

Creating an Election Academy **MANUAL**

*Instructions and templates for implementing
an election education course in your jurisdiction*

INCREASE VOTER PARTICIPATION

PROMOTE TRANSPARENCY

FOSTER CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

ENHANCE VOTER CONFIDENCE

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Introduction

Welcome

Inspired by successful election education courses implemented in jurisdictions across the country, this manual is designed to help you start, run and repeat an election academy—an election education course—in your jurisdiction.

An election academy is a hands-on course designed to provide participants with information on how election officials prepare for and conduct elections in their jurisdiction.

Jurisdictions that have implemented this type of course include:

- [Greenwich, CT](#)
- [Forsyth County, GA](#)
- [Contra Costa, CA](#)
- [Orange County, CA](#)

Why Start an Election Academy?

There are many reasons, but here are the top four:

Promoting transparency: An educated electorate leads to a more transparent and accountable electoral process. By providing clear and accessible information about election administration, rules and procedures, election offices can help build trust and confidence in the electoral system.

Enhancing voter confidence: A well-informed electorate is more likely to have confidence in the integrity of the electoral process. When voters understand how their votes are collected, counted and verified, they are less prone to misinformation or conspiracy theories that can undermine trust in elections.

Increasing voter participation: Some eligible voters decline to participate in elections due to a lack of understanding about the process. By educating the public about registration, voting methods (in-person, mail-in or early voting) and important deadlines, election offices can help remove barriers to participation and encourage more people to exercise their right to vote.

Fostering civic engagement: Education about election administration processes can contribute to a broader culture of civic engagement. When people understand

how elections work, they are more likely to engage in other forms of civic participation, such as volunteering, running for office or becoming a poll worker.

Getting Started

This manual will guide you through four phases: developing, scheduling, running and concluding an election education course in your jurisdiction. You will find templates and example materials that you can customize for your town, city or state.

If you have any questions at any stage of this process, please reach out to:

- [Registrars of Voters, Greenwich, CT](#): They developed the original election academy behind this manual. You'll see examples from Greenwich throughout these materials to help get you thinking about what will work best in your jurisdiction.
- [The Elections Group](#): The Elections Group's communications team may be able to provide low- or no-cost assistance with designing, writing and editing these or other materials for your election academy. For more information, please [send the team a note](#).

Phase 1: Developing Your Course

This section looks at the initial work needed to set up your election education course. It includes information on how it can be structured and scheduled within the election calendar, plus an example course overview and class descriptions.

You'll want to begin by deciding how you want to structure your course and when in the election cycle you want to schedule it.

Structuring Your Course

The election education courses currently in place all have a heavy focus on in-person instruction and tours. Some have an online portion as well. The online instruction can include background information, such as state and local laws and procedures, or information from your jurisdiction's poll worker training program.

First, Some Brainstorming

Here are some questions to ask yourself as you start to plan your course:

- What class schedule will work best in our jurisdiction?
- What existing training opportunities could be leveraged?
- What election activities can become part of the course?
- In what order should we present the content?
- Where can we hold in-person classes?
- What materials do we need to get started? Do we need to create anything?
- Who will teach the classes? Will there be guest presenters on certain topics?
- What content works best in person? Online?
- What online content do we want to present and when?

In Greenwich, participants who attended every part of the election academy received six hours of presentations and Q&A with the town's registrars. They also received:

- 3 hours of online training
- 4 hours of moderator (chief polling place official) training
- 1 hour of logic and accuracy testing (ballots and voting equipment)
- 5 hours of poll worker training (during the actual poll worker training classes)
- 1 hour of recount observation
- 1 hour of post-election audit observation

During the first class, Greenwich's registrars provided each participant with a binder and dividers to help them organize and archive their course materials. The binder included the materials for the first class. Then, in advance of each class, the registrars emailed pre-reading materials to participants to print on their own. After each class, the registrars provided participants with "wrap-up" emails. These included supplemental materials and deeper dives into questions asked during class. [Read Greenwich's example correspondence here.](#)

If binders and dividers are not in the budget, you could print class materials, staple them together in packets, and provide them to participants at the start of your course or before each class. If printing is not in the budget, you could ask participants to either print the materials that you email to them before each class or bring a laptop or tablet to class to view the materials, if they don't have easy access to a printer.

Class Size

Jurisdictions have seen success with smaller groups of individuals, limiting class size to between 10 and 15 people, but the size may also depend on the space you have to hold your in-person classes.

Location

Election offices that have implemented similar programs have either held all classes in person at the election office or combined in-person and online instruction.

Participants could get hands-on experience watching public pre-election ballot and equipment testing, participating in a facility tour, attending poll worker training,

observing ballot sorting machines, reviewing security measures and observing post-election reconciliation. Some courses also allow participants to be stationed at a polling place on Election Day or during early voting.

Topics

With so many election processes, rules and procedures, it may not be easy to narrow down what your election academy will cover. Consider the topics that voters, candidates and the media ask about most frequently. Consider the topics that will help support election transparency, security and accuracy.

Here is an example course overview that may help with planning. Use this template as a starting point. You can add and delete and move topics until you find what will work best for your jurisdiction.

[Course Overview](#) (Word)

While we've provided this example framework, class content is the most DIY part of this process, so you can be sure you cover the topics of most interest in your jurisdiction.

Timing

If possible, consider aligning your classes with the election calendar. This adds real-world context to your coursework and makes it possible for participants to be part of the election and learn firsthand about election processes.

GREENWICH REGISTRARS OF VOTERS

In 2024, the Greenwich Election Academy's first class took place on April 27, and the course wrapped up following election activities in November, with a summer break in between. Here is [Connecticut's 2024 election calendar](#), so you can see what took place after classes began.

Election Academy "Lite"

If you're developing your election academy course and feeling that it may be more than you can take on this year, step back and consider hosting a version of what we're calling Election Academy "Lite" instead. It's essentially one or two hands-on open houses. Invite the public to come to your office or another space to see your voting equipment in action, learn how accessible voting works, and get a closer look at the tools and practices election officials use to maintain chain of custody.

Open houses are great opportunities for voters to ask questions and increase their understanding of election processes. If this sounds like a good option for your jurisdiction, make a plan. Find a date and time and recruit colleagues to be on hand

to answer questions and demonstrate tools and equipment. Consider setting up stations and displaying posters to keep things moving and information flowing. Use a sign-in sheet so you can follow up with anyone who has questions or concerns or who may have expressed interest in serving as a poll worker or participating in your future election academy.



Greenwich's registrars of voters hosted an open house in August 2024. They displayed large posters to explain many aspects of how elections work and wore buttons with messages, like:

- Ask me tough questions,
- Ask me about early voting, and
- Ask me about audits and recounts.

They used flyers and social media posts to promote the open house and were pleased with the turnout.

Phase 2: Scheduling Your Course

This section covers ways to create awareness of and promote your course, and offers guidance for scheduling your first series of classes. It includes templates for flyers, applications and other materials.

Promoting Your Course

Once you've determined how many classes you'll hold and set the dates, it's time to tell people about your course and invite them to participate.



The Greenwich registrars used [a flyer](#) to advertise their election academy both on paper and as a PDF on the town's website.

Here are templates you can customize and use to introduce and promote your course.

[Flyer](#) (PPT)

[Social media graphics](#) (PPT)

[Website graphics](#) (PPT)

[Press release](#) (Word)

Applications

There are different options for collecting application information, and the option or combination of options you choose will depend on what will work best for you, your access to technology and your outreach plans.



You may want to consider using an [online](#) application form like the one Greenwich used. If your website is managed by another office or team, check to see if they can assist you with creating and using an online form.

If an online form is not an option in your jurisdiction, you could ask interested voters to call or email you for an application or for more information. Or you can make an

application available for download on your website (PDF or Word). Just be sure to include instructions for submitting completed forms. Here is an introductory paragraph you can use to introduce your application:

Thank you for your interest in attending the [Jurisdiction] Election Academy. Please answer all questions before emailing your application to [EMAIL ADDRESS]. If you would prefer not to email your application, please mail or drop it off. Our address is [OFFICE ADDRESS]. The last day to apply is [DATE].

Here is a template you can customize and use to collect information from your applicants.

[Application](#) (Word)

Once you've accepted applicants for your election academy, you'll want to welcome them and start providing them with course materials. This set of email templates has suggested sending dates and text that you can customize for your course.

[Email templates](#) (Word)

Phase 3: Running Your Course

This section previews example classes and materials provided to participants. It includes activities, poll worker training and post-election opportunities. You can decide if pre-reading or homework is needed before a class.

Every state, county, city and town in the U.S. runs elections a little differently. You may have materials, such as checklists, videos, and manuals, that you've developed in-house that would work well as course materials. There are also resources that are used statewide.

Here is an example list of course materials developed by the Greenwich registrars, with links to items available online. The materials are grouped by class based on the list provided in the [course overview template](#). Once you identify materials for your classes, go ahead and make adjustments to the [email templates](#), such as adding or deleting links to materials.

Note on terminology: In the example materials list below, “moderator” and “checker” are poll worker roles in Connecticut elections, and “SOTS” is short for secretary of the state, Connecticut’s top election official.

Class 1: Introduction to Elections and Election Administration [April]

- [Election Calendar](#)
- Ballot Counting Samples & Instructions

Class 2: Voter Registration and Canvass [May]

- [SOTS Memo on Canvass Procedures](#)
- [SOTS Memo on Confirmation of Voting Residence](#)
- Example "Friendly Letter" for address verification
- [Example CVR form \(Confirmation of Voting Residence\) to inactivate a voter](#)
- SOTS Memo on Electronic Registration Information Center (ERIC)
- Example of ED-683 (Moved within Town) notification to voter
- [Example paper voter registration form](#)
- [Example electronic voter registration form](#)
- Voter Registration Graph
- [ERIC Cases at State Elections Enforcement Commission \(SEEC\)](#)
- ERIC Cross State/City | Town Voters List

Class 3: Polling Places and Poll Workers [May/June]

- Official Checker Instructions ([use your local instructions or reference State of CT poll worker manual](#))

- [Electronic Checker Instructions](#)
- Frontline Poll Instructions (ID checker, ballot clerk, tabulator tender) ([use your local instructions or reference State of CT poll worker manual](#))
- [Moderator Instructions](#)
- Online Moderator training
- [De-escalation guides](#) from The Elections Group
- [Security Awareness for Poll Workers handout](#) from The Elections Group

[SUMMER BREAK]

Class 4: Early Voting, Absentee Ballots and Election Day Registration [September]

- Election Day Registration Statistics
- Election Day Registration flyer
- [Absentee Ballot Fact Sheet](#)
- [Absentee Ballot Counting Manual](#)
- Absentee voting statistics
- [Ballot Access Presentation from SOTS \(how minor parties get access to nominate candidates\)](#)
- [Sample Ballot with Minor Parties](#)

Class 5: Tabulator Testing Observation [October]

- [Observer guides](#) from The Elections Group (download and customize)
- [Election Technology Testing Guide and Checklists](#) from The Elections Group
- [Ballot Proofing Guide](#) from The Elections Group

Class 6: Training and Post-Election Activities [November]

- [Poll Worker Training materials](#)
- Audit, canvass and other [observer guides](#) from The Elections Group (download and customize)

Phase 4: Concluding, Following Up and Starting Again

This section covers wrapping up a course, issuing certificates, conducting surveys, following up and then starting the process again for the next round of classes. Includes templates for certificates and surveys.

You've made some important connections with the voters who took part in your jurisdiction's course. Extend the goodwill by celebrating their accomplishments. At your last meeting, whether it's a class or quick catchup after observing audit or recount processes, present participants with a certificate of completion. (If you don't have the opportunity to present certificates in person, you could mail them with a thank you letter or email them with some words of gratitude).

Here is a certificate of completion template that you can customize and present at the end of your course. You can add your jurisdiction's logo or seal and then update it for each participant who completed your Election Academy.

[Certificate of Completion](#) (PPT)

In addition to celebrating, you'll want to spend part of your final class or meeting gathering feedback on your course from participants. This will help you prepare to repeat your Election Academy next election season.

To help understand how well your course, instructors and content were received, ask participants to complete a brief survey when your course concludes. Here is an exit survey template you can use to create your survey. Delete, add and adjust questions until you have a survey that works for your jurisdiction. (If it's not possible to distribute a survey in person, includes a link to the survey in your thank you email to participants.)

[Exit Survey](#) (Word)

Conclusion

As you plan your classes and select course materials, keep in mind the top reasons for starting your Election Academy:

- Promoting transparency
- Enhancing voter confidence

- Increasing voter participation
- Fostering civic engagement

With these in mind, you are sure to develop a course that benefits voters, candidates, election officials and democracy. And as you gather feedback from participants with each course, you will be able to fine-tune your presentations and materials to enhance this learning opportunity.

Remember, you're not alone in this. The [Greenwich registrars of voters](#) and [The Elections Group](#) are available to assist you as you plan, launch and run your jurisdiction's election academy.