Texas Volunteer Deputy Registrar Guide

Texas Secretary *of* State
Elections Division

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INTRODUCTION

The Elections Division of the Office of the Secretary of State has prepared this guide for Volunteer Deputy Registrars in Texas. This serves as a guide for these volunteers and contains essential information, tips, and resources needed to confidently and accurately assist with voter registration.

Volunteer Deputy Registrars (VDRs) are individuals who generously give their time and effort to provide the opportunity to register to vote to eligible Texans. VDRs are appointed by voter registrars in each county pursuant to Chapter 13 of the Texas Election Code. As trained and certified volunteers, they ensure the registration process is accurate, accessible, and compliant with the law. VDRs are often the first point of contact for new voters, offering guidance and support with a friendly, nonpartisan approach.

A VDR's work empowers communities, boosts voting engagement, and helps every voice have the chance to be heard. Becoming a VDR is a meaningful way to make a difference – one voter at a time.

References in this guide are made to the appropriate sections in the Texas Election Code, unless otherwise indicated.

Visit sos.texas.gov, as well as votetexas.gov, for additional election information.

The Office of the Secretary of State does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, or disability in employment or the provision of services.

QUALIFICATIONS

To serve as a volunteer deputy registrar, individuals must meet certain qualifications to ensure they can carry out their responsibilities effectively and in accordance with the law. These requirements help maintain the integrity of the voter registration process and make sure that VDRs are well-equipped to assist citizens accurately and effectively.

To be appointed a volunteer deputy registrar, a person must:

- Be at least 18 years old;
- Be a United States citizen;
- Be a resident of the State of Texas.

To be appointed a volunteer deputy registrar, a person must not:

- Have been determined by a final judgment of a court exercising probate jurisdiction to be
  - Totally mentally incapacitated; or
  - Partially mentally incapacitated without the right to vote;
- Have been convicted of failing to deliver a voter registration application to a voter registrar;
- Have been finally convicted of a felony, or, if convicted, must have:
  - Fully discharged the sentence, including any term of incarceration, parole, or supervision, or completed a period of probation ordered by any court; or
  - Been pardoned or otherwise released from the resulting disability to vote; and
- Have been finally convicted of identity theft under Section 32.51 of the Penal Code.

HOW TO BECOME A VOLUNTEER DEPUTY REGISTRAR

Becoming a volunteer deputy registrar is a simple and rewarding process that allows you to play an active role by encouraging voter participation in your community. By completing a few key steps, you can become certified to help register voters in your county.

- Contact the voter registrar in your county. Visit the Secretary of State's website to find your voter registrar's contact information.
- The voter registrar will provide you with information on how training will be offered and completed.
- After completing training and passing an examination, if required, the voter registrar will appoint you as a volunteer deputy registrar and advise you of any county-specific procedures for processing voter registration applications and that the only requirements for voter registration are those prescribed by state law or by the Secretary of State.
- The voter registrar will issue you a certificate of appointment and give you a receipt book or voter registration applications with a tear-off receipt.

LENGTH OF APPOINTMENT

Period of Appointment

You may be appointed as a volunteer deputy registrar at any time of the year. There is no waiting period after receiving the certificate of appointment issued by the voter registrar. Once appointed, a VDR can immediately start offering their voter registration services.

Expiration of Appointment

All volunteer deputy registrar terms expire on December 31st of every even-numbered year. That means that as of January 1, 2025, all VDRs appointed in 2023 and 2024 must again complete training and an examination, if required, prior to being appointed as a VDR for the 2025-2026 biennium.

Termination

Your appointment as a volunteer deputy registrar may be terminated by the appointing authority if it is determined that you:

- Failed to properly review a voter registration application for completeness;
- Intentionally destroyed or physically altered a registration application; or
- Engaged in any other activity that conflicts with your responsibilities as a volunteer deputy registrar.

Your appointment as a volunteer deputy registrar will be terminated by the appointing authority if:

- You are finally convicted of an offense under the law relating to delivery of completed voter registration applications to the registrar; or
- You are finally convicted of an offense under the law relating to performance-based compensation for voter registrations.

Upon termination of appointment, all election materials issued to a volunteer deputy registrar, including the certificate of appointment, receipt books, receipts, VR applications and other forms in the volunteer deputy registrar's possession, must be returned or accounted for.

HOW TO BECOME A VDR IN MORE THAN ONE TEXAS COUNTY

If you are a VDR in one county and are interested in becoming a VDR in another county, you must submit a Request for Appointment as a Volunteer Deputy Registrar with the new county. The voter registrar in the new county will appoint you as a volunteer deputy registrar and advise you of any county-specific procedures for completing the duties of a volunteer deputy registrar. You are not required to retake the examination in the new county if you previously took the exam and received a certificate of appointment in another county.

HOW TO REQUEST VOTER REGISTRATION APPLICATIONS

Request Applications from Your Voter Registrar

VDRs can easily request voter registration applications from their individual counties by contacting their local voter registrar's office. A VDR can request an ample amount of applications with an accompanying number of receipts by either phone, email, or in person. Your county voter registrar should provide you with applications containing the county's return address. These applications should only be distributed to applicants residing in your county.

Find your county voter registrar's contact information here.

Print Applications from the SOS Website

If your county voter registrar does not have enough applications to provide to you, you may print blank applications for volunteer deputy registrars from the Secretary of State's website.

Find printable voter registration applications here.

ROLE OF A VOLUNTEER DEPUTY REGISTRAR

Checklist

Before you get started, be sure you have the following:

- A certificate of appointment;
- A sufficient number of voter registration applications;
- A blue or black ink pen;
- A receipt book (unless the county is using the Voter Registration Application for Use by VDR with the tear-away receipt); and
- This guide.

Distributing Applications

While Distributing Voter Registration Applications

- Offer Equal Access – Registration opportunities should be extended to all eligible citizens of the county, ensuring inclusivity and accessibility.
- Remember Your Goal – As a VDR, it is your purpose to boost voter registration participation in Texas. By providing applications to as many eligible county residents as possible, you will not only aid in the increase of voter registration participation, but in the overall voting turnout of future elections.
- Do Not Pre-Fill Any Information – Let applicants fill out their own forms to avoid errors or possible confusion.
- Stay Nonpartisan – Do not promote any political party or candidate while distributing applications.
- Track Submission Deadlines – Make sure individuals know when their applications must be submitted to be eligible to vote.
- Know Where to Return Forms – Ensure completed applications are submitted to the correct county voter registrar in a timely manner.

While Distributing Voter Registration Applications to College Students

- Remember that college students may have moved counties for school.
- Remind the students they have the option of either registering at the address where they currently reside OR at their hometown address if they do not currently reside there during the school year.
- They can only register at one of these addresses.

Accepting Applications

You may accept a voter registration application from any resident of the county who:

- Is a citizen of the United States;
- Is at least 17 years and 10 months old to register, and must be 18 years of age by Election Day;
- Has not been finally convicted of a felony, or if a felon, must have completed all of the punishment, including any term of incarceration, parole, supervision, or period of probation, or must have been pardoned or otherwise released from the resulting disability to vote; and
- Has not been determined by a final judgment of a court exercising probate jurisdiction to be totally mentally incapacitated or partially mentally incapacitated without the right to vote.

Reminder: You may also offer voter registration services to currently registered voters who wish to update information on their voter registration certificate (such as name or address) by checking the "change" box on the application.

Assisting with Applications

- You may help a person fill out the application if he/she cannot read or has a physical disability.
- If an applicant cannot sign his/her name on the application, the applicant may make a mark on the signature line. Print the name of the applicant beside the mark. If the applicant cannot make a mark, state that fact on the application and print the applicant's name. Sign and print your name, and provide your residence address as the witness.
- You may allow another registered voter (or anyone who has submitted a registration application) to fill out and sign an application for his/her spouse, parent or child. That person must sign the application as "agent" and state the relationship to the applicant on the application. The "agent" must have the permission of the applicant to do this.

Reviewing the Applications

While the applicant is still in your presence, you must review the application for completeness. The following sections of the voter registration application are required to be completed:

- **Section 1:** Applicant must select why they are submitting the application (new application, change of current information, or request for replacement). Applicant must also answer citizenship and age questions;
- **Section 2:** Full name, including any middle, maiden, or former name;
- **Section 3:** Residence address must be a street address or a description of the location of the residence;
- **Section 4:** Valid mailing address, if mail cannot be delivered to the residence address;
- **Section 5:** City and county of former residence in Texas;
- **Section 6:** Date of birth, including month, day, and year;
- **Section 9:** Texas driver's license number, Texas personal ID number, or last 4 digits of social security number. If the applicant has not been issued any of these items, he or she must check the box in this section affirming this statement; and
- **Section 10:** Signature of applicant and date of signing. Be sure the applicant has read the statements that he/she is signing regarding qualifications to register. If an agent is registering for an applicant, be sure the agent provides his/her relationship to the applicant.

You CANNOT:

- Determine if the applicant is actually qualified to register to vote or
- Make the applicant provide his/her gender or telephone number.

REGISTRATION RECEIPTS AND DELIVERY OF APPLICATIONS

Completing Registration Receipts

For each completed voter registration application, fill out a receipt in duplicate and give each applicant the original receipt. The duplicate receipts must be delivered to the voter registrar along with the applications. You may wish to keep copies of the receipts for your records. **You should not keep copies of the completed voter registration applications because these documents contain information that is confidential by law.**

Delivery of Applications and Receipts

You must deliver completed registration applications and receipts in person to the voter registrar no later than 5:00 p.m. of the 5th day after the date you receive them. **Failure to deliver an application in a timely manner is a criminal offense.**

Note: Section 13.042(c) of the Code states that you must deliver an application submitted after the 34th day before the date of an election and on or before the last day for a person to timely submit a registration application for that election to the county voter registrar not later than 5 p.m. of the next regular business day after the date to timely submit a registration application for that election.

REGISTRATION

When is the Registration Effective?

Tell the applicant that he/she can vote as soon as the 30th day after submitting the application. This 30-day period starts when the volunteer deputy registrar receives the application form.

If the applicant is under the age of 18, the registration will become effective on the 30th day after the voter registrar receives the application or on the applicant's 18th birthday, whichever comes later.

How Long is the Registration Effective?

Tell the applicant that the registration will be automatically renewed every even-numbered year unless:

- The voter moves to another address;
- The voter receives a final felony conviction and has not completed the sentence, probation, or parole or been pardoned or otherwise released from the resulting disability to vote (note: "deferred adjudication" does not constitute a "final felony conviction"); or
- The voter has been determined by a final judgment of a court exercising probate jurisdiction to be totally mentally incapacitated or partially mentally incapacitated without the right to vote.

Deadline for Voter Registration

Texas law requires eligible voters to register by the 30th day before Election Day. If you receive a voter registration application within four days before the last day to register for the upcoming election, you are required to deliver the application and receipt to the county voter registrar no later than 5:00 p.m. of the next regular business day after the date to submit a timely application.

Specific election dates and deadlines information including last day to register to vote can be found on our website's Important Election Dates webpage.

CHANGING VOTER REGISTRATION INFORMATION

Address Changes

If the voter moves, the voter must update the address on the registration by:

- Making the change on the back of the voter registration certificate and mailing it to the county voter registrar;
- Submitting a new application to the voter registrar and checking the box for "change";
- Writing a letter to the voter registrar explaining the change of address without having to submit any additional paperwork; or
- Updating information on their voter registration record through the VoteTexas.gov online portal.*

*A voter can update information on their voter registration record through the VoteTexas.gov online portal by clicking on *"Am I registered?"* To access the VoteTexas.gov portal, the voter will need their Voter Unique Identifier (VUID). The voter can find their VUID by visiting the Texas Secretary of State's *My Voter Portal* and entering their name, county, date of birth, and zip code to display their voter registration information.

Name Changes

If a voter's name changes, the voter can update their registration by:

- Making the change on the back of the voter registration certificate and mailing it to the county voter registrar;
- Submitting a new application to the voter registrar and checking the box for "change";
- Writing a letter to the voter registrar explaining the chance of name without having to submit any additional paperwork; or
- Updating information on their voter registration record through the VoteTexas.gov online portal (see above note regarding accessing the VoteTexas.gov portal).

VOTER REGISTRATION APPLICATION TIPS

Two Portions Per Voter Registration Application

The Registration Portion. This section is used to register the voter, and can be mailed to the election official without the need for postage.

The Voter's Receipt. This section is used and completed by the VDR after a voter registration application has gone through the final stage of review for any mistakes or missing information.

Use Ink

The application should always be filled out with a black, blue, or other dark colored ink pen.

Print Legibly

All information on the application must be legible. If an elections official cannot read the information on the application, they may not be able to enter the voter's name or other required information into the system.

Do Not Use Abbreviations

For cities or street names, make sure the applicant has spelled out the address in its entirety unless they are commonly accepted, for example, "St" for "Street" or "Rd" for "Road."

No White-Out or Cross-Outs

If an applicant makes a mistake, please have them start over with a new form instead of trying to fix the mistake by crossing out the incorrect information.

MOST COMMON VOTER REGISTRATION MISTAKES

While registering to vote is a simple process, small mistakes on an application can lead to delays or even prevent a person from being successfully registered. As a VDR, it is important to be aware of the most common errors so you can help applicants avoid them. Catching these mistakes early ensures an application is completed accurately and processed without issues.

- **Failing to answer a required question in Section 1.** Checking the required boxes on an application is crucial because the purpose is to confirm essential eligibility criteria, such as U.S. citizenship and age requirements. Without checking these boxes, the application may be considered incomplete or invalid, leading to the applicant possibly being denied the opportunity to register.
- **Incorrect or outdated address.** An accurate address is essential on an application because it determines the voter's proper voting precinct, polling location and the specific local elections in which they are eligible to vote. If the address is incorrect or outdated, the voter may receive the wrong ballot, be assigned to the wrong district, or face delays or issues on Election Day. A correct address helps facilitate a smooth voting experience.
- **Not providing information in Section 9**. Providing a driver's license number or the last four digits of the applicant's Social Security Number is important because it helps verify identity when registering to vote. This information is used to confirm that the person submitting the application is who they say they are, which helps prevent voter fraud. Without this verification, the application may be delayed or rejected.
- **No signature or wrong date provided.** Not signing the application or writing the wrong date can make the application invalid. The signature serves as a legal authentication that the information provided is accurate. The date confirms when the application was completed. An unsigned form or incorrect date can delay processing, which can lead to the individual not being registered before the deadline.

REMINDERS

Volunteer Deputy Registrars are allowed to:

- Educate the Public - Inform voters about the importance of participating in elections, dispelling myths or misunderstandings about the voting process.
- Increase Accessibility – Help make voter registration forms accessible to different populations by providing forms, ensuring accessibility for people with disabilities.
- Encourage All Groups – Target members of each community, such as young voters, first-time voters, and those with less access to traditional voter registration opportunities.
- Provide Assistance – Many eligible applicants face challenges when filling out registration forms or understanding eligibility requirements.
- Recruit New VDRs – Encourage others to become volunteer deputy registrars to expand the opportunities to even more individuals.

Volunteer Deputy Registrars are not allowed to:

- Use Registration for Personal or Political Gain – Voter information must remain confidential.
- Alter or Pre-Fill Applications – VDRs cannot complete any part of an applicant's registration form unless assisting them at their request.
- Withhold or Discard Applications – Every competed application must be submitted to the county voter registrar within five days of completion.

- Influence Voter Choice – VDRs cannot suggest political preferences, party affiliations, or voting decisions.
- Engage in Electioneering – While performing duties, VDRs cannot wear or distribute political material.
- Charge a Fee for Registration – VDRs cannot accept money for helping someone register.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1) Must I personally be registered to vote in order to serve as a volunteer deputy registrar?

No. Pursuant to Section 13.031(d)(3) of the Code, to be eligible for appointment as a volunteer deputy registrar, a person must meet the requirements to be a qualified voter under Section 11.002 of the Code, except that the person is not required to be a registered voter.

2) I have been designated a deputy registrar in County X. I will be at an event that will have attendees from County X along with County Y and County Z. May I register people from County Y and County Z?

No. Volunteer deputy registrar status is conferred on a county-by-county basis. To accept applications for residents of County Y or County Z, you would have to become a volunteer deputy registrar for those counties. You can provide applications to the attendees from County Y and County Z and direct them to mail the application to the appropriate county voter registrar's office. Under Section 13.044 of the Code, a person commits a Class C misdemeanor by acting as a volunteer deputy registrar when he or she does not have an effective appointment as a deputy registrar.

3) May I photocopy a completed application before turning it in to the county voter registrar?

No. The VDR should not keep copies of completed voter registration applications because these documents contain information that is confidential by law. A VDR may wish to keep copies of the receipts for their records.

4) I am a candidate and/or working for a campaign. May I serve as a volunteer deputy registrar?

Yes. There is no prohibition against a candidate or campaign worker serving as a deputy registrar, as long as they otherwise meet the qualifications described above and have been officially appointed as a volunteer deputy registrar. Similarly, there is no prohibition against a volunteer deputy registrar registering voters at a campaign rally or event. While working a rally or public event, a volunteer deputy registrar must offer registration to anyone who requests it.

5) Is there any way for me to become a statewide volunteer deputy registrar?

No. Volunteer deputy registrar appointments are made on a county-by-county basis. Section 13.032 of the Code provides that a county may not refuse to appoint a person who meets the qualifications to become a VDR. A voter registrar may not refuse to appoint a volunteer deputy registrar on the basis of sex, race, color, creed, or national origin or ancestry.

6) Is there a minimum age to become a volunteer deputy registrar?

Yes. A person must be at least 18 years of age to become a volunteer deputy registrar.

7) I just want to hand out blank voter registration application forms and encourage people to register to vote. Can I do that without being appointed as a volunteer deputy registrar?

Yes. Anyone can provide blank application forms to voters for the voters to fill out and mail in themselves. If this is all you want to do, you do not have to be a volunteer deputy registrar. Also, if you are already a volunteer deputy registrar in one county, you can distribute blank forms in other counties where you are not a volunteer deputy registrar. It is the voter's action of submitting the registration application to you for review and delivery to the registrar that triggers the requirement to be an authorized volunteer deputy registrar.

8) What if someone says he or she is already registered?

You may wish to advise the person that the new application form will be treated as an update if the old registration is in the same county and the voter is providing new information. If the person moved to a new county, he or she will need to register to vote in the new county. A person may update their voter registration by submitting a new application to the VDR and checking the box for "change" or by updating their information through the VoteTexas.gov online portal.

9) As a volunteer deputy registrar, may I appoint others to assist me in registering voters?

No. Each volunteer deputy registrar must be appointed directly by the county voter registrar or that registrar's deputy in the voter registrar's office.

10) May a volunteer deputy registrar bundle completed applications and submit them to the voter registrar by mail?

No. There are two methods for a volunteer deputy registrar to submit applications to the county voter registrar. First, the volunteer deputy registrar may submit the applications to the voter registrar by personal delivery. Second, the volunteer deputy registrar may give the applications to another volunteer deputy registrar for personal delivery to the county voter registrar.

11) I failed to submit the applications to the county voter registrar within the allotted period. What should I do now?

Submit them to the county voter registrar as soon as possible. Under the Texas Election Code, the voter's registration is not impacted by your late delivery of the application to the voter registrar—the date on which a completed registration application is submitted to you is considered to be the date of submission to the voter registrar for the purpose of determining the voter's effective date of registration. However, the registration process cannot be completed until you deliver the application.

12) What do I do with my receipts?

For each completed voter registration application, a VDR must fill out a receipt in duplicate and give each applicant the original receipt. The duplicate receipts must be delivered to the voter registrar along with the applications. A VDR may wish to keep copies of the receipts for their records.

The VDR should return the receipt books to the voter registrar if their appointment is terminated and/or at the end of their appointment.

13) What if I was appointed but still have not gone through the training?

Until you have completed the training, you may not receive any person's voter registration application. For more information, contact the Secretary of State's office or the Voter Registrar (who may be the County Clerk, Elections Administrator, or Tax Assessor-Collector) in your county.

14) If I have previously taken the volunteer deputy registrar examination and have received a certificate of appointment in one county, but would like to be appointed as a volunteer deputy registrar in another county, am I required to take the examination again in the new county?

No. You are not required to retake the examination in the new county if you previously took the exam and received a certificate of appointment in another county. You should complete and submit a Request for Appointment as a Volunteer Deputy Registrar with the new county. The voter registrar in the new county will appoint you as a volunteer deputy registrar and advise you of any county-specific procedures for completing the duties of a volunteer deputy registrar.

Notes: