# STEALING. AMERICA.
# Vote. by. Vote.

## Learn What Activities Can Be Observed

Each of the activities listed here is summarized below. A chart to help prioritize monitoring projects follows those summaries.

### A. Before the Election

1. Ballot Design
2. Preparation of operation of tabulating devices, programming and testing
3. Logic and Accuracy Testing
4. Absentee/Vote by Mail Ballot processing
5. Pollworker training

### B. On Election Day

1. Poll opening/set-up procedures
2. The polls as either a poll worker or a poll watcher
3. Poll closing procedures

### C. After the Polls Close & After Election Day

1. Chain of custody of ballots and memory cards
2. Central Count Election Night
3. Absentee/Vote by Mail Ballot processing.
4. Provisional Ballot processing
5. Rewriting of ballots
6. Auditing
7. Reconciliation activities

## Summary of Monitoring Activities

### A. Before the Election

### 1. Review Ballot Design

High priority. Although this isn't technically observing – i.e., watching someone do something – it is a very important activity to do prior to an election. Ballots are designed and printed 60-90 days before an election. Printed paper ballots are sent to voters for absentee/vote by mail voting and, depending on the voting system used at the polls, may be used on election day as well. The layout could cause the ballot to be misread by an optical scanner. There are numerous other potential problems. An excellent discussion of this has been prepared by Black Box Voting. See pages 6 and 23 of this Toolkit.

**2. Observe preparation and operation of tabulation devices programming, and testing**

Medium . This process is requires a high time commitment, very specialized person. County or jurisdiction elections officials will most likely balk at letting this be observed in any close up, meaningful manner.

**3. Observe logic and accuracy testing**

Low to medium priority. The testing itself is superficial. It's a good way to look at the machines in advance, especially if you have not been a poll worker before and don't plan to be in November. Sometimes systems display failures in the field that should have been caught at this step and it is good information to know.

**4. Observe absentee ballot/vote by mail processing**

Variable priority* depending on percentage of votes cast in this manner. Observability is limited. The most important thing you can see here is the chain of custody of the ballots and see if it would be easy to misplace or lose trays of ballots.

**5. Observe pollworker training**

Medium to high priority. The security measures for the machines and how to deal with problems should be covered here. If they are not, it is a red flag for either incompetence or willfulness. It is also useful to see if there is a lot of propaganda in the training re. Paper vs. paperless voting and if there is anything taught that is an election code violation.

## B. On Election Day

**1. Observe poll opening/set-up procedures**

Low to medium priority. You will most likely upset the pollworkers and make them very nervous. Must be able to get up very early in the morning. If your county or jurisdiction is using new equipment for the first time, this is a time when lots of problems happen that would be good to document.

**2. Observe voting at the polls**

High priority. All of the above reasons, especially #1. Best done as a poll worker.

**3. Observe poll closing**

High priority. Here is your chance to get the fresh data on results, to see if there are reconcile problems between number of votes and number of people who signed into to vote, etc. All of the above reasons, especially #1 and very important for reconcile.

## C. After the Polls Close & After Election Day

**1. Observe chain of custody of ballots and memory cards**

High priority. This has a high deterrent effect. There are areas you might not be allowed into to see what is going on.

## 2. Central Count Election Night

High priority. You need to be able to commit to stay up all night for this. First you will watch the ballots and memory cards be brought in from the polls and go to the central tabulator. If you are fortunate, you may actually be able to see the tabulator screen. Periodically, the elections official will release results so that the press and candidates know what is happening. It is important to keep these and watch carefully for sudden changes or vote totals decreasing, which they shouldn't.  It is very important to document if vendors come in to fix things or if you notice the staff getting agitated. The computers have been known to crash or have other problems. Mostly you sit around and watch computers and bathe in the anxiety of candidates and media that want to meet a news deadline. Excellent details on Election night observing can be found in the Black Box Voting 2006 Toolkit.

## 3. Absentee/Vote by Mail Processing

Priority depends on the percent of Vote by Mail ballots in your local jurisdiction. In California, for example, over 50% of the votes are absentee. The main steps in the process are signature verification, envelope opening, ballot unfolding and crucial sorting tasks. Signature verification can be done either electronically or manually. Although Vote by Mail election results are not be released until the polls close, state laws vary on whether or not these ballots can be counted in advance of election day . Note: Chain of custody cannot be observed or verified in a Vote by Mail system.

## 4. Provisional Ballot Processing

Medium priority. Provisional ballots are researched one by one by the elections staff. Some elections officials will not count the votes if there is any problem at all with the information on the envelope or with the envelope itself. Others will do their best to qualify as many votes as possible.

## 5. Rewriting of Ballots

High priority. Ballots that are determined to be unreadable by the machine due to extraneous marks or other problems are re-written on a fresh ballot.  Thousands of ballots in just one county can be re-written. Observers, especially partisan observers, should watch this to confirm the accuracy of the re-write.

## 6. Observe Audit

High. This takes several days so there should be many people to do this and show up randomly to check on activities. This is supposed to be our main safeguard and it is our only chance to really see people counting votes. The DREs are particularly hard to hand tally and #4 is an important reason for doing this. Clerks and officials may try to bypass the law and make it easier on themselves to count. With no one watching, there is nothing to stop him or her.

## 7. Reconciliation Activities

High. What is done by the elections officials and is mandatory under the law are two different things. Not enough attention is paid here, yet this is where the rubber hits the road. A dedicated team should be in place ready to do analysis and report results as

soon as they can. Computers and people that can handle large files and quantities of data are needed. Also people who are good at nitpicking details.

## **Choosing Which Activities and Processes to Monitor**

Use the following chart to help you choose monitoring projects based on importance, what is allowed in your state, your time available and the number of people you have available. Note: not all of these activities apply in all jurisdictions.

## PRE-ELECTION

| Event | Priority | Timing | Amount of time | Who | Qty people |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Equipment Prep | Medium | Weekdays, possibly weekends one month prior. | Significant | Technical person | 2/county |
| Logic and Accuracy Testing | Low to medium | Weekdays one month prior. | A lot for a few days | Anyone | 2/county |
| Absentee Ballot processing | Medium | Weekdays one month prior | Off and on for many days | Anyone | 2/county |
| Poll worker training | High | Days or evening or weekend one month prior. | 3 hours | Anyone | 2/county |

## ELECTION

| Event | Priority | Timing | Amount of time | Who | Qty people |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Poll set up | Medium | Typically 6AM-8AM election day. Check your county or jurisdiction. | 2 hours | Anyone | 1-2/precinct |
| Poll watching | High | Typically 7AM-8PM election day. Check your county or jurisdiction. | Off and on all day | Anyone | 1-2/precinct |
| Poll Closing | High | Typically 8PM-10PM election day. Check your county or jurisdiction. | 2 hours | Anyone | 1-2/precinct |

# POST ELECTION

| Event | Priority | Timing | Amount of time | Who | Qty people |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Chain of Custody | High | Typically 8PM-12PM election day | 4 hours | Anyone with a car. | 1/precinct - 2/accumulation site |
| Central Count Election Night | High | Typically 8PM - 8AM election day | 12 hours | Anyone, technical | 3, trade off for staying up all night. |
| Absentee Ballot Processing* | Medium | November all month | 2 hours | Anyone | 1 |
| Provisional Ballot Processing | Medium | November all month | 2 hours | Anyone | 1 |
| Re-writing of ballots | High | November all month | 8 hours | Anyone | 2, trade off |
| Auditing** | High | Starts typically one week after the election. | Off and on 2 days | Anyone. Statisticians. | 2/day |
| Reconcile activities | Low to medium | Nov 4th until election is certified | 1-2 hrs per day | Technical, accounting, audit | 1 |

*NOTE: The importance of Absentee and Vote by Mail processing will vary depending on the number of votes cast by these methods which will vary by state. For example, in California over 50% of the votes are vote by mail thus monitoring of the handling of these votes is of high importance. Some states have no vote by mail, only limited absentee voting, and it would make no sense to concentrate any efforts there. Project Vote Smart has information about absentee and vote by mail laws in each state.

**NOTE: Most states do not audit their results. Citizens for Election Integrity MN has compiled a reference guide on state audit requirements.

**Now return to the monitoring guide for next steps.**

# The Vote You Save May Be Your Own!