Streamlining the inbound ballot process

COVID-19 and Election Administration:

Approaches for Election Officials

June 18, 2020

CENTER FOR TECH AND CIVIC LIFE

Housekeeping

- Be gracious about **work-from-home setups**
- **Restart Zoom** if needed
- Slides **and captioned recordings** will be available on the registration page
- Use the **chat panel** to say hello, chat with other attendees, and ask questions

Today’s objectives

- Use simple tools to **estimate ballot volume, processing time, and resource needs**
- Plan for **time-intensive processes** like ballot remakes and spoiled ballots
- **Update guidelines** for tracking, reconciling, adjudicating, and securing more mail ballots

Today’s agenda

- Introduction (5 minutes)
- Overview of inbound ballot processing (10 minutes)
- Inbound ballot processing in practice (10 minutes)
- Steps to prepare (15 minutes)
- Q&A (15 minutes)
- Wrapping up and course survey (5 minutes)

Hello, there!

Rocío Hernandez
CTCL
rocio@techandciviclife.org

Josh Simon-Goldman
CTCL
josh@techandciviclife.org

Ryan Chew
Elections Group
ryan@electionsgroup.com

Ricky Hatch
Weber County, UT
rhatch@co.weber.ut.us

Leanne Scott
Rochester Hills, MI
scottl@rochesterhills.org

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Harnessing the promise of technology to modernize the American voting experience

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Federal resources

- Set of documents provide guidance for state, local, tribal, and territorial election officials

- Written by the Joint COVID-19 Working Group
  - Cyber Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA)
  - Elections Infrastructure Government Coordinating Council (GCC)
  - Elections Infrastructure Sector Coordinating Council's (SCC)

- https://www.cisa.gov/protect2020

Keep in mind

1. This is tough!
2. One size doesn't fit all
3. Things will change
4. Preparation and flexibility > certainty
5. A supportive team > a solo mission
6. Your work ***matters***, and it's hugely appreciated

What is involved in processing? What are important considerations?

OVERVIEW OF INBOUND BALLOT PROCESSING

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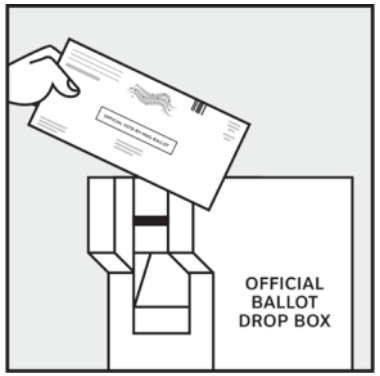
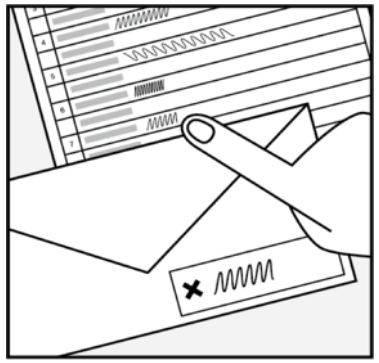
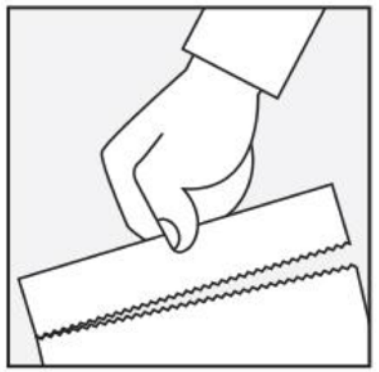


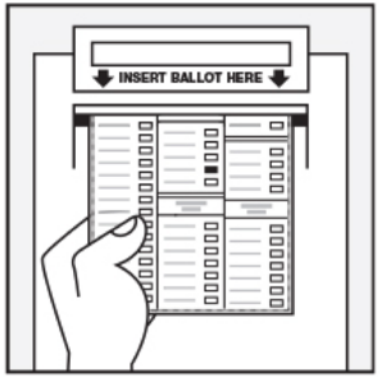
Receiving



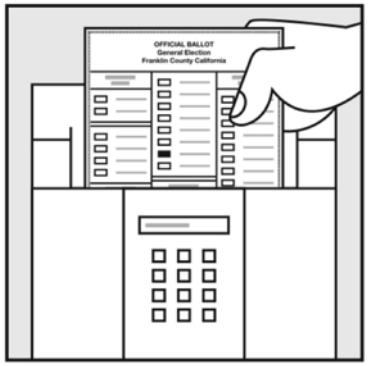
Verification



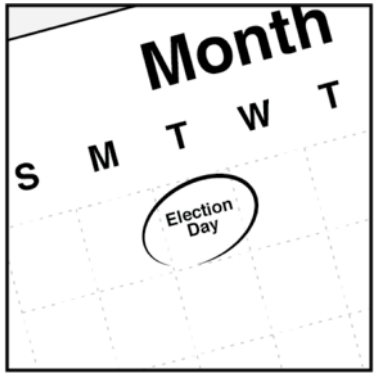
Preparation



Scanning



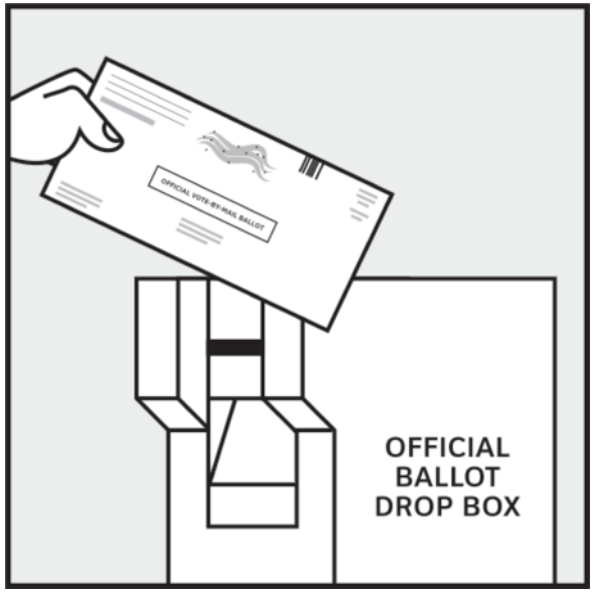
Tabulation



Post-election audits

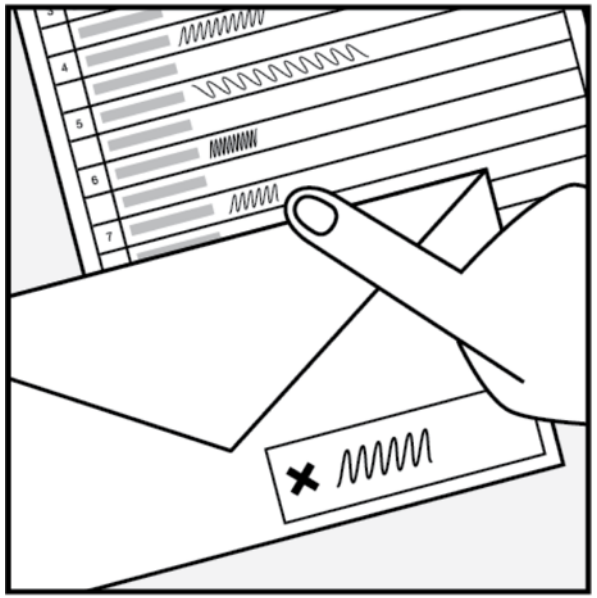
Ballot receiving

- Ballots are received from USPS and drop boxes
- Hand count or weigh ballots to estimate total
- Have a plan for undeliverable ballots



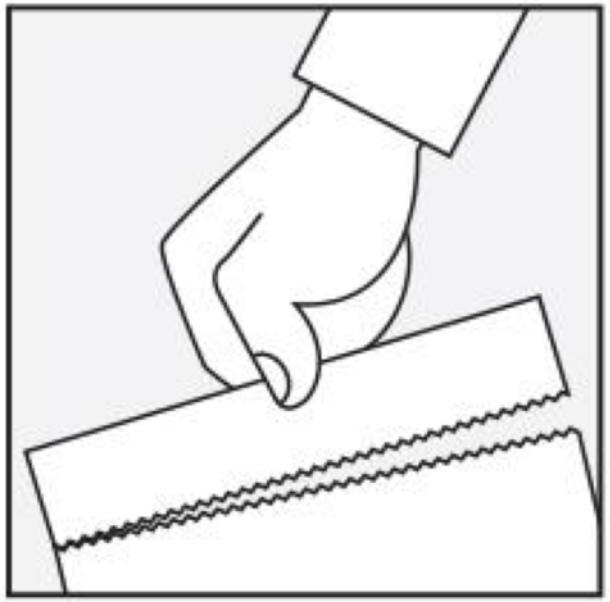
Ballot verification

- Record information in the voter registration database
- Signatures are reviewed
- Envelopes are opened and ballots are grouped into batches



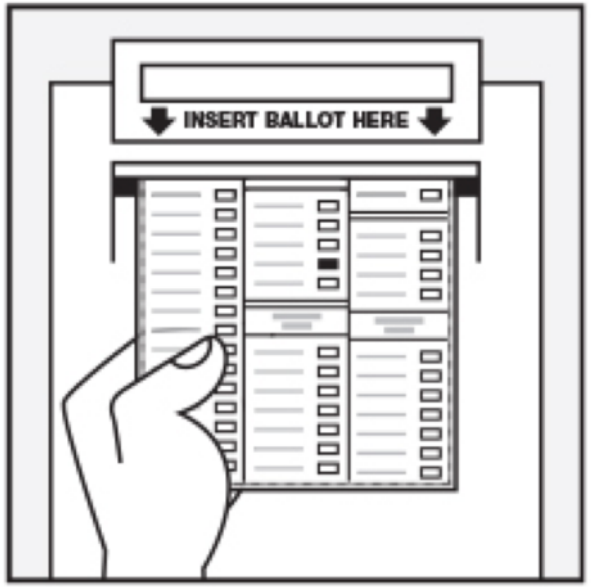
Ballot preparation

- Ballots are removed from envelopes
- Run a zip tie through the envelopes to avoid missing a ballot
- The most space-intensive step



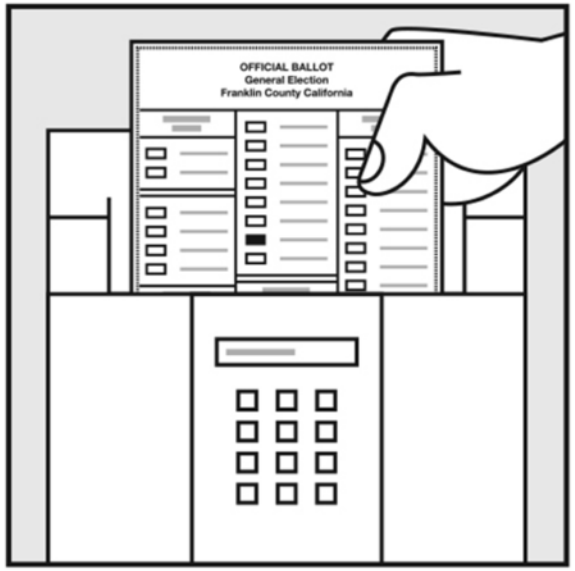
Ballot scanning

- Scanners read the marks on ballots
- Requires ballot duplication and adjudication



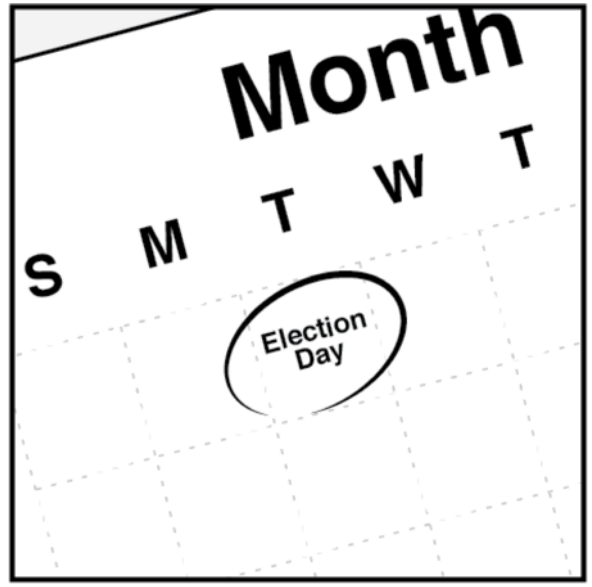
Ballot tabulation

- follow normal procedures for tabulation



Post-election audit

- Ensures accuracy of results and process
- Risk-limiting audits



What steps should you take to prepare?

INBOUND BALLOT PROCESSING IN PRACTICE

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Streamlining the inbound ballot process

- How many absentee ballots are you expecting to receive?
- What is your timeline to process the AV ballots?
- How many workers/election inspectors do you need to hire?
- Will you be prepared for a post-election audit(s) (RLA)?

Increase in absentee voting

- No-reason absentee
- Same day voter registration
- AV Lean Process Improvement
- Impact of COVID-19

Timeline to process AV ballots

- Election day processing – 7am to 8pm
- Receiving/Organization of AV ballots
- Reconciling ballots
- Be present!

Increase the number of workers

- Office staff / AVCB workers
- Time your AVCB teams
- Impacts of COVID-19
  - Social distancing
  - Training
  - Retaining / recruiting election workers

Post-election audits

- Organization of processed ballots
- Storage of AV envelopes and applications
- Post-election audit checklist
- Risk limiting audit (RLA)

Inbound ballot processing

WEBER COUNTY

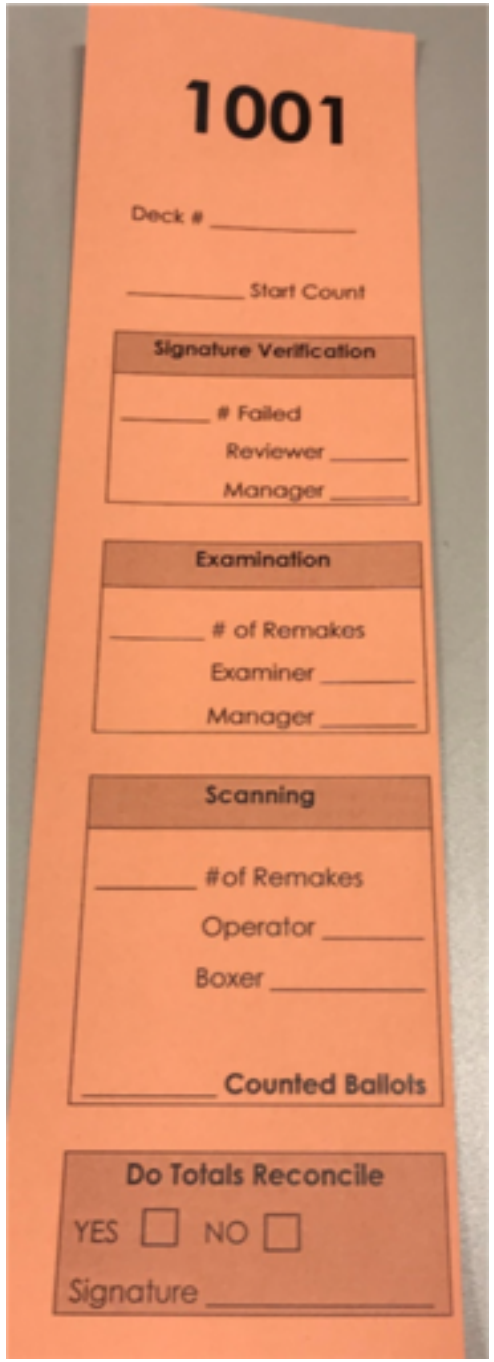
Key principles

- Chain of custody
- Ability to research backwards
- Dual handling and supervision
- Let technology do the work

Pickup and receipt

Batch reconciliation form

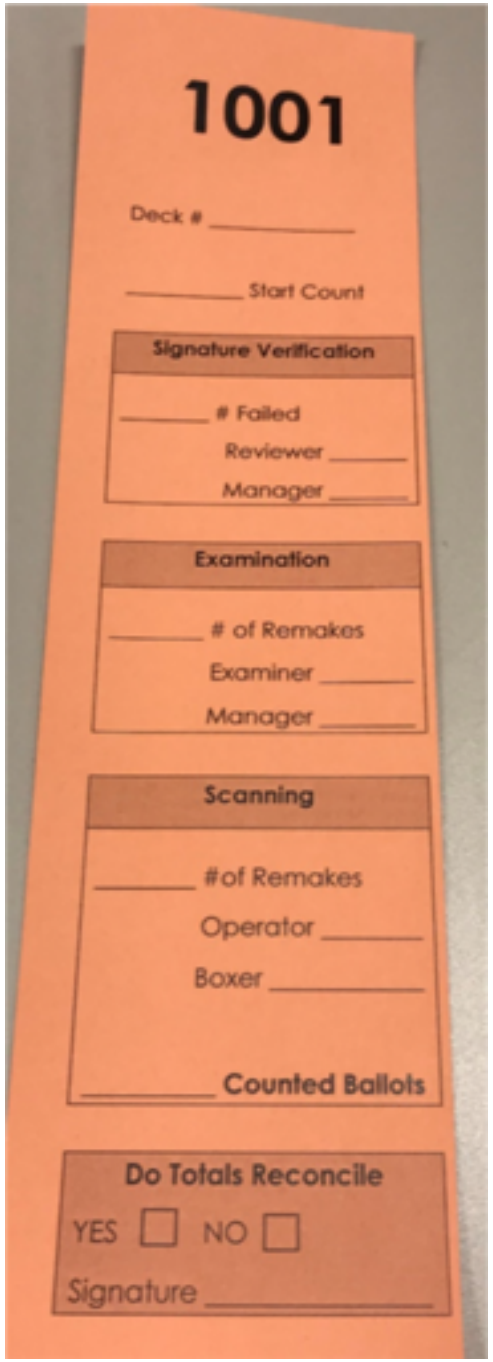
- Batch size (50/250)
- Unique batch #
- Unique to year/election (reduce handwriting)
- Initials master sheet
- Subtract, don't recount
- Use technology (scanner, slicer, folding machine, scale, etc)



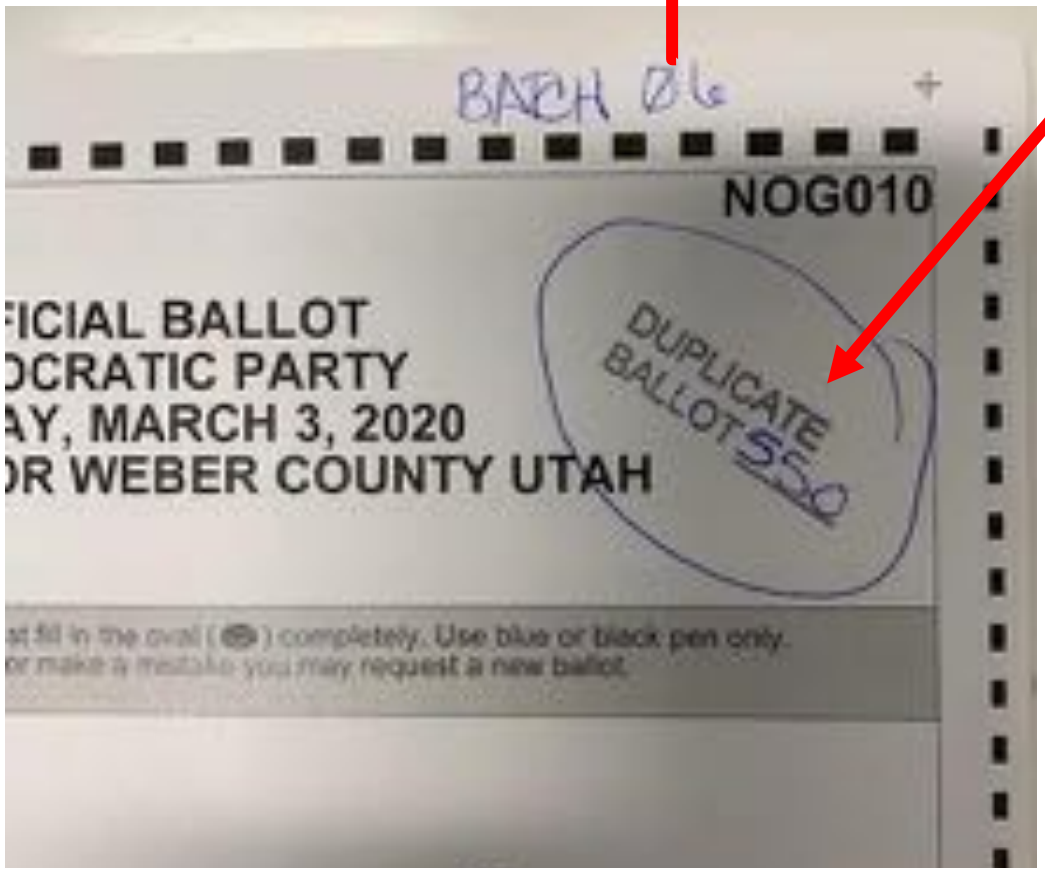
Approximate error rates

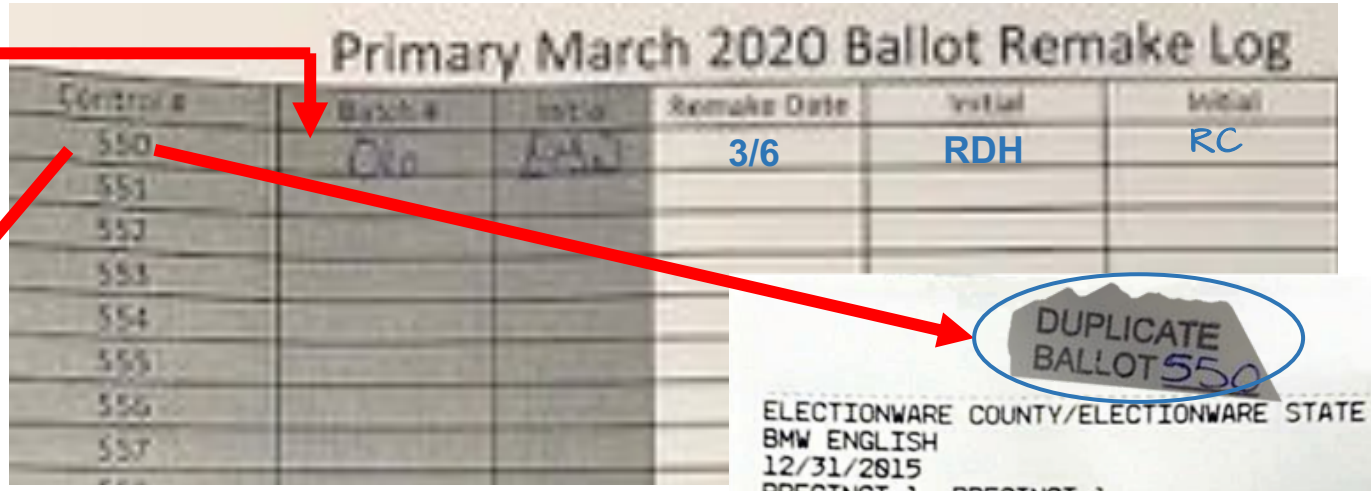
Effort Expended	Batch Size:	50	250
	Less: Envelope rejects (1%)	1	3
	Less: Sig Ver reviews (4%)	2	10
	Less: Examination remakes (1%)	1	3
	Less: Scanning remake issues (1%)	1	3
	= Counted Ballots	**47**	**233**

Approximately 7% of ballots will need extra attention



Remake process





How can your office proactively plan for this process?

STEPS TO PREPARE

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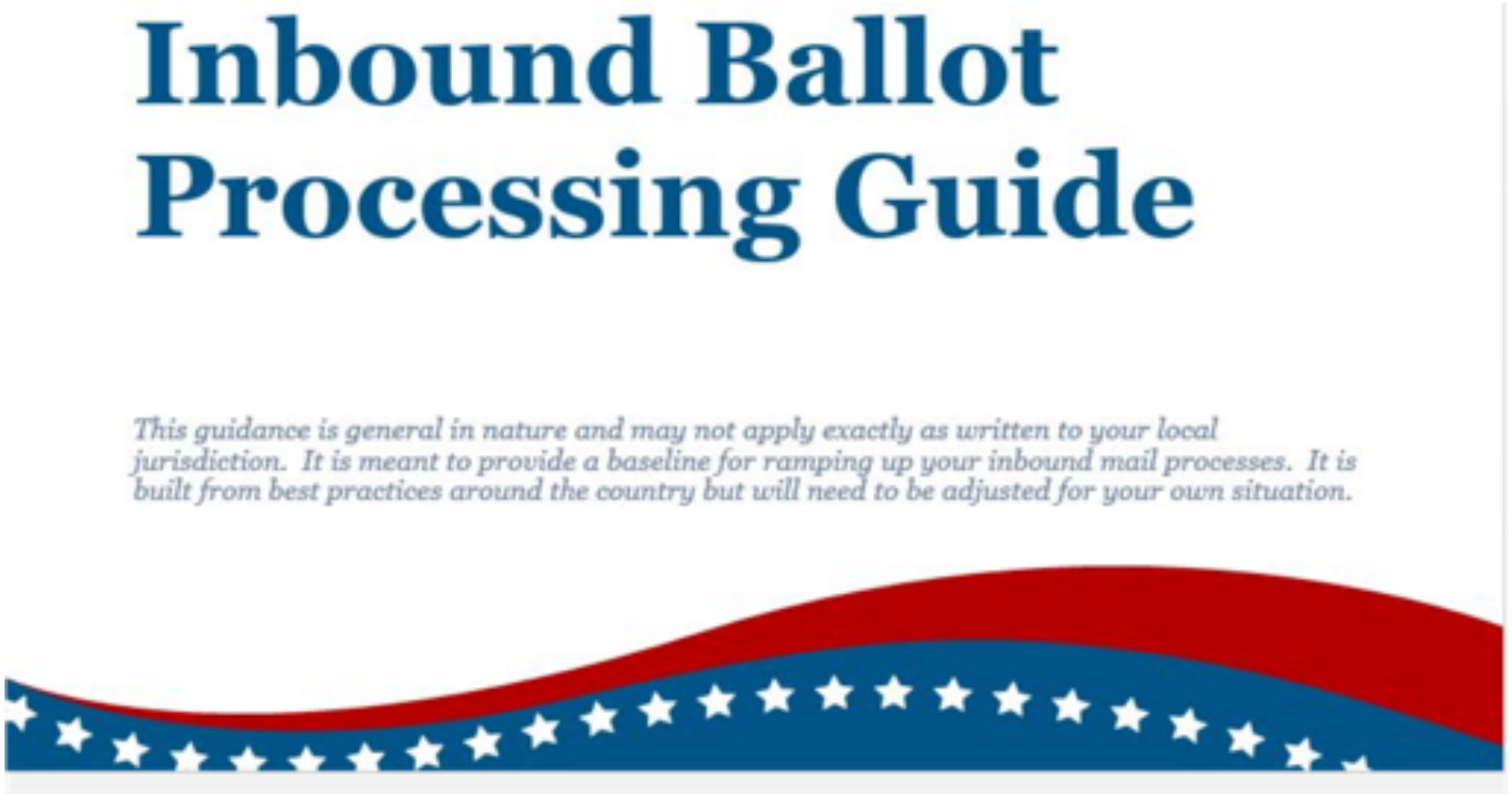
Who, why, and how

Helping jurisdictions adapt in a year of rapid, forced change to voting processes by integrating your local knowledge with best practices and expert advice from a wide range of sources.

- broad circle of advisors
- adapting to rapid, forced change
- integrating expert advice with local knowledge

Inbound mail ballot processing guide



Uniqueness of the guide

- customized
- modular, with zoomable focus
- decision trees

Creating the guide

- Interview
- Choosing 2-3 models
- Writing the guide
- Superhero feedback
- State/local feedback

The superhero model

- Partnering with a superhero
- Series of calls or emergency advice
- Agenda-driven

Michigan AV processing time calculator

Time assumptions	
Each day prior to and including election day	
(1) Receive, date, and time stamp ballot:	10 seconds per ballot
(2) Verify signature and check in:	137 seconds per ballot
(2a) Percent of ballots that need extra attention on receipt: Average time required for extra attention:	0 % 300 seconds each
(3) Daily balancing count:	45 seconds per ballot
(4) Secure one day's ballots:	5 minutes each day

Election resource planning calculator

Getting started: inputs

Jurisdiction data	Value
Voters who would be eligible to receive a ballot by mail if requested (and if an applicable excuse applies)	32,731
Ballot request deadline, in days before Election Day	7
Number of days available for canvassing	6
Number of ballot pages	1

Time and effort data	
Fraction of mail ballots expected to require duplication	2%
Number of ballot styles in use	2
	(per person-hour of effort)
Voter registrations processed	45
Ballot requests processed	45
Ballot packets prepared	50
Inbound ballots sorted	30
Signatures verified	60
Ballots extracted	1000
Ballots scanned	1500
Ballots duplicated	6

Return ballot handling				
Recommended staff	Person-hours per time period	more than 12	12	11
43	All-mail	0	7.4	45.8
6	Promoted VBM	255.4	25.5	23.3
7	Non-promoted VBM	51.9	20.8	20.8

Ballot tabulation					
Recommended staff	Person-hours per activity	Extraction	Scanning	Duplication	Total person-hours
22	All-mail	26.2	17.5	87.4	131.2
11	Promoted VBM	12.0	8.0	40.1	60.2
7	Non-promoted VBM	8.3	5.5	27.7	41.5

Return ballot processing	Minimum baseline (in sq ft)	Additional sq ft per 1000 ballots	Recommended facility space
All mail	400	10	662
Promoted VBM	400	10	520
Non-promoted VBM	400	10	483

Conduct a practice run

Source: Alysoun McLaughlin

Social distancing

Source: Colorado County Clerks Association

Cross train election workers

- Signature verifiers
- Ballot scanners
- Adjudication teams

Ballot tracking processes

DISCUSSION

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Share your thoughts

- What resonate with you from today’s webinar? (Any “ah-ha” moments)?
- What are your next steps?
- What questions do you have about what we covered today?
- What questions do you have about what we didn’t cover today?

As more questions come up…

- Reach out to CTCL
  - We'll help out, or
  - We'll find someone for you who can

hello@techandciviclife.org

We've covered a lot of ground

WRAPPING UP

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Today’s resources

- Post-Election Audits
  techandciviclife.org/course/post-election-audits
- Elections Group
  ryan@electionsgroup.com
- 2020 Election Resource Planning
  electionresourceplans.org
- Vulnerability scan and remote penetration test, Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency
  Send email to CISAServiceDesk@cisa.dhs.gov

Timeline considerations (138 Days out)

Resource allocation – May 22

- Analyze space and staffing needs (165 days)

Equipment needs – July 19

- Procure and install envelope sorting equipment, if expecting >75,000 returned ballots (107 days)
- Procure high-speed scanner (107 days)

Documentation – July 26

- Document procedures including training, setup, secure transfer of ballots and storage (100 days)

What was your experience with today's course?

- A brief survey is linked in the chat box.
- Please complete the survey now to provide feedback and improve the course for future participants

See you soon!

- ~~Supporting election officials (Thursday, May 21)~~
- ~~Planning 2020 workload and resource allocation (Tuesday, May 26)~~
- ~~Ensuring access, equity, and inclusion (Thursday, May 28)~~
- ~~Educating voters about their options (Thursday, June 4)~~
- ~~Maintaining voter lists (Tuesday, June 9)~~
- ~~Managing mail ballot request forms (Thursday, June 11)~~
- ~~Organizing ballot dropoff locations (Tuesday, June 16)~~
- ~~Streamlining the inbound ballot process (Thursday, June 18)~~
- Verifying and curing signatures (Tuesday, June 23)
- Recruiting and training election workers (Thursday, June 25)
- Implementing public health guidelines for voting locations (Tuesday, June 30)

techandciviclife.org/covid-19-webinars/

Thanks!

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