

Secure HQ: Unobstructed Counting Checklist

Close elections generate skepticism, scrutiny and complaints for election administrators. Today's climate of anger multiplies the risks – and the anxiety.

Consider the suggestions below as you prepare to count, audit and canvass your election; they can help limit the effects of disturbance or obstruction in the event your office becomes a focal point.

Headquarters and Central Counting Facilities

Facility preparation is a critical component of security and continuity of operations planning. Some simple preparation will help establish order and reinforce the impression that the operation is under control, which itself deters unruliness.

Assess your current security plan under a worst-case scenario – large crowds of unhappy people – so you can make necessary adjustments.

Traffic and parking around main facilities

Use security personnel, signage, and stanchions to manage traffic and routing into and through the parking lot.

Separate the parking area for staff and poll workers, especially those returning secure materials on election night, from that for observers and the public.

Create a safe facility perimeter by limiting parking adjacent to facility walls.

Spatial organization (See Figure 1)

(1) Create orderly, separated work spaces with rope, stanchions and signage.

→ (1a) Separate observers from work space, while ensuring sufficient proximity that real observation can take place.

→ (1b) Create a check-in desk or counter to control facility access

→ (1c) Create a neutral space outside the check-in desk to prevent crowds from forming there.

(2) Set capacity limits that allow real observation but preclude massing of angry people.

(3) Create internal control points around tally computers and ballot storage areas.

(4) Designate a room to meet with observers or group leaders; or let them examine materials, to change the setting away from operations or from unruly crowds.

(5) Minimize distraction to workers should protests outside become distracting.

→ (5a) Explain exactly how and why observation remains ongoing and ample where any actions could be construed as reducing transparency.

(6) Provide a video feed to duplicate sightlines, if possible.

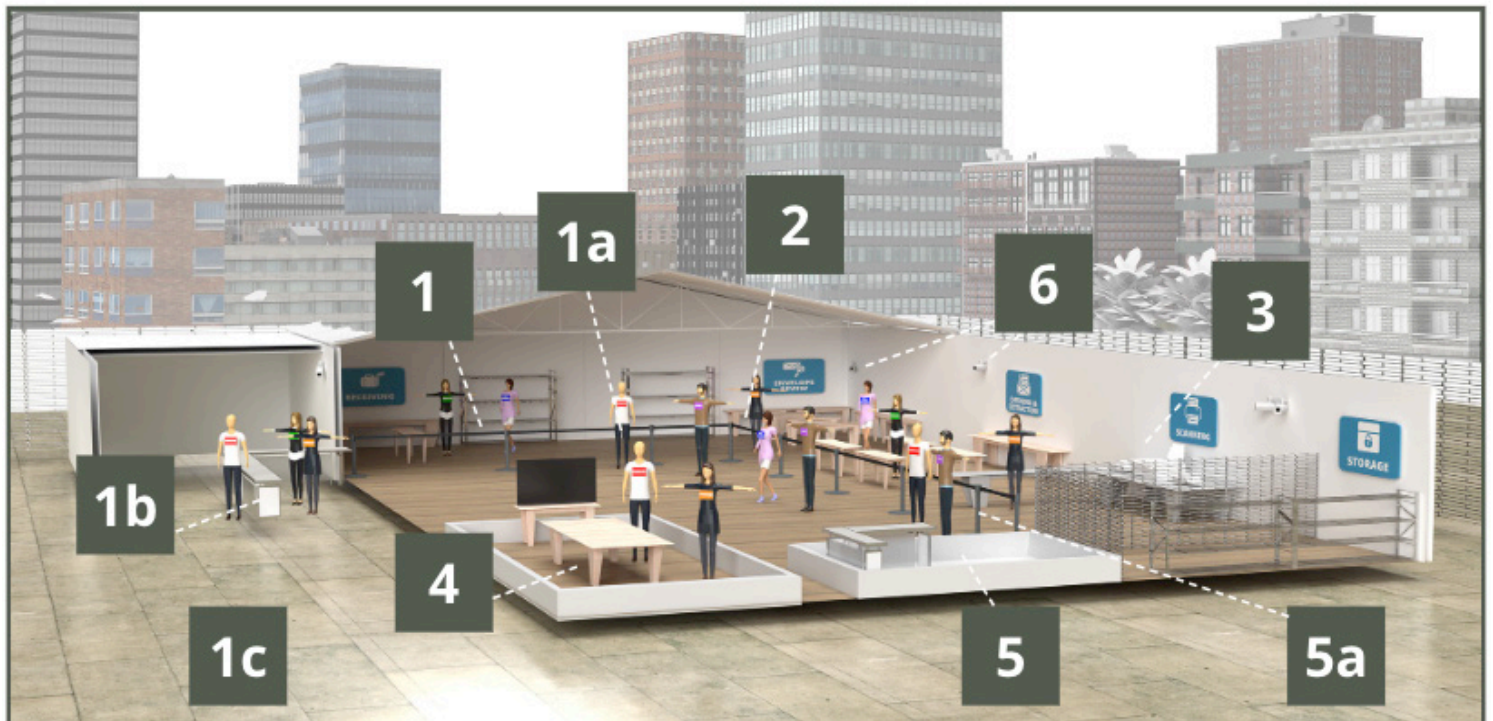


Figure 1: Central Counting Facilities Spatial Organization



A more detailed guide is available at electionsgroup.com.

Managing the Relationship with Observers and Crowds

Approach the relationship with observers bearing in mind that the right to observe helps prove the integrity of an election. Limiting observation undermines trust.

Still, serious conflicts may develop as normal observer friction escalates in a context of heightened distrust. Administrators must clearly communicate and enforce rules for election observers in order to prevent disruption, so the count and legal observation can both continue.

Crowds may gather spontaneously. The danger of larger groups of people include their volatility and susceptibility to rumor.

Security staffing – law enforcement or private security	
	Create an interagency team including city/county administration and sheriff/police.
	Assign security staff to the facility check-in desk to control access.
	Assign security personnel to watch all work spaces considered critical.
	Identify reserve security personnel to deploy if tensions rise.
Security cameras	
	Cover facility entry & exit, internal secure storage, and all key workspaces.
	Avoid views that could violate voter privacy in live feeds or open records requests.
	Test camera operation, video retrieval and file storage.
Staff and worker reassurance	
	Provide for the presence of security personnel
	Institute alternate entry/exit plan, and parking escorts or buddy system
	Make additional support available for those directly threatened (liaison to law enforcement, provision of temporary housing, etc.)
Observer management	
	Create a formal intake process for observers, including all statutory forms and procedures. If permitted by statute, ask observers for ID.
	Create a color-coded system of badges to distinguish observers from staff and workers.
	Require a signature on a declaration form disavowing any intent to disrupt.
	Assign specific staff as observer liaisons, preferably with experience speaking to partisans, with comprehensive election knowledge, and authority.
	Assign a supervisor who frontline staff can deflect complaints to.
	Promptly address observers who are loud or disruptive, even in minimal ways, because the behavior can be contagious or attract a crowd.
	Provide training or written guidance on standards of behavior for observers to prevent conflict over uncertain rules.
Crowd management	
	Address the group at regular intervals to inform them and answer questions.
	↳ Recognize and accommodate legitimate concerns.
	↳ Rumor, conspiracy and anger grow in a setting of uncertainty. Good information does help.
	If election processes can be observed online, direct the group to those links.
	Direct focus toward standard procedures that do protect election integrity.
	↳ Create a one-page FAQ explaining post-election tasks or detailing a particular process protesters seem concerned about.
	Request law enforcement presence if you expect crowds, and be prepared to call 911.

Guidance and materials on standards of conduct and de-escalation tactics are available at www.electionsgroup.com