

Training and Certifying Election Officials

A Step-by-Step Guide to Implementing an Election Education Program

Published May 2023



In a complicated field that can attract uncharitable attention from the public, a surprising number of election officials are self-taught, leaning on the experience of others in our offices. **Somehow, it usually works**, but there is wisdom in this quote from baseball great Vern Law, **“Experience is a hard teacher. She gives the test first, the lesson afterwards.”**

There is an easier, safer way. Give the lessons first. A comprehensive training program can teach new election officials what they need to know. Even experienced administrators will learn from the best practices of their colleagues.

This guide is designed to help you pull together a training and certification program for election officials and staff. Your state will benefit in a number of ways. Such a program can:



Ensure that new election officials have the knowledge and support needed to successfully administer an election.



Elevate best practices.



Promote conformity across the state to improve public understanding.



Create a shared learning experience through the sharing of ideas and challenges among peers.



Strengthen public trust in election officials by offering them a **respected credential**.



Educate staff about election responsibilities and practices outside the normal focus of their work.

The journey to a successful certification program starts with these steps.

1. Build a **working group at your state association** or through state/local collaboration.
2. Choose a **training framework that works for your state**.
 - a. Range of topics
 - b. Intensity of coursework
 - c. Venues – online, in-person or hybrid
3. Establish program administration and oversight.
4. Develop **engaging and informative class materials and efficient administrative tools**.

We provide a Model Charter for a Training and Certification program in Appendix A. You can edit that document to create your own charter using the answers you provided in this workbook. This guide was written for state association leaders wishing to launch a certification program, but the principles and methods can be effective whether implementation is led by the association, the state election office or a university partner.

STEP

1

Build a Certification Working Group

Certification programs can't be undertaken lightly. Models like the one we present here and in our case study make things easier, but conducting training and handling administrative tasks will require a time commitment and at least an initial funding stream (though several existing programs show the path to a self-funding program).¹ You need to **build a strong working group in your state organization** to support the program and share the work.

Benefits and Motivations of Allies

In building a working group, it's important to consider different motivations of potential allies. Primary benefits to your state are greater adherence to best practices and the improved transparency for voters and candidates that comes from greater standardization.

Individual election officials may want the authority a trusted credential can provide. They may want to be seen as leaders in the state election community, helping found the program and teach courses. Some will appreciate the opportunity to outsource training of staff who they can send to the program.

Determining Your Objectives

Of the seven ideas we listed in the preface, mark those that are most important to you, or add your own. Consider which will be most important to your colleagues. Whether you zero in on a few or mark them all, the ones you select will be the key goals and objectives of your program.

- Ensure that new election officials have the knowledge and support needed to successfully administer an election.
- Elevate best practices.
- Promote conformity across the state to improve public understanding.
- Create a shared learning experience to establish a shared perspective among peers.
- Strengthen public trust in election officials by offering them a respected credential.
- Educate staff about the responsibilities and practices outside the normal focus of their work.
- _____

You will likely repeat this exercise with the Working Group, but we think it's useful to do this now to clarify your own ideas and think about those of your colleagues.

¹ For an example of a program that became financially self-sufficient, see "[Florida's Certified Election Professional Program](#)".

Composition of a Working Group

To ensure the program maintains support in your association, you might look to your executive board or an existing committee, or recruit a working group that reflects different viewpoints. Here are some points of variation that you may want to represent:

- Jurisdiction size - large and small
- Jurisdiction type - elected officials, appointed boards or other relevant distinctions
- Demographics
- Party
- Different voting equipment or paper vs. e-pollbook variation

It may be helpful to recruit an “anchor tenant” – a popular, influential official who already sees the benefits of a certification program and can help you shape and promote the idea.

Potential Working Group Members

<u>Name</u>	<u>Strengths</u>
A. _____	_____
B. _____	_____
C. _____	_____
D. _____	_____
E. _____	_____

As the program takes shape, your Working Group may transition into a formal Governing Committee under the state association or the state election office to oversee the program.

STEP 2 Choosing a Training Framework

With your working group, discuss what kind of program your state needs:

- Topics to be covered
- Intensity of the curriculum
- Timelines of Certification and Recertification
- External Partnerships
- Venues / style of instruction (online, hybrid and in-person offerings)

Consider scheduling a **whole-day retreat with your working group to discuss these topics and hammer out agreement on key issues.**

Topics in the Curriculum

Certification programs for election administrators can **focus solely on election-specific subjects or can also include management topics** such as Human Resources and Payroll, Creative Thinking or Performance Management.

On the next page, we provide a checklist of topics offered in some of the state programs we've surveyed. **Mark the list to build a proposed curriculum** for your program.

Election-Specific Course Titles

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Elections 101 (An Intro to Certification) | <input type="checkbox"/> History of Elections (Federal & State) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Voter Registration-IVRS & the Local Database | <input type="checkbox"/> Voter Outreach and Education /Public Communications |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Voting Systems | <input type="checkbox"/> Signature Verification |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Vote By Mail Overview | <input type="checkbox"/> Continuity of Operations |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Voting Sites and Facilities | <input type="checkbox"/> New Election Legislation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Managing Election Tech | <input type="checkbox"/> Public Records Management |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Election Security and Risk | <input type="checkbox"/> Media Relations |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Election Worker Management | <input type="checkbox"/> Vote by Mail — Outbound Mail, USPS and UOCAVA |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Election Night-Logistics, Tally, Reporting and Reconciliation | <input type="checkbox"/> Vote by Mail — Inbound Mail Handling and Tally |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Candidate Qualifying / Ballot Prep | <input type="checkbox"/> Chain of Custody |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Matching Address to District - GIS and address data management | <input type="checkbox"/> Election Integrity, Poll Watchers and Observation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Voter List Maintenance | <input type="checkbox"/> Early Voting/E-Day Vote Centers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Audits, Recounts and Ballot Management | <input type="checkbox"/> Duplicate Ballots, UOCAVA, Confidential Addresses and other exceptional procedures |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Physical Security | <input type="checkbox"/> Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Elections |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pollbooks and E-pollbooks | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Managed Co-Observation | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> History of Elections | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Redistricting | |

Management-Oriented Courses

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Customer Service | <input type="checkbox"/> Team Building |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ethics | <input type="checkbox"/> Time and Stress Management |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Budget Development | <input type="checkbox"/> Making Powerful Presentations |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Human Resources | <input type="checkbox"/> Public Records Management |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Meeting Management | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conflict Resolution | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Performance Management | |

Program Intensity

How much time do you expect participants to devote? And how much is necessary to provide a thorough election education, and to cultivate respect for the credential. You may want to refer back and forth between this section and the previous one, Topics in the Curriculum. Important topics may prompt you to expand the requirements, but on the other hand, your sense of a realistic time commitment for election administrators may encourage you to strike some courses:

A. How many classes will be required for certification? (Existing programs require between four and 20 courses for certification.)

B. How much instruction time per subject, whether in-person or in hybrid instruction or directed reading? (Most existing programs offer 1-4 hr. classes)

Setting the Curriculum Cycle for Certification and Recertification

The intensity of your curriculum will help determine the term over which you expect students to complete the program. Some states offer a high-paced boot camp certification to be completed within a year, often during several days of intense in-person instruction aimed at bringing new election officials up to a baseline understanding of state laws and procedures. (Some such boot camps are mandatory programs run by state government). Other programs run over a 2- or 4-year cycle.

Many programs offer either core courses and a range of electives, or a progression from basic courses to advanced topics. Some states offer a set of basic initial courses through online, self-paced training, saving more complex topics for in-person sessions.

Describe the pace of instruction and timing of course offerings:

A. How many years will your curriculum cycle require before completion?

B. Will you create a boot camp followed by higher level courses or a gradual progression through the program?

C. Are all courses required, or will you offer elective classes?

Recertification

In some cases, advanced courses are incorporated into recertification, in a program that offers both basic and higher level certificates (“core and master’s programs”). In other cases, the path to recertification is less demanding.

Recertification courses should be substantive and significant. Rather than forcing experienced officials to attend courses that aren’t useful and demanding, you might consider reducing the burden by making the recertification period longer, while maintaining high expectations for participants.

The expiration of certification and the terms of recertification may depend on how volatile the election environment is in your state, and how important it is to get election administrators new information or reinforce messages. Existing programs may have lighter requirements every two years, or more significant requirements over a longer period of time.

Mixing it Up in Recertification

A novel approach to recertification is “facilitated observation.” At a regional meeting, participants visit a nearby county to see how they manage a major process like early voting or list maintenance, and then engage in a structured discussion comparing procedures and exploring strengths and weaknesses of different approaches.

If you incorporate facilitated observation, it should be managed rigorously, like other classes, with an instructor/facilitator, learning exercises during the visit and a test to show genuine engagement with the material.

A. How long will certification last before recertification is required?

B. How will recertification differ from the initial curriculum? Explain how many courses will be required, and the mix of advanced courses, “facilitated observation” or repeat attendance at core offerings in the recertification curriculum.

C. What types of alternate credit may count toward completion? (Observation of other offices; courses offered by the state, higher education institutions or other organizations)

Certification, Recertification and State Association Membership

Some states require conference attendance as part of certification or recertification. Such a requirement can improve conference numbers, and ensure that trained administrators continue to participate in the mutual conversations that help guide younger members and shape rules and procedures in your state. A conference requirement could also add travel costs that discourage some jurisdictions from sending staff to certification, so balance your goals as you answer this question. Even without a requirement, holding courses in conjunction with conferences incentivizes attendance, and some states experience membership increases. On the other hand, extending a conference to allow time for courses requires participants to leave the office for a longer time, which may not be feasible, and it can add to the complexity of conference planning.

External Partnerships

While the state association of election officials is the natural home for a professional education program, you’ll want to consider how your program relates to two other key institutions in your state.

Some state election offices (SEOs) themselves offer courses for election administrators, usually focused on very specific state-related topics, like working inside the state voter registration database, or a basic introductory course, “Elections 101.” **Consider how to approach the SEO and make them an ally** as you build your program. You might recruit the director and staff to teach relevant courses, ask them for advice about issues they want addressed and even enlist SEO support for the program’s budget.

You may also find it useful to enlist **support from a college or university**, particularly if one offers a continuing education program in government administration. A university may provide a software solution, administrative support and train-the-trainer experience in developing the teaching skills of your instructors.

Class Venues – Physical Locations and Online Instructional Offerings

Offering classes only at a central location may be easier to administer, but it can deter participation from distant jurisdictions. States sometimes combine classes with existing conferences to promote attendance and minimize new travel costs.

If you have specific course requirements, you will need to be flexible by repeating courses annually or on multiple dates in a term, or by providing self-paced online instruction, to allow for the varied schedules of participants. Offering classes multiple times at regional gatherings of your state association may help maximize attendance.

Online instruction can also minimize participant costs by limiting or eliminating the need to travel. Some different approaches to online or hybrid instruction include:

- Offering some or all classes online with live instruction
 - With live instruction, interaction with students becomes an option, though it may be challenging for presenters.
- Offering video and/or slide instruction, self-paced and available whenever a student logs in
- Online prerequisites (for instance, a 1-hour online class that precedes an in-person class on the same topic)
- Post-class online homework and/or testing

Whether live or taped, online offerings will require your program developers and instructors to master relevant software and online presentation skills. We discuss this in depth in Step 4 – Developing Engaging and Informative Class Materials.

A. Explain where you intend to hold in-person classes:

B. Describe how you will use online offerings in the curriculum:

C. Will classes be repeated during the cycle, either regionally or from year to year?

STEP 3 Set-Up Program Administration & Oversight

Planning program administration will ensure that you know who will handle course development and instruction; who will oversee instructors and maintain educational standards; how students will register; pay and track their progress; and how the program will be funded.

Selecting a Program Manager

A certification program will need a manager who takes responsibility for critical tasks including:

- Recruiting and supporting instructors
- Ensuring consistent, high-quality instructional materials and courses
 - Developing a course template for instructors to follow
 - Ensuring adherence to educational principles
- Approving course plans
- Event planning, calendar coordination and prep of the student interface
- Managing pass/fail status and student progress tracking
- Providing or managing tech support related to the program
- Budgeting

The manager role may not be a full-time responsibility, and your budget may not support a dedicated manager, so you may need to take a creative approach to oversight. An executive director for the state association could oversee certification. It's possible a particularly dynamic leadership team at the association could do so. More likely, **you should look for a former senior election administrator looking for part-time work, consider an organization like the Elections Group with experience developing election training,** or seek a partner at a local university continuing education or public administration program.

A. List some options for Program Oversight (individuals and/or partner organizations):

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Building a Pool of Instructors

Experienced election administrators have the ability to speak as peers, making them effective messengers who know what is realistic and practical. Where possible, recruit leaders from your association and peers whose work in particular subject areas stands out for your instructor team.

Different programs draw from a variety of sources for instructors, including administrators currently in office or retired, state election office staff, and former administrators or staff from other states or national organizations. Sometimes including an instructor with “star power” helps generate interest.

Many programs cooperate with a local university, relying on professors to teach management courses and teach or co-teach those with election-centered topics. Vendors may also be willing to teach courses relevant to their offerings

An adult education standard is that it takes roughly four hours of preparation time along with an hour’s rehearsal to develop each hour of engaging, practical instruction. Or maybe it’s more accurate to say it should take that long. If instructors don’t devote enough time and attention, their trainings may fall flat. To ensure they can recruit instructors who will put in the time, many states provide a stipend.

Election administration and teaching ability are different skills, and it’s important to support your instructors by providing them with pointers, outlines and other teaching support, which we discuss in Section 4. You’ll also need to think about how your program manager works with instructors, potentially reviewing lesson plans and slides to maintain your educational standards.

A. Looking at the checklist of topics, list a few topics you may approach first and thoughts on who might teach them – leaders from your state in the topic area:

<u>Topic</u>	<u>Instructor</u>
1. _____	_____
2. _____	_____
3. _____	_____

B. Consider whether to offer a tuition credit, stipend, waived organization membership or some other incentive for instructors:

C. In a few lines, describe an ideal relationship between the program manager and instructors, and how you prioritize teaching support, team-building, oversight and holding instructors to high teaching standards. Is the program manager more like a supervisor, a coach, a cheerleader or a coordinator?

Student Registration, Payments and Progress-Tracking

Your program manager will be responsible for:

- Overseeing student registration
- Crediting student payments and managing funds
- Preparing a course calendar to be posted online, including
 - a synopsis of each class
 - dates and locations.
- Crediting students for course completion
- Maintaining student records in a portal where they can track progress through the curriculum.

While it might be possible to accomplish registration and progress-tracking with a website, online or Venmo-style payment, and a spreadsheet maintained by the program manager, we think election administrators will recognize the heavy workload this imposes and the potential for mistakes. We recommend **using an integrated application that:**

- Hosts **the course calendar**, including date, location, instructor and available hotels or other information relevant to attendance
- Creates **secure individual accounts for students**, where they can register and pay for courses and view their progress.
- Allows instructors or the program manager to **update student accounts to indicate course completion**.
- Facilitates email communication between the program and both instructors and students.

The Elections Group is developing a secure application and website to handle these tasks. In addition, the site will host a library of course materials, including slides, videos and course notes for each class. Hosting course materials on the program site helps ensure continuity in the event instructors retire or decide to stop teaching. The Election Group's application will also host online testing, to streamline the process of correcting tests and updating student status.

A local college or university partner could also provide the relevant knowledge and software.

Planning a Budget and Identifying Funding Sources

Total costs will consist of per-course fees (instructor, material and location fees) and overhead in the form of curriculum/student management software and administrative staffing. A partnership with a university may provide some of these back-end necessities, in addition to the credentialing authority and teaching expertise it brings to the program. Income will include student course fees as well as any support you can enlist from vendors or your state election office. Additional backing from the state organization may be necessary to cover start-up costs like purchase or development of curriculum software and the initial creation of course outlines, slides and notes.

Without minimizing the task, the amount of money and associated risks, we note that several state associations report that their programs are self-funding, return a small surplus, and boosted attendance at state conferences. Many election officials have been more successful justifying association dues by pointing to the educational value of certification.

- A. Complete the column on the right of this sample budget chart to sketch out likely costs and income streams for your program.

Sample Budget COST ACCOUNTING

Item	Description	Unit Cost	Units	Sample Cost	Your Figures
Program administration	Executive Director or new staffer	\$15,000	1	\$15,000	
Third Party admin of users, accounts, online platforms, etc.	Partner with institution or develop in-house	\$35,000	1	\$35,000 ²	
Association-member trainers pay	2 instructors per course	\$200	40	\$8,000	
Boot camp or adjacent facility rental	Full day training at hotel ³	\$300	6	\$1,800	
Printing	Materials all online	\$10	20	\$200	
Coursework syllabus and materials creation		\$1,000	20	\$20,000 ⁴	
Total Costs				\$80,000	

INCOME ACCOUNTING

Tuition income	60 students each at 20 courses	\$75	1,200	\$90,000	
Association transfer to program income	In lieu of charging students				
External grants income	Could include in-kind labor from instructors				
Sponsors	Vendors for specific courses	\$350	10	\$3,500	
Total Income				\$80,000	

² Copy

³ States that conduct regional trainings might make use of facilities in larger election offices.

⁴ The cost of creating course materials and curriculum-tracking software declines significantly after the initial term, enabling an ongoing surplus.

STEP 4 Developing Engaging, Informative Class Materials

Ensuring that your courses are interesting and useful will require detailed and creative preparation from instructors as well as advice and oversight from the program manager.

A Model for Engaging Presentations

The best approach will appeal to students with different learning styles - listening, seeing, doing and reading. The class will be broken into logical segments that can be digested separately. Some ways to “break the trance” include:

- Presentation/lecture segments
- Icebreaker activities
- Small group discussions
- Hands-on activities
- Physical segments or moments to stand and stretch will help “break the trance”

Inviting guest speakers or pairing instructors with different styles, mannerisms and speech patterns will appeal to different people and change the visual focus and frame of reference to keep students engaged. Speakers with different perspectives – professors, vendors, election attorneys and experts from outside your state – can also add spice to the menu to keep presentations interesting.

Paired instruction may be particularly valuable if you have college professors or other third-party instructors taking primary roles, and you need to complement their approach with other voices more thoroughly grounded in the specific election laws and procedures of your state. Pairing can distribute the burden of course preparation, but consider whether it could also lead to friction over personalities, work styles or the pace of preparation.

Inevitably, **election jurisdictions in your state come in a range of sizes that require different approaches**, including varying election equipment and IT solutions that require their own procedures and forms. Although a key goal of a statewide certification program is to standardize methods and provide best practices, you still need to demonstrate understand

The chart on the following page offers an outline that suggests how a course can achieve these objectives.

A Sample Outline for a Chain of Custody Course

Online Prerequisite Work: (1.5 - 2 hours)

Read	1 - 1.5 hours	EAC Chain of Custody (CoC) Best Practices document
Compile	20 - 30 minutes	Any CoC forms your office uses (brings these to in-person class)
Test	10 minutes	A simple test to verify the online prerequisite was completed

In-Person Course Outline: (2 hours)

Intro Slides	10 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CoC for cash in banking, retail and elections • Evidentiary chain in law enforcement • Goals of CoC - transparency and trust
Ice-breaker	10 minutes	The Five-Dollar Bill Challenge ⁵
Lecture from Slides (First lecturer)	15 minutes	CoC in Practice - voting equipment & ballots Visuals: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Security cart sealed and padlocked • Ballot box with seal broken (implying a problem) • Tracking forms
Hands-on Exercise	10 minutes	Counting envelopes to complete CoC forms
Lecture from Slides (Second lecturer)	15 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cradle to Grave CoC • Usability Testing - is it sufficient?
Stand-up / Active Exercise on Diverse Procedures	10 minutes	Students bring sample CoC forms to demo tables and examine versions from other jurisdictions
Self-Assessment	10 minutes	Consider your office's CoC from a skeptical perspective. Are you convinced? Do you see weaknesses?
Discussion	20 minutes	Guided class discussion comparing the CoC practices of different offices
Lecture from slides (First lecturer)	10 minutes	Bringing it all together
Exam	10 minutes	A more demanding exam than the online prerequisite test; the goal is to prove understanding of CoC concepts

⁵ An exercise with money, envelopes and volunteers to get people thinking about the trustworthiness of a process where individuals have unsupervised access to something valuable.

Class Development Timeline

To present a rigorous series of classes with a revolving set of instructors working part-time, you'll need to create benchmarks for course preparation, measure progress and provide approval or feedback at each step. To avoid alienating instructors, schedule creative, brainstorming sessions and feedback sessions with an additional observer or two, as well as a practice session where you can provide constructive suggestions alongside positive reinforcement.

You'll get the best results by encouraging instructors to feel part of a supportive and successful team. You do have a bottom line - instructors must meet the standards of the program, subject to the approval of program sponsors or program manager.

Providing a class preparation schedule can help your instructors cut the work into manageable pieces. We offer this sample timeline that you can adapt for your program:

A Sample Course Development and Approval Schedule

Create a Course Outline <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Online Reading• Main Topics of In-Person Presentation	3 months pre-class
Present Engagement Ideas <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ice-breaker ideas• Breakout sessions• Hands-on sessions• Interesting visuals	2 months pre-class
Present slides and lecture notes	1 month pre-class
Practice Presentation	1 week pre-class

Online and Hybrid Education

In our model course outline, we present an approach to online education in which each course includes both an online component and in-person instruction. The online class consists of reading a best practices document, pulling together thoughts on one's own practices, and a brief, easy test to prevent students from skipping the reading. The online component is self-paced and can be taken at any time before the in-person class. The goal is to optimize in-person time, which costs the student in travel expenses and time away, by ensuring everyone arrives with a basic understanding of the vocabulary and issues.

Other approaches to online professional education could include presenting some or all topics entirely online or making live classes available using edited video, slides and educational software. To create a truly interactive online course will probably require presentation and engagement tools and instructors who are comfortable with technology and with online presentation. The benefits in keeping costs to students down may justify the necessary investments, which may not be significant.