



The Election Official's Guide to **Ballot Drop Boxes**



Overview

Ballot drop boxes offer a secure, convenient alternative for voters to cast their completed mail ballots. They save voters money in jurisdictions where return postage is not prepaid, and they can reduce costs for election authorities that pay postage.

Understanding the Guide

Voters like ballot drop boxes. In jurisdictions where vote-by-mail is prevalent, as many as 80% of voters choose to return their ballot at a ballot drop box.

A ballot drop box program can help build public trust in the election process. Ballot drop boxes can reassure voters who mistrust the postal system because of lost or delayed mail, or who worry about someone potentially tampering with their ballot. Ballot drop boxes also provide a solution for voters who are concerned about their signature being exposed to anyone outside their local election office.

For election officials, ballot drop boxes ensure ballots are received in time to be processed. This is critical since many voters wait until Election Day to return their ballots.

This guide is divided into three sections:

PLANNING

Planning will help election officials decide the type, location, equipment and staffing for three types of ballot drop boxes.

VOTER OUTREACH AND COMMUNICATION

Voter Outreach and Communication contains suggestions for promoting ballot drop box convenience and availability, and to publicize your request and return deadlines.

EXECUTION

Execution includes example forms that can be used for training temporary staff and as daily checklists and chain of custody logs through election night.

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Planning

How Many Ballot Drop Boxes Do I Need?

Estimating a sufficient number of ballot drop boxes can be challenging when you don't know how many voters will use them. And determining how many to obtain will be constrained by your budget, purchasing process and capacity to deploy multiple boxes before Election Day.

Hiring enough temporary workers to staff ballot security teams is another critical factor. To maintain public trust, bipartisan, two-person teams should pick up ballots from each drop box on a daily basis. You will need more frequent pick-ups in the days leading up to and including Election Day. Early on, some busy locations may also require frequent pick-ups, perhaps multiple times a day.

The benefits to deploying as many ballot drop boxes as possible include:

- Providing greater access to the election process
- Keeping voters out of busy and stressful polling places on Election Day
- Receiving voted ballots back faster than USPS delivery

A rule of thumb to consider is one drop box for every 10,000 to 15,000 voters; that is a common requirement in states where mail ballots are the primary voting method. Your geography should also inform how many drop boxes you place. For example, rural, sparsely populated areas may require more drop boxes per capita than densely populated urban areas.

Fewer drop boxes will yield fewer benefits. An overflowing, unstaffed 24-hour ballot drop box can become a serious public relations and voter trust issue. If mailing out ballots is a temporary alternative or if you don't have an adequate budget, temporary indoor ballot drop boxes at staffed locations may provide a workable solution.

Scaling Up

Ballot drop boxes should be available to voters as soon as ballots are mailed and remain available through the close of polls on Election Day (or as the statute in your state provides). Unstaffed drop boxes are usually available 24 hours per day. Staffed drop boxes or drive-up options are typically offered on a more limited schedule, such as during business hours and during polling hours on Election Day.

If staffing is a problem, consider starting with fewer drop boxes and scaling up to the full number you need closer to Election Day. Note that scaling up over time presents public relations challenges. You will need to clearly publicize drop box locations, plus the dates and times that each location is available.

Where Do I Place Them?

When selecting ballot drop box locations, election officials should consider these factors at a minimum:

- Concentrations of population
- Concentrations of historically higher mail-voting populations
- Geographic distance and features
- Voter convenience
- Proximity to public transportation
- Community-based locations
- Security, including lighting, visibility and security cameras
- Accessibility for voters with disabilities

The Center for Tech and Civic Life (CTCL) created a [Ballot Drop-off Location Criteria Planner](#) to help jurisdictions evaluate potential ballot drop-off locations.

Unless prohibited by law, a staffed ballot drop box should be provided at every polling location. This will require separate drop boxes for mail ballots and in-person paper ballots (when not scanned at the polling location).

Additional locations for staffed drop boxes may include, but are not limited to: city offices, public libraries, county offices, assisted living facilities, senior living communities, college campuses, local businesses and shopping centers, and offices of community organizations. At these locations, the voter may need to leave their vehicle and enter the building. A drive-up option could allow voters to deposit their ballots and remain in their vehicles.



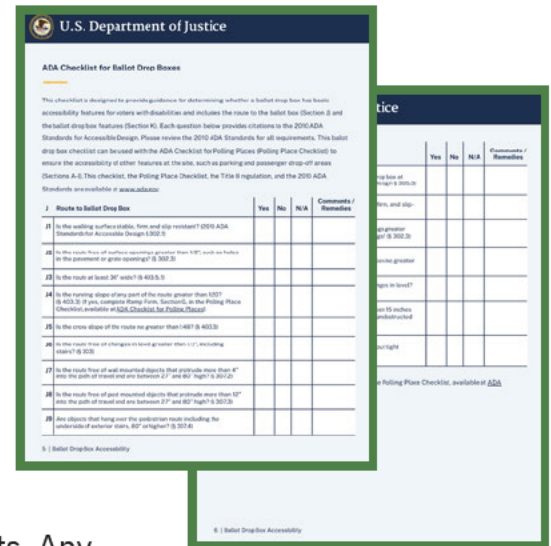
ADA Accessibility

Election officials should ensure that ballot drop box locations are accessible to voters with disabilities.

Refer to and follow ADA requirements for polling locations and use the [ADA Checklist for Ballot Drop Boxes](#).

Consider the following when implementing drop box plans.

1. If a location has only one drop box, the design and placement of that drop box should meet accessibility requirements.
2. If a location has more than one drop box, at least one of the drop boxes should meet accessibility requirements. Any inaccessible drop box at a facility should have a sign with directions to the nearest accessible drop box.
3. A drop box should be placed along an accessible path connected to the nearest ADA parking space or nearest the passenger drop-off zone, and if applicable, the nearest public transportation stop.
4. If there is no accessible pathway from the parking lot, there should be signs directing the voter to the nearest accessible drop box.
5. Drop boxes located inside buildings should be assessed for accessibility as if they were polling places. For more information, please see the ADA Checklist for Polling Places.



Purchasing Considerations

The type of ballot drop box(es) you use will depend on your plan and budget. Drop boxes come in several sizes and styles, and use different construction materials to withstand vandalism and inclement weather, and to prevent removal. The following section covers three types of ballot boxes:

- 24-hour permanent boxes
- Temporary indoor boxes
- Temporary drive-through ballot drop-offs



24-Hour Unstaffed Ballot Drop Box

A 24-hour ballot drop box mimics a USPS blue mailbox. It is a permanent metal structure accessible by vehicle or on foot in the public right-of-way, and should be well-secured to the ground. Styles vary. These can be installed on your jurisdiction's property, or you can arrange to install one at a partnering public agency (see list in previous section.) This usually means securing a written agreement with property owners to locate and secure these drop boxes on their property before you purchase them. A list of drop box vendors is located in Appendix A.

Some things to consider when purchasing 24-hour unstaffed ballot drop boxes:

- The drop box should be a permanent fixture or a temporary structure that is secured in place to prevent removal or tampering.
- The ballot drop box needs sturdy locking mechanisms for both the ballot slot(s) and storage compartment. Confirm that ballots cannot be tampered with while in the drop box or removed by anyone other than your authorized ballot retrieval team.
- The opening slot should be large enough to deposit ballot return envelopes and designed to keep all liquids out, including poured liquids, rainwater and seepage.
- Drop boxes should be easily recognizable by voters. Plan to purchase or produce permanent, large, weather-proof decals to label the drop boxes with at least your agency name, logo, phone number and the words Official Ballot Drop Box. Use consistent decals on all 24-hour boxes. Additional language may include:
 - No Postage Required
 - Closes at 7 p.m. on Election Day (or relevant time)
 - This Box Under Video Surveillance (if applicable)
 - If required, list any statutory language, such as the number of ballots that can be dropped off by one person in any election.
- Find out how many ballot envelopes each drop box size and style can hold. Ballot return projections will help you to determine the drop box size you will need.
- Consider whether your jurisdiction can or must monitor the ballot drop box with 24/7 video surveillance, where you will mount the camera and how you will store footage. If the drop box is located at another agency's facility, include mounting and access requirements in the agreement.
- If the ballot drop box is accessible by vehicle, consider whether you can safely locate it on the driver's side. Ensuring the driver can cast their ballot without exiting the vehicle supports personal safety and ballot security. "One-Way" streets/thoroughfares are ideal for installing a box on the driver's side.

- When planning to receive a shipment of drop boxes, consider multiple important factors.
 - The drop boxes will arrive on pallets and are large and heavy.
 - They should be shipped directly to a warehouse.
 - If installation will not take place immediately, you may need space to store them.
 - You may need a forklift to move them.
 - While drop boxes have few moving parts, it is crucial that you verify the locks and doors are functioning properly and that all ballot slots are unobstructed before acceptance.

Note that you may need an agreement or permit from the local governing body to install drop boxes. Once an agreement and/or permit is secured, you may need to coordinate work with other offices to complete installation.

Some items to consider:

- To extend the timeline for safe and fully functional drop boxes, you may need to pour new concrete.
- Consider drop box weight and bulk for transportation to installation locations. Consider which staff and vehicles will work best, and how to move the boxes in and out of the vehicle cargo area.
- Securing the boxes may require tradespeople with set schedules, so it is important to stick to the plan and timetable.
- Early and regular communications will help the team work better together.

24-Hour Unstaffed Ballot Drop Boxes

Some things to consider when purchasing 24-hour, unstaffed ballot drop boxes:

- The drop box should be a permanent fixture or a temporary structure that is **secured in place** to prevent removal or tampering.
- Ensure that the ballot drop box has **robust locking mechanisms** for both the ballot slot(s) and storage compartment. Ensure that ballots cannot be tampered with while in the drop box, nor removed by anyone other than your authorized ballot retrieval team.
- The **opening slot** should be large enough to deposit ballot envelopes and designed to keep anyone from pouring liquid into the drop box, or for rainwater to seep into it.
- Drop boxes should be **easily recognizable by voters**. Plan to purchase or produce permanent, large, weather-proof decals to label the drop boxes with your agency name, logo, phone number and the words Official Ballot Drop Box. Use consistent decals on all 24-hour boxes. Additional language may include:
 - No Postage Required
 - Closes at 7 p.m. on Election Day (or relevant time)
 - This Box Under Video Surveillance (if applicable)
 - If required, list any statutory language, such as the number of ballots that can be dropped off by one person in any election.
- Find out **how many ballot envelopes** each different brand or style of drop box can hold. Ballot return projections will help you to determine the drop box size you will need.
- Consider whether your jurisdiction can or must monitor the ballot drop box with **24/7 video surveillance**, where the camera will be mounted, and how footage will be stored. If the drop box is located at another agency's facility, include mounting and access requirements in the agreement.
- If the ballot drop box is accessible by vehicle, consider whether you can safely access it on the **driver's side**. This can ensure safety by letting the driver cast their ballot without exiting the vehicle. One-way streets/thoroughfares are ideal for installing a box on the driver's side.
- When planning to **receive a shipment** of drop boxes, consider multiple important factors.
 - These drop boxes will arrive on pallets and are large and heavy.
 - They should be shipped to a warehouse.
 - Installation may not take place immediately, and you may need space to store them.
 - A forklift may be needed to move them.
 - While drop boxes have few moving parts, it is crucial that you verify the locks and doors are functioning properly and that all ballot slots are unobstructed before acceptance.

Temporary Indoor Ballot Drop Boxes

Temporary indoor ballot drop boxes or bags are portable and much smaller than 24-hour drop boxes. Smaller options rest on a table and have carrying handles. Larger options have wheels and can hold more ballots. Bipartisan teams of two election workers usually monitor these drop boxes or bags.

Ideally, these drop boxes or bags should be available inside every polling place, to offer voters the greatest convenience for dropping off mail ballots. When placed inside a polling location, poll workers can staff and service the drop boxes rather than separate ballot collection teams.

Government buildings, libraries, community centers and other high traffic areas are other locations for temporary indoor drop boxes. Your agency could secure an agreement to have staff from these partnering agencies monitor the drop box during their business hours and during polling hours on Election Day. The agreement should ensure access for your ballot retrieval team to pick up the ballot drop box or bag at scheduled times.

Factors to consider when purchasing temporary, indoor ballot drop boxes or bags:

- Consider durability, weight and sizing options, and which is the best solution for your facility—a smaller tabletop box, bag or larger box on wheels.
- Determine how many ballots each drop box or bag can hold and your requirements for replacing or emptying it. Ballot drop boxes fill up quickly, especially approaching and on Election Day.
- Ensure that the drop box or bag cannot be opened or moved by unauthorized persons. It should have a lock to protect ballot envelopes, and ideally should be secured to an immovable object with a padlock or chain lock, like a bicycle lock.
- Ensure there is a place on the drop box or bag for a zip tie-style security seal for chain of custody.
- The drop box or bag should be easily recognizable by voters. Plan to purchase or produce decals to label it with your agency name, branding and other useful information, such as the purpose of the box. See the section on Voter Outreach and Communication.

Temporary Ballot Drop Boxes

Indoor Drop Boxes

Temporary indoor ballot drop boxes or bags are portable and much smaller than 24-hour drop boxes. Some options have handles on the side for carrying and are small enough to rest on a table. Larger options can hold more ballots and are on wheels. Bipartisan teams of two election workers usually monitor these drop boxes or bags.

Ideally, these drop boxes or bags should be available inside every polling place to offer voters the greatest convenience for dropping off mail ballots. Ballot drop boxes placed inside the polling location may be serviced and staffed by poll workers rather than separate ballot collection teams.

They can also be located inside government buildings, libraries, community centers, and other high traffic areas. Your agency could secure an agreement to have staff from these partnering agencies monitor the drop box during their business hours and during polling hours on Election Day. The agreement should ensure access for your ballot retrieval team to pick up the ballot drop box or bag at scheduled times.

Factors to consider when purchasing temporary, indoor ballot drop boxes or bags:

- Consider **durability, weight and sizing options**, and which would be a better solution for your facility—a smaller tabletop box, a bag, or a larger box on wheels.
- Determine **how many ballots** each drop box or bag can hold and your requirements for replacing or emptying it. Ballot drop boxes fill up quickly, especially approaching and on Election Day.
- Ensure that the drop box or bag **cannot be opened or moved** by unauthorized persons. It should have a lock to protect ballot envelopes, and ideally should be secured to an immovable object with a padlock or chain lock (such as a bicycle lock).
- Ensure that there is a place on the drop box or bag for a zip-tie style **security seal** for chain of custody.
- The drop box or bag should be **easily recognizable by voters**. Plan to purchase or produce decals to label it with your agency name, branding, the purpose of the drop box and useful information.

Temporary Drive-Through Ballot Drop Box

A drive-through ballot drop box is staffed by bipartisan teams of two election workers on a street or in a parking lot. These workers safely approach a vehicle, accept the ballot return envelope from the voter and deposit it into a ballot drop box while the voter observes. At minimum, these workers are equipped with safety vests and badges, a canopy tent for shelter, a table and chairs and locked ballot boxes. This option is usually only deployed on the last few days of the election, including Election Day.

Drive-through locations can be very convenient for voters because they don't need to park or leave their vehicles. They also offer greater operational efficiency for election administrators because they can absorb some of the traffic from high-demand, 24-hour ballot drop boxes on Election Day.

To avoid long lines of cars potentially blocking roadways or parking lots, ensure you have enough staff and ballot drop boxes to move traffic through quickly. Also, some jurisdictions provide "I Voted" stickers at drive-through locations. While this is a fun idea, it has the potential to slow the pace of cars through the process, creating longer lines. Be sure to consider this impact in your planning.

Considerations for temporary, drive-through drop off locations:

- To maximize safety and efficiency, conduct detailed planning to map out exactly where setup should take place and how traffic should flow, and then provide instructions and maps to setup teams.
- Election offices can often borrow canopy tents, tables, chairs, safety cones and portable space heaters from other government agencies, such as the Sheriff's Office, Public Works, Parks & Recreation, Facilities or Fleet, or rent them from a party or restaurant supply company.
- Staff working outdoors may need additional supplies, such as spotlights and flashlights for working in the dark, and apparel for inclement weather.

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- ❑ Staff working outdoors may need additional supplies, such as spotlights and flashlights for working in the dark, and apparel for inclement weather.

How Do We Secure Drop Boxes?

The type of drop box and location affect the security measures needed to ensure both actual and perceived security.

Locking Requirements

Drop boxes must be secured by a lock and a tamper-evident seal. Limit access to the keys or combination to the lock to an election official and designated ballot retrieval teams only.

If your drop boxes are secured by key locks, be sure to make copies of each key and store them securely at your election facility.

Video Requirements

If feasible, monitor both temporary and 24-hour drop boxes using a video security surveillance system or an internal camera that can capture digital images and/or video.

A video security surveillance system is especially critical for unstaffed, 24-hour boxes and can include existing systems on county, city or private buildings. The video system should be capable of capturing and storing video for the entire period that ballot drop boxes are open to receive ballots during an election. If these videos are considered an election record under your state laws, your office would need to retain them for a certain period of time after each election.

The easiest way to provide video surveillance is to position your ballot drop box within view of an existing video surveillance system. If you need to install your own system, work with your facilities, IT or law enforcement division. Chances are your jurisdiction already uses similar systems and has a vendor for this type of equipment.



Bipartisan Election Workers (Drive-Through Locations)

Drive-through ballot drop boxes must be monitored very closely by election workers to ensure no one drives off with a ballot drop box.

Other Safety and Security Measures

To prevent moving or tampering, securely fasten unstaffed drop boxes placed outdoors to concrete or an immovable object. This will prevent unauthorized removal of the drop box.

For staffed drop boxes, consider additional security measures for when the ballot drop site is not staffed. Safeguarding the drop box during unstaffed hours could mean the drop box is inaccessible to the public when not in use and then made accessible when staff transport it to a curbside or mobile voting area. When unstaffed, the box should be secured in a locked room, sealed with a tamper-evident seal and, if possible, stored under video surveillance. When in use, these drop boxes should be constantly monitored by elections staff or other designated representatives. Best practices for security include securely fastening drop boxes to a stationary surface or to an immovable object, or placing them behind a counter.

Work with law enforcement to include frequent patrols of unstaffed drop boxes. In some communities, developing a network of citizens willing to regularly patrol unstaffed drop boxes may be an option.

Work with the public works department and law enforcement to make drive-through locations safe and secure.

Ballot Retrieval

Once the locations of your ballot drop boxes are set, you should begin planning daily routes for ballot retrieval. This includes sending teams to visit all ballot drop boxes – permanent and temporary. The frequency of pickups may vary in the beginning, every other day versus every day, and become more frequent – multiple times per day – the closer you get to Election Day.

The time it takes to retrieve ballots will depend on the type of ballot drop box. Ballot retrieval teams will be able to park close to most permanent, 24-hour drop boxes. They will need to transfer the contents of the drop boxes to portable bags or boxes, seal them, complete their chain of custody paperwork and then load the portable bags or boxes into their vehicle.

Temporary, staffed ballot drop boxes are usually located inside a building. This means ballot retrieval teams will need to park and walk into the building to retrieve ballots. Most often, they will replace the full ballot drop box with an empty drop box, complete the chain of custody paperwork and carry the full drop box back to their vehicle. The process for temporary drive-through locations is similar.



Driving Routes

The ballot retrieval process is most efficient when retrieval teams follow pre-planned driving routes. Mapping technology can make this easier. Some election offices use commercial software, such as Routific and Esri Workforce. Google Maps is a free option that is easy to use and likely already familiar to staff.

When using Google Maps, begin by mapping out a route that you think can be completed within four hours. Identify each stop, including the starting and ending location, typically the election office. Assume it will take ballot retrieval teams approximately 15 minutes to complete the collection process at each location. Adjust the number of drop boxes until you have a route your ballot retrieval



team can finish in four hours. When mapping the route, adjust the time of day to match the when your retrieval team will be on the road to account for daily traffic patterns, and be sure to include breaks, as needed.

Consider using mobile phone tracking applications or GPS spot trackers to ensure teams follow assigned routes without deviation and make each stop on time. This may also help document chain of custody.

Retrieval Frequency

How frequently you retrieve ballots from each ballot drop box depends on multiple factors, including:

- Timing: How close to Election Day is it?
- Projected and actual voter turnout
- Total number of ballot boxes
- Maximum ballot capacity of each box
- Geography of your jurisdiction and distance retrieval teams have to travel

Generally, it is important to retrieve ballots at least once per day, starting as soon as voters have ballots in hand. This maintains ballot security and ensures ballots enter your processing operation quickly. From there, structure your retrieval plan around a slowly building stream of ballots. Jurisdictions have seen as few as 20% of ballots cast by mail deposited in drop boxes during the first two weeks and as many as 55% to 60% of ballots deposited during the last two days of the election, including 40% of ballots cast on Election Day. You will need to retrieve ballots multiple times per day from your busier ballot drop boxes the closer you get to and on Election Day.

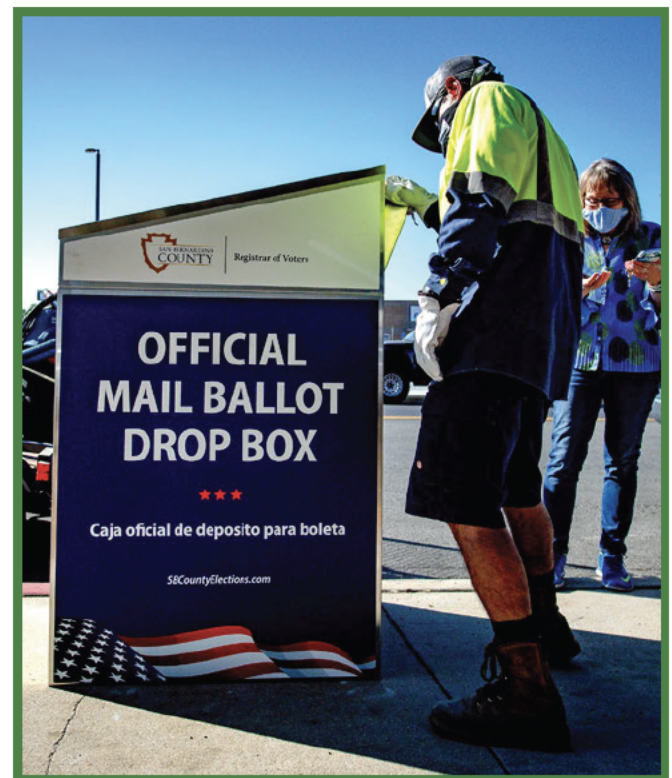
Other Important Considerations

- Your plan needs to be flexible. If voter turnout is higher than anticipated, you may need to scale up and retrieve ballots multiple times per day earlier than planned.
- On the Monday evening before Election Day, you must retrieve ballots from all drop boxes at the end of the day to leave space for overnight and early morning deposits and to maximize the number of ballots you can count on Election Day.
- On election night, you must close all drop boxes simultaneously when the polls close. This will take significant staffing and coordination.
- Track as much data about this process as possible, including how many ballots you retrieve from each drop box each day and how many retrieval runs were needed to each drop box each day. You can pull this data from ballot logs and review it after the election. Retain this data for your debrief and future planning.

Staffing Needs

Use the mapped driving routes and frequency of retrieval to determine how many teams and vehicles you will need and for how long. For example, in the first few weeks after your office mails ballots, you might only need three teams of two and three vehicles. In the week leading up to Election Day, you may need to increase or even double staffing levels.

The biggest staffing challenge for ballot retrieval will be at the close of polls on election night. You will need bipartisan teams to close and seal each ballot drop box right at the close of polls (or as the statute in your state provides). Many jurisdictions recruit staff from partner agencies, since drop box closing teams do not require full poll worker training. Remember, these ballot retrieval teams need to be bipartisan, even those staff recruited from other agencies, and may need to be sworn in as election workers.



Voter Outreach and Communications

Promoting the use and availability of ballot drop boxes is essential to their success. Use all communication tools and resources at your disposal as soon as practical to publicize ballot drop box locations, hours and notable accessibility features.

For example, use your regular print and electronic materials—website, social media, video and news releases—to announce ballot drop box locations and share a link to a comprehensive list and/or map of ballot drop boxes.

You can also include a list of ballot drop box locations in your mail ballot instructions, voter information guide and sample ballot publications. Depending on how many locations you have, you may be able to print them on the mail ballot envelope as well. If there are too many locations to fit, perhaps include a link or QR code on the envelope to direct voters to your list of locations.

Make your election website the optimal resource for voters to find ballot drop box locations. Create a [web page for Ballot Drop Box Locations](#). Include a list of all location names, addresses and hours, and embed a link to a Google map for each. If the ballot drop box plan changes, note it on your official website within 24 hours. Another creative idea is to develop a ‘Find My Nearest’ web-based tool to help voters find the ballot drop box closest to them. A user types an address or allows the tool to use their device’s location services to identify their current location. The tool populates with a map and a list of three or four nearby ballot drop off locations. This requires ArcGIS or Google Maps knowledge; your IT department can lend support.

You can also create and embed a map of all ballot box locations using Google My Maps. First, create a list of locations as a .csv file with separate columns for location name, address, city, state and zip code; hours; and type of ballot drop box. Then visit www.google.com/mymaps and follow the instructions to import the map. You’ll need to create a Google account if you don’t already have one.

Issue a news release and photos once you install one or more new 24-hour ballot drop boxes in your community. Share it on your staff communications channels and with local news media. Write about it in community newsletters, blogs or websites, and share the information with relevant jurisdictions for newsletters and public television news shows.

Ask the clerk or communications team in your local cities and towns if you can submit a contributed article for their newsletter, blog or website regarding the election. Be sure to request a deadline and word count. Describe options for voters and indicate how and where voters can find their nearest ballot drop box and polling place. You can also ask them to embed your election page link on their webpages.

Execution

Opening and Setup

Whether you are setting up a temporary ballot drop box or a 24-hour location, ballot retrieval teams need supplies and a plan for setting up, opening and securing the drop boxes as voters deposit their voted ballots.

Temporary Ballot Drop Boxes

Supplies:

- Locked and sealed ballot drop boxes or bags
- Tamper-evident seals
- Chain of custody logs
- Phone numbers to call for support or in emergencies
- Cable or bike lock
- Key or combination for locks, kept secure by elections staff or the ballot retrieval team
- Applicable signage
- Tables and chairs, if necessary
- “I Voted” stickers (optional)
- Voter information sheet (optional)
- Voter registration forms (optional)

Note:

Place voter information sheets, “I Voted” stickers and other handouts for voters near the drop box.



Other Drop Box Supplies and Equipment



All Types of Ballot Drop Boxes

- Bipartisan ballot retrieval teams
Enough teams to ensure each drop box is closed/locked at close of polls on Election Night
- Phone tree to reach bipartisan teams while in the field
(May need to provide mobile phones for those who do not want to use their personal phones)
- Rental cars or fleet vehicles
- Chain of custody logs
- Security seals
- Portable ballot drop boxes or bags for transport
- High-visibility vests for workers
- Personal protective equipment such as gloves, masks, and hand sanitizer
- Accessibility, directional, and electioneering signs (if applicable)

PERMANENT 24-HOUR

- Extra keys made
- Large mail bin placed inside
- Flashlights

TEMPORARY INDOOR

- Tables
- Chairs
- Cable or bike lock

TEMPORARY DRIVE-THROUGH

- Tables
- Chairs
- Pop-up canopy
- Road signs
- Orange cones
- Lanterns
- Flashlights
- Weather appropriate support such as propane heater and rain gear

Drop Box Opening and Setup



Whether you are setting up a temporary ballot drop box or a 24-hour location, you will need to plan for a ballot retrieval team to set up, open, and secure the drop boxes for voters to deposit their voted ballots.

Temporary Ballot Drop Boxes

Supplies:

- Locked and sealed ballot drop boxes or bags
- Tamper-evident seals
- Chain of custody logs
- Phone numbers to call for support/emergencies
- Cable or bike lock
- Applicable signage
- Tables and chairs (if necessary)
- "I Voted" stickers (optional)
- Voter information sheet (optional)
- Voter registration forms (optional)

Voter information sheets, "I Voted" stickers, and other voting related information may be placed near the drop box.

Drive-Through Ballot Drop Boxes

Drive-through ballot drop boxes might be set up in a parking lot or on the street depending on the location. For all street-related setups, there should be a law enforcement officer present to guide the setup and maintain safety throughout the day.

When setting up in a parking lot, consider the use of "no parking" signs. These signs can be left out overnight to ensure no vehicles park in the area to be used for the drive-through location.

Supplies should be delivered, including:

- Locked and sealed ballot drop boxes or bags
- Tamper-evident seals
- Chain of custody logs
- Phone numbers to call for support/emergencies
- Set-up maps/documentation
- Pop-up tent
- Road signs
- Orange cones
- Table and chairs
- "I Voted" stickers (optional)
- Propane heater (during cold weather months)
- Flashlights or lanterns

Bipartisan teams should:

- 1** Position road signs and cones according to provided map or instructions.
- 2** Set up the tent and position according to the provided map or instructions.
- 3** Set up the folding table and chairs.
- 4** Place the ballot drop box on the table.
- 5** Set up the heater and propane tank if needed.

24-Hour Ballot Drop Boxes

Permanent, 24-hour drop boxes should be available for voters to use as soon as ballots are mailed. This requires staff or ballot retrieval teams to inspect, clean, and open the ballot drop slot on each drop box. An assigned route for opening should be created along with a checklist or log to ensure all ballot drop boxes have been opened.

Each retrieval team will need:

- Slot key
- Access door key
- Phone numbers to call for support/emergencies
- Cleaning supplies
- Silicone spray (for locks)
- Flashlight
- Inspection checklist or chain of custody form

For setup and opening of 24-hour ballot drop boxes, retrieval teams will:

1. UNLOCK

- Open the ballot slot, using the slot key.
- Open the access door, using the access door key.

2. INSPECT AND CLEAN

- Visually inspect the drop box and surrounding areas.
- If there is any graffiti or wrap damage, the retrieval team will clean or repair as best they can.
If unable to clean or repair it thoroughly, use mobile phone to take pictures and note the damage on the chain of custody form.
- Wipe down the exterior, top and slot area of the drop box.
- Spray the locks with silicone spray and ensure they can be easily locked and unlocked.
- Both retrieval team members visually inspect the drop box interior for ballots or any type of debris.
- Use a mobile phone to take a picture as time-stamped proof the ballot drop box is empty.

3. SEAL AND RECORD

- Close and lock the access door using the access door key.
- Place a security seal on the access door and record seal number on a chain of custody form.
- Complete and sign the retrieval form or chain of custody form.

Drive-Through Ballot Drop Boxes

Drive-through ballot drop box locations may be in a parking lot or on the street, depending on the location. For on-street setups, be sure a law enforcement officer is on hand to guide the setup and maintain safety throughout the day.

When setting up in a parking lot, consider using “no parking” signs. You can leave them out overnight to ensure the drive-through location remains clear.

Plan to deliver supplies, including:

- Locked and sealed ballot drop boxes or bags
- Key or combination for locks, kept secure by elections staff or the ballot retrieval team
- Tamper-evident seals
- Chain of custody logs
- Phone numbers to call for support or in emergencies
- Setup maps and documentation
- Canopy tent
- Road signs
- Orange cones
- Table and chairs
- “I Voted” stickers (optional)
- Propane heater (optional during cold weather months)
- Flashlights or lanterns



Bipartisan teams should:

1. Position road signs and cones according to the setup map or instructions.
2. Set up and position the canopy tent according to the setup map or instructions.
3. Arrange the table and chairs.
4. Place the ballot drop box on the table.
5. Set up the heater and propane tank, if needed.

24-Hour Ballot Drop Boxes

Permanent, 24-hour drop boxes should be available for voters to use as soon as ballots hit the mail. Assign staff or ballot retrieval teams to inspect, clean and open the ballot drop slot on each drop box. Provide them with a checklist or log and a mapped route to ensure they open all drop boxes according to your process.

Each retrieval team will need:

- Slot key
- Access door key
- Phone numbers to call for support or in emergencies
- Cleaning supplies
- Silicone spray for locks
- Flashlight
- Inspection checklist or chain of custody form

For setup and opening of 24-hour ballot drop boxes, retrieval teams will:

1. Unlock
 - a. Open the ballot slot using the slot key.
 - b. Open the access door using the access door key.
2. Inspect and Clean
 - a. Visually inspect the drop box and surrounding areas.
 - b. Clean any graffiti and repair any wrap damage, if possible.
 - c. If cleaning or repair is not possible, take photos using a mobile phone and note the damage on the chain of custody form
 - d. Wipe down the exterior, top and slot area of the drop box.
 - e. Spray the locks with silicone spray and confirm they can be easily locked and unlocked.
 - f. Both retrieval team members visually inspect the drop box interior for ballots or any type of debris.
 - g. Use a mobile phone to take a picture of the inside of the drop box as time-stamped proof it is empty.

3. Seal and Record

- a. Close and lock the access door using the access door key.
- b. Place a security seal on the access door and record seal number on a chain of custody form.
- c. Complete and sign the retrieval form or chain of custody form.

Daily Collection of Ballot Drop Boxes

- Assign designated bipartisan ballot retrieval teams of two to remove ballots from drop boxes.
- Ensure designated ballot retrieval team members wear badges or vests clearly identifying them as ballot retrievers or election officials.
- Provide each team of two with a mapped route each day.
- Ensure teams retrieve ballots in designated order.
- Task teams with completing a separate chain of custody form at every stop—both for 24-hour drop boxes and temporary drop boxes or bags.
- Be sure teams complete a ballot retrieval log and checklist at the beginning of the route, at each stop and after returning to the election office.
- Require teams to visually inspect the drop box and surrounding area at each visit. If there are any signs of tampering or vandalism, they should take pictures, clean or repair the drop box as best they can, and report in the notes section of the chain of custody form.

Train staff to check inventory against the supply list, fill out the retrieval team daily log and complete the ballot retrieval chain of custody record.

Ballot Retrieval Team

DAILY LOG



Route: _____

Date: _____

Retriever 1: _____

Retriever 2: _____

Supplies

- Locked and sealed ballot drop boxes or bags
- Key or combination for locks, kept secure by elections staff or the ballot retrieval team
- Tamper-evident seals
- Chain of custody logs
- Phone numbers to call for support or in emergencies
- Setup maps and documentation
- Canopy tent
- Road signs
- Orange cones
- Table and chairs
- "I Voted" stickers (optional)
- Propane heater (optional during cold weather months)
- Flashlights or lanterns

Log records

Drop Box Name/ID	Existing Seal ID	Transfer Box/ Bag Seal	New Seal ID	Collection Time	Team Initials	

Ballot Retrieval Team



CHAIN OF CUSTODY RECORD

Ballot Drop Box Name/#	Date
Retrieval Team Member 1	Retrieval Team Member 2
Transfer Box/Bag #	Additional Transfer Box Bag #

Time of Arrival	Initials	Place used security seal here
Security Seal Intact	Initials	
Remove security seal and record seal #		

Ballot Retrieval

- Inspect ballot drop box for any signs of tampering or vandalism.
- Unlock the access door and remove ballots.
- Transfer ballots to ballot transfer box or bag.
- Inspect inside of drop box for ballots that might be leaning against or stuck to the wall.
- Inspect drop box area to ensure no ballots have fallen on the ground.
- Seal the ballot transfer box or bag.
- Record the transfer box or bag seal number(s).
- Verify access door is closed and locked (checked by both team members).
- Place new security seal on door.
- Record new security seal placed on door.
- Load transfer containers into vehicle.
- Record new door security seal and transfer security seal numbers on the ballot retrieval log

All procedures completed and recorded	Initials
Time of Departure	Initials
Service Required?	Notes

Instructions for Completing Ballot Retrieval Log

- On the front, record the date and time and check off all supplies to be used for ballot retrieval.
- On the back, record the route number, date and names of both ballot retrievers.
 - After ballots have been retrieved at each stop, record:
 - Column A: Name/ID/location of the ballot drop box
 - Column B: Seal number on the door (24-hour drop box) when you arrived (should be affixed to custody log) or the security seal on the temporary drop box you are retrieving
 - Column C: Seal number attached to each transfer box or bag (only for 24-hour drop box)
 - Column D: New seal number put on the door (24-hour drop box) or the seal number for the replacement temporary box or bag
 - Column E: Current time of day
 - Column F: Initials of each ballot retrieval team member.
- At the conclusion of each route, team members should complete the bottom portion of the form. Consider using the same supply checklist so your teams can show they returned all supplies and equipment to the election office.

Election Night Closing

All ballot drop boxes, temporary and permanent, need to be collected or closed at the time the polls close. The process outlined below focuses on permanent, 24-hour drop boxes, but you can apply the same general principles to temporary ballot drop boxes. You can supplement these instructions with the Election Night Closing Checklist that follows.

Station a bipartisan retrieval team at each drop box 15 minutes before the polls close. When the polls close, they will lock drop boxes and retrieve ballots.

- Consider asking other jurisdictions' employees to assist, since this process does not require a great deal of training. Provide each retrieval team with these supplies and a closing checklist:
 - Map with driving directions and the driving time to their location. This ensures teams leave the election facility with enough time to arrive 15 minutes before the polls close.
 - "Last Voter in Line" card
 - Extra transfer ballot box or bag to collect ballots cast after the polls close. These are ballots from voters who were not in line at the time polls closed, but who approach the box as the retrieval team is transferring ballots. Their late ballots will not count.

- Checklist with instructions for completing a full sweep of the drop box with a flashlight along with instructions for locking, sealing, recording, transferring ballots to a temporary box, taking a photo and returning to the election office.
- Instructions for how to handle a line of cars (if 24-hour drop box or drive-through ballot drop-off) or a line of people (if temporary indoor drop box). This should include a “Last Voter in Line” card and potentially coordinating with local law enforcement for traffic control.
- If at the close of polls you have a line of people or cars waiting to use the drop box, have one person walk to the end of the line of people or cars and hand the last voter in line at the close of polls the “Last Voter In Line” card. This is the same process used for in-person voting at a polling place and will ensure everyone in line when polls close can cast their ballot.
- Recommend teams take pictures of:
 - Locked ballot slot
 - Inside of the 24-hour boxes once emptied after the close of polls to show that no ballots are left in the box.

Election Night Closing



All ballot drop boxes, temporary and permanent, need to be collected or closed at the time the polls close. The process outlined below is focused on permanent, 24-hour drop boxes, but the same general principles can be applied to temporary ballot drop boxes. These instructions can be supplemented with the *Election Night Closing Checklist* that follows.

Station a bipartisan retrieval team at each drop box 15 minutes before the polls close. They will lock drop boxes as soon as the polls close and retrieve ballots.

- Consider asking other jurisdictions' employees to assist, since this process does not require a great deal of training. Provide each retrieval team with the necessary supplies and checklist as detailed in this guide. In addition to those supplies, these retrieval teams will also need the following:
 - **Map with driving directions and approximate time** it will take to arrive at their location. This ensures they leave the election facility with enough time to arrive 15 minutes before the close of the election.
 - **"Last Voter in Line" card**
 - **Extra transfer ballot box or bag** to collect ballots cast after the polls close. These ballots will not be counted. These are ballots from voters not in line at the time polls close, but who approach the box as the retrieval team is transferring ballots.
 - **Checklist with instructions** for completing a full sweep of the drop box with a flashlight along with instructions for locking, sealing, recording, transferring ballots to a temporary box, taking a photo and returning to HQ.
- You may have a line of people, or cars, at close of polls with people waiting to cast their ballot in the drop box. As with in-person voting, have one person walk to the end of the line of people and/or cars and hand the last voter in line at close of polls the "Last Voter In Line" card to ensure everyone in line at close of polls may cast their ballot.
- **Instructions for how to handle a line of cars** (if 24-hour drop box or drive-through ballot drop-off) or a line of people (if temporary indoor drop box). This should include a "Last Voter in Line" card and potentially coordinating with local law enforcement for traffic control.
- Recommend teams take pictures of:
 - **Locked ballot slot**
 - **Inside of the 24-hour boxes** once emptied after the close of polls to show that no ballots are left in the box.

It is highly recommended to have your daily ballot retrieval team visit all ballot drop boxes the day after the election to double-check that all ballots were collected.

Election Night Closing Checklist

Ballot Drop Box Name/#	Date
Retrieval Team Member 1	Retrieval Team Member 2

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Ensure you have necessary supplies and chain of custody logs before leaving for your designated drop box. <input type="checkbox"/> Ensure you take enough transfer boxes or bags to completely empty the drop box. <input type="checkbox"/> Arrive at your assigned ballot drop box at least 15 minutes early. <input type="checkbox"/> If there is a line before polls close, one retrieval team member must find the “Last Voter In Line” card and go to the end of the line. <input type="checkbox"/> At the close of polls, announce “Polls are closed” and lock the door to the drop box. If there is a line, the team member at the end of the line should give the Last Voter In Line card to the last person or car in line at the close of polls. Once the card is given out, return immediately to help empty the drop box. <input type="checkbox"/> If any voter should try and cast their ballot after the close of polls, put their ballot in the box/bag designated for late ballots. <input type="checkbox"/> Unlock the access door and remove all ballots, placing them in a transfer box or bag. <input type="checkbox"/> Using a flashlight, inspect the inside of the drop box for ballots that might be leaning against or stuck to the wall. <input type="checkbox"/> Once all ballots are removed from the drop box, take a picture of the inside of the empty drop box using your phone. <input type="checkbox"/> Inspect the drop box area to ensure no ballots have fallen on the ground. <input type="checkbox"/> Seal the ballot transfer box(es)/bag(s). <input type="checkbox"/> Verify the access door of the drop box is closed and locked. <input type="checkbox"/> Close the ballot slot using the slot key. <input type="checkbox"/> Complete Chain of Custody log(s) for the transfer box(es) or bag(s). <input type="checkbox"/> Load transfer containers and all supplies into vehicle. <input type="checkbox"/> Head directly back to counting facility.

All procedures completed and recorded <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	Initials
Time of Departure <input type="checkbox"/> a.m. <input type="checkbox"/> p.m.	Initials

Common Mistakes and How to Prevent Them

Problem	Solution
Drop boxes left unsealed or unlocked.	Checklist that is signed or initialed for each drop box and verified at the end of every shift.
24-hour drop boxes left open or unlocked.	Checklist that is signed or initialed for each drop box and verified at the end of every shift.
Drop boxes are full before Election Day and voters are leaving ballots on top, calling news media, etc.	Increase the number of pickup times as you get closer to Election Day.
Drop boxes not closed at when polls close.	Send retrieval teams out to sweep boxes the day after the election to ensure no ballots are left behind (perhaps take photos).