


TEXAS SECRETARY OF STATE

# Central Counting Station Best Practices

February 2022

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# 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.”

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## Establishing 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.
- (127.001)



## Personnel for Central Counting Station

- Mandatory Appointments:
  - Central Counting Station Manager
  - Tabulation Supervisor
  - Presiding Judge and Alternate Judge
- Optional Appointments:
  - Assistants to Tabulation Supervisor
  - Counting Station Clerks



## Central Counting Station Manager

- Manager is in charge of the overall administration of the CCS and the general supervision of personnel. (127.002)
  - Must have knowledge and experience in the conduct of elections with the electronic voting system.
  - **SOS strongly recommends that the general custodian of election records (e.g. County Clerk or EA), or a member of their staff, be appointed as the CCS Manager.**



## Tabulation Supervisor


- Tabulation supervisor is in charge of operation of tabulating equipment. (127.003)
  - Trained in the operation of the automatic tabulating equipment.



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## Central Counting Station Presiding Judge

- Presiding Judge is responsible for maintaining order and has same authority as a precinct presiding judge. (127.005)
  - Responsible for determining voter intent for ballots.
  - MUST sign off on precinct returns.
- **If a county election, the presiding judge must be appointed through list procedure along with alternate.**

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## Assistants to Tabulation Supervisor


- Assistants may be appointed to assist the tabulation supervisor. (127.004)

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## Counting Station Clerks

- Clerks may be appointed by the CCS manager or the Presiding Judge to assist.
  - Manager Assistance: Duplicating ballots.
  - Judge Assistance: Logging entries in chain of custody as polling place precinct judges bring in media/voted ballots, resolving voter intent issues.



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## Qualifications – Central Counting Station (CCS)

	CCS Manager	Tabulation Supervisor	Assistant Tabulators	CCS 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.
Registered voter unless...	Person is employee or it's the first year of adoption	Person is employee	County with pop less than 60K, be registered voter or employee.	N/A	N/A
Can be an employee of political subdivision?	Yes.	Yes.	Yes.	Yes.	Yes – if no other legal or practical conflict.
Can be a 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 systems	None.	None.
Must meet other requirements of an election judge?	Yes.	Yes.	No.	Yes.	Must meet clerk requirements.

## Oaths and Identification

- Required oath for all election officers appointed under Chapter 127
  - CCS Manager, Tabulation Supervisor, Tabulation Assistants
  - Presiding Judge/Alternate Judge
  - CCS Clerks.
- Must have nametag prescribed by SOS



## Central Counting Station Plan


- Manager **MUST**:
  - Implement a written plan for the orderly operation of the station.
    - The Central Counting Station Plan must be made available to the public on request not later than 5 P.M. on the fifth day before the date of election.
  - For March 1, 2022 Primary Election = February 24, 2022



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## Central Counting Station Plan


- The plan **MUST** address the process for comparing the numbers of voters listed as having voted and 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 voter 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)

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## Central Counting Station Plan

- **Suggested Elements of Plan**
  - Key CCS personnel roles and responsibilities
  - Tabulation of election day ballots
  - General conduct rules
  - Accumulating results
  - Testing procedures
  - Reconciliation of number of voters who voted with election totals
  - Intake of ballots, electronic media, and supplies
  - Printing of precinct returns, election totals
  - Duplication of ballots
  - Security procedures
  - Resolving voter intent (write-ins)
  - Storage of election materials
  - Counting write-ins
  - Procedure for reconvening CCS
  - Tabulation of mail ballots
  - Poll watcher guidelines
  - Tabulation of early voting ballots

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## Time for Convening

- CCS may only convene on election day.
- Exception –
  - In counties with 100K+: Elections ordered by the county or conducted jointly with the county – may convene to count mail ballots after EV in person concludes.
  - In these counties, CCS can convene and count but may **NOT** release results until after the polls close on election day.



## What does it mean to convene CCS?

- Minimum of three people –
  - CCS Manager
  - Tabulation Supervisor
  - Presiding Judge
- Poll watchers are entitled to be present.





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## NEW Security Requirements


- **Licensed Peace Officer at Central Count**
  - Must be posted to ensure the security of ballot boxes during the time the CCS has convened.
  - Applies to all entities or counties regardless of population
- **Video Surveillance**
  - Counties over 100,000 in population must establish a video recording system that captures all areas containing voted ballots from the time they are delivered to the EVBB, CCS or SVC until the cavass of the election.
  - Recording must be live streamed.
  - See Advisory **2022-10 – Ballot Security Requirements for more details.**

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## Receiving Mail Ballots


- EVBB prepares “**ballot transmittal form**”
  - Form contains the number of accepted mail ballots that will be counted at central count.
  - EVBB will deliver the form to the CCS Manager as general custodian. (87.021, 87.1221)
- EVBB will secure ballots for delivery to CCS.
- CCS Judge will accept ballots and sign a receipt acknowledging receipt and the seals were intact.

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## Counting Ballots


- After CCS Judge accepts ballots:
  - CCS **Manager** prepares ballots for counting. (127.125)
  - CCS Manager has authority to duplicate ballots, and have Clerks assist with duplication. (127.125, 127.126)
  - CCS **Presiding Judge** has the authority to determine voter intent, such a misspelling of a write-in candidate's name or other irregularly marked ballots. (127.005)

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## Results

- Results must be reported **by election day precinct** as part of the total for early votes.
- The precinct returns must be prepared and **signed by the CCS Judge.**
  - The same number of copies must be prepared as a precinct polling place (3 copies).
  - The precinct returns may be generated by the voting system – still must be **signed** by CCS Judge. (127.131)

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## Write-In Votes

- The CCS Judge (Presiding and Alternate, if applicable) and the CCS Clerk are responsible for counting write-in votes at the CCS.
  - They may need to have tally teams in larger elections, such a presidential election, to ensure the write-in ballots are counted on election night.



## Reminders

- Keep counting until you're done. You can't go home and come back in the morning to resume counting activities.
- After CCS has adjourned, there is no authority to reconvene CCS to resolve errors. (COURT ORDER)
- **Contact the SOS if...**
  - Unresolvable errors in counting.
  - Results will be late.



## Reminders

- Double check the number of voters that voted at each polling place to your totals for that polling place.
  - If your total number of voters doesn't match your total number of voted ballots, you may have a problem.
- If you have questions, **contact the SOS THAT NIGHT!!!!**



## Reconciliation Form


- Presiding Judge of the CCS shall provide and attest to a written reconciliation of votes and voters at the close of tabulation on election day and again after the CCS has convened for the last time to process late-arriving mail ballots and provisional ballots.
- SOS shall create form to be used for this purpose.
- Reconciliation form shall be posted on the county website along with election returns and results.



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## 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.

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## Poll Watchers


- A poll watcher may be present at any time the station is open for the purpose of processing or preparing to process election results until the election officers complete their duties at the station.
- It is a Class A misdemeanor to knowingly prevent a watcher from observing an activity the watch is entitled to observe.

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## Poll Watchers


- **Inspection of Election Records**
  - A poll watcher is entitled to inspect the returns and other records prepared by the election officers at the location at which the watcher is serving. (33.056)
  - A poll watcher may request a copy of an audit log from the central accumulator at certain intervals during the counting process.

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## Poll Watchers

- **Access to central computer used to accumulate vote totals**
  - Poll watchers must be provided access to this area.
  - If the location is not large enough to accommodate all poll watchers desiring access, the central counting station manager shall designate a limited number of spaces for poll watchers.
  - Poll watchers may rotate in and out of this location or designate a specific poll watcher to observe the activities and report any concerns to the other watchers.

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Questions?

[elections@sos.texas.gov](mailto:elections@sos.texas.gov)

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