Exploring Audits: *Part Two*

Conducting a Ballot Proofing Audit

The Elections Group

Introduction

Ballot proofing is the process of reviewing ballot drafts to ensure that all ballot information is accurate.

- Meticulous ballot proofing is time-consuming and tedious but is the cornerstone of successful election administration.
- Election administrators cannot conduct a successful election with inaccurate ballot information, which could confuse or mislead voters.
- Mistakes are costly: both financially (potentially hundreds of thousands of dollars to reprint and mail ballots to correct issues) and by eroding the public's trust in the process (correcting mistakes causes confusion and people to wonder what else will go wrong). Errors can also lead to costly and time-consuming litigation.

The ballot proofing audit reviews a jurisdiction's methods for ballot proofing. **It ensures that all relevant state and local laws and regulations are followed, and that jurisdictions are using their own ballot proofing processes and procedures in a deliberate, systematic way.** Additionally, reports produced for this audit will show the public that ballots are reviewed carefully after programming to ensure they are accurate.

Standards

1	***The audit is conducted before ballots are printed or transferred to voting equipment.***
2	***The audit is performed by different individuals than those who initially performed ballot proofing.***
3	***A timely post-audit report is drafted in plain language and made available to the public.***

Getting Started

Reports and Materials Needed

- Primary source materials such as candidate qualifying papers, candidate petitions, certificates, official ballot question text, etc.
- Election management system (EMS) generated master list of all contests, candidates and ballot question data to review against primary source materials
- Jurisdictional information including all contests and precinct information
- State and local process information, including statutory requirements and minimum ballot standards and guides
- A comprehensive checklist or form that outlines the specific criteria to be reviewed during the audit and identifies who reviewed and when they reviewed the information
- Labeling materials such as tags or stickers for labeling different batches or sections of the master list

Who Conducts the Audit?

- The audit should be performed by different individuals than those who performed ballot proofing.

Who Observes the Audit?

Election audit transparency is enhanced by opening the audit to observers such as members of the community. Some general considerations when observation is feasible and allowed by law.

- Observers must not direct or interfere with the audit process or compromise the security and privacy standards for the audit.
- Public notice should be given to announce opportunities to observe audit events.
- A member of staff should be designated as an observer liaison to help answer questions.
- Materials such as handouts should be available so observers understand the audit process.

For ballot proofing audits, it is not practicable for the audit event to be open to the general public, however, the public should be given timely access to the post-audit report. Ballot proofing and the audit of the work requires concentrated, meticulous work. Auditors need a quiet space that does not detract from their work.

When Should the Audit Take Place?

- Immediately after the ballot proofing process but before ballots are printed or sent to be printed, before sample ballots or any accessible ballot marking system is made available, and before voting equipment is loaded with the election.
- Additional considerations should be made for any legal deadlines related to the proofing or printing of ballots, for example before the UOCAVA ballot delivery deadline.

- Ensuring that the audit is both meaningful and achievable should be a priority when determining the timing of the audit.

Conducting the Audit

AUDIT CHECKLIST

Review applicable statutes and regulations, the audited jurisdiction's ballot proofing checklists, standard operating procedures, staff task assignments, etc.

Review the EMS master list	**Yes**	**No**
Does it appear that all contests, candidate, and ballot question data were checked against the primary source materials?		
Review the EMS ballot style report	**Yes**	**No**
Does it appear that each unique ballot style was checked against the ballot style report?		
Review Headers	**Yes**	**No**
Does it appear the county included the correct date, election type, party (in a primary)? Do instructions match the ballot form (e.g. "Fill out the oval to the right/ left.")?		
Review your contest rotation for federal, state, and local contests	**Yes**	**No**
Does it appear that ballots include the correct house/senate contests as well as school boards, municipal contests for the election year?		
Review your jurisdiction's dual language requirements?	**Yes**	**No**
Do your ballot styles reflect those requirements?		
External Reviews	**Yes**	**No**
Is there evidence that sample ballots or proofs were sent to all the individuals or entities with contests on the ballot and a written response attesting to the accuracy or completeness of the ballot was received?		
Random Sampling	**Yes**	**No**
Draw a random sample[1] of ballot proofs and compare against the master list for accuracy. Did the proofs match the master list?		

[1] Further research is needed to determine an adequate initial sample size.

Legal Compliance	Yes	No
Did the ballot proofing effort comply with: • Applicable state laws and regulations • All legal deadlines • Jurisdictional processes and procedures, including ballot proofing checklists and standard operating procedures		

Fully Compliant	Substantially Compliant	Not Compliant
☐	☐	☐

Jurisdiction:	Location:	Observer:	Date:

Audit Reports

Public facing audit reports should be written in plain language and include definitions for any technical terms used. At a minimum, reports should include:

- Date and timeline for the audit
- Who conducted the audit
- Methods used for conducting the audit
- Sample size or number of records or other artifacts reviewed
- Findings, including recommended improvements to procedures

For ballot proofing audits, this might also include:

- All checklists and documentation reviewed.
- The number of ballots and/or styles that were audited.
- The completed audit checklists.

Election officials should consider working with local media to help the public understand the value of election audits and understand the findings from the audit report.

This guide is part of our Exploring Election Audits series. We welcome feedback and suggested modifications to this guide. Please reach out to support@electionsgroup.com with any comments.

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