

Fort Bend County
Office of Elections Administration
Central Counting and Central Accumulation Station Plan and Procedures
For the November 8, 2022 General Election

These procedures are to be followed in tabulating ballots at the Fort Bend County Central Counting Station as well as accumulating results from the various Early Voting and Election Day polling locations within the county. Adherence to these procedures is required to ensure an accurate and verifiable count of all ballots cast in each election administered by Fort Bend County.

Purpose

Section 127.001 of the Texas Election Code allows for the establishment of one or more Central Counting Stations. Section 127.007 of the Texas Election Code requires the Manager of the Central Counting Station to “establish and implement a written plan for the orderly operation of the central counting station.” This plan must be made available to the public, on request, not later than 5 p.m. on the 5th day before the date of the election.

Central Counting Station Personnel

The Fort Bend County Elections Administrator, John Oldham, shall serve as Manager of the Central Counting and Accumulation Station. Assistant Elections Administrator, Chase Wilson, will serve as the Tabulation Supervisor. Elections Systems Coordinator, Matthew Castillo shall serve as Assistant Tabulation Supervisor. Jack Bantarri will represent the Fort Bend County Republican Party as Presiding Clerk of Central Count. William Bobrick will represent the Fort Bend County Democratic Party as Alternate Judge of Central Count. The two political parties may also appoint a Presiding and Alternate Judge for each of the three remote collection sites. All tabulation and accumulation shall take place in the Fort Bend County Office of Elections Administration located in Suite A-400 of the Fort Bend County Rosenberg Annex, 4520 Reading Road, Rosenberg, TX.

All appointees shall meet the eligibility requirement set forth in Subchapter A, Sec. 001, et seq. of the Texas Election Code. Pursuant to Section 127.0015 of the Texas Election Code, the Central Counting Station Manager shall administer the required oaths to central counting station personnel.

1. **Manager**

The manager is in charge of the overall supervision of the Central Counting and Accumulation Station. The manager shall appoint clerks to perform duties necessary for the operation of the station.

2. **Tabulation Supervisor**

The tabulation supervisor is responsible for counting the ballots and preparing the necessary reports such as the results summary, precinct reports, canvass, and overvote and undervote

reports. The tabulation supervisor is responsible for the security of the count program and ensures that no persons, except assistant tabulation supervisors, operate the tabulation equipment or accumulation software

3. Assistant Tabulation Supervisor will assist the Tabulation Supervisor to operate the automatic tabulation equipment and accumulation software.
4. Presiding Judge and Alternate Presiding Judges of Central Count are responsible for maintaining order and administering oaths to Central Count Personnel. The Presiding and Alternate Judge are responsible for verifying seals on security bags containing DS200 media, the ExpressTouch DRE's and the Provisional Ballot bags. The presiding judge shall be responsible for resolving any questions about voter intent on a ballot and will supervise the clerks, or the EVBB in the remaking of any damaged ballots. The Presiding and Alternate Judges shall sign all official tabulation reports and the Election Night Reconciliation form.
5. Central Counting Station Clerks may be appointed as needed by the Manager, the Presiding Judge and the Alternate Presiding Judge (Section 127.006 of the TEC)

Testing of Ballots and Programming

1. Automatic Tabulating Equipment

Pursuant to Sections 127.091-127.100 of the Texas Election Code, three tests will be performed when using automatic tabulating and central count accumulation equipment. All three tests will be conducted using the same test data. The first test shall be conducted before the start of Early Voting, and preferably before the first day to mail absentee ballots. Notice of this Public Test is to be published in a newspaper of general circulation at least 48 hours before the test. The second test, which uses the same test data, is performed immediately before the tabulation of ballots or accumulation of results from polling locations. The final test is performed immediately after all ballots have been counted on Election Day.

Prior to the first public test, proper logic and accuracy testing of the accumulation software shall be performed before the first required public test, The test will be designed to determine whether the central accumulator system accurately tabulates results from the electronic files used to count ballots voted in an election. The electronic files and ballots created from the logic and accuracy testing will be used in the public test. The logic and accuracy test must be performed not later than 48 hours before voting begins.

Testing shall be performed on all voting systems, the Precinct Count DS-200, the ExpressTouch curbside DRE and the Central Count DS-450's. Ballots shall be marked by hand and with the ExpressTouch ballot marking device. Any test decks must be prepared on the same ballot stock and printed in the same manners as official ballots which are to be mailed to absent voters.

Test decks must include overvotes and undervotes in every race, an individual vote for every candidate whose name appears on the ballot as well as each write-in position. The vote totals must be determined before running the test deck through the tabulator, the results of this tabulation and the results from the ballots cast electronically will be read into the county's

accumulation software and compared against the expected results. After successful completion of the public test, the test deck and the count program must be secured until Election Day.

A second successful test must be conducted before the official ballots are counted. The results of this test shall be compared against the public test. If any discrepancies are found, the count program must be corrected before proceeding with tabulation.

The third test is to be performed after the official ballots have been tabulated.

After completing each test, the presiding judge shall place the test ballots and other test materials in a container provided for that purpose. The container shall be sealed so that it cannot be opened without breaking the seal. The manager, tabulation supervisor, presiding judge, and not more than two poll watchers, if present, shall sign the seal or seal log. The test materials shall remain sealed for the period of time required for preserving the precinct election records. The testing materials shall remain sealed unless they are required to conduct a test under Subchapter D of Chapter 127 of the Texas Election Code, a criminal investigation, an election contest, or other official proceeding under the Texas Election Code.

Processing of Absentee Ballots

All returned ballot by mail envelopes will be date stamped, digitally scanned and their receipt recorded in the county's voter registration system. The flap of the envelope will be opened, without disturbing the voter's signature. Departmental staff will verify that the voter has entered either their Texas Driver's License Number, or the last four digits of their Social Security Number. If the number are not present, the carrier envelope will be returned to the voter for correction. The carrier envelopes which do include the required numbers will be stored in ballot boxes by batch number in the Fort Bend County Tabulation room.

Upon the convening of the Fort Bend County Early Voting Ballot Board or Signature Verification Committee, the ballot boxes will be transferred to them. The teams processing the ballots will verify the signatures on the ballot envelopes against the ballot applications by comparing scanned images of both signatures. If any ballots are rejected by the Ballot Board, they are removed from the ballot box and stored in a separated container. After signature verification, the EVBB will open the carrier envelopes, unfold the ballots and return them to a ballot box which is sealed and returned to tabulation for scanning. Any ballots that are not processed will, at the end of each day be returned to Tabulation for secure storage. Any ballots that appear to be damaged, any UOCAVA ballots that were electronically transmitted to voters, and any FWAB's will be remade by the EVBB before being sent to tabulation. Once the EVBB has convened, voters who have defects in their carrier envelope will be notified by telephone or email of their options for correcting those defects.

Similar procedures will be followed in the processing of any valid absentee ballots that arrive after Election Day.

Scanning of the ballots will begin on November 2, 2022 and continue until completed. No tabulation will occur at this time. Scanning will be done utilizing the DS-200 central count system

For the November 8, 2022 Election, the Early Voting Ballot Board will be convened at 9:00 a.m. on November 8, 2022. They will reconvene at 10:00 p.m. on November 15, 2022 to process any ballots that arrive on Election Day. They will reconvene on November 15, 2022 at 1:00 p.m. to process any UOCAVA ballots, Provisional ballots, eligible ballots by mail arriving on November 9, 2022, and any ballots whose carrier envelope defects have been corrected by voters.

Accumulating Results

On the last day of Early Voting, the DS-200 Precinct tabulators will be closed at each site. The media removed and stored and sealed in security bags. The security bags, the Early Voting ExpressVote units, and provisional ballot containers will be returned to the Fort Bend County Election Office after the close of Early Voting. On Election Day, the ExpressTouch units will be closed and totals tapes printed and verified by the EVBB. The media will be removed from the ExpressTouch units and stored in the tabulation area. The Presiding Judge or her designee shall supervise the removal of the Media. The seal on the security bag and the ExpressTouch units will be checked against the seal log.

The Tabulation Supervisor, or his designee, shall produce zero reports to illustrate that no pre-existing votes exist on the official database

The total number of ballots issued from each location shall be verified against the number of voters issued ballots during the Early Voting period and the number of ballots cast shall be reconciled prior to uploading any results into the ElectionWare accumulation software.

When accumulating results, the Tabulation Supervisor will confirm that the number of ballots uploaded matches the status reports and the number of voter check-in's from the ePollbooks.

After uploading Early Voting results, the media shall be secured in the tabulation area.

On Election Day, the DS-200 precinct tabulators will be closed by the Election Judge. Two copies of the accumulated results reports will be printed. One copy will be placed into the Election Day results Reports envelope, and the second copy included in the security bag with the media for delivery to collection sites. The media from the DS-200's and the ExpressTouch units will be delivered by each Presiding Judge either to the Election Office or to a remote drop off location. The ballot bin containing the Election Day ballots, the sealed ballot bag containing any Provisional Ballot envelopes and Provisionals are also delivered.

At each collection site, the ExpressTouch units will be closed and results printed. The results tape will be signed by the Judge delivering the ExpressTouch. Copies of those results tapes will be added to the results reports envelope and to the media bag. The media stick from the ExpressTouch will be removed. This stick along with one media stick from each DS-200 will be read into the accumulation software and transmitted via a secured network to Election Central. After reading, the USB media will be returned to the security bag for transportation to the Counting Center. The bag will be sealed. At the counting center the media will be removed from the security bag by the Tabulation Supervisor and read into a separate accumulation system not

connected to an outside network. The Tabulation Supervisor will verify the number of ballots uploaded against the status report. This process may occur on the day after the election.

Printing and Reporting Election Results

Immediately after 7:00 p.m. on Election Night, Early Voting will be tabulated and the results will be posted on the Fort Bend County Elections Department web site. As media is received at the collection sites and uploaded, unofficial vote totals will be reported. Results will also be made available for distribution and the results will be manually entered into the web portal of the Texas Secretary of State.

Poll Watchers

Poll Watchers are permitted in the Central Counting Station. A video system has been installed that will live stream the processing of ballots by the EVBB, delivery and processing of ballots & media to Central Count and the processing of media.

Livestreaming will begin when ballot carrier envelopes are delivered to the EVBB for process and continue until the Canvass of Election Results has been completed.

Storage of Voting Equipment and Media

All media will be retained in the secured tabulation room until after the canvass and filing period for recounts has passed. The ballots will remain in secure containers and stored at the offices of the Elections Administrator. After 60 days, the ballots will be removed from their storage bins and boxed and sealed for the remainder of the retention period.

Security

A licensed law enforcement officer will be station in Central Count from the polls close until all ballots are processed and reported on Election night.