



Texas Secretary of State  
ELECTIONS DIVISION



# Management of Ballots by Mail



# Organization of Applications for Ballot by Mail

- File mark ABBMs and FPCAs as soon as they arrive at the elections office
  - Day and time of receipt is permanently documented on the form
  - Documenting the exact time the application arrived is very important
- Immediately review the applications for completeness and determine if there are any defects
- Send applications to the next step as soon as possible
  - Corrective Action
  - Verification of Personally Identifiable Information



# Organization of Applications for Ballot by Mail

- Consider alphabetizing applications so that they can be located easily
  - FPCAs should be kept separately from ABBMs
  - Use mail trays or other containers
- Consider keeping applications in batches if not alphabetizing them.
- Consider scanning applications and storing them electronically
  - Scan all documents that should be kept with the application
- Whatever method is used, make sure it works for your purposes and your technological capabilities



# Organization of Applications for Ballot by Mail

- Keep all correspondence, records of actions taken and other relevant paperwork with the application
  - Rejection Letters
  - Emails to/from the voter
  - Corrective Action print outs/screenshots if applications were corrected using the tracker
  - Emails and faxes of applications to preserve the deadline
    - Hard copy of the application to follow within 4 business days
  - Any other relevant paperwork



# Organization of Applications for Ballot by Mail

- Implement a system for all annual applications to be pulled into the next election during the voting year for which the application is active
- Verify voter registration for each annual application before mailing the ballot.
  - Voter registration for annual applications should be checked before the ballot is mailed in each new election.
  - Voter may have moved
  - Voter may have died
  - Voter sent written cancellation
  - Voter had a felony conviction
  - Voter declared mentally incapacitated



# Entity Acting as the Early Voting Clerk

- Ballot by Mail
  - Obtain current applications from the County Election Officer
  - Verify the Personal Identification Numbers
    - Application for Ballot by Mail
    - Carrier Envelopes
- Corrective Action Process
  - Online Ballot by Mail Tracker – Work with County
  - Notices of Defects in Applications
  - Notices of Defects in Carrier Envelopes



# Corrective Action - Application

- What happens when an voter's application enters the corrective action process?
- The voter receives:
  - Notice of Rejected Application for a Ballot by Mail
    - The Early Voting Clerk must include a new application for ballot by mail with this notice
    - If the voter's PII was not contained in the application or the numbers did not match the voter's registration record, a new Voter Registration Application must also be included with the notice
  - Notice of Rejected Application for a Ballot by Mail Containing a Defect that May be Corrected Online
    - Notice outlines the defects that can be corrected online through the Ballot by Mail tracker
    - The Early Voting Clerk must include a new application for ballot by mail with this notice



# Conduct Logic and Accuracy Testing Prior to Mailing Ballots by Mail

- It is recommended that Logic and Accuracy Testing be conducted prior to mailing ballots by mail
  - Errors can be identified in the testing process
  - Ballot corrections are greatly reduced by testing before mailing
- A corrected ballot causes issues throughout the rest of the election cycle.
  - Carriers must be marked “Corrected Ballot”
  - Postage has to be paid again – very costly
  - Incorrect ballot stock must be destroyed
  - Ballot Board procedures must change to account for both ballots
  - A letter explaining what happened has to be sent with corrected ballot





## Printing Ballots Before Mailing

- If done on an “in-house” printing system – Typically called an “on-demand” system
  - Consider implementing a two person process whereby there is a check and verification check to ensure the correct ballot style is printed.
  - Implement a log to keep track of all ballots printed
- If using a mail processing vendor
  - Ensure that all ballot styles are checked before submitting the file to the vendor.
  - The vendor relies on correct information coming from the county to send the correct ballot



# Proofing Ballot by Mail Envelopes and Contents

- Make a checklist of all items that should be a part of the balloting materials
  - For ABBMs
- Ensure that all required balloting materials are in the Envelope for Mailing a Blank Ballot before inserting the official ballot
  - Carrier Envelope with unique serial number
  - Carrier Insert - Info about returning the Carrier
  - Secrecy Envelope
  - Ballot Envelope (for secrecy)
  - List of Certified Write-In Candidates, if applicable
  - Statement of Residence, if required
  - Extra Postage Notice, if required
  - Notice to Voter Who Must Provide Identification, if required
  - Dear Voter Letter - optional



# Proofing Ballot by Mail Envelopes and Contents

- Make a checklist of all items that should be a part of the ballot by mail “kit”
  - For FPCAs
- Ensure that all required balloting materials are in the envelope before inserting the official ballot
  - FPCA Carrier Envelope
  - FPCA Carrier Insert - Info about returning the Carrier
  - Envelope to Mail Ballot Materials to FPCA Voter
  - Signature Sheet for FPCA Voters
  - List of Certified Write-In Candidates, if applicable
  - Notice to Voter Who Must Provide Identification, if required



# Proofing Ballot Style Before Mailing

- Implement a process that verifies that the voter is registered before mailing the ballot, especially for annual applications
- Compare the voter's registration record to application and make sure the ballot style on the printed ballot is correct
- Compare the address of the voter listed on the envelope to the voter's registration record.
  - If different, review the application to determine if there was a mailing address listed on the application (e.g., nursing home, relative's home)



# Confidential Voters – Attorney General Program

- Confidential Voters in the Attorney General Program
  - Confidential Voters' Applications are valid for 3 years
  - These voters are not in TEAM
- Create a system to keep up with the regular mailing of ballots to confidential voters
  - Their information is usually kept in a secure file cabinet since their records are not stored electronically
  - If you recently took over the election duties in the county or political subdivision, determine if there are any confidential voters in the program.
  - The county Early Voting Clerk **MAY NOT** provide a copy of a confidential application to a political subdivision if acting as its own early voting clerk!
    - The confidential voter must submit an application to each early voting clerk



# Physical Security of Applications

- Keep ABBMs and FPCAs in a locked room that a limited number of persons can access
- Badge controlled access is preferable, but a log that keeps track of entries and exits can also be used.
  - Leaving the door open during the day is not a good practice, even when there are many staff members present.
- Enter in teams of two so that no one person is alone in the room
  - Two-person “check and verification check”



# Organization of Voted Ballots

- File mark ABBM and FPCA Carrier Envelopes as soon as they arrive at the elections office
  - Day and time of receipt is permanently documented on the Carrier
  - All deadlines regarding ballots by mail are “received” deadlines, not postmarked deadlines
  - Documenting the exact time the ballot arrived is very important
  - Send the Carrier or FPCA signature sheets to the next step as soon as possible so that it can be determined if there are any defects
    - Signature Verification Committee – if one is convened
    - Early Voting Ballot Board



# Physical Security of Voted Ballots

- Keep voters' returned Carrier Envelopes containing voted ballots in a locked room that a limited number of persons can access
- Badge controlled access is preferable, but a log that keeps track of entries and exits can also be used.
  - Leaving the door open during the day is not a good practice, even when there are many staff members present.
- Enter in teams of two so that no one person is alone in the room
  - Two-person "check and verification check"
  - Counties with a population of 100,000 or more shall implement a video surveillance system that retains a record of all areas containing voted ballots





## Organization of Voted Ballots - SVC

- The Carrier Envelopes must be immediately reviewed for completeness and determine if there are any defects that are eligible for corrective action
- If using the SVC, the following defects can be identified by the committee:
  - Verify that Carrier Envelope contains a signature
  - Does the signature match the application or other previous signatures
  - Verify that the Personally Identifiable Information is present and matches the voter's registration record
  - Is information complete with respect to a Witness?
- The SVC cannot determine whether a required Statement of Residence is present in a Carrier for an ABBM because the SVC cannot open Carrier Envelopes
- The SVC can open a sealed carrier envelope for voters who submitted an FPCA, as signature sheets are expressly authorized for this process.



# Organization of Voted Ballots - EVBB

- The Carrier Envelopes must be immediately reviewed for completeness and determine if there are any defects that are eligible for corrective action
- If Carrier Envelopes are reviewed by the EVBB, the following defects can be identified by the board:
  - Verify that Carrier Envelope contains a signature
  - Does the signature match the application or other historic signatures
  - Verify that the Personally Identifiable Information is present and matches the voter's registration record
  - Is information complete with respect to an Witness?
  - Was the Statement of Residence included, if required?



## Organizational Checklists

- Signature Verification Committee Handbook and an Early Voting Ballot Board Handbook that outline all the duties that the respective bodies will perform when convened on the Secretary of State Website
- Consider making “at a glance” checklists of the procedures to assist SVC and EVBB members in completing their duties
  - Checklists could be taped at each station
    - Overview of all processes
    - Person on the left duties
    - Person on the right duties



## Example of the SVC Checklists

### Signature Verification Committee

#### Overview

1. Take a Carrier Envelope from the stack to be reviewed.
2. Person on the left reviews the Carrier to ensure that the voter's signature is present.
3. Person on the left removes the flap or tab that covers the voter's personally identifiable information.
4. Person on the left determines whether the voter's PII is present.
5. Person on the left announces the numbers that the voter provided.
6. Person on the right verifies that the numbers match the numbers in the voter's registration record.
7. Person on the right verifies that the signature of the voter matches the signature on the application or other historic signature on file.
8. Person on the left examines the Carrier to determine whether the information with respect to a Witness is complete, if applicable.
9. If all portions of the review are met, the Carrier Envelope can move on to the Early Voting Ballot Board for final review.
10. If any portion of the review reveals a defect, the Carrier Envelope will be put aside and undergo the Corrective Action process.

### Signature Verification Committee

#### Person on the Left

1. Take a Carrier Envelope from the stack to be reviewed.
2. Reviews the Carrier to ensure that the voter's signature is present.
3. Remove the flap or tab that covers the voter's personally identifiable information.
4. Determine whether the voter's PII is present.
5. Announce the numbers that the voter provided.
6. Person on the right and left verify together that the signature of the voter matches the signature on the application or other historic signature on file.
7. Examine the Carrier to determine whether the information with respect to a Witness is complete, if applicable.
8. If all portions of the review are met, the Carrier Envelope can move on to the Early Voting Ballot Board for final review.
9. If any portion of the review reveals a defect, the Carrier Envelope will be put aside and undergo the Corrective Action process.

### Signature Verification Committee

#### Person on the Right

1. Verify that the PII numbers that were called by the person on the left match the numbers in the voter's registration record.
2. Person on the right and person on the left verify together that the signature of the voter matches the signature on the application or other historic signature on file.
3. If all portions of the review are met, the Carrier Envelope can move on to the Early Voting Ballot Board for final review.
4. If any portion of the review reveals a defect, the Carrier Envelope will be put aside and undergo the Corrective Action process.



# Early Voting Clerk Corrective Action – Carrier Envelope

- What happens when a voter's Carrier Envelope enters the corrective action process after review by the Early Voting Clerk?
- Early Voting Clerk's Authority is in effect until the SVC or EVBB begin their meetings.
- The voter receives either:
  - Notice of Carrier Defect Issued by the Early Voting Clerk - Returned to the Voter by Mail + Corrective Action Form
  - Notice of Carrier Defect Issued by the Early Voting Clerk – Defective Carrier Held at the Early Voting Clerk's Office Awaiting Corrective Action + Corrective Action Form



## Rosters for Early Voting by Mail

- When a voter was mailed a ballot, the voter's name should be added to the Roster for Early Voting by Mail
- Keep track of daily totals of Carriers that have been returned by voters so that daily rosters can be updated.
- When a voters sends back a timely carrier, the voter's name must be added to the Roster for Early Voting by Mail (Form 5-7)
- Maintaining organization and keeping good records assists with the completion of the daily rosters.



# Organizational Rosters for Corrective Action

- Rosters on the website for tracking voters' carriers that are in the corrective action process:
- ABBM Voters:
  - SAMPLE Roster of Voters with Defective Carrier Envelope - Corrective Action Form Mailed to the Voter – Form 10-28
  - SAMPLE Roster of ABBM Voters with Defective Carrier Envelopes - Notified by Phone or Email – Form 10-29
- FPCA Voters
  - SAMPLE Roster of FPCA Voters with Defective Carrier -Notified by Phone or Email – Form 10-30



## Visually Track Progress

- Consider creating a visual way to track the progress of applications, mailed ballots and received ballots
  - Helps with goal setting and planning for SVC or EVBB staff numbers
  - Seeing the information at a glance promotes a sense of accomplishment
  - Keeping track of daily progress helps with media inquiries
- What should be tracked?
  - Number of applications received
  - Number of applications in the corrective action process
  - Number of ballots mailed
  - Number of voted ballots received from voters
  - Number of voted ballots in corrective action process
  - How many ballots have been rejected by the EVBB





# Notification Scripts

- When notifying voters of defective carrier envelopes by phone or email:
  - Make a script for telephone callers so each voter receives exactly the same information
  - Make a standard email so that all voters receive the same information
- By standardizing the scripts, anyone could step in and help make telephone calls or send emails
- All voters must be treated in the same manner
- The exact verbiage used will be preserved through the retention period
  - Could help with Public Information Requests.



# Final Counting and Records Retention

- When corrective action processes are complete:
  - Send ballots from corrected carriers to the Central Counting Station once the 6 day corrective action period has ended
  - Execute the final counting of ballots
  - Prepare final rejection letters
    - Ballots that were not timely returned
    - Ballots with defects that were not corrected



# Storage of Ballot by Mail Materials

- Store all rejected Carrier Envelopes together in a sealed ballot box
  - Rejected carriers envelopes cannot be opened without court order
- Store all voted ballots by mail in a separate sealed ballot box
  - Batches which you ran them through the central scanner
- Clearly label all materials so they can be easily located for:
  - Recounts
  - Election contests
  - Public Information Requests
- When using a records management vendor:
  - Discuss continued access to the records and the costs



# Texas Secretary of State

ELECTIONS DIVISION



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[elections@sos.texas.gov](mailto:elections@sos.texas.gov)

800-252-VOTE • 512-463-5650

[sos.texas.gov](http://sos.texas.gov)