



Texas Secretary of State
ELECTIONS DIVISION



Running a Flawless Post-Election Hand Count Audit

44th Annual
Election Law Seminar
for County Election Officials

August 10–12, 2026



Texas Secretary of State
ELECTIONS DIVISION



The Law



Partial Manual Count is Now Post-Election Hand Count Audit

SB 827 passed both houses and signed by Governor

Effective Sept. 1, 2025, the Partial Manual Count is now known as the Post-Election Hand Count Audit



Post-Election Hand Count Audit Requirement

All counties and local political subdivisions that tabulate voting system ballots electronically are required to conduct the Post-Election Hand Count Audit



Other Political Subdivisions Contracting with County

In elections conducted jointly with your political subdivisions, a separate Post-Election Hand Count Audit for the political subdivision elections will **NOT** be required if the political subdivision shares a joint ballot with the county

In this instance, the Post-Election Hand Count Audit for the county will serve as the political subdivision's required Post-Election Hand Count Audit

Local political subdivisions should check with their county elections office to determine whether they or the county will be conducting their Post-Election Hand Count Audit

Political subdivisions in counties participating in the Countywide Polling Place Program will have to select **three** polling locations to conduct their Post-Election Hand Count Audit



Conducting the Post-Election Hand Count Audit

The Post-Election Hand Count Audit must be conducted after every election using paper ballots counted with an electronic voting system. **This includes marked paper ballots and paper ballots generated by a ballot marking device.**

It includes all ballots that were counted with a precinct or central scanner and reported as part of your unofficial results on election night. It also includes:

- Early voting in person and by mail ballots that were counted with a precinct scanner or central scanner.
- Ballots cast on a paperless DRE are exempt from the Post-Election Hand Count Audit.



Initial Steps of the Post-Election Hand Count Audit

For the Nov. 3, 2026 General Election, the SOS must select polling locations and precincts to be counted.

- Three election day polling locations and three early voting locations or one percent of the election day polling locations and one percent of the early voting locations, whichever is greater, will be selected
- No more than three offices or measures must be designated for the count



General Custodian Role In the Post-Election Hand Count Audit

General custodian must conduct a manual count of all races contained on the ballots by mail in at least one percent of the precincts in which a ballot by mail was cast and in which the ballot were counted using automatic tabulating equipment **OR** in three precincts, whichever is greater.

- Precincts must be selected at random.



Selection of Polling Locations/Precincts - Random

The general custodian may select additional polling locations for early voting and election day and additional precincts for ballots by mail through a random selection process.

- The general custodian should follow the guidelines used to randomly select polling locations and precincts for the initial Post-Election Hand Count Audit.
- These guidelines are discussed in more detail in the Post-Election Hand Count Audit Handbook.



Selection of Polling Locations/Precincts - Turnout

The general custodian may select additional polling locations for early voting and election day, or additional precincts for ballots by mail with the highest voter turnout.

- For voting by mail, the general custodian may focus on precincts with the largest number of accepted ballots by mail.



Selection of Polling Locations/Precincts - Discrepancy

If reconciliation documentation indicates that a discrepancy exists between the number of votes cast at a polling location (or in a ballot by mail precinct) and the number of ballots counted, the general custodian is authorized to add the precincts or polling locations to the Post-Election Hand Count Audit.

- The general custodian must document the reason or reasons for adding the additional polling locations or precincts to the Post-Election Hand Count Audit.



Early Voting Ballot Board Role In the Post-Election Hand Count Audit

General custodian must designate members of the EVBB to perform the Post-Election Hand Count Audit

If a member or members of the EVBB are unable to serve, the general custodian may appoint other individuals



Who Can Attend the Post-Election Hand Count Audit?

Each person entitled to appoint watchers in the election may attend

Each person may have a watcher present

- Each watcher must deliver a certificate of appointment to the presiding judge “at the time” the watcher reports for service
- Each watcher must satisfy the same requirements to be a watcher in Chapter 33



Video Surveillance of Post-Election Hand Count Audit

- Counties with populations of 100,000+ must implement a video surveillance system of all areas containing voted ballots until the canvass of precinct election returns.
- In counties with the video surveillance requirement and counties that have voluntarily implemented video surveillance, this will mean that the Post-Election Hand Count Audit will be conducted under video surveillance if the Post-Election Hand Count Audit is conducted prior to the canvass.

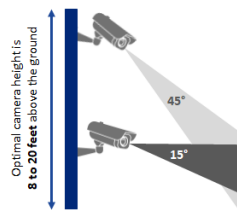


**Texas Secretary of State**
ELECTIONS DIVISION

**VIDEO SURVEILLANCE
RECOMMENDATIONS**

In counties with a population of 100,000 or more, the general custodian of election records is required to maintain a video surveillance system and a continuous livestream of all areas containing voted ballots. This recording must begin from the time voted ballots are delivered to the SVC, EVBB, or CCS—whichever occurs first—and must remain continuous and publicly accessible at no cost to the viewer until the local canvass of election results is complete. Although the livestream requirement is mandatory for covered entities, its design and implementation are left to the discretion of the entity running the election. **Therefore, the following items are recommendations only, intended to assist in evaluating the current setup or implementing an effective system.**

Camera Positions



- An effective camera angle between **15° and 45°**
- Camera height determines how far focal point is from the camera's center

Camera Height	Focal-Point Distance (min/max)
8 feet	4.6 feet – 8 feet
10 feet	5.8 feet – 10 feet
12 feet	7 feet – 12 feet
14 feet	8 feet – 14 feet
16 feet	9.2 feet – 16 feet
20 feet	11.5 feet – 20 feet

Camera Specifications



- Lens:** 2.8mm or 4 mm
- Frame Rate:** 15 to 30 frames per second (FPS)
- Resolution:** 2MP (1080p), 4MP (1440p), 5MP (1920p), or 8MP (4K/2160p)
- Compression:** H.264 offers universal compatibility while H.265 is more efficient but requires a powerful computer
- Either **analog, network, or wireless** models

Connectivity

- 25/3 Mbps** (download/upload): Basic HD streaming and office work
- 100/20 Mbps** (download/upload): 4K conferencing and cloud backups

Types of Cameras

Camera Type	Description
Dome	Obscured lens direction makes it hard to tell where it's pointing
Analog	Provides an effective, low-complexity security solution
Transport Video Interface (TVI)	Allows for high-definition video transmission using standard analog cables
Action	Durable construction with automated "one-button" recording
Wireless and Digital/Internet Protocol (IP)	Ideal for areas where running data cables is impossible
Fisheye	Captures a complete 360° by 180° field of view
Bullet	Less conspicuous than larger models and works well at many depths
Pan-Tilt-Zoom (PTZ)	Can pan, tilt, and zoom to cover large areas with fewer units
Turret	Ball-and-socket design allows for simple installation and many angles

Video Storage

- Consider size of hard drives required for storing footage
- Influenced by desired resolution, days' worth of footage to be retained, frame rate, compression method, and total number of cameras





Starting the Post-Election Hand Count Audit

Entities will receive a separate email prior to election day from SOS with information specific to the Post-Election Hand Count Audit.

Once notified, the general custodian of election records will post notice of the date, hour, and place of the count.



Starting the Post-Election Hand Count Audit

The general custodian must begin the Post-Election Hand Count Audit **within 72 hours** after the polls close on election day.

The Post-Election Hand Count Audit must be completed no later than the **21st day after election day** (Tuesday, Nov. 24, 2026).

Results of the Post-Election Hand Count Audit **must be posted** on the county's website in the same location where election returns and results are posted.



Opening the Ballot Box

You are not required to petition a district judge for permission to retrieve the ballots when conducting the Post-Election Hand Count Audit, since this is a procedure that is required by law.

- When you have designated to begin the Post-Election Hand Count Audit, you should arrange access to the ballots for the selected precincts.
- Before conducting the Post-Election Hand Count Audit, the general custodian of election records should coordinate with the Custodian of Keys to receive the keys to the ballot boxes, or to be present for the opening of the ballot boxes
- Following the Post-Election Hand Count Audit, all election material must be re-secured and returned to the appropriate authority.



Counting the Ballots

Counties and local political subdivisions should consider preparing written procedures that explain how to conduct the Post-Election Hand Count Audit step-by-step in their respective political subdivision

Each counting team should pull and tally their ballot box, use preprinted tally sheets, and ensure accuracy before submission

It is recommended that teams of 2-3 people retrieve the ballots that are part of the Post-Election Hand Count Audit and hand count those ballots

At all times relevant to the count, the general custodian of election records must take every precaution necessary ***to protect the confidentiality and security of the ballots cast by the voters***



Counting the Ballots

Each counting team must consist of at least two people.

Three original tally sheets are required. These tally lists should be completely filled out and include the following information:

- Names and offices of candidates and/or propositions;
- Date;
- Precinct number or polling location; and
- Name of presiding judge.

No marks should be made on any ballot by any person during the counting process. In the event a ballot is not counted, a separate log containing the ballot number and reason(s) for not counting the ballot should be maintained.



Counting the Ballots

If the ballots were not previously pre-sorted by the EVBB or the staff of the general custodian of election records, then the counting officers should open the ballot box containing voted ballots as soon as it is received.

The officer designated as the caller should remove the ballots from the ballot box.

The caller must read and distinctly announce, to the officers keeping the tally lists (the talliers) each name of a candidate or proposition for which there is a vote.

When counting ballots, remember to count only those races and ballot measures which are a part of the Post-Election Hand Count Audit.



Valid vs. Invalid Ballots

The failure of a voter to mark his or her ballot in strict conformity with the Election Code does not invalidate the ballot.

The failure of a voter to vote a full ballot does not invalidate the ballot.

Marking the ballot by marking through the names of candidates for whom or the statements beside the proposition for which the voter does not desire to vote does not invalidate the ballot.



Valid vs. Invalid Ballots

The intent of the voter in marking a ballot may be determined by:

- A distinguishing mark adjacent to the name of a candidate or political party or a voting choice associated with a proposition;
- An oval, box, or similar marking clearly drawn around the name of a candidate or political party or a voting choice associated with a proposition;
- A line drawn through:
 - The names of all candidates in a manner that indicates a preference for the candidates not marked if the names of the candidates not marked do not exceed the number of persons that may be elected to that office;
 - The name of each political party except one in a manner that clearly indicates a preference for the political party not marked;
 - A voting choice associated with a proposition in a manner that clearly indicates a preference for the other voting choice associated with the proposition; or
- Any other evidence that clearly indicates the intent of the voter in choosing a candidate or political party or deciding on a proposition.



Valid vs. Invalid Ballots

**A ballot is not counted
in the Post-Election
Hand Count Audit if:**

- The intent of the voter cannot be determined for any races or propositions on the ballot.
- Two or more marked ballots are folded together in a manner indicating that they were folded together.
- The ballot is not numbered and the presiding judge determines that the ballot was not provided at the polling place.
- The ballot was never deposited in the ballot box.



Replacing Counting Team Members

A member of the counting team should not be replaced after vote tallying has begun unless each existing discrepancy among the three tally lists is corrected before the replacement is made.

If a counting officer is replaced on a counting team after the tallying is begun, the officer to be replaced should certify the accuracy of the list the officer has kept, as of the time of replacement, by signing the list at that time.



Conducting the Post-Election Hand Count Audit for Countywide Polling Place Counties

For counties that are participating in the Countywide Polling Place Program, for the election day count, they will complete the Post-Election Hand Count Audit by polling place.

Early voting ballots now required to be counted by polling place in countywide counties. The selected polling places must be counted for early voting ballots cast in-person.



Conducting the Post-Election Hand Count Audit for Countywide Polling Place Counties

At the convening of the Post-Election Hand Count Audit, the general custodian of election records must identify the applicable ballot boxes containing voted ballots subject to the Post-Election Hand Count Audit

For the selected polling places, the general custodian of election records with at least one individual of the counting team must inspect the ballot boxes to verify that all locks and seals are intact



Counties Using Direct Recording Electronic Voting Systems

Effective Sept. 1, 2026, DREs that do not have a paper record will no longer be permitted for use in Texas elections unless the device is used ONLY for curbside voting.

When entering information into the results, place zeroes "0" in the columns for election and early voting in person.

Still required to conduct a Post-Election Hand Count Audit for mail ballots.



Resolving Discrepancies

If there are discrepancies between the hand count and the voting system reports, the general custodian of election records, in consultation with the EVBB, must attempt to determine what caused the discrepancy.

When investigating a discrepancy, start with the hand counted ballots.

- Verify that the number of ballots in each batch of ballots matches the expected totals from the voting system count, and that no ballots were missed when retrieving ballots from their ballot boxes and that no ballot boxes were overlooked.
- Check that each stack of ballots is from the correct precinct or polling place, and sorted into the correct stacks for that precinct or polling place.
- Recount the pulled ballots to double check that the hand count is accurate.
- If any changes are being made to tally sheets, be sure to document what the change is and why it took place.



Resolving Discrepancies

After the hand count has been reviewed, the general custodian of election records should ensure that the most current version of the results report is being used.

- Checking the cast vote records can also tell you how an individual ballot was counted by the voting system, but it may be a challenge to track down.

In counties with hand-marked ballots inserted into precinct scanners or central scanners, there may be some ballots interpreted by the voting system as an overvote or an undervote, but when viewed manually the voter's intent is clear.

If the discrepancy cannot be resolved, the general custodian of election records should document the discrepancy and any efforts to resolve it.



Completing the Post-Election Hand Count Audit

The Post-Election Hand Count Audit must be completed no later than the 21st day after election day.

No later than the third day after the date the Post-Election Hand Count Audit is completed, the general custodian of election records must deliver a written report of the results to the SOS.

Results of the Post-Election Hand Count Audit must also be posted on the county's website in the same location where election returns and results are posted.



Completing the Post-Election Hand Count Audit

If you are a local entity conducting your own election, and therefore performing your own Post-Election Hand Count Audit, you are still required to submit the results to the SOS and to the county to post on the county's website.

It is recommended that the local entity also post a link from its website to the county's website where the results are posted.



Public Information

Records of the Post-Election Hand Count Audit are publicly available, and must be retained for the standard 22-month period. When storing records, keep related Post-Election Hand Count Audit paperwork together in well-labeled boxes, separated from other election records.



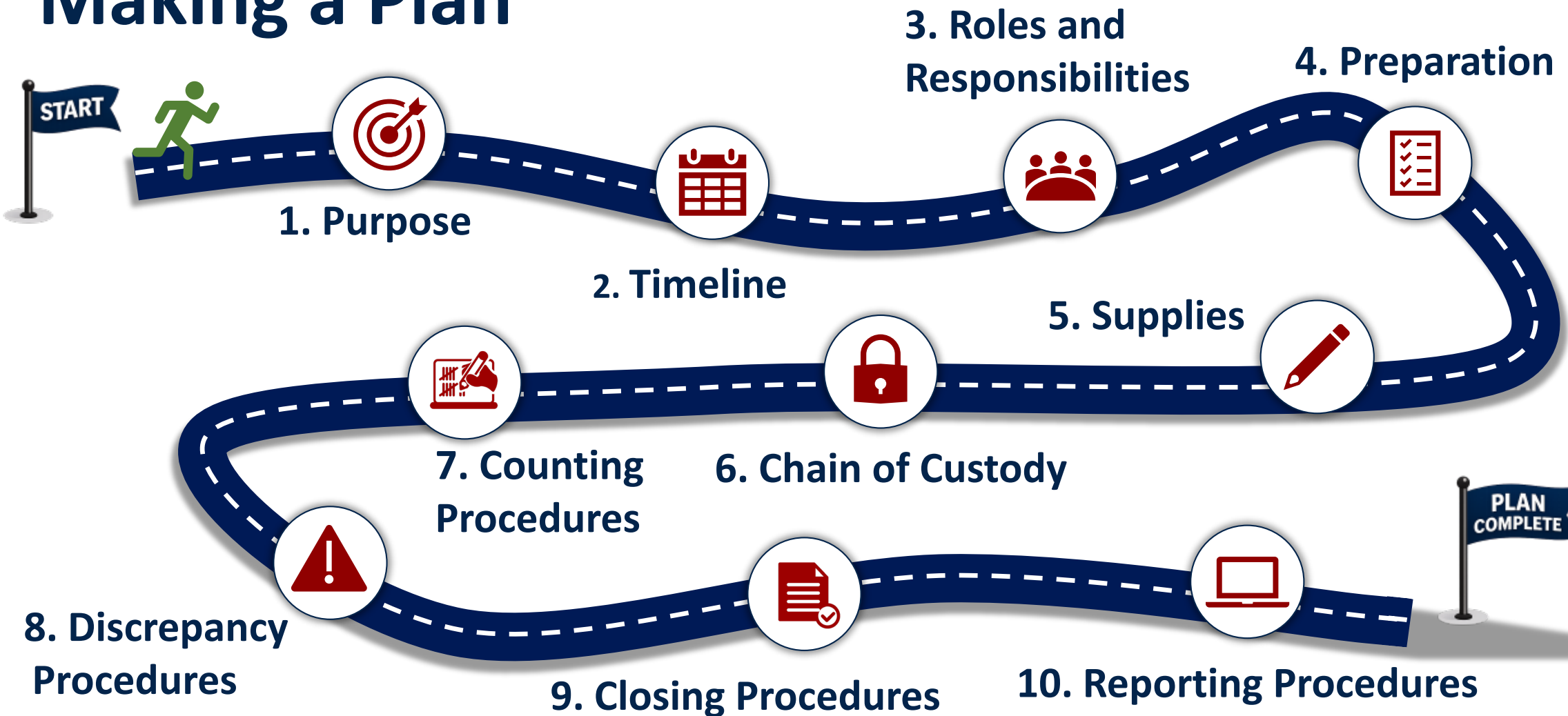
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The Audit



Making a Plan





Review the Email



Selected Races



Selected Polling Locations



Audit Instructions



Required Forms



Submission Deadline



Contact Information

Read it
COMPLETELY
before you
begin!

Dear Seabreeze County,

As a reminder, procedures for conducting the Post-Election Hand Count Audit and submission of the results are indicated below. For additional information, you may refer to [Advisory No. 2025-21: Post-Election Hand Count Audit Changes \(SB 827\)](#).

• Selection of Races

The Secretary of State's office has selected the following races for the Post-Election Hand Count Audit:

1. Seabreeze County Judge
2. Seabreeze County Clerk; and
3. One other contested race (if available) selected by the general custodian of election records.

• Selection of Polling Locations for Early Voting, Election Day and Precincts for Early Voting Ballot by Mail

The Secretary of State's office randomly selected polling locations for Early Voting and Election Day and precincts for Early Voting by Mail for each county and are included in the attached excel worksheets. In each worksheet there is a separate tab for Early Voting, Election Day and Ballot by Mail in the attached spreadsheets. If you have any questions related to polling locations/precincts selections, please contact our office.

• Submission of Results

To report your Post-Election Hand Count Audit results, please provide the following information to our office at elections@sos.texas.gov. Our office will review the submitted results and may reach out to your county for additional information or clarification, as needed.

- Record of the manual counts (Tally Sheet totals) and electronic results and explanation of discrepancies, if any (spreadsheets attached)
- Certification of Completed Post-Election Hand Count Audit
- A link to the results of the Post-Election Hand Count Audit which is posted on the county's website.

• Post-Election Hand Count Audit Timeline

- Start of the Post-Election Hand Count Audit - within seventy-two (72) hours after the polls close (November 6th).
- Completion of the Post-Election Hand Count Audit - The Post-Election Hand Count Audit must be completed no later than the 21st day after election day (November 24th)
- No later than the third day after the date the Post-Election Hand Count Audit is completed, the general custodian of election records shall deliver a written report of the results to the Secretary of State's Office (November 30th). Results of the Post-Election Hand Count Audit must also be posted on the county's website in the same location where election returns and results are posted.

The Post-Election Hand Count Audit is required for all entities that automatically tabulate their ballots using an optical/digital scanner. Optical/digital scanners are either precinct ballot counters or central scanners. Therefore, entities that hand counted their ballots are not authorized to conduct the Post-Election Hand Count Audit. If your county is not required to complete the Post-Election Hand Count Audit, please respond back to this email and we will update our records for this election.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact our office at (800) 252-2216 or elections@sos.texas.gov.



Additional Selections

Keep it **RANDOM**



Keep it **SIMPLE**



Keep it **FAIR**



DRAW FROM A HAT



DRAW FROM A BOX



USE A PROGRAM

The method used is not important—the process must be fair and random



Preparation



Give Notification

Notify
Stakeholders



Prepare Space

Workspace
Setup



Gather Supplies

Organization



Prepare Records

Gather
Election Data



Organization



Follow the Plan

Follow the written
audit procedures



Keep Away

Do not allow
food or drinks



Clear Workflow

Create a clear
workflow



Document

Document any
discrepancies



Voter Intent



If the voter's intent
is clear, the vote
should be counted

CLEAR INTENT—Count the Vote

Seabreeze County Judge

- ☐ ~~Surfer Dude~~
- ☐ ~~Sand Dune~~
- ☐ Sea Shell
- ☐ ~~Palm Tree~~

Seabreeze County Judge

- ☒ Surfer Dude
- ☐ Sand Dune
- ☐ Sea Shell
- ☐ Palm Tree



Counting

Call, Hashmark, and Verify

3 members

- 1 Caller
- 2 Talliers
- Caller keeps a tally sheet
- Caller announces every vote
- Talliers record all votes

Manual Sort and Stack

3 members

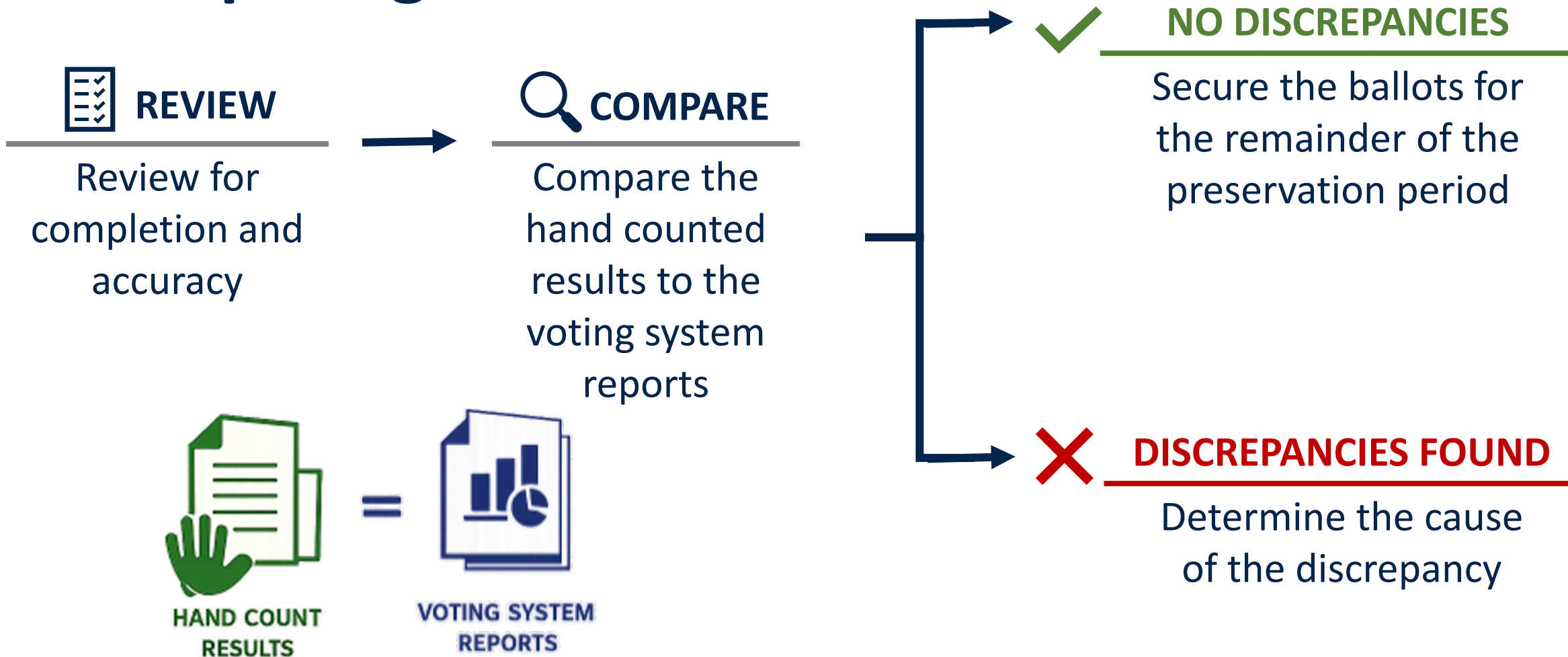
- 3 tally sheets
- Cover sheet for each ballot stack
- Baskets for candidates, overvotes, undervotes
- Sort ballots into the correct baskets
- Each team member counts each ballot stack
- Record preliminary totals on the cover sheet



Overvotes and
Undervotes **MUST**
be tallied

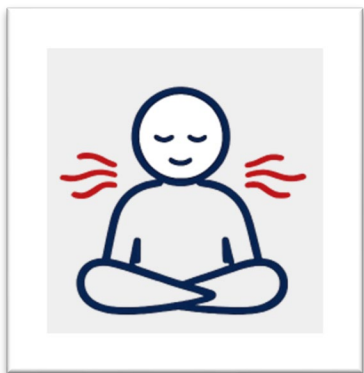


Comparing Results

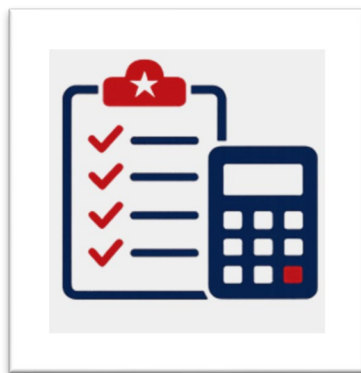




Resolving Discrepancies



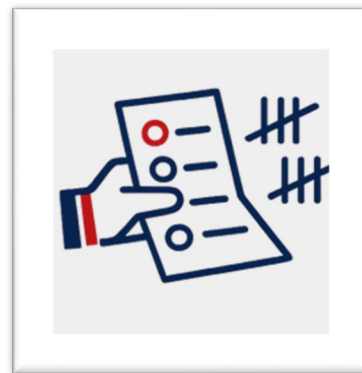
**Stay
Calm**



**Verify
Batches**



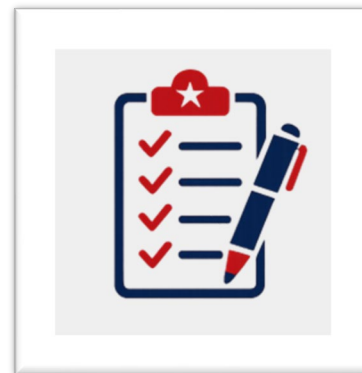
**Ballot
Boxes**



**Recount
Ballots**



**Different
Method**



**Document
Changes**



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The Report



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Reporting Post-Election Hand Count Audit Results



Use Your Post-Election Hand Count Audit Email as Reference

- **Submission of Results**

To report your Post-Election Hand Count Audit results, please provide the following information to our office at elections@sos.texas.gov. Our office will review the submitted results and may reach out to your county for additional information or clarification, as needed.

- Record of the manual counts (Tally Sheet totals) and electronic results and explanation of discrepancies, if any (spreadsheets attached)
- Certification of Completed Post-Election Hand Count Audit
- A link to the results of the Post-Election Hand Count Audit which is posted on the county's website.

- **Post-Election Hand Count Audit Timeline**

- Start of the Post-Election Hand Count Audit - within seventy-two (72) hours after the polls close (May 29th).
- Completion of the Post-Election Hand Count Audit - The Post-Election Hand Count Audit must be completed no later than the 21st day after election day (June 16th)
- No later than the third day after the date the Post-Election Hand Count Audit is completed, the general custodian of election records shall deliver a written report of the results to the Secretary of State's Office (June 22nd). Results of the Post-Election Hand Count Audit must also be posted on the county's website in the same location where election returns and results are posted.

The Post-Election Hand Count Audit is required for all entities that automatically tabulate their ballots using an optical/digital scanner. Optical/digital scanners are either precinct ballot counters or central scanners. Therefore, entities that hand counted their ballots are not authorized to conduct the Post-Election Hand Count Audit. If your county is not required to complete the Post-Election Hand Count Audit, please respond back to this email and we will update our records for this election.



What Should Your Submission Include?

- ✓ Record of the manual counts and electronic results and explanation of discrepancies, if any.
- ✓ Certification of completed Post-Election Hand Count Audit.
- ✓ A link to the results of the Post-Election Hand Count Audit which is posted on the county's website.



Texas Secretary of State
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Common Post-Election Hand Count Audit Submission Errors



Reason for Discrepancies Not Included

Assigned Race:	Mayor			
Election Day Polling Locations	Candidate Name	Electronically Tabulated Results	Hand Count (Tally Sheet Total)	Discrepancy
County Courthouse	John Johnson	32	32	0
	Robert Robertson	28	28	0
	Undervotes	0	0	0
	Overvotes	0	0	0
Local Library	John Johnson	40	40	0
	Robert Robertson	35	34	1
	Undervotes	0	1	-1
	Overvotes	0	0	0
Community Center	John Johnson	38	38	0
	Robert Robertson	40	40	0
	Undervotes	0	0	0
	Overvotes	0	0	0
Reason for Discrepancies:				

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Missing or Incomplete Documentation

**PEHCA
Results**

**Certification
Document**

**Link to the
County's Website**



Available Support



WEBINARS



TRAINING



RESOURCES

elections@sos.texas.gov

800-252-VOTE • 512-463-5650

sos.texas.gov