



Texas Secretary of State  
ELECTIONS DIVISION



# Selecting and Preparing Your Polling Places

Spring 2025 Webinar Series



- **Legal Requirements for Selecting Polling Places**
  - General Rules for Precincts and Polling Places
  - Precincts for Local Entity Elections in May
  - Precincts for County Elections in May
  - Precincts in May vs Precincts in November
  - Considerations for Entities in More Than One County
  - Other Legal Requirements for Polling Places
- **Guidelines for Setting Up and Preparing Polling Places**
  - Selecting Polling Places
  - Accessibility
  - Design and Setup
  - Security
  - Facility Contacts
  - Staffing
  - Supplies and Equipment
  - Organizing Ballots and Forms
  - Unforeseen Events



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# General Rules for Precincts and Polling Places



# General Rules for Election Day Polling Places

- Precinct-based: On election day, each precinct must be served by a single polling place in the boundaries of the precinct (Sec. 43.001)
  - The number of election day precincts you establish will equal the number of polling places on election day
  - This is the default rule
- Countywide: If you are contracting with a county that uses the countywide polling place program, then that program has its own specific rules for the required number of polling places and the placement of those locations (Sec. 43.007)
  - Only available if you contract with a county that uses the countywide polling place program
  - Work with your county on where to place your polling places



# General Rules for Early Voting Locations

- Main Early Voting Location (Sec. 85.002)
  - If contracting with county and county is the early voting clerk (EVC), then the main EV location will be at the county election officer's main office
  - If not contracting with county (or county is not EVC) and:
    - The entity is a city, must be at city secretary's main office
    - The entity is not a city, must be at a location within the territory covered by the election
  - If it is not practicable to do so at the main office, must be at another location within the same city.



# General Rules for Early Voting Locations

- Branch Early Voting Locations (Secs. 85.062, 85.064)
  - Required for some elections, but generally optional for local entity elections in May
  - If a branch location is established, it must be open at a single location for the duration of the EV period
  - Must be open for:
    - 8 hours each day, if territory has 1,000 registered voters or more; or
    - 3 hours each day, if territory has fewer than 1,000 registered voters



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# Precincts and Polling Places for Local Entity Elections in May



# Election Day Polling Place Rules

- In May elections, local entities generally have the ability to draw their own precinct lines and select their own polling place locations (Sec. 42.061)
- If you are holding a precinct-based election, you will divide your territory into geographic areas (precincts) and voters from each of those areas will go to one designated polling place for their precinct on election day.
- If you are contracting with the county and the county is using the countywide polling place program, then voters may vote at any location on election day.





## Early Voting Polling Place Rules

- In May elections, local entities generally have some flexibility in placing their early voting locations
  - Main EV Location:
    - If contracting with county: County election officer's office.
    - If city (not contracting with county): City secretary's office.
    - If other entity (not contracting with county): A location within the territory of the election.
  - Branch EV Locations:
    - Generally optional for May
    - Must be open at the same place for the entire EV period



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# Precincts and Polling Places for County Elections in May



# Precinct Rules for County Elections in May

- If the county is holding a **county-ordered election** in May, then the county must use county election precincts for their election
  - e.g. a measure election ordered by commissioners court or county judge
- If the county is **only** holding local entity elections under contract in May, then the election will use the precincts established by the local entities and county election precincts are not required
  - However, a county that uses the countywide polling place program can use countywide for the local entity's election in May



## Early Voting Polling Place Rules

- In May elections, counties generally have the ability to decide where to place each of their early voting locations
  - Main EV location will be at the county election officer's office
    - If doing so is impracticable, may be at another location in the same city as their office
  - Branch EV locations for May are generally optional unless your county is holding a special election to fill a vacancy in the legislature or congress.
    - If so, contact our office for guidance.



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# Precincts and Polling Places May vs. November



## May vs. November

- May elections and November elections have very different rules for the number of polling places and where those locations must be.
- If you normally hold your elections in May, but have a special election planned for November, please be aware that in November there are stricter rules for polling places that require you to share locations with the county.
- If you normally hold your elections in November, but have a special election in May, then you may have more flexibility in placing your locations for your May election.



## Election Day Polling Place Rules

- In May elections, local entities generally have the ability to draw their own precinct lines and select their own polling place locations
- In November elections, the local entity **must** use the county's election precincts and must use the county's polling places that correspond to those precincts that include the entity's voters
  - If the county uses the countywide polling place program, this means that a local entity located wholly or partly in that county **must use every single one of the county's polling places on election day**



## Early Voting Polling Place Rules

- In May elections, local entities generally have the ability to decide where to place each of their early voting locations
- In November elections, the local entity **must** use at least one of the county's early voting locations contained in their territory, if any
  - If the entity wishes to have their own main early voting location, then they would need to have at least one temporary branch location that is shared with the county





## Entities in More Than One County

- If you are located in more than one county, there are big differences between May elections and November elections
- In May elections, voters can cross county lines to vote at a polling place for a local entity's election during early voting or on election day
- In November elections, voters **must** vote in their home county and cannot cross county lines to vote in a local entity's election
  - This means that in November you must set up locations in each county



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# Entities in More Than One County



## General Considerations

- Whenever you are conducting an election, it is important to know your **exact** territory lines
  - You need to know all of the counties you are located in.
  - You need to be able to provide a map or specific territory description to your counties to get an accurate list of registered voters.



## General Considerations

- If you are located in more than one county, then you will need to make specific plans to address your voters in each of those counties.
  - This will always require you to get a list of registered voters from each county.
  - If the county is not running your election, you will also need to get a list of Annual ABBM voters from each county that is not running your election.
  - If you are holding a November election, this will also require you to set up polling locations in each county.
  - If you are contracting with multiple counties, have a plan to aggregate your election results from each county.



# May Elections vs. November Elections

## May Elections

- Voters may cross county lines to vote in local entity elections in May.
  - This applies to both election day and early voting
  - Alternatively, you can set up separate locations in each county for your voters in each county
  - Work with your counties to come up with the best plan for your voters
- You will still need to request a list of registered voters from each county you are located in.



# May Elections vs. November Elections

## November Elections

- Voters **cannot** cross county lines to vote in local entity elections in November.
  - In November, voters are required to vote by county election precincts. Voters must vote at their county polling place on election day.
  - If your county has one or more early voting locations in your territory, you must use at least one of those locations for your own election.
  - Your election must be set up to report your results by county election precinct.
- You will need to request a list of registered voters from each county you are located in.



# Things to Consider

- Communicate!
  - Speak to all the counties you are located in to discuss your plans to handle each portion of your election that falls within each county.
  - Tell your county what other counties you are located in, so that they can coordinate with the other counties.
  - If you're not contracting, get a list of registered voters and annual ABBM voters from each county
- Remember that you are the expert on your entity's territory.
  - Don't assume that your county will know what your territory lines are, or that they have the most current maps.
  - Give your county the most recent version of your entity's map before each election, and communicate with them about the other counties you are located in.
- Remember that May elections and November elections have different rules!



## Things to Consider

- For more guidance on considerations for entities in more than one county, please review the most recent versions of our other training presentations on this subject:
  - Contracting and Joint Elections
  - Entities in More Than One County
- All training presentations can be found here on our website:
  - [Training and Education Resources](#)





# Things to Consider

- **Remember:**
  - **May Elections and November Elections have different rules, especially for entities in more than one county.**
    - Voters cannot cross county lines in November, but they can in May
    - Voters must vote at their county polling place on election day in November, so you need to set up at those locations.
    - In November, entities must share at least one of the county's early voting locations located in their territory - if you are in multiple counties, this means at least one for each county
    - In November, results must be reported by county election precinct. When you are programming your election, be sure to set it up with those precincts.



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# Legal Requirements for Polling Places



## Accessibility

- A building used as a polling place must be accessible to voters and must meet ADA accessibility requirements
- If you don't know which buildings to use, consider working with your county to identify buildings that are used as polling places in your area that satisfy these requirements.



## Public Building

- A building used as a polling place generally must be a public building if one is available
  - Public building = owned or controlled by a governmental entity
- If no suitable public building is available, a private building that allows electioneering on its premises (outside the 100-foot zone) can be used.
- A private building that does not allow electioneering outside the 100 foot zone cannot be used unless there is no other available polling place



## Restrictions

- A building cannot be used as a polling place if:
  - It is the residence of a candidate for an elective office; or
  - It is the residence of a person who is closely related to a candidate for a public office.



## Charges for Use of Polling Place

- A charge cannot be made for the use of a public building as a polling place on a day that the building is normally open for business.
- If the public building will be used as a polling place on a day that it is not normally open for business, then a charge may be made only for reimbursement of the actual expenses incurred in using the building that day.
- No specific limitations on charges for use of a private building as a polling place.



# How to Prepare Polling Places for Voting

- Building for use as a polling place
- Accessibility and Americans with Disability Act (ADA) Compliance
- Designing the layout for functionality, compliance and security
- Security inside and out
- Facility contact and key holders
- Staffing requirements, planning ahead
- Replacement equipment and supplies
- Organizing ballots and forms
- Unforeseen events



# Selecting a Building for a Polling Place

The local authority ordering the election is responsible for designating the location of the polling place



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Considerations:

Ask if the building will be available for any elections held within that territory for the coming year

Be sure to reserve the facility as far in advance as possible!





## Accessibility and Americans with Disability Act (ADA) Compliance

- Is the building accessible for elderly voters or those with disabilities
- Is there adequate parking and room for both disabled voter parking *and* curbside voting
- Do curbs have curb “cuts” or can you use a temporary non-slip ramp
- Steps with hand rails





# Accessibility continued...

Inside the building:

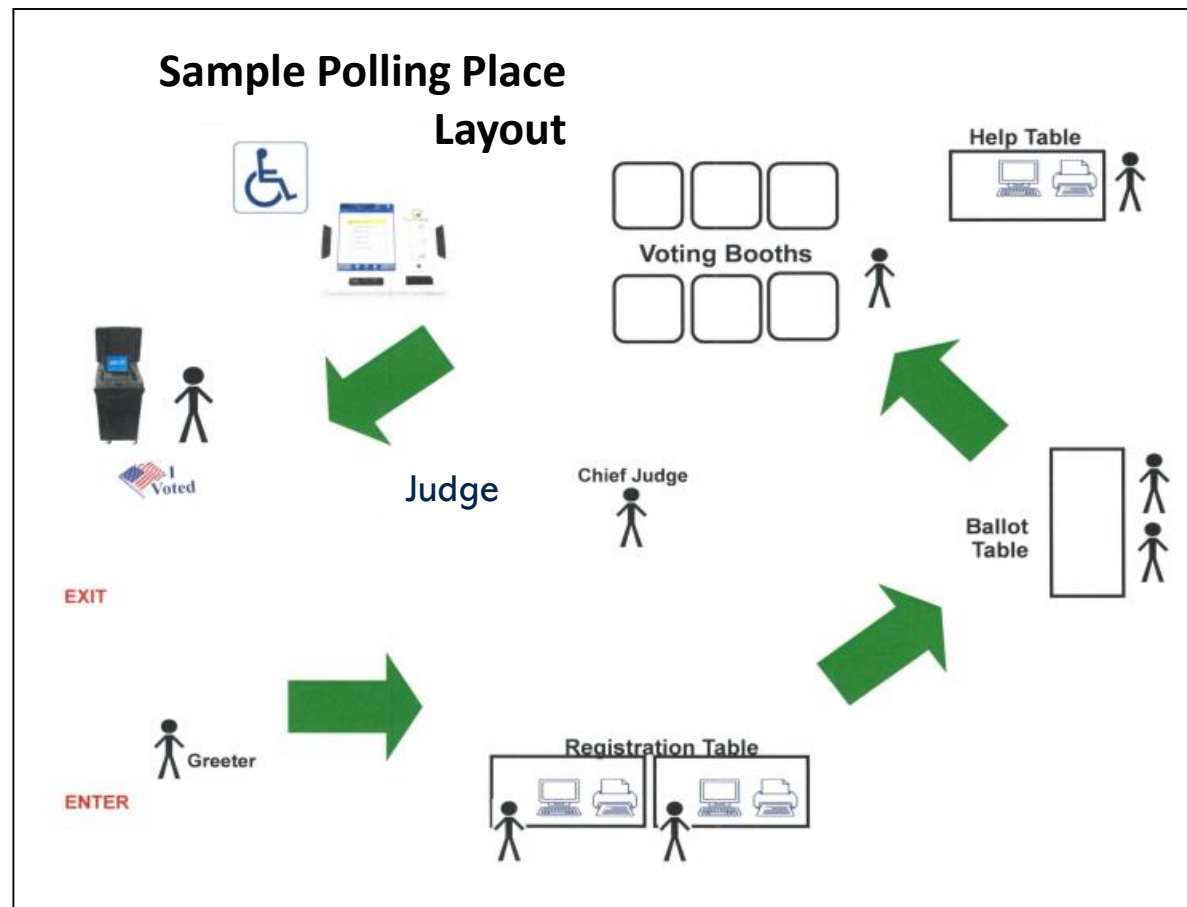
- 36-inch aisles are needed to accommodate a wheelchair
- Wheelchair accessible booth with a 5-foot radius for turning
- Knee and toe clearance at tables
- Voting system equipment should not exceed 48 inches in height
- An accessible restroom





## Designing the layout for functionality, compliance and security

- Consider:
  - Planning the layout ahead of time
  - Clear signage with translations
  - Forms kept in a secure location
  - Keep booths turned away from those waiting to vote
  - Is the room accessible





# Security Inside and Out

## Inside:

- Election Judges and Early Voting Clerks should be able to see all entrances and exits into the voting room.
- Determine whether or not security cameras are present in the building; cameras should be turned off or covered during voting hours, if possible.
- Confirm that all equipment will be kept in a locked secured room.

## Outside:

Is there adequate lighting around the entrance to the building and the parking lot.

Will there be security onsite or constable or sheriff patrols.



# Facility Contact and Key Holders

Reserve polling locations as far in advance as possible as discussed earlier.

Determine point of contact, get commitments in writing

Be certain the contact can be reached after hours and on weekends!





# Staffing Requirements, Planning Ahead

Election workers must:

- Take the required training

- Be registered voters

- Meet certain eligibility requirements

When understaffed, consider offering shift work to those who may be hesitant to work a 12-14 hour shift.





# Organizing Equipment, Ballots and Forms

Organization is the key to a well run polling location

Label equipment and materials clearly

- Distinguish Early Voting from Election Day

- Create an identifying label for all equipment that will be deployed to an individual voting site

Forms and Supplies

- Plastic boxes with hanging file folders

- Binders

- Pizza Boxes and binder clips for grouping forms together



# Replacement Equipment and Supplies

Designate Staff to trouble shoot and deliver equipment

Prepare extra equipment and forms:

- Voting booths, scanners, power cords, batteries

- Statements of Residence

- Combination Forms

- Provisional Envelopes

- Reasonable Impediment Declarations

- Statements of Oaths and Compensation

- Oaths of Assistance

- Any other forms that should be replenished







# Unforeseen Events

- Polling location closures
  - Flooding
  - Ice and snow
  - Fires
- Create a Written Back up plan
- Notifications
  - Voters
  - Secretary of State
  - Media
  - Party Chairs





## Available Support



**WEBINARS**



**TRAINING**



**RESOURCES**

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

800-252-VOTE • 512-463-5650

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