

*This Guide provides a look “behind the scenes” at preparations for Election Day. It provides a snapshot of what happens on Election Day and contains questions/answers and additional information to assist the media, candidates, voters, and voter advocacy groups. The U.S. Election Assistance Commission encourages you to review this Guide and to celebrate democracy by casting your vote.*

U.S. ELECTION ASSISTANCE  
COMMISSION



A VOTER'S  
GUIDE TO  
ELECTION DAY



U.S. ELECTION ASSISTANCE  
COMMISSION

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To contact your local election official,  
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**Voter Registration**

- Voters are encouraged to carefully print their name, address and other information to avoid questions on Election Day. Illegible forms are a common concern for election officials.
- Contact your local election office to determine the last day that you can register to vote or change your voter information. Voter registration deadlines vary from state to state.
- Voters should verify their registration status prior to the close of registration, and make needed corrections or changes. If you have moved, changed your name or party affiliation, you may need to re-register.
- If you give your completed form to a third party, you are not guaranteed that the form will be delivered in a timely fashion. Use caution in providing the personal information on your voter registration application form to a third party. It is recommended that you personally mail or hand deliver your form to your local election office.
- Agencies/individuals and/or candidates conducting voter registration drives should contact the local election office for training/instructions and additional information regarding statutory deadlines for returning completed forms.

**Polling Places**

- Confirm the location of their polling place **PRIOR** to Election Day. For each election, permission must be obtained to use buildings as polling places. All polling places must comply with federal law accessibility standards. Election officials have no control over the availability of polling place locations, and often are required to find new locations.

- If you have computer access, check your election office's web site to access updated information on polling place locations. Candidates and the media can help to communicate and publicize this information.
- Candidates should contact their local election office to obtain information on state laws and procedures regarding poll watchers and campaigning laws prior to Election Day.

**Absentee/Early Voting**

- Contact your election office to determine your state's laws regarding absentee/early voting. Find out the rules on how to vote in person or by mail before Election Day. If you vote in person, find out the polling place location and hours of operation. If you vote by mail, find out how to apply for a ballot.
- Determine the deadline for returning the ballot in the mail. If you mail your ballot too late, the post office may not deliver it to the election office before the deadline. Ballots received after the deadline cannot be counted.
- Protect the integrity and secrecy of your ballot – vote the ballot yourself. Do not let another person tell you how to vote.
- Carefully review the instructions for voting your ballot and completing the ballot envelope. Incomplete information or errors may cause your ballot not to be counted.
- If you vote by mail, be certain that you put sufficient postage on the envelope. Insufficient postage could cause a delay in the delivery of your ballot.

- Candidates should find out when the absentee vote totals will be released on election night. Be aware that these votes are often tabulated at the Election Office and will not be included in the precinct totals posted and/or announced at polling places.
- Candidates and the media should review information on the history of absentee/early voting in your jurisdiction. Statutory rules for processing and tabulating absentee ballots may impact an election official's ability to efficiently manage an unexpected large volume of absentee ballots. This could delay the release of results on election night.

### Provisional Voting

- Contact your local election office to get information on the rules governing provisional voting in your state.
- Learn the state law on where provisional ballots must be cast. In some states voters must vote a provisional ballot in their correct precinct in order for the ballot to be counted.
- Ask if the laws in your state allow for votes cast in federal and state races to be counted if the provisional ballot is voted in the wrong precinct.
- Understand the voter identification laws in your state. If necessary, bring the required identification with you when you go to vote on Election Day.
- If you must vote a provisional ballot, be sure to find out how to determine

if your ballot was counted.

- In close races, the provisional ballots may change the outcome of the race. So, candidates and the media should delay declaring winners until after the provisional ballots have been processed and counted.

### Voting Systems

- Voters in many jurisdictions will be casting ballots on new equipment. Contact your local election office or visit your election office web site to find out times and locations to practice on the new equipment.
- Candidates and media should consider signing up to attend a poll worker training class to educate themselves about new equipment and procedures for processing voters.
- Deployment of a new voting system impacts every aspect of the internal operation of your local election office. From staff training, to polling place supplies, to poll worker training, to collection and tabulation of results – you can be assured that the process will be different than in past elections.
- Review your state law governing public observation and testing of voting equipment. If you want to attend these tests, contact your election office for place, date and time.
- Ask questions about how votes are tabulated on Election Night. Be aware that many things can impact the timely release of election results, including: (1) number of voters in line at polling places when the polls close; (2) poll worker procedures for closing the polling places; (3) method for delivering ballots to the central office; and (4) central office procedures for tabulation of votes.

- Contact your local election office to determine how often results will be released on election night. Understand the different types of results to be released. Unofficial, partial results mean that only a portion of the polling places results have been reported. Unofficial, final results mean that all polling place and absentee results have been reported – but these results do not include provisional ballots. Final official results are released after the election is certified and include counted provisional ballots.
- Be aware that votes cast on voting machines cannot be reported until after all of the polling places have closed and vote cartridges are returned to local election offices. In the past, some jurisdictions were able to pick up ballots mid-day pickup. This provided the opportunity to release a percentage of results immediately after the polls closed. Closing procedures for new voting machines could delay reporting results in jurisdictions that previously had mid-day pickups.

### Pollworkers

- On Election Day, an army of poll workers will rise and shine in the early morning hours to answer the call of democracy. The public's greatest opportunity to understand the election process is to join the ranks and become a poll worker. Contact your election office and complete an application today.
- If you are a high school or college student, request an excused absence from your instructor to work the polls on Election Day.
- If you are an employee in the work force, contact your personnel department to determine if you can have a day off with pay or

- take leave to serve as a poll worker.
- To learn about what happens behind the scenes on Election Day, contact your local election office and request the poll worker training manual or sign up to attend a training session.

### Managing Election Day

- Voters should verify their registration status and confirm their polling place location prior to Election Day.
- Early morning and late evening hours are the busiest times at polling places. If possible, schedule your day to avoid those peak hours.
- Contact your state or local election office to learn about their administrative complaint procedure.
- Candidates and the media should verify how election results will be released, determine who is the designated media staff person and how to contact him/her on election night.
- Changes in voting systems create additional stress for everyone. Please be patient with the poll workers and election office staff. They are working diligently to conduct the election.

**TIP:** Elections are administered nationwide by various officials, i.e. city clerk, county clerk, local board of elections, and secretary of state offices. If you have questions, feel free to contact any of these offices.