

## QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE

# The Stacking Method

*The “stacking method” is a hand-count process where ballots are sorted, counted in stacks and verified by a team, preferably bipartisan, for accuracy.*

While most jurisdictions in the United States have moved away from hand-counting as the primary method of tabulation, many jurisdictions use it to conduct post-election tabulation audits and recounts. In these jurisdictions, officials use a variety of procedures and forms to manually tally votes cast in a specific contest or a subset of contests on a small portion of the voted ballots. Next, they compare those hand-counted results to the machine-counted results.

## SUPPLIES

- Tables and chairs for each team
- Tally sheets
- Pencils with erasers or pens with ink colors other than blue or black
- Rubber finger tips
- Finger moisteners
- Voter Intent Guide

## METHOD

In most jurisdictions that use a stacking method, hand-count teams have three or four members. No more than two members of each team should have the same political party affiliation.

All team members should be seated around a table so they can clearly see the ballots and the tally sheets. One member of the team should follow the steps below in their entirety, while other members of the team observe. If the team members who are observing notice an error, they should say something. The team is working together to count the votes accurately and systematically.

- 1.** Count the number of ballots in the batch and enter the number on the tally sheet.
- 2.** Separate the batch into separate stacks based on how the contest was marked. There are three categories:
  - No selections were made for the contest (undervoted contest)
  - More selections made than permitted for the contest (overvoted contest)
  - Selection of candidate (including write-in candidates) or choice (yes/no). *Unless the contest had only one candidate, there will be multiple stacks in this category.*

- 3.** Carefully review each stack of ballots to ensure only like ballots are contained in the stack.
- 4.** Count the number of ballots in each stack and record the numbers on the tally sheet. When counting the ballots, count in stacks of 10 ballots and crisscross the stacks to make counting easier.
- 5.** Combine all stacks together and pass the ballots to another team member to separate, count and record the number of ballots in each category.
- 6.** All team members compare the two tally sheets. If the numbers are the same, this contest has been completed. If the numbers differ, repeat all steps again.
- 7.** Compare the hand-count totals to the totals from the tabulation equipment. If there are discrepancies, the hand-count team should explain, if possible.
- 8.** Repeat all steps for all contests required to be hand-counted for this batch of ballots. Then repeat the process for any additional batches.

In a variation of this method, the entire team sorts and stacks the ballots, rather than one person. The team members sort and place the ballots into stacks for each candidate, a stack for undervotes and a stack for overvotes. This method would not work particularly well for contests in which voters are permitted to make multiple choices (vote for 2, vote for 3), because a single ballot can only be placed in one stack at a time.

If your jurisdiction allows write-in votes (and segregates the ballots that contain write-in votes), be sure to locate those ballots to include them in the hand-count tally.