

TLP: WHITE



Election Operations During COVID-19

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ARCHIVED – Refer to Department of State website for current information

As our local, state, and national leaders continue to address the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), the pandemic also continues to impact the conduct of elections and daily operations for the Department of State and county election offices. In order to assist the counties in providing essential services to voters, the Department is updating its April 28, 2020 guidance to provide recommendations issued by health experts, and assist in integrating these conditions and recommendations into election processes in Pennsylvania, to protect public health while providing access to voting.

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1 PUBLIC MEETINGS

During the COVID-19 pandemic, county boards of elections (CBEs) may consider conducting official meetings remotely using electronic means, as long as public meeting requirements are fully satisfied, including the requirements for notice and open meetings. Public access may be accomplished by providing a call-in number. Services such as FreeConferenceCall.com, Zoom, and GoToMeeting* have free telephone conference options if your county does not have a service. When board members attend remotely, all materials necessary for any decision-making must be made available to all board members, and unless deemed confidential, also available to the public. For additional guidance, county boards should consult with their solicitor on how to conduct official meetings remotely and ensure compliance.

**The Department does not endorse any specific telephonic service and is providing a few commonly used tools only as examples.*

2 STAFFING

During the COVID-19 pandemic, we encourage county boards, in consultation with your county solicitor, to adopt policies and voter communications regarding any changes and options for the provision of essential election and voter services. It is critically important to keep election offices appropriately staffed to perform these services, while also maintaining safety through wearing of masks, six (6) feet social distancing, and occupancy limits.

While protecting the health of election office workers, county boards must also ensure that voters have access to key voter services. Office visitors and staff should be required to wear a mask, wash hands frequently, and maintain social distance. Where possible, if your front counter area is open, place plexiglass or “sneeze guards” on the front counter. You may also consider placing a phone outside the office entrance so that members of the public who come to the office can still receive assistance. For additional guidance, refer to information from the PA Department of Health or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

In order to continue essential functions, county boards may also consider options for telework. Boards may identify tasks or projects that staff who are teleworking can complete remotely.

The Department of State recommends the following security guidelines for teleworking:

- You may work with your IT office to set up and use a virtual private network (VPN). If you use a VPN, be aware of the security risks and take all necessary precautions. It is imperative that staff recognize and be trained on heightened security during teleworking and training is recommended prior to enabling telework conditions.
- Where feasible, provide county equipment for staff to work remotely, rather than allowing them to use a personal device.
- Require multi-factor authentication (MFA) for employees who access their work accounts remotely. This will further safeguard access to restricted information. Be mindful that phishing attempts and other cybersecurity risks may be higher during the coronavirus response period.
 - Additionally, security should be utilized at all levels in addition to MFA. For example, to name a few other considerations:
 - Username and password policies
 - End user device and endpoint protections
 - Network routing for teleworkers
 - Application access and roles
 - Data access and roles
- Develop teleworking agreements for all staff members.

If your county elections office modifies operations or closes at any point, be sure to inform the Department of State. Furthermore, if your office has not developed a continuity of operations plan (COOP), this should be done immediately, and if you do have a COOP plan, you should review and revise the plan as necessary. For assistance or recommendations, please don't hesitate to contact the Department.

3 PROVIDING CORE VOTER SERVICES

The county boards of elections must take all reasonable measures to continue performing election operations during the COVID-19 emergency, while also protecting the health and safety of your staff and the public. If your office closes at any point because of the pandemic, activate your office's emergency continuity of operations procedures so that you will be in a position to perform the following core election tasks:

3.1 PROCESS VOTER REGISTRATION APPLICATIONS

County boards must continue to process voter registration applications and perform related voter registration processes. These processes are essential government functions because they ensure that voters will be properly registered for the upcoming election, that their name, address and party affiliation are updated and voters who indicate they are no longer qualified to vote in a county are removed from the voter list in that county. When possible, county boards of elections should encourage voters to submit online applications for voter registration, at votespa.com/Register-to-Vote.

3.2 PROCESS ABSENTEE AND MAIL-IN VOTING APPLICATIONS AND ISSUE BALLOTS

Like voter registration processes, absentee and mail-in voting processes are essential functions necessary to conduct the upcoming election. In the event that a county board of elections office is officially closed to the public, county staff must continue processing absentee and mail-in applications and ballots but should do so in an environment that minimizes their risk of exposure to COVID-19. To the extent possible, the county board of elections should encourage voters to submit online applications for absentee and mail-in ballots, rather than paper applications, at www.votespa.com/applymailballot.

County election officials must arrange to fulfill civilian and UOCAVA ballot requests. It is critically important that all processing is current by the deadlines in order to comply with federal requirements.

3.3 REMOTE ACCESS TO THE STATEWIDE UNIFORM REGISTRATION OF ELECTORS (SURE)

The Department of State's election technology team has taken steps to permit county boards of elections to perform certain activities in SURE remotely, and some counties have implemented these secure options. Regardless of how you access SURE during this time, to prevent voter confusion, make sure you follow prior guidance on how to utilize the system and notification triggers properly to ensure emails are timely sent to voters when the ballot has been issued.

4 POLL WORKER TRAINING

Poll worker training should be conducted in person if possible, using social distancing, mask, and occupancy protocols, and/or may also be provided remotely in order to safeguard the health and wellbeing of all workers. The Department has developed general online training tools that counties can utilize during the training of poll workers. If you are using a voting system for one of the first times, DOS recommends in person training wherever possible, and where not, hosting a video conference rather than a phone conference, so that poll workers can see the system components. Poll workers should be given sufficient time and flexibility to attend multiple training sessions and be given opportunities to ask questions and follow up on any questions they have.

4.1 RESOURCES FOR REMOTE TRAINING

County boards of elections may develop training to recognize different learning styles and what suits your poll worker population most. Consider using the following, depending on available resources:

- Reading material such as manuals and other visual aids.
- Audio-visual resources such as online lectures, telephonic question-and-answer sessions and slide presentations.
- Live representations such as acted out polling place scenarios and Election Day simulation videos.

There are a number of ways that counties can train poll workers remotely:

- Webinar software such as Zoom, GoToMeeting, and Skype are examples of useful tools that can be procured at a reasonable cost and may include free options.
- Webinars may be conducted live, with participants joining during a set time to participate.
- Webinars may also be pre-recorded and made available to poll workers as a static resource.
- If the county has conducted or conducts an in-person training, that session could be recorded and made available to poll workers who prefer not to come in person.
- Important Tip: While conducting training remotely, be mindful that you should not inadvertently disseminate passwords or share sensitive information about the voting system. Further, we encourage you to follow all security protocols required by your county's IT administration.

To assist counties, the Department of State has developed training modules that counties may use during remote training and/or provide to poll workers as resources. Counties may also use training videos and resources provided by voting system vendors. The county board of elections must work with the voting system and electronic poll book vendor (if applicable) to ensure that the content in the training is tailored to the county's procedures.

4.2 GUIDELINES FOR IN-PERSON TRAINING

County board of elections should utilize in person poll worker training wherever possible, observing safety and social distancing guidelines from the PA Department of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The county board of elections should ensure that the voting systems are available for poll workers to inspect and familiarize usage, within the guidelines of social distancing safe practices. Be sure to follow the instructions from the voting system vendor to properly sanitize the voting system components before and after each instructional session.

5 LOGIC & ACCURACY TESTING

Logic and accuracy (L&A) testing is an essential function and critical for successful election day operations. County boards of elections must conduct proper L&A testing of any voting equipment or electronic poll books that will be used in the upcoming primary election; however, staff should take the following precautions:

- Utilize personal protective equipment and proper sanitization techniques.
- Follow social distancing and sanitation guidelines from the PA Department of Health or the CDC

- Follow your vendor's recommendations for sanitizing the voting equipment.
- Set up the testing space so that personnel, and public if present, can follow social distancing and sanitation guidelines.
- For public access during this emergency period, county boards may live-stream their L&A testing.

If you rely on vendors for onsite support for L&A testing, you should start coordinating with the vendors as early as possible to plan L&A testing. In person vendor services are greatly preferable; however, COVID-19 restrictions may require the vendor to minimize travel. The county board of elections must work with the vendor to plan remote support if onsite support is not possible. County boards of elections should be in constant contact with all the vendors and stakeholders in their supply chain to identify and mitigate any risks or delays that may happen due to COVID-19 restrictions. Please contact the Department if you are having any issues with your vendors.

Note: county boards of elections must follow the L&A testing directive from the Department of State and submit the signed attestation after completing testing. For any questions on L&A testing, contact the Department of State at RA-STBEST@pa.gov.

6 POLLING PLACES

Polling location setup should follow the social distancing and disinfecting [guidelines](#) in effect during the pandemic. In partnership with PEMA and some businesses, the Department of State is supplying counties with masks, face shields, hand sanitizer, floor marking tape, sneeze guards, disinfectant cleanser and other supplies for polling places so Pennsylvanians can safely exercise their right to vote during this COVID-19 emergency.

6.1 PHYSICAL POLLING PLACES

- Prior to election day, ensure the polling place is cleaned according to [CDC guidelines](#)
- Assess the condition of HVAC systems and make necessary repairs to address the effects of heating, ventilation, and air-conditioning systems on disease spread, including Legionnaires disease for previously unoccupied rooms or buildings.
- Ventilation: Ensure polling places provide a good supply of outside air to dilute indoor contaminants. If the polling place is not ventilated or poorly ventilated, if weather permits, open doors and windows on election day.
- Air Distribution: Do not use personal fans. This will aid in spreading virus particles from the breathe of a one person onto others.
- Air Cleaning: Consider adding air cleaners to supplement ventilation and filtration, but evaluate the technology and equipment to ensure it will effectively clean indoor air without generating additional contaminants or negatively impacting space air distribution by creating strong air currents.
- Water System Precautions: If a building has been unoccupied, it may have stagnant water. Water systems should be flushed to remove potential contaminants, such as legionella.

6.2 POLLING PLACE SETUP

Utilize the following measures while setting up polling places:

- Provide election officials with masks and other personal protective equipment.
- Designate work areas for poll workers following the 6 feet rule and encourage poll workers to follow proper hand hygiene.
- Designate spaces for voters to stand while waiting to check-in, while waiting for an available voting station, and while waiting to scan their ballot. This can be achieved by using stanchions, traffic cones, marking with tape and/or having instructions posted at the polling place.
- Place hand sanitizer dispensers at the polling place entrance and exit for voters to use upon entering and exiting the polling place.
- Use election officials as “greeters” to advise voters about social distancing and hand-hygiene at the polling place.
- County boards utilize voter privacy sleeves to protect voters’ privacy. In light of COVID-19, counties may consider using one of the following measures to prevent the spread of germs:
 - plastic folders that can be wiped off or sprayed with disinfectant before being handed to another voter.
 - single-use sheets of large-sized paper (e.g. 11”X 17”) that can be folded to cover the ballot but may then be discarded by voters following their usage.

6.3 VOTER CONSIDERATIONS

- We strongly urge voters to wear masks for safety and out of respect for their fellow voters and for the dedicated poll workers staffing the polling places.
- Try to limit the non-voting time that a voter spends inside the polling place
- Have ample signage for voter education and clear directions
- If possible, ensure that waiting lines are outside the building or in hallways outside of the room where voting occurs

6. Other COVID-19 and Emergency Election Resources:

As a reminder, please refer to additional information on COVID-19 in the links below.

- Pennsylvania Department of Health: They are continually updating the site with several updates throughout the day on current information. Their resource page may be found here: <https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/disease/Pages/Coronavirus.aspx>
- Centers for Disease Control (CDC): They are also providing updates and have additional information that may be helpful to you and your staff. You may access their page here: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>
- Centers for Disease Control (CDC) - Recommendations for Polling Locations: The CDC has also assembled information dedicated for polling location for consideration. You may access the page here: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/election-polling-locations.html>
- The U.S. Election Assistance Commission has compiled a library of information regarding novel coronavirus/COVID-19 to support the election community’s response to this concern. This

helpful resource is available at <https://www.eac.gov/election-officials/coronavirus-covid-19-resources>

Version History:

Version	Date	Description
1.0	4.21.2020	Initial document release
1.1	4.28.2020	Updated the Request Template
1.2	10.14.2020	Updates to COVID-19 mitigation guidance