The Elections Group

Ballot Reconciliation Troubleshooting Guide

Part Two of the Ballot Management Resource Series

What to Expect?

The purpose of this guide is to help election officials perform ballot reconciliation. Reconciliation is a set of routine procedures used by poll workers and election officials to ensure the accuracy of the election, including comparing the number of voters issued a ballot at a voting location to the number of ballots counted.

Even with solid policies and established procedures in place, election officials may encounter problems during reconciliation. The charts and information in this guide are intended to aid election officials in resolving these problems, but are not exhaustive. The Elections Group encourages election officials to adapt this guide to meet their needs by determining whether the scenarios that follow apply as written or with your changes, and by expanding the guide to cover additional scenarios.

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Mail Ballots: More Voters than Ballots

Possible Causes	Potential Solutions
The results of a scanned batch of ballots were not imported into the election management system (EMS) properly.	• Review system reports from the scanner and the EMS to verify the number of batches scanned compared to the number of batches imported or accepted in the EMS. • Media from the scanners (e.g., USB drives) may not have been imported. • Scanner batch may not have been accepted.
A batch of ballots was not scanned.	• Review your documentation (e.g., batch management sheets/accounting logs) to affirm all batches were scanned. • Compare the number of ballots processed before scanning to the number scanned. Rescanning all ballots may be necessary.
A voter received credit for voting but did not return a ballot or their ballot was not counted. This could be the result of an entry error.	• Compare the batch of unopened, rejected ballot envelopes to a system report of voters with rejected ballots. If there is an envelope in the batch not on the reject report, look up that same voter to see if they received mail-in vote credit. • Review a list of all voters who received credit against the actual documentation returned by a voter (i.e., empty envelopes, affidavits, etc.) to determine if a voter is listed but does not have matching documentation indicating a ballot was returned.
An individual ballot within a batch was not scanned.	• Compare the piece counts from the ballot/batch tracking logs to the reported EMS batch reports. • Look for any discrepancies and delete and rescan the batch as needed.
Empty envelope. Voter returned a ballot affidavit envelope without a ballot.	• Update the voter's record to reflect the envelope was empty so that the totals balance. • Contact the voter and issue a replacement ballot (if allowed).
A voted ballot was not extracted from the envelope.	• Re-examine the opened envelopes to determine they are empty.

Possible Causes	Potential Solutions
A voter was given credit for returning an envelope containing a ballot from a previous election (e.g., primary ballot returned during a general election).	• Refer to the policies and laws that govern voter credit. Voters who returned a ballot for a past election may need their vote credit for the election removed.
Multiple page ballots were processed, and in some instances, the first sheet or page was not returned.	• Review the EMS reports for the actual sheet or page counts to determine if some ballots were returned without a header page. • Compare the sheet or card count from the EMS report against the number of cards from your batch control logs. • The explanation for their being more voters than ballots may be that some ballots were returned without a header page (typically page one).
Damaged or unscannable ballots sent for replication were not scanned.	• Review ballot/batch tracking logs and ballot replication logs. • Do the number of ballots sent for replication equal the number of entries in the ballot replication log? • Verify that all replicated ballots were scanned.

Mail Ballots: More Ballots than Voters

Possible Causes	Potential Solutions
A batch of ballots was scanned twice.	• Compare the number of batches from batch control logs and batch management sheets to the number of batches shown as scanned in the EMS reports. • If there are more batches scanned than you show in the batch tracking logs, identify the duplicate batch or batches. • If needed, review the ballot images to identify the duplicate batch or batches. • Delete the duplicate batch or batches from the EMS and rescan as needed.
The voter registration status of a voter who returned a mail ballot may have been changed after the ballot was received and scanned.	• This problem applies more to same-day registration states and states that have a voter registration deadline closer to Election Day. • Review your voter registration system data entry logs to determine if the voter's status may have changed after the ballot was received. • Determine if any voters who returned mail ballots were canceled due to a move to another jurisdiction or after requesting to be canceled.
Not all the envelopes containing ballots were processed correctly, and some voters were not credited with voting.	• Identify the batches where more ballots were scanned. • Generate a report from the voter registration system and compare the report to the envelopes in the batch to determine which voters did not receive credit.

In-Person Voting: More Voters than Ballots

Possible Causes	Potential Solutions
Ballots cast by voters were placed in an incorrect location, such as an auxiliary ballot bin or a provisional envelope.	- Check to ensure the auxiliary ballot bin and other ballot storage containers do not contain ballots. - Review the incident reports, and if necessary, contact election workers to ask questions concerning the ballots to determine if they can help discover where the ballots may be. *Tip:* Ensure the ballot boxes and other storage containers are properly labeled.
Election officials checked in more voters than ballots on purpose (e.g., bad actor situation).	Review any audit logs from the electronic pollbook to review for unusual check-in timing and interview all election officials. Review any surveillance footage. Contact law enforcement.
USB media or memory devices are loaded into the EMS but never "accepted" and therefore not included in the overall results.	- Review the EMS upload screen or log to affirm each upload was successful. - Compare this to your manifest of USB drives or memory devices to verify every device was successfully uploaded and included in the results. - Upload any memory cards that were not previously uploaded successfully, rescanning ballots to a new card if the card cannot execute a successful upload. *Tip:* Use a checklist to ensure that media devices are downloaded and uploaded. Check the backup media device. Make sure the ballots cast number updates after each upload.
USB media or other memory devices were not removed or returned from the tabulation equipment. Votes recorded on the devices were not included in the tallied results.	Verify that all programmed memory cards (even those with zero ballots) have been uploaded to the EMS. Your system may display a log of all cards and their status. Physically inspect tabulation equipment and return supplies for memory cards. *Tip:* Use a checklist to ensure that all media and memory devices are inventoried upon receipt. This ensures that all votes recorded are included in the results.

Possible Causes	Potential Solutions
Voters signed in as "regular" voters but were provided with a provisional ballot that was placed in a provisional envelope.	• Compare the provisional ballot envelopes to the check-in roster to determine if all voters are marked as provisional voters.
Voters were signed in or checked in but did not finalize a voting session; they were "fleeing voters."	• Review incident reports and ask election workers if they had any fleeing voters. • If using a direct recording electronic device or ballot marking devices, check the voting systems's audit log to determine the number of occurrences at the location. Contact the voting system vendor for assistance, as needed. *Tip: Add a section to the reconciliation worksheet completed by poll workers to note issues that occur such as a fleeing voter. Train poll workers how to monitor and prevent voters from leaving the location before finalizing their voting session. If a paper ballot was issued to a voter but not cast, collect these ballots and place them in a separate envelope or container.*
Election officials unintentionally checked in voters whose names appear on a list of early voters.	• Determine if any of the voters that were marked as returning a ballot or voting early were also checked in for the same election. • Interview election officials, as needed. (This issue should not be possible because of programming safeguards.)
Pollbook check-in error went unreconciled (e.g., poll worker checked in the wrong voter, went back and checked in the right voter, but never removed credit for the original voter)	• Review any incident reports and contact poll workers, if needed. Explain your findings and ask poll workers if they recall any incidents. • Inspect your pollbook signatures where a signed name is an apparent mismatch from the voter's name or existing signature.
When manually entering pollbook entries into the voter registration system (e.g., scanning individual barcodes), staff incorrectly scanned a blank entry.	• Compare voters with vote credit in your registration records to signatures in the pollbook. You may find a voter with credit for voting at a location but no signature in the pollbook.

In-Person Voting: More Ballots than Voters

Possible Causes	Potential Solutions
A provisional ballot was incorrectly scanned.	• Count the number of provisional ballot envelopes and compare the total to the number of provisional voters from the poll book and, if applicable, the number of blank provisional ballots issued. • Review the scanned ballots to see if a provisional ballot was scanned. Consult your state/legal authority on whether to remove the provisional and rescan the precinct.
The election official did not complete the check-in process.	• Review the audit log contained within the electronic pollbooks to determine if any voters were searched for but not checked in. • Review any incident reports or notes completed by the election officials.
The electronic pollbook was offline and did not sync.	• Review the logs on the individual electronic poll book units to determine if the correct number of voters that signed the poll book is present. • Re-sync the electronic poll books so the voter credit updates correctly. • Review any receipts/authority-to-vote slips produced by the electronic poll book if available.
A jammed ballot was incorrectly scanned twice.	• Perform a count of all the ballots in the affected precinct (sometimes called a "piece count") to determine if the number of physical ballots matches the number of votes reported. • If the counts are off, rescan the ballots scanned on that device.
Voters were provided with a federal or state-only version of the ballot. The voter was not listed in the poll book.	• Determine if any of these ballot types were used. Review incident reports and/or ask election workers whether they had any voters who were provided with this ballot.
The election media loaded on the voting equipment was not properly cleared from testing mode.	• Rescan the ballots after resetting the results to zero.

Provisional Voting: More Voters than Ballots

Possible Causes	Potential Solutions
Provisional ballots marked as "accepted" in the voter registration system, but ballots have not been tabulated.	• Check provisional ballot envelopes to ensure that all accepted ballots have been removed from the envelopes and tabulated. • If using a system with a Voter Verified Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT), ensure that the provisional ballots are accepted in the EMS. • Check the ballots cast report again to ensure that the numbers are correct.
A voter or voters were provided voting credit even though the provisional envelope is empty.	• Verify all provisional envelopes had ballots. If uncertain and quantities are small, you may be able to compare precinct ballot styles to envelopes to determine the empty envelope after the fact.

Provisional Voting: More Ballots than Voters

Possible Causes	Potential Solutions
A ballot from the provisional inventory was issued to a regular voter. When it was scanned, the EMS reported it as a provisional ballot, even though the voter was not a provisional voter.	• Review your election and scanner setup. Consult with your vendor. Determine how the EMS would report a provisional ballot scanned into a regular batch. Inspect the physical ballots to see if a provisional was among regular scanned ballots.
A provisional voter did not place the ballot in a provisional envelope and instead placed it in the ballot box or tabulator.	• Inspect the voted ballots from the location/batch to determine if any of the ballots is a provisional ballot. If available, check ballot stubs to see if the stub for the issued provisional ballot is present. Review any incident reports for the location and look for empty envelopes. *Tip: Train poll workers to watch provisional ballot voters to ensure that this does not happen or use a removable sticker to cover timing marks so that the paper ballot will not tabulate until the provisional voter is accepted. Print the type of ballot (e.g., provisional) on the footer of the ballot, if this is permitted.*
Provisional voters allowed to vote a regular ballot or the poll workers did not know the steps to issue a provisional ballot on the ballot marking or direct-recording device.	• Review incident reports and/or ask election workers whether there is a record that any provisional voters scanned their ballot. If individual types of ballots are identifiable (i.e., "provisional ballot" is printed on the bottom or top of the ballot), then election officials may be able to rescan ballots from that scanner without the provisional ballots.