

Spokane County

ELECTION PROCEDURES REVIEW
2013 PRIMARY

FINAL REVIEW REPORT – ISSUED APRIL 2014



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Overview	3
Best Practices	4
Improvements made On Site	6
Suggestions for Improvement	8
Conclusion	9
County Response	10

OVERVIEW

Spokane County, home to the 2nd largest city in the state, has the largest population in Eastern Washington. A number of colleges and universities are located in the county as well as the Fairchild Air Force Base, providing diversity. The city of Spokane and Spokane County serve as the medical, financial, and commercial hub for Eastern Washington, Idaho, and Western Montana.

The review process promotes consistency of election administration statewide and provides feedback about best practices in our state.

The purpose of the process, required by state law, is to provide Spokane County with an evaluation of election procedures and practices established for conducting a special, primary or general election every five years.¹

In the process of Spokane's review, the reviewer assessed procedures supporting 77 state statutes, 63 state rules, and 3 federal acts regarding the administration of elections and voter registration. The reviewer observed election practices used in the **2013 Primary Election** during two visits and reviewed all written procedures and county documents for compliance with these state laws and rules.

The reviewer studied and examined all aspects of the election process. In this review, the reviewer followed a checklist containing 74 procedures and processes.

This report outlines best practices and areas of improvement needed as observed during the Primary Election. The report does not affect the validity of the outcome of a primary or election or the validity of any canvass of returns. The election review staff does not have jurisdiction to make such an evaluation, finding, or recommendation under this title.²

During the election, Spokane County issued 193,980 ballots and processed 43,108 voted ballots equaling a 22% turnout.

¹ RCW 29A.04.560, RCW 29A.04.570

² RCW 29A.04.570

BEST PRACTICES

The reviewer has identified areas where the county exceeds voter service requirements or engages in activities the reviewer may consider a best practice.

BALLOT PROCESSING

Several best practices related to ballot processing were observed by the reviewer:

- Rejected signatures go through three different checks before going to the County Canvassing Board. These checks limit the number of ballot signatures the Canvassing Board must review.
- A minimum of two election staff run the ballot sorter. In fact, Spokane Elections requires two people to be present whenever processing ballots.
- The County only allows red and green pens in the ballot processing areas. Using only colored pens provides distinction between marks made by a voter and election staff.
- Applicable voter intent rules are included in the ballot processing procedures. This practice provides a quick reference for ballot questions. Additionally, the county adds Canvassing Board policy decisions to their voter intent manual for staff reference.



BALLOT DUPLICATION

For each ballot duplicated, the ballot duplication team documents the voter intent rule used on the log. This notation supports the actions taken by the team.

The County Auditor established a ballot duplication review similar to the election results audit. Official party observers select one envelope containing a group of duplicated ballots. With observers present, staff verify the accuracy of the duplication process by comparing the duplicate ballots in the envelope to the original ballots.

VOTING CENTERS AND DROP BOXES

Spokane County provides six voting centers throughout the county—the main Elections Office and five remote locations. These voting centers provide accessible voting units, replacement ballots and provisional ballots, a great service for Spokane County voters.

The three voting centers visited by the reviewer used exceptional sign placement, maintaining a line of sight from the road to the voting center area. Good signage is essential for voters unfamiliar with voting centers.

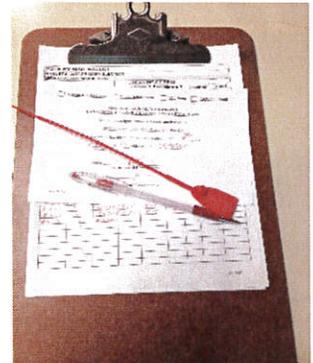


Twenty-four hour drop boxes are located at all 17 public libraries in the county. These locations are easy for voters to find, located in population centers, and provide a simple way of directing voters.

SECURITY

Spokane County exceeds security measures required in Washington State. In addition to keeping voter ballots secure, the county:

- Keeps blank ballot stock in a secured room. Entry to the room is restricted to authorized personnel.
- Uses numbered seals and locks the ballot tabulation room.
- Limits access to ballot processing areas to authorized personnel with security badges or escorted by authorized personnel.
- Requires observers to wear special badges at all times. Regular observers receive individualized security badges while observing.



DISABILITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Spokane County has an active disability advisory committee. To solve membership issues, the Spokane Disability Advisory Committee is working with the county to form a countywide association under RCW 36.01.310. The Elections Disability Advisory Committee would be a subset of this association. Additionally, the Committee has worked with Whitworth University on a research project to determine other states' disability policies.

IMPROVEMENTS MADE ON SITE

Upon identification of these areas, the elections department reevaluated its processes and immediately took action.

VOTING CENTERS

Spokane County provides six voting centers throughout the county. At the St. Mark's Lutheran Church location, election workers made two changes at the request of the reviewer.

- Privacy screens are provided for each accessible voting unit (AVU). The screen at St. Mark's was moved from the front of the AVU to the back to shield the voting screen.³
- About five minutes before 8:00 p.m., a voter brought in their son's unsigned ballot. The voting center staff told the voter they could not accept an unsigned ballot, but accepted the ballot at the request of the reviewer.



Additionally, at the downtown Spokane bus station (STA), the AVU screen could be seen by bus passengers using the stairs. Voting center staff training should emphasize voter privacy and provide examples or scenarios for dealing with different ballot issues during training.

While important to offer, use of the AVUs during this election was very low or, in some cases, not used at all.

VOTER REGISTRATION VERIFICATION NOTICE

Voter registration applicants must provide the following required information: name, residential address, date of birth, affirmation of citizenship, and a signature attesting to the information provided on the form. When an applicant does not provide all required

³ Washington State Constitution, Article 6, Section 6

information, the Spokane County Elections Department correctly utilizes government resources or sends a Verification Notice to the voter to obtain the necessary information.

If the voter does not respond to the Verification Notice within 45 days of mailing from the county, the application is void. Spokane County's Verification Notice lacked information about the 45-day deadline for keeping the application active.⁴ The Election Supervisor added the 45 day deadline immediately upon notification.



⁴ RCW 29A.08.110

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

During the course of the review, review staff objectively observes many of the election department's policies and procedures. Based upon observations, the reviewer identifies areas for the department to evaluate. One goal of this review is to encourage procedural consistency in the administration of elections throughout the state. This report includes suggestions that are intended to assist the elections department with an opportunity to review its interpretations of state laws and rules, and to improve the effectiveness of its election processes.

VOTING CENTERS

A partisan legislative district race on the 2013 Primary ballot appeared on a portion of the county. State law requires a partisan office notice be included in the ballot packet and posted in voting centers. While the notice was included in the ballot packets, it was not posted at the three voting centers visited by the reviewer. The Spokane County Elections Department should display partisan office notices in all voting centers when any partisan office appears on the ballot.⁵



⁵ WAC 434-250-105

CONCLUSION

Spokane County has an outstanding elections operation. Security of ballots and service to voters meet the highest standards. Additional security steps used for the tabulation room and the room containing blank, unvoted ballots are examples of the extra security measures employed. Spokane County opens six voting centers for the public, one of the highest number in the state.

In addition to managing Spokane County's elections, the Spokane County Auditor and staff willingly provide assistance and mentorship to surrounding small counties in all areas of election administration. Spokane County serves as a role model for these counties.

While this report contains one suggestion for improvement, the observations and review of procedures by the reviewer reveal an excellent operation.





VICKY M. DALTON, CPA
SPOKANE COUNTY AUDITOR

April 7, 2014

Sheryl Moss
Certification & Training Program Manager, Office of Secretary of State
PO Box 40229
Olympia, WA 98504-0229

Dear Sheryl:

I appreciate the thoroughness of your review of our procedures during the 2013 Primary Election. Your comments and suggestions provide feedback on the quality of the continuous improvements that my office implements. Consistent with the provisions of WAC 434-260-145, our response to the need for additional changes is as follows:

- **Improvements made on Site**

Voting Centers - Spokane County Elections will be holding training with all Voter Service Centers workers in Spring 2014. We will emphasize the two points that you noted:

- The placement of the privacy screens will be emphasized to actually provide shielding of the assistive voting unit's screen from public view. Although the AVUs receive very little, if any use, the workers need to ensure that privacy of the vote is paramount.
- We will continue to emphasize to the workers that they accept all ballot envelopes that are presented to them. They will be reminded that if there is an issue with the ballot envelope, it will be processed by the office.

- **Suggestions for Improvement**

Voting Centers - The "partisan office notice" was added to the checklist for Voting Service Center supplies and the directions were updated to include this as a notice to be posted.

We appreciate receiving your perspective on our processes as compared to other county processes. This review is a valuable tool for us as we continue to employ the best practices in election administration.

Sincerely,

Vicky M Dalton, CPA
Spokane County Auditor