



October 2018

NASS Issue Brief: Key Election Administration Policies and Practices for November 2018

As the 2018 general election approaches, much of the conversation on elections has centered on state efforts to secure election systems and defend against cybersecurity threats. However, it is important to remember election administration involves a variety of components designed to ensure elections are administered with accuracy and integrity and all eligible voters have an opportunity to cast a ballot. With over 10,000 local jurisdictions across the country, each state has different election laws and policies.

Voter Registration: Each state, except North Dakota, requires individuals to register to vote. Voter registration applications are processed by local officials and the information is maintained in a statewide voter registration database. Canivote.org is a great resource for eligible voters to figure out how and where to go vote. In addition, it is important for those already registered to check their voter registration to ensure all the information is accurate.

Trusted Sources of Information: Many voters receive information from third-party organizations about registering to vote and casting a ballot prior to Election Day. Unfortunately, this information can sometimes be inaccurate or intentionally incorrect. Voters should reach out to their [local election officials](#) or their chief state election official for accurate and timely information.

Early/Absentee Voting: Each state allows voters to submit an [absentee ballot](#) by mail prior to Election Day. While some states require an excuse (work, travel, health, etc.) for voting absentee, many states now allow “no-excuse” absentee voting or have some form of [early voting](#). States have different deadlines for these activities and it is important to check your [specific state deadlines](#). States also have special absentee balloting procedures for military and overseas voters, including electronic transmission of absentee ballots to these voters. It is important to reiterate that all absentee ballots are counted in every election, regardless of how close an election may be.

Poll Worker Recruitment and Polling Place Management: Serving as a poll worker in your community is a great way to help your neighbors and learn about the mechanics of voting! If you haven’t already signed up to serve, [here](#) is a good place to learn more about serving as a poll worker in your community. Poll workers provide instructions to voters and ensure the polling place functions properly.

Efficient polling place management depends on a variety of factors, including adequate resources, availability of suitable facilities and poll worker training and recruitment. Another factor in polling place efficiency is the availability of technology, including electronic poll books. Electronic poll books substitute for paper voter registration rosters and allow poll workers to quickly access voter registration information. Many states now use electronic poll books in at least some local jurisdictions.

Polling places management also means working to ensure candidates, observers and campaigns are abiding by [electioneering](#) boundaries established outside of polling places. Voters should speak to a poll

worker immediately if they believe that there has been any interference or violation by any of these actors or activities.

Provisional Ballots: If an error, discrepancy, or other issue prevents a voter from casting a regular ballot under normal procedures on Election Day, states must allow the voter to cast a provisional ballot. Provisional ballots are held for a certain time period to provide the voter or the election office an opportunity to resolve the issue. If the issue is resolved the ballot is included in the overall vote tally.

Review and Canvass of Election Results: While most states make preliminary election results available on election night, these results are unofficial. These are unofficial results for a number of reasons including:

- In some states, absentee ballots must only be postmarked by Election Day, not received by Election Day.
- States need to process provisional ballots for voters with issues on Election Day.
- State and local election officials need to double-check counts (canvassing) and ensure that numbers were not transposed and early returns are accurate. Results for statewide and multi-county offices are then [canvassed and certified by state officials](#). Additionally, if the canvass shows the results of a particular race to be within a specified margin, a number of states require an automatic state-funded recount, or allow for a candidate to request a state-funded recount.
- A number of states require that some form of post-election audit take place prior to certification of results. These audits vary by state, but generally involve procedures to confirm voting machines functioned properly.

Voter Preparation: When voters are prepared before they go to the polls, it helps ensure they will be able to cast their ballot successfully. Voters should review sample ballots for races and ballot questions before going to the polls to help reduce delays that increase polling place wait times.

Voters can also visit their [state election website](#), or [contact their local election officials](#), for more information on voting and upcoming elections.

###