



## HIDALGO COUNTY ELECTIONS DEPARTMENT

### CENTRAL COUNTING STATION PLAN

#### A. PURPOSE:

- The Central Counting Station Manager (*TEC Secs. 127.001 & 127.007*) is required to establish and implement a written plan for the orderly operation of the Central Counting Station.

#### B. LOCATION:

- Hidalgo County Elections Department Training Facility Room A  
317 N. Closner "Rear", Edinburg, TX 78539.

#### C. CENTRAL COUNTING STATION PERSONNEL:

- Central Counting Station Personnel (*TEC Sec. 127.0015*) will be required to take the oath prior to any duties at the central counting station.
- Central Counting Station Manager (*TEC Sec. 127.002*) is in charge of the overall administration of the central counting station(s) and may appoint clerks to perform duties.
- Tabulation Supervisor (*TEC Sec. 127.003*) is in charge of the operation of the automatic tabulating equipment, accumulation of vote totals and results reports.
- Assistant Tabulation Supervisor (*TEC Sec. 127.004*) to assist the Tabulation Supervisor.
- CCS Presiding Judge (*TEC Sec. 127.005*) shall maintain order at the Central Counting Station, administering oaths and resolving questions on voter intent.
- CCS Alternate Presiding Judge (*TEC Sec. 127.005*) (*County Elections*) shall assume the role of the Presiding Judge, if the Presiding Judge unable to serve.
- Central Counting Station Clerks (*TEC Sec. 127.006*) will be appointed by the *CCS Manager* and *Presiding Judge* to perform duties.

#### D. PROCEDURES FOR CONVENING THE CENTRAL COUNTING STATION:

- The Central Counting Station may not begin the process to count early voting ballots until, (*TEC Sec. 87. 0241 (b)(2)*):
  - (1) the polls open on election day; or
  - (2) in an election conducted by an authority of a county with a population of 100,000 or more or conducted jointly with such a county, the end of the period for early voting by personal appearance.
- The Second TEST of Tabulating Equipment will be conducted prior to beginning the process to count early voting and mail ballots. (*TEC, Secs. 127.093 (c)(d) & 127.097*)
- The Notices of the EVBB will be posted on our website for the dates, times and location.

**E. INTAKE PROCEDURES:**

- The general custodian of election records maintain procedures related to inventory control and chain of custody of electronic media and voting system equipment. Procedures relating to the chain of custody must require two or more individuals for the verification of equipment identifiers, verification of seals, and verification of chain of custody. (*TEC, Secs. 129.051 & 129.052*)

Early Voting:

1. After closing polls on the last day of early voting, the Early Voting Election Judge will deliver paper ballots (in ballot transport bag(s)), emergency ballot(s) (in the emergency ballot transfer red bag(s)), and vDrive (in the Verity Scan) to the Elections Department intake location (Elections Main Office).
2. Elections Department intake personnel will verify the seals on the ballot transport bag(s), emergency ballot bag(s), and the Scan are the same seal numbers listed on the seal log.
3. Assistant Tabulation Supervisor removes vDrive from Scan and secures the vDrive in a secure bag for CCS.
4. Assistant Tabulation Supervisor then delivers the vDrives secure bag and any Emergency Ballot Bag(s) to the Secure Storage Room.

Election Day:

1. On Election Day, the Early Voting vDrive secure bag, any Emergency Ballot Bag(s) and mail ballots will be delivered to the CCS by a Sheriff Deputy.
2. After closing polls on Election Day, the Election Day Election Judge will deliver paper ballots (in ballot transport bag(s)), emergency ballot(s) (in ballot emergency ballot transfer red bag(s)), and vDrive (in Scan) to the Elections Department intake location (Elections Warehouse).
3. Elections Department intake personnel will verify the seals on ballot bags, emergency ballot bag, and Scan are the same as the seal numbers on the seal log.
4. Assistant Tabulation Supervisor removes vDrive from Scan and secures in vDrive in a secure bag for CCS.
5. Assistant Tabulation Supervisor then delivers the vDrives secure bag and any Emergency Ballot Bag(s) to the Tabulation Room where the Tabulation Supervisor will read the vDrives.
6. As the media is read into the central accumulator, the Presiding Judge, Central Counting Station Manager or designee shall verify that the vote totals on the electronic media match the vote totals on the printed results tape.
7. The Tabulation Supervisor will periodically be releasing to the public via the Election Night Reporting program SCYTL online and posted on the website.

**F. SECURITY PROCEDURES:**

- A Licensed Peace Officer will be posted to ensure the security of ballot boxes containing voted ballots throughout the period of tabulation at the central counting station. (*TEC, Sec. 127.1232 (a)*)
- Live video streaming will be available for public access on our website during the time the SVC, EVBB and CCS convenes. (*TEC, Sec. 127.1232 (b) (c)*).

**G. GENERAL CONDUCT RULES:**

1. Follow all rules and regulations as per Texas Election Code, Hidalgo County and Hidalgo County Elections Department.
2. Be courteous and respectful to all.
3. The CCS Manager, Tabulation Supervisor, CCS Presiding Judge, state inspector, or voting system technician may use devices that are capable of recording sound or images.
4. A poll watcher may not be accepted for service if the watcher has possession of a device capable of recording images or sound unless the watcher agrees to disable or deactivate the device. The presiding judge may inquire whether a watcher has possession of any prohibited recording device before accepting the watcher for service. *(TEC, Sec. 33.051 (c))*
5. A poll watcher may not leave during voting hours on election day without the presiding judge's permission if the counting of ballots at the central counting station has begun to use such devices. *(TEC, Sec. 33.055 (b))*

**H. POLL WATCHERS:**

1. A poll watcher serving at a central counting station may be present at any time the station is open for the purpose of processing or preparing to process election results and until the election officers complete their duties at the station." *(TEC, Sec. 33.055 (a))*
2. A watcher may not leave during voting hours on election day without the presiding judge's permission if the counting of ballots at the central counting station has begun. *(TEC, Sec. 33.055 (b))*
3. The poll watcher must deliver their certificates of appointment and completion for the SOS Poll Watcher Training to the Presiding Judge. *(TEC, Sec. 33.051 (1) (2))*
4. All activities of poll watcher(s) shall comply with Texas Election Code, Sections 33.0015, 33.055, 33.056, 33.057, 33.058, 33.060 and the current *Poll Watchers Guide* issued by the Secretary of State.

**I. TESTING PROCEDURES:**

- Testing must be conducted three times for each election. *(TEC, Sec. 127.093 (a))*
- 1<sup>st</sup> TEST shall be conducted at least 48 hours before the automatic tabulating equipment is used to count ballots voted in the election. *(TEC, Sec. 127.093 (b))*
- 2<sup>nd</sup> TEST shall be conducted immediately before the counting of ballots with the equipment begins. *(TEC, Sec. 127.093 (c))*
- 3<sup>rd</sup> TEST shall be conducted immediately after the counting of ballots with the equipment is completed. *(TEC, Sec. 127.093 (d))*

**J. DUPLICATION PROCEDURES:**

The manager of a central counting station may have ballots duplicated for automatic counting. *(TEC, Sec. 127.126 (a))*

1. The duplicated ballot must be clearly labeled "Duplicate" and must bear the serial number of the original ballot. *(TEC, Sec. 127.126 (e))*
2. The duplicated shall be substituted for the original ballot in the ballots prepared for automatic counting. The original shall be preserved with the other voted ballots for the same period. *(TEC, Sec. 127.126 (f))*
3. The duplicate ballot will then be created by the *Presiding Judge* and CCS clerks

**K. ADJUDICATION PROCEDURES/ RESOLVING VOTER INTENT:**

The CCS Presiding Judge is responsible for resolving questions of voter intent at the central counting station. If a voter's ballot contains ambiguous markings, then the CCS Presiding Judge will determine the voter's intent and the ballot will be counted according to that intent. *(TEC, Secs. 65.009 & 127.005)*

1. The Presiding Judge will make a determination of voter intent prior to duplication of a ballot. The duplication process can be performed manually using hand-marked ballots or can be performed using electronic ballot marking devices.  
*(TEC, Secs. 127.005 & 127.126)*
2. The duplicate ballot will then be created by the Presiding Judge and CCS clerks in the manner in which the voter intent was deciphered.
3. After the ballot is duplicated and the ballots have been approved for counting by the CCS Manager, the duplicate ballot will be counted using the automatic tabulating equipment. *(TEC, Sec. 127.126 (a))*

**L. TABULATION PROCEDURES:**

Early Voting Ballot Board meets at Central Counting Station after early voting ends where they will start the process of getting the early voted ballots by mail ready to be counted:

Early Voting:

- a. Keys are delivered with the transport of the Ballot Boxes to Early Voting Ballot Board Judge by a Sheriff/ Constable Deputy (or if he/she is on the ballot then from the County Judge).
- b. The Presiding and Alternate Judges will verify the seal numbers listed on the Record of Early Voting Ballot Seals form and then break the seal on the mail ballot box(es).
- c. Early Voting Clerk presents the list of persons that voted by mail.
- d. Ballot by mail applications and carriers are reviewed by the EVBB. (See EVBB handbook for more details on rules and regulations)
- e. The Presiding Judge or CCS Manager will designate CCS clerks to create batches of 25 to be scanned at a time.
- f. The Presiding Judge and Tabulation Supervisor will complete the 2<sup>nd</sup> Testing of the Tabulation Equipment.
- g. All scanned ballots will be reviewed by the software which will identify any that need to be adjudicated by the EVBB (under-votes, over-votes, damaged, etc.).

Election Day:

- a. The Early Voting vDrive(s) will then be read into Verity Count for addition to the database.
- b. The Tabulation Supervisor will confirm that the number of vDrives read into the system is accurate.
- c. All of Early Voting vDrives and absentees received up to that point, may be tabulated, results will not be released prior to 7pm and released once all Election Day locations have closed.

**M. RECONCILIATION:**

The process for comparing the number of voters who voted and the number of ballots cast in three categories:

1. **Early Voting in Person** – Compare the number of early voting check-ins to the total number of ballots cast. *(TEC, Sec. 127.007 (b))*
2. **Early Voting By Mail** – Compare the number of ballots entered on the “Ballot Transmittal Form” from the early voting ballot board to the number of ballots counted. *(TEC, Secs. 87.021 (5), 87.1221 (a))*
3. **Election Day** – Compare the number of election day check-ins to the total number of ballots cast. *(TEC, Sec. 127.007(b))*

**NOTE 1:** Upon completion of reading all vDrives from the secure bag into the OFFICIAL tabulation computer to tally the totals, the Tabulation Supervisor will print UNOFFICIAL reports from Count.

**NOTE 2:** The Presiding Judge of the CCS shall provide and attest to a written reconciliation of votes and voters at the close of tabulation for election day and again after the CCS meets for the last time to process late-arriving ballots by mail and provisional ballots.

**N. GENERATING RESULTS:**

The Tabulation Supervisor and the Assistant Tabulation Supervisor are the only ones authorized to operate the automatic tabulating equipment or handle ballots that are automatically counted. After the counting of ballots (or accumulation of vote totals) has occurred, the Tabulation Supervisor and Assistant Tabulation Supervisor of the CCS are responsible for preparing the reports.

The unofficial election results shall be released as soon as available after the polls close on Election Day. The Elections Administrator will withhold the release of unofficial results until all election day polling locations have closed. *(TEC, Sec. 121.1311)*

Unofficial election results will be released via Hidalgo County’s Election Night Results SCYTL and CivicPlus webpages, beginning no earlier than 7:00 p.m. Election Day results will be released incrementally as processed through acceptance and tabulation until all results are in. *(TEC, Sec. 121.1311)*

**O. REPORTING RESULTS TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE (if applicable):**

For certain elections, including primary elections, the general election for state and county officers, and constitutional amendment elections, the SOS is required to tabulate the unofficial results statewide. *(TEC, Sec. 68.001 (a) (b))*

This information can be reported to the SOS through their online portal or via telephone.

1. The Assistant Tabulation Supervisor will prepare reports with the requested totals for the Secretary of State.
2. Elections Administrator will report the totals to the Secretary of State using the SOS online portal (TEAM) or via telephone as appropriate.

**P. CONVENING OF BALLOT BOARD FOR PROVISIONAL, LATE-ARRIVING MAIL, & CORRECTIVE ACTION MAIL:**

The CCS will convene again after election day to process late-arriving mail ballots and provisional ballots before the final results of the election are canvassed.

There are five categories of ballots that may require the CCS to reconvene after election day.

1. Provisional Ballots: The voter registrar has until the ninth day after election day to complete their review of provisional ballots. After the voter registrar's review, the EVBB will meet to determine whether the provisional ballot will be accepted or rejected. *(TEC, Sec. 65.051(a))*
2. Late-Arriving Domestic Ballots: Ballots from domestic voters (from non-military voters and from any military voters who submitted an ABBM) will still be considered timely if they are postmarked by 7 p.m. on election day and are received by the early voting clerk by 5 p.m. of the first business day after election day. *(TEC, Secs. 86.007(a) & 87.125(a))*
3. Late-Arriving Overseas/Non-Military Ballots: Ballots that were submitted from outside the United States by voters who applied for the ballot using an ABBM or by non-military voters who applied for the ballot using an FPCA, must be received by the early voting clerk by the 5th day after election day. *(TEC, Secs. 86.007(d), 87.125(a))*
4. Late-Arriving Military Ballots: Ballots mailed by military voters using an FPCA must be received by the early voting clerk no later than the 6th day after election day. *(TEC, Secs. 87.125(a) & 101.057)*
5. Ballots by Mail in Corrective Action Process: If there is a curable defect on the voter's carrier envelope for a ballot by mail, the voter must correct the defect with the early voting clerk no later than the 6th day after election day. *(TEC, Secs. 87.0271 & 87.0411)*

The last day that the EVBB may meet to accept or reject provisional ballots, late-arriving ballots by mail, and ballots by mail that have been corrected through the corrective action process is the 9th day after election day (for most elections) or the 13th day after election day (for the general election for state and county officers). If the EVBB or the CCS needs to meet after that date, then they will need a court order to do so. *(TEC, Sec. 87.125)*

**Q. DELIVERY OF MATERIALS TO THE GENERAL CUSTODIAN OF ELECTION RECORDS:**

The completion of the Election the voted ballots, electronic media, election records, and election equipment will be retained by this office for the retention period, who is the general custodian of election records.

**R. PUBLICATION:**

- The central counting station plan must be made available to the public on request no later than 5pm of the fifth day before election day. *(TEC, Sec. 127.007 (c))*
- The central counting station plan will be available on our website:  
[www.hidalgocounty.us/elections](http://www.hidalgocounty.us/elections)