

Yolo County Elections Office



Election Observer Guide

Yolo County Elections
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Introduction

The Yolo County Elections office welcomes all visitors who are interested in the election process to visit our office at any time. Election Observers provide an important avenue for public observation and comment on the election process. This public participation protects the integrity of the process and ensures voter confidence in the electoral process.

The “Election Observer Guide” provides advice to those who wish to observe the electoral process. The purpose of this document is to ensure both observers and election staff are following procedure. References to the California Elections Code are provided where appropriate to help observers better understand the rules governing the work of the election office.

Members of the Yolo County Elections Observer Panel are provided with this guide.

Check-In Procedures at the Elections Office

- All observers must appear at the front desk of the Yolo County Election Office, located at 625 Court St, Room B-05, Woodland, Calif., prior to entering any secure area.
- Observers must sign the “Observer Acknowledgement” and “COVID-19 Waiver” once for each election.
- Observers must sign in daily.
- All observers will be issued a temporary Election Observer badge, which must be worn at all times when the observer is in the election offices.
- Observers must sign out when leaving the office during or at the end of the day.

Check-In Procedures at the Vote Center for Observers

- All observers must introduce themselves to the Vote Center Supervisor(s) and sign in daily.
- Observers who are members of the Election Observer Panel Plan may present their “Letter of Introduction” to signify that they have read the Election Observer Guide, Observer Acknowledgement, and COVID-19 Waiver
- Observers must sign the “Observer Acknowledgement” and “COVID-19 Waiver” once for each election.
- The observer will be issued a temporary Election Observer badge, which must be worn at all times in the Vote Center. Vote Center workers will collect the badge when the observer signs out.
- Observers must sign out when leaving the Vote Center during or at the end of the day.
- Since Vote Center Supervisors do not have access to the observer documentation at another Vote Center, observers who visit more than one site may be required to sign the same documents at each Vote Center they visit.

COVID-Specific Rules

Election Observers should consult their local public health officials for up-to-date health and safety guidance. If state and/or local health guidance is issued, county election officials, election workers, and election observers must adhere to that guidance. It is essential that those involved in elections take all possible steps to ensure health safety.

Please see the suggestions below that help prevent the spread of COVID-19.

- Remain at least 6 feet apart from others and remain in designated observation areas.
- Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds and/or use hand sanitizer.
- Wear gloves and use them properly.
- Stay home if you are sick and avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Wear an approved, well-fitting face mask/face covering.

Observers can be asked to take other safety measures such as hand hygiene, cough etiquette, general attentiveness to cleanliness and sanitation.

Mandatory Responsibilities of Observers

Observers who fail to abide by these rules will be removed from the building and/or be subject and/or civil and criminal penalties.

- Maintain a professional demeanor and constant courteousness to election workers and officials.
- Ensure they do not interfere with the election process.
- Follow established Yolo County observation rules, policies, and procedures.
- Keep cell phones on silent. Observers may silently text, but not conduct phone conversations.
- Observers must introduce themselves to the election workers at a Vote Center or Ballot Drop Box.

Observer's Rights and Interacting with Election Officials

While at a Vote Center or a Ballot Drop Box location, Election Observers may:

- Speak to election workers, but only when it is convenient for voters and the election workers and when it does not interfere with the conduct of the election. Do not talk to any election worker while they are assisting voters.
- Watch the proceedings at the Vote Centers, including opening and closing procedures; however, the observer may not interrupt the process.
- Ask questions about the process. If it is not possible to ask a question and receive an answer while a process is occurring, the observer should write down the question, and the time the issue came up, so it can be addressed when the election official is not otherwise occupied.
- Obtain information from the Street Index. The Street Index was formerly posted outside traditional polling places. The Street Index is now available inside the Vote Center. The Vote Center Supervisor will direct observers to the Street Index and ensure that no one observer monopolizes it.
- Make notes and watch election procedures. Observers may NOT use a camera to document their observations.

While at the Yolo County Elections Office, Election Observers may:

- Speak to and ask questions of the designated staff members assigned to accompany you.
- Speak to and ask questions of election workers when it is convenient for voters and the election workers and when it does not interfere with the conduct of the election.
- View election-related activities at the central counting site.
- View the canvass of the vote activities following the election.
- View vote-by-mail and provisional ballot processing.

Access and Integrity

All observers must follow these rules when in the election offices. Anyone failing to follow these rules will be asked to leave for the duration of the canvassing process.

1. This is a politically neutral office. No discussion of politics, campaigns, or candidates is allowed among observers within the facility.
2. The individual's function is to observe that procedures are followed.
3. All questions concerning a procedure must be directed only to the designated staff members assigned to accompany the observer or the manager of the section.

4. No observer shall interfere with the orderly processing of ballot envelopes or processing and counting of ballots, including touching or handling of the ballots or envelopes. *Elections Code §15104(e)*
5. Observers will be permitted access to a designated observation area(s), sufficiently close to enable them to observe and challenge whether individuals handling ballots are following established procedures. *Elections Code §15104(d)*
6. If the challenge process unduly impedes or interferes with the verification process, challenges shall be discontinued.
7. Radios, cameras, and recording devices are not allowed. Pagers and cellular phones must be set to vibrate or off mode while observing the canvass. The observer may not use their cell phone in the office. All phone conversations must be conducted outside.
8. Observers are to hold discussions and conversations outside the designated canvass work areas. Anyone not adhering to these rules will be told to leave for the day.
9. Observers will be allowed into the canvass work areas only when employees are performing canvass operations.
10. Operations will continue as scheduled whether or not an observer is present.
11. Observers must remain in the area they were escorted to. If an observer are found unsupervised in an area that they were not escorted to, they will be escorted from the office.
12. No food or drink is allowed to be brought into the election offices. All meals must be taken outside the office.

Helpful Hints

Please keep in mind that no activity related to election administration will be postponed, halted, delayed, or concluded based on the presence or absence of observers, an observer's schedule, or the coordination of an election observer team's schedule. The work being conducted is managed based on statutory requirements, maintaining the integrity of the election, business processes, workflow efficiencies, and workload.

It is difficult for one observer to watch all aspects of the operation at all times. The elections team works long hours many days in a row, and there are multiple activities happening at the same time. To maximize observation opportunities, we suggest:

- Stay in close contact with elections office management to get an idea of when the election workers intend to begin an activity you are interested in and when they estimate it will end. The dates and times we provide might not be exact but being proactive will help you plan.

- A team of election observers may take turns in shifts. If this is your plan, we request that you schedule a group orientation on the activity you are interested in observing or become a member of the Election Observer Panel. This ensures a uniform understanding of our work and allows the elections staff to lead observers directly to the work area on subsequent visits.
- Familiarize yourself with this Election Observer Guild ahead of time. You will be asked to sign the Election Observer Acknowledgment agreeing to abide by these rules and procedures.

Ballot Handling Challenges

A member of the county grand jury, and at least one member each of the Republican County Central Committee, the Democratic County Central Committee, and any other party with a candidate on the ballot, and any other interested organization:

- Shall be permitted to observe and challenge the manner in which the vote by mail ballots are handled, from the processing of vote by mail ballot return envelopes through the counting and disposition of the ballots. Elections Code §15104(b), and
- May challenge whether the individuals handling VBM ballots are following established procedures, and
 - Cannot challenge signatures on VBM ballot return envelopes.
 - Only the elections official shall perform a signature comparison (*Division 3 of the California Elections Code*)
 - If an observer would like the chief elections officer to review a particular signature, write down the time when the signature was verified. The chief elections officer or his/her delegate will follow up with the observer.

Mechanism for Feedback

Observers in Yolo County have several options for providing feedback, making constructive suggestions, or asking questions. The staff member or election worker who you are interacting with may request the observer to provide the information or questions in writing via email or mail.

1. Email: elections@yolocounty.org
2. Mail: 625 Court St., Room B-05, Woodland, CA 95695

Election Code Governing Observer Behavior

Violations of “Corruption of the Voting Process” and “Electioneering” can lead to fines from \$1,000 to \$10,000 and/or imprisonment for 12 to 16 months and/or up to two or three years.

Corruption of the Voting Process

- **DO NOT** commit or attempt to commit election fraud.
- **DO NOT** provide any sort of compensation or bribery to, in any fashion or by any means induce or attempt to induce, a person to vote or refrain from voting.
- **DO NOT** illegally vote.
- **DO NOT** attempt to vote or aid another to vote when not entitled to vote.
- **DO NOT** engage in electioneering; photograph or record a voter entering or exiting a polling place; or obstruct ingress, egress, or parking.
- **DO NOT** challenge a person's right to vote or prevent voters from voting; delay the process of voting, or fraudulently advise any person that he or she is not eligible to vote or is not registered to vote.

Corruption of the Voting Process (continued)

- **DO NOT** attempt to ascertain how a voter voted their ballot.
- **DO NOT** possess or arrange for someone to possess a firearm in the immediate vicinity of a polling place.
- **DO NOT** appear or arrange for someone to appear in the uniform of a peace officer, guard, or security personnel in the immediate vicinity of a polling place.
- **DO NOT** tamper or interfere with any component of a voting system.
- **DO NOT** forge, counterfeit, or tamper with the returns of an election.
- **DO NOT** alter the returns of an election.
- **DO NOT** tamper with, destroy, or alter any polling list, official ballot, or ballot container.
- **DO NOT** display any unofficial ballot collection container that may deceive a voter into believing it is an official collection box.
- **DO NOT** tamper or interfere with a copy of the results of votes cast.
- **DO NOT** coerce or deceive a person who cannot read or an elder into voting for or against a candidate or measure contrary to their intent.
- **DO NOT** act as an election officer when you are not one.

- **EMPLOYERS** cannot require or ask their employee to bring their vote by mail ballot to work or ask their employee to vote their ballot at work. At the time of payment of salary or wages, employers cannot enclose materials that attempt to influence the political opinions or actions of their employee.

- **PRECINCT BOARD MEMBERS** (Vote Centers Staff) cannot attempt to determine how a voter voted their ballot or, if that information is discovered, disclose how a voter voted their ballot.

The prohibitions on activity related to corruption of the voting process summarized above are set forth in Chapter 6 of Division 18 of the California Elections Code.

Electioneering

Within the immediate vicinity of a person in line to cast their ballot or within 100 feet of the entrance of a polling place (Vote Center), curbside voting or Ballot Drop Box the following activities are prohibited:

- DO NOT ask a person to vote for or against any candidate or ballot measure.
- DO NOT display a candidate's name, image, or logo.
- DO NOT block access to or loiter near any ballot drop boxes.
- DO NOT provide any material or audible information for or against any candidate or ballot measure near any polling place, vote center, or ballot drop box.
- DO NOT circulate any petitions, including for initiatives, referenda, recall, or candidate nominations.
- DO NOT distribute, display, or wear any clothing (hats, shirts, signs, buttons, stickers) that include a candidate's name, image, logo, and/or support or oppose any candidate or ballot measure.
- DO NOT display information or speak to a voter about the voter's eligibility to vote.

The electioneering prohibitions summarized above are set forth in Article 7 of Chapter 4 of Division 18 of the California Elections Code.

Election Timeline

VBM BALLOTS ARE MAILED	Monday, October 10, 2022	E-29
BALLOT DROP BOXES OPEN	Monday, October 10, 2022	E-29
VBM BALLOT PROCESSING	Monday, October 10 until completion	E-29 through the Canvass
LOGIC AND ACCURACY TESTING	Monday, October 10, 2022 at 1 PM	
LAST DAY TO REGISTER TO VOTE	Monday, October 24, 2022	E-15
CONDITIONAL VOTER REGISTRATION BEGINS	Tuesday, October 23, 2022	E-14
FIRST 3 VOTE CENTERS OPEN	Saturday, October 28, 2022	E-11
LAST DAY BALLOTS CAN BE MAILED	Tuesday, November 1, 2022	E-7
ALL (13) VOTE CENTERS OPEN	Saturday, November 5, 2022	E-4
ELECTION DAY	Tuesday, November 8, 2022	E-0
CANVASS PERIOD	Thursday, November 10, 2022	E+2 to E+30
LAST DAY TO RECEIVE PROPERLY POSTMARKED BALLOTS	Tuesday, November 15, 2022	E+14
LAST DAY TO RECEIVE CURES TO CHALLENGED VBM	2 DAYS PRIOR TO CERTIFICATION	
CERTIFICATION	NO LATER THAN DECEMBER 8, 2022	E+30

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