes.
- Ballots marked in pencil or colored pens are sent to resolution.
- Ballots with a write-in and unmarked target area are sent to resolution.
- Ballots that have torn barcodes, spoiled, whiteout is used or are too damaged to be scanned are placed in an envelope for the duplication process.
- Ballots that have minor damage can still be scanned. These are placed on the top of the stack for final processing.

Final Processing of Ballots

- After voted ballots have been reviewed, ballots are scanned by batch. The number of ballots scanned is compared to the completed Ballot Inspection Accountability form to affirm the quantity matches.
- Adjudication of ballots takes place after ballots are scanned.
- The A-Team will adjudicate the ballots to capture the voter's intent while following the Statewide Voter Intent manual.
- Daily reconciliation is done at the end of scanning each day and at the end of each step throughout processing each day. The number of ballots scanned is verified against the number of valid signatures accepted in the VoteWA.

Adjudication of Ballots

- **Adjudication.** Process of resolving cast ballots to reflect voter intent. Common reasons that ballots require adjudication include: write-ins, overvotes, marginal machine-readable mark, having no contest selections marked on the entire ballot, or the ballot being unreadable by a scanner.
- An undervote occurs when no selection is made for a single choice contest.
- An overvote occurs when one votes for more than the maximum number of selections allowed in a contest. The result is a spoiled vote which is not included in the final tally.
- Write-ins are adjudicated when the target area is not selected.
- Readable marks (hesitation marks) are adjudicated to an undervote.

Write-ins

- When a name is written on a write-in line, it shall be counted as a valid write-in vote regardless of whether the corresponding target area is marked.
- If the name of a candidate who is already printed on the ballot is written in, that vote shall not be tallied as an overvote, but shall be counted as a valid vote for the printed candidate. This applies even if both target areas are marked, or no target areas are marked.
- If a write-in vote is cast for a declared write-in candidate using a commonly recognizable nickname or spelling variation, it shall be counted as a valid vote for that candidate.
- If the write-in target area is marked, but no name is written on the line, it shall not be counted as a valid vote, even though it may be tallied as a write-in vote by the tabulation system.
- If a candidate's target area is marked, the write-in target area is also marked, and something other than that candidate's name is written in the write-in response area, it shall be counted as an overvote and not a valid vote for any candidate. If a candidate's target area is marked and the write-in target area is not marked, it shall be counted as a valid vote for the marked candidate.

Duplication Process

- Duplication is the process of transferring the voter's intent from the original ballot to an unmarked ballot readable ballot.
- If the ballot is on multiple pages (electronic ballot) or is too damaged to go through a scanner, the ballot is sent for duplication.
- A unique sequence number is assigned to both ballots and the original ballot is rendered "unreadable" for the tabulation.
- This process is always completed by two teams of two staff members.
- Completed duplications are compared to the original ballots to ensure they were marked correctly.
- The Duplication Log is signed by four staff members when complete.

Election Results

- Results will be posted after drop boxes and voting centers close at 8 p.m.
 - Expect the first results to publish online at around 8:15 p.m.
- Tabulation
 - The process of tallying the number of votes cast for each contest.
- No results can be tabulated or released until after 8:00 p.m. on Election day.
- Unofficial results can be found on election night at sanjuanco.com/elections.
- Staff will continue to process ballots until certification.
 - Under RCW 29A.60.160, interim ballot tabulations are normally scheduled after a Primary or General Election excluding weekends and holidays.

Canvassing Board (open public meeting)

- The Canvass Board is comprised of the Auditor, Prosecuting Attorney and Council Chair or an assigned delegate.
- The purpose of canvassing is to account for every ballot cast and ensure that every valid vote is included in the election totals.
- Canvassing is that process of examining in detail a ballot, groups of ballots, election subtotals, or grand totals, in order to determine the final official returns of a primary, special, or general election, and to safeguard the integrity of the election process.
- Only the Canvassing Board has the authority to reject ballots or parts of ballots.
- All elections must be certified by the San Juan County Canvassing Board. The process of certification includes a review of the final election tabulation report and the signing by each board member of the election certification oath.

Elections – Every Vote Counts

Thank you for your participation in elections process.

Any questions, please contact our office.

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