

Central Counting Station Plan, Procedures, and Best Practices

41st Annual Election Law Seminar for County Election Officials
Texas Secretary of State - Elections Division



Agenda

- What is a Central Counting Station?
- Central Counting Station Personnel
- Central Counting Station Procedures
- Designing a Central Counting Station Plan



What is a Central Counting Station?



What is a Central Counting Station?

- A central counting station (CCS) is the place on election night where ballots are counted, vote totals are accumulated, and the unofficial elections results are generated.
- Can establish more than 1 CCS (substations)
- Sometimes referred to as a “central accumulation station.”



Do I Need a Central Counting Station?

- You need a CCS if:
 - You generate your results by reading media into a central computer
 - You bring your election day ballots from your polling locations to a central location and read them into a scanner
- You do not need a CCS if:
 - You hand-count your ballots in your polling places
 - You generate your results by printing tapes from your equipment in the polling place and adding those totals up by hand/calculator
- If you're not sure, just ask!



Establishing a Central Counting Station

- The authority adopting a voting system for use is responsible for establishing one or more central counting stations.
 - In a county ordered election, this is the commissioners court.
 - For a political subdivision's election, this is the political subdivision's governing body.

(127.001)



Central Counting Station Personnel



CCS Personnel - Mandatory Appointments

- Central Counting Station Manager
 - In charge of the overall administration of the CCS and the general supervision of personnel
- Tabulation Supervisor
 - Responsible for the operation of the tabulating equipment at CCS
- Presiding Judge
 - Responsible for maintaining order at CCS, resolving voter intent questions, and signing off on precinct returns and reconciliation form
- Alternate Judge
 - Required for county elections, optional for political subdivision elections
 - Serves as presiding judge if presiding judge is unavailable, otherwise will serve in another role at CCS if presiding judge is available



CCS Personnel - Optional Appointments

- Assistants to Tabulation Supervisor
 - Assists the tabulation supervisor and performs other duties as directed by the tabulation supervisor
- Counting Station Clerks
 - Appointed by presiding judge, alternate presiding judge, or manager
 - Performs duties as directed by appointing authority (PJ, AJ, or Manager)



Personnel for Central Counting Station

	CCS Manager	Tabulation Supervisor	Assistant Tabulators	CCS Presiding Judge / Alt. Judge	CCS Clerks
Registered Voter of _____	Political subdivision of authority establishing CCS	Political subdivision of authority establishing CCS	No requirement	Political subdivision of authority adopting voting system	Political subdivision of authority adopting voting system
Registered Voter Unless...	Employee or first year of adoption of voting system	Employee	County with pop less than 60K = must be registered voter or employee	N/A	N/A
Can be employee of political subdivision?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes, if no other legal or practical conflict
Can be candidate or officeholder?	Yes – if general custodian of election records	No	Yes, if no other legal or practical conflict	Yes – if general custodian of election records	No
Other requirements	Knowledge of voting system	Trained on voting system	Trained on voting system	None	None
Must meet other requirements of an election judge?	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Must meet clerk requirements

Central Counting Station Procedures



Time for Convening

- Counties under 100K – CCS may not convene until polls open on election day
- Counties of 100K or more – CCS may convene after EV in person ends
 - Applies to elections ordered by the county or conducted jointly with the county
 - In these counties, CCS can convene and count, but may not release results until after the polls close on election day



Convening CCS

- You must have your mandatory appointments present in order to convene your CCS:
 - CCS Manager
 - Tabulation Supervisor
 - Presiding Judge
 - Alternate Judge (county elections)
- Poll watchers are entitled to be present any time that the CCS convenes.



Security Requirements

- **Licensed Peace Officer at CCS**

- Must be posted to ensure security of ballot boxes when CCS is convened
- Applies to all counties and entities

- **Video Surveillance**

- Applies only to counties with a population of 100K or more
- Must establish a video recording system that captures all areas containing voted ballots from the time they are delivered to the CCS, EVBB, or SVC until the canvass of the election
- Recording must be livestreamed
- [Advisory 2022-10 – Ballot Security Requirements](#)



Results and Adjudication

• Results

- Must be reported by precinct
- Can be generated as a report from the voting system
- Precinct returns must be prepared and signed by presiding judge

• Write-In Votes

- CCS Judge is responsible for adjudicating write-in votes through the voting system at the CCS
 - May be assisted by clerks, tabulation supervisor, and assistant tabulation supervisors in conducting the process, but CCS Judge should make the determination on assigning the write-in selection to a candidate based on voter intent
- Must be adjudicated and reported on election night



Reconciliation

• Reconciliation Form

- CCS Judge must sign the written reconciliation of votes and voters
- Must be completed at the end of tabulation on election day
- Must complete a new reconciliation form on final canvassed totals after the CCS convenes to count late-arriving mail ballots and provisional ballots
- Must be posted on county website with election results

Election Night Form: <https://www.sos.texas.gov/elections/forms/pol-sub/9-12f.pdf>

Canvass Results Form: <https://www.sos.texas.gov/elections/forms/pol-sub/9-13f.pdf>



Wrapping Up the CCS

- At the end of the night, you should have the following:
 - **Precinct Returns** (65.014, 127.131)
 - **Unofficial Results (Totals)** (66.056, 127.1311)
 - **Unofficial Reconciliation Form** (127.131(f))
- This means you should have at least **three** different documents prepared.
- **Precinct Returns** and the **Reconciliation Form** should be signed by the Presiding Judge.



Poll Watchers

• Observation

- Poll watchers may be present at any time the CCS convenes until the election officers complete their duties at the station.
- May observe any activity conducted at the location at which the watcher is serving.
 - Including activities that occur in the tabulation room
- May sit or stand near enough to see and hear the election officers conducting the observed activity.
- Class A misdemeanor to knowingly prevent a watcher from observing an activity they are entitled to observe.

• Inspection of Records

- May inspect the returns and other records prepared by the election officers at the location at which the watcher is serving.
- May request a copy of an audit log from the central accumulator at certain intervals during the counting process.



Developing a Central Counting Station Plan



Central Counting Station Plan Requirements

- The manager must develop a written plan for the orderly operation of the central counting station
 - Must be made available to the public on request no later than 5 PM on the 5th day before election day
- The plan must address the process for comparing the number of voters listed as having voted and the number of ballots
 - Early Voting in Person: Compare # of early voters on early voting roster/combination form to the # of ballots cast.
 - Election Day: Compare # of voters on combination form to # of ballots cast. (127.007)
 - By Mail: Compare # of ballots entered on “Ballot Transmittal Form” from EVBB to number of ballots counted. (87.021, 87.1221)



Central Counting Station Plan Design

- The Election Code does not outline specific requirements for what must be included in the CCS Plan (other than a reconciliation process)
- Two basic objectives for your central counting station plan:
 - Provide an outline of the basic setup and procedural process for how your central counting station will be run to act as a guide for your personnel at the CCS
 - Provide an explanation to the public (including poll watchers) about the process you'll follow for counting the ballots in their election
- Balance defined procedures against the need to be flexible
 - It is important to outline how you'll be conducting the process in detail
 - But also important to leave room for flexibility in case of changing circumstances
 - Can update your plan if circumstances change
 - Provide revision dates so that people know what the most recent version of your plan is



Central Counting Station Plan Design

- Suggested Elements:
 - Purpose
 - Outline the basic reason for establishing a CCS plan and the purpose of the document
 - Location
 - Describe where it will be conducted
 - If there are specific entryways or locations that people need to go to, you can include that here
 - Key CCS Personnel
 - Outline the roles and responsibilities for different CCS positions
 - Identify the individuals appointed to your mandatory appointment positions (Manager, Tabulation Supervisor, Presiding / Alt. Judge)
 - Procedures for Convening
 - When will the CCS meet?
 - What is the process that will be followed to notify people of additional or subsequent meetings of the CCS?



Central Counting Station Plan Design

- Suggested Elements:
 - Intake Procedures
 - What is your process for receiving your ballots?
 - Highlight your process for verifying chain of custody
 - Security Procedures
 - Address posting of a peace officer
 - Address the livestreaming requirements (if a county over 100K)
 - General Conduct Rules
 - Address how disruptions in the CCS will be addressed
 - Outline general conduct guidelines
 - Address any restrictions on the use of cell phones / other devices in the CCS
 - Poll Watchers
 - Address procedures for acceptance of poll watchers
 - If there are limits on the number of people who can be present in the tabulation room at any given time, address those limits and any rotation policy



Central Counting Station Plan Design

- Suggested Elements:
 - Testing Procedures
 - Outline the process for conducting the Second and Third Tabulation Tests at CCS
 - Duplication Procedures
 - Outline your process for duplicating ballots when necessary
 - Adjudication / Resolving Voter Intent
 - Describe your process for resolving voter intent questions on irregularly marked ballots
 - Address your procedures for adjudicating write-in votes
 - Tabulation Process
 - Describe your process for the counting of ballots
 - Address early voting, ballot by mail, and election day ballot tabulation procedures
 - This will generally depend heavily on your equipment configuration, the type of voting system you use, and your county's overall setup
 - A step-by-step explanation can be helpful for your workers to understand the process
 - It can also help your poll watchers understand what they're seeing



Central Counting Station Plan Design

- Suggested Elements:
 - Reconciliation
 - This is a required element under the Election Code
 - Should address a process for verifying the number of ballots counted against the number of voters
 - Address the process for completing the reconciliation form
 - Generating Results
 - How do you generate your results from your system?
 - What is your process for reporting those results on your website?
 - Reporting to SOS
 - What is your process for reporting your election night results to SOS?



Different Plans for Different Counties

- Different counties have different equipment configurations, or different procedures, or different needs
- There may be some elements in a template plan or another county's plan that works well for them, but doesn't fit your own practice
- Cater your plan to your county, your process, and your audience
- If a template plan or another county's plan is missing a piece that is crucial for your county's process, add it in!



Q & A

- What parts of your plan work well?
- What parts of your plan need to be fleshed out?
- Which parts of your plan get the most questions from poll watchers or the public?
- Who is the audience for your plan?
 - Is it a procedures guide for your workers?
 - Or a transparency tool for watchers/the public?
- Anything else you'd like to discuss!

