

Franklin County

Election Procedures Review | 2016 General Election

Final Report Issued April 2017

The report does not affect the validity of the outcome of a primary or election or the validity of any canvass of returns (RCW 29A.04.570).



Elections Division

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Review Process

The county elections department procedures review process:

- Promotes consistency of election administration statewide.
- Provides feedback to the County Auditor.
- Highlights best practices in our state.

County elections departments are scheduled for review every 5 years.¹

This review, required by state law, evaluates Franklin County Elections Department procedures and practices. A certified elections administrator from the Elections Division of the Office of the Secretary of State conducted the review.

The reviewer followed a checklist containing 129 election procedures and processes. The election department procedures reference 114 state statutes, 112 state rules, and 3 federal acts regarding the administration of elections and voter registration. The reviewer observed election practices during the 2016 General Election. Written procedures and county documentation were analyzed for compliance with state laws and rules.

¹ RCW 29A.04.560, RCW 29A.04.570

County Elections Department Fact Sheet

Election: 2016 General Election

Registered voters: 34,042

Ballots returned: 25,075

Percentage of voter turnout: 73.56

Total ballot deposit sites available: 7

Voting centers: 1

24-hour deposit sites: 5

Jurisdictions: 25

Permanent staff: 3

Seasonal staff: 5

County square miles: 1,265

Incorporated areas: 4

Voter registration system: DFM

Tabulation system: Dominion

Unique Challenges: Franklin County is one of four counties subject to Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act. Providing Spanish language on materials such as envelopes and ballots is challenging in terms of space and layout. This requirement increases costs in advertising, materials and staff time.

Best Practices

County elections department activities that improve efficiency, accuracy, and voter services.

Canvassing Board Training

State law only requires all personnel assigned to verifying signatures receive training on statewide standards for signature verification. Statute does not specifically require this training for canvassing board members. However, Franklin County requires all canvassing board members attend signature verification training prior to canvassing signatures on ballots.²

Candidate Filing Handbook

Elections department staff presented candidates with a Franklin County Candidate Guide during the 2016 candidate filing week. This guide contains a calendar of important dates, sign ordinances, voter data, maps, information about certification, oaths of office, online resources and data request forms. The Franklin County Candidate Guide provides a great resource for candidates filing for office.

Ballot Format Checklist

The Franklin County elections staff uses the Secretary of State Ballot Format Checklist each election. Using this checklist ensures that ballots are designed correctly and meet state and federal requirements.

Challenged Ballots in Clear Folders

During the Franklin County Canvassing Board meeting, elections staff presented the board with mismatched signatures in clear folders. Each folder contained information for a single voter, including a copy of the signature on file, the ballot envelope as received, and any pertinent information to assist the board. This allows canvassing board members to verify documents individually, in a methodical manner.



² [RCW 29A.40.110 \(3\)](#)

Improvements Made on Site

During the review, the county elections department reevaluated its processes and immediately took action.

Provisional Ballot Declaration

Prior to the election Franklin County elections staff immediately updated the voter declaration printed on the provisional ballot envelope once the reviewer notified the County Auditor the declaration was outdated.³

Issuing Provisional Ballots

Elections staff neglected to offer an unregistered voter a provisional ballot on Election Day. After a discussion with the Chief Deputy Auditor, staff issued provisional ballots to unregistered voters the rest of the day.⁴

Request for Observers

Election staff correctly sent letters to the political parties requesting observers and provided the ballot processing dates. However, the maximum number of official observers allowed during ballot processing was not included. The Franklin County Auditor must notify the major political parties in writing of the maximum number of official observers allowed to observe ballot processing at any one time.⁵

Ballot Deposit Sites

The Franklin County elections staff secured ballot deposit boxes with a keyed lock, but did not use a numbered seal. A keyed lock does not provide detection of access to the ballot deposit box. Uniquely numbered seals and seal logs must be used in order to detect any access to ballots.

Once informed of this requirement, staff promptly secured all ballot boxes according to state law. Staff now documents access to ballot deposit boxes with seal logs each time the box is opened.⁶

³ [RCW 29A.40.160 \(8\)](#), [RCW 29A.40.091](#)

⁴ [RCW 29A.40.160 \(7b\)](#), [RCW 29A.04.008](#) (5)

⁵ [WAC 434-261-020](#)

⁶ [WAC 434-250-100 \(2\)](#), [WAC 434-261-045](#)

Suggestions for Improvement

These suggestions assist the county elections department in implementing state and federal laws and rules.

Manual Ballot Inspection and Duplication

During a hand recount of a County Commissioner race, the County Auditor discovered a variance of 17 votes when matching the recounted results to the tabulated results. This vote difference resulted from voter corrections and lightly marked responses. Temporary staff tasked with ballot inspection and duplication need training that focuses upon these unique ballot issues.⁷

Verification Notices

If an application is not complete, the auditor correctly mails a verification notice to the applicant. The multipurpose verification notice used by Franklin County Elections incorrectly requires applicants to complete a new registration form. A verification notice must not ask for information, other than a signature, that has already been provided by the applicant on the original application.⁸

Disability Advisory Committee (DAC)

The Franklin County DAC plan was last reviewed in 2011. Each Disability Advisory Committees must review the disability access plan annually. The Franklin County DAC must convene and update the county plan.⁹

Transmittal of Official County Canvass Report to the Secretary of State

A copy of the official county canvass report must be transmitted to the Secretary of State immediately after certification by the canvassing board. The report includes final cumulative results report, the signed certificate of election, and the reconciliation report. The canvassing board certified the 2016 General Election correctly, but these documents were not transmitted until the day after certification.¹⁰

⁷ [WAC 434-261-070](#) (1)

⁸ [RCW 29A.08.110](#) (2); [NVRA](#)

⁹ [RCW 29A.04.223](#) (2)

¹⁰ [RCW 29A.60.230](#), [WAC 434-262-070](#)

Secure Storage

Ballot security is defined by the need to identify unauthorized access. It is not just about locks and keys.

Tabulation system. The Franklin County Auditor secures tabulation equipment using keyed locks. A keyed lock does not provide detection of access to tabulation equipment and programming. The elections division must use uniquely numbered seals and seal logs to detect access to the tabulation machines. This requirement also applies to the servers that accumulate and report vote totals.¹¹

Initial processing. Elections staff must leave ballots in secured storage unless processing. The reviewer observed staff opening cabinets containing unsealed trays of voted ballots at the start of the business day. Cabinets remained open and unsecured until the close of business. Ballots must remain in secured storage until processing begins and must be secured once that process is complete.¹²

Ballots: After the election, post-election retention of ballots implements cardboard boxes to secure tabulated ballots. A uniquely numbered seal is only applied to one of the box openings and documented on a seal log. Security tape seals the bottom of storage boxes. Security tape when breached does not indicate inappropriate access. Ballots must be secured to detect access during the entire retention period.

Additionally, ballots remained in a room unsealed after completion of results reconciliation was completed. Staff must secure voted ballots immediately after tabulation or reconciliation.¹³



¹¹ [WAC 434-335-330 \(3\)](#)

¹² [WAC 434-250-110 \(5\)](#)

¹³ [RCW 29A.60.110](#)

County Response



FRANKLIN COUNTY AUDITOR

Matt Beaton, Auditor

March 28, 2017

Joesph R. MacLean
 Certification & Training Coordinator
 PO Box 40229
 Olympia, WA 908504

Dear Joe,

We, the Franklin County Canvassing Board, want to thank the Secretary of State's Office and you for conducting our review. We appreciated the independent and knowledgeable review and look forward to continuing to implement our shared mission of conducting accountable and transparent elections.

To that end we have included a portion of the email sent by our reviewer to assure that the context of the review is captured as suggested improvements are reviewed.

Sent: Friday, March 3, 2017 10:46 AM

Good morning All,

Attached is a copy of the discussion document for the 2016 General Election Review report.

I would like to say thank you for all of your kindness and cooperation through this whole process. I know that it was a rough year with five elections and to be reviewed in Presidential year. I will say that this was one of the best reviews that I have done since my time here at the Secretary of State's office and am grateful that we all value the elections process.

I look forward to our conversation on Monday but until then have a great weekend.

Joesph R. MacLean

Following is the response to the suggestions for improvement included in the election procedures review conducted during the 2016 Presidential General election.

Issuing Provisional Ballots

Response: A person presented themselves at the Auditor's office on Election Day checking on registration status. A brief check revealed they were not registered in Franklin County or the State of Washington. Learning this, the person started to leave. After a discussion it was revealed that all people regardless of registration status are to be offered a provisional ballot. Staff issued a provisional ballot to the above referenced voter and to all other unregistered voters. All voted provisional ballots are reviewed by the canvassing board at a later date. This explanation is to clarify that no voters were disenfranchised.

Manual Ballot Inspection and Duplication

Response: Temporary staff (board workers) receives training at each election prior to undertaking

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FRANKLIN COUNTY AUDITOR

Matt Beaton, Auditor

inspection and duplication duties to look for voter corrections. The hand recount successfully identified the reason for a variance between the recounted results to the tabulated results (voter corrections and lightly marked responses). Immediately after the recount, new pens were purchased for staff to use when duplicating ballots to produce darker marks.

Verification Notices

Response: The verification notice used in Franklin County does not state that it requires applicants to complete a new registration form. It correctly asks the voter to provide the missing information.

Disability Advisory Committee (DAC)

Response: Agreed. The Franklin County DAC will convene and review/update the county plan at least annually beginning in 2017.

Transmittal of Official County Canvass Report to the Secretary of State

Response: Agreed. This has not been an issue with previous elections. Election staff has implemented a control to ensure compliance in all future elections.

Tabulation System

Response: Agreed. Election staff will add the use of seals and logs to the tabulation system equipment doors that previously relied on locks alone. We will continue the existing procedure of reconciling the day to day vote totals to assure the integrity of the process.

Initial Processing

Response: Agreed. Election staff updated procedures to limit the opening of the secured cabinets located in the secured ballot storage room to one cabinet at a time. Logs will continue to be used. The policy remains that only authorized personnel are allowed access to the monitored secured ballot storage room.

Ballots

Response: Agreed. During the election period, tabulated ballots are stored in sealed and logged boxes that are placed in sealed and logged security cabinets according to policy. An additional step of adding a seal to the bottom of the box has been added. The additional seal will remain during the post-election retention period.

It has been a pleasure to work with you and the Office of the Secretary of State during this review.

Sincerely,

Matt Beaton
Franklin County Auditor

Rick Miller
Chair, Board of County
Commissioners

Shawn Sant
Prosecuting Attorney

Synopsis

During the review, 129 election procedures and processes were examined. The county elections department procedures were reviewed against 114 state statutes, 112 state rules, and 3 federal acts regarding the administration of elections and voter registration. The reviewer observed election practices during the 2016 General Election.

The reviewer identified areas of best practices:

- Canvassing board training.
- Bilingual voter assistance.
- Candidate filing handbook.
- Ballot format checklist.
- Challenged ballot folders.

The report suggests improvement in the following areas:

- Manual ballot inspection and duplication
- Verification notices
- Request for observers
- Disability Advisory Committee (DAC)
- Transmittal of Official County Canvass Report to the Secretary of State
- Secure storage

The response of the County Auditor and County Canvassing Board addresses compliance with state and federal laws to ensure accessible, fair, and accurate elections.

The report does not affect the validity of the outcome of a primary or election or the validity of any canvass of returns. The election reviewer does not have jurisdiction to make such an evaluation, finding, or recommendation under this title. (RCW 29A.04.570).