Mail Ballot Processing Guide

1

Receive
Ballot envelopes are received through the mail and secure ballot drop boxes.

2

Sort
Ballot envelopes are sorted into batches . Batch size will not exceed 200 ballot envelopes.

3

Signature Review
The signature on every ballot envelope is reviewed and compared to the signature in a voter's record.

4

Deconstruct
Ballot envelopes are opened by teams. Team members are never the same party. Ballots are extracted from the envelopes and prepared for scanning.

5

Reconcile
Damaged ballots, emtpy return envelopes or envelopes with two ballots are outstacked and batches are reconciled.

6

Scan
Ballots are scanned using high-speed scanners that are tested for accuracy before every election.

7

Adjudicate
Overvoted and blank ballots, ballots with stray marks, and ballots with write-ins are manually adjudicated.

8

Store
Ballots are stored in sealed containers and retained for at least 22 months following each election.

Lane County Elections
Mail Ballot Processing Guide - Step 1

Previous steps: Voters deposit ballots in a ballot box or mailbox

This step: Receive

Teams of election workers, never of the same major political party, travel together to collect ballots from locked ballot boxes and the USPS.

Ballots from ballot boxes and the USPS are transferred to clear plastic totes.

Team members affix seals with unique serial numbers to lock the clear plastic totes, then document the unique serial numbers onto a chain of custody log. Both election workers sign the chain of custody log.

Teams collect from all locations on their route, using a separate clear plastic tote and chain of custody log for each location, then return all sealed, clear plastic totes to the election office.

A team of election workers, never of the same political party, in the receiving area enter the unique serial numbers of the seals being removed onto the chain of custody log, verifying that the seal numbers affixed match the seal numbers removed.

The location tracking board is updated. At a glance, staff and observers can see which locations have been collected for the day.

The clear plastic totes are tagged with ballot box location information and moved into the secure sorter room.

The chain of custody log will be put back into service until log is full, then retained as part of the official election record.

Next steps: Sort, Signature Review, Deconstruct, Reconcile, Scan, Adjudicate, and Store

Lane County Elections
Mail Ballot Processing Guide - Step 2

SORT

Previous step: Receive

This step: Sort

Election workers remove ballots from clear plastic totes, working on ballots from one location at a time.

Ballots are faced in mail trays, all in the same orientation. All "white" or non-ballot mail is removed.

Envelope contents are gently tamped to ensure that no contents are cut when the ballots are opened.

Ballots are then run through the sorter, by source and if applicable, location.

- USPS
- Ballot Box>Florence

Sorter opens ballots where the envelope signature is matched to the registration card signature by Automated Signature Verification (ASV), and sorts the ballots with good signatures into green mail trays, in groups of no more than 200.

Ballots that do not match in ASV are sorted to specified bins for additional review. These ballots are stored in yellow mail trays.

Next steps: Signature Review, Deconstruct, Reconcile, Scan, Adjudicate, and Store

Lane County Elections
Mail Ballot Processing Guide - Step 3

Previous steps: Receive, and Sort

This step: Signature Review

Signature Review is initiated by the Automatic Signature Verification (ASV) process. ASV is a software program that compares signatures on file in the Statewide Voter Registration System to the ballot envelope signature, detecting signature characteristics that are indistinguishable to the human eye. It analyzes signatures by comparing geometric shapes, fragments, and trajectories.

If ASV determines the signatures matches, the ballot envelope is sorted into a green tray. Each green tray is a batch and contains no more than 200 ballots.

If ASV determines the signature does not match, the ballot is sorted into a yellow tray and the signature is then verified by a Tier 1 election worker. If Tier 1 determines the signature does not match, it is elevated to Tier 2 for additional review. Tier 2 verification staff have access to additional signature verification resources.

If Tier 2 determines a signature doesn't match, or that the voter failed to sign the return envelope, the voter is mailed a letter and is given the opportunity to cure. Ballots must be cured no later than 21 days after the election.

Next steps: Deconstruct, Reconcile, Scan, Adjudicate, and Store

Lane County Elections
Mail Ballot Processing Guide - Step 4

DECONSTRUCT

Previous steps: Receive, Sort, and Signature Review

This step: Deconstruct

Deconstruct means to dissect into components. Deconstruction teams, never of the same party affiliation, dissect mail ballot packets into their individual components and move those components on to the next step of the mail ballot process.

One member of a deconstruction team will collect a green tray, along with its matching ballot box, and a tray header.

When both deconstruction members are present, they will:

- Enter batch information onto the tray header
- Distribute the ballot envelopes between the team (voter information face down)
- Separate the ballot from the envelope
    - Monitor for two ballots in one envelope, empty envelopes, and damaged ballots
    - Outstack any troubled ballot envelopes into red mail trays
- Thread a zip tie through the drill hole in empty envelopes to ensure there are no ballots remaining, then lock the zip tie
- Unfold ballots
    - Monitor for torn or damaged ballots, alternative format ballots, stray marks through vote bubbles, and instances when a voter's choice may not be recorded accurately
- Count ballots
- Reconcile ballot count and complete tray header
    - Floor supervisors are available to help troubleshoot

Upon completion of a batch, deconstruction team members will:

- Prepare empty envelopes for storage
- Place flattened ballots in ballot box and place completed tray header on top
- Deliver empty envelopes and ballot box to check-in station
- Begin a new batch

Next steps: Reconcile, Scan, Adjudicate, and Store

Lane County Elections
Mail Ballot Processing Guide - Step 5

RECONCILE

Previous steps: Receive, Sort, Signature Review, and Deconstruct

This step: Reconcile

All ballots are processed in batches and every batch is tracked on a ballot reconciliation log. When a ballot is outstacked or removed from a batch during any process, the ballot reconciliation log is updated.

Here are some examples of next steps for outstacked ballots:
Two voted ballots found in one return envelope:

a. Reconciliation log is updated to show total number of ballots to be counted is one less than expected (one envelope removed from count).
b. Outstacked ballot envelope is marked with the batch number and stored in a sealed container with a chain of custody log.
c. Voter's ballot is marked as unaccepted in the statewide voter registration system and will appear on an unaccepted ballot report.
d. Ballots on the unaccepted ballot report are reconciled to physical ballots in the sealed container throughout the election process.

Torn ballot, missing one half:

a. The reconciliation log is updated to show the total number of ballots to be counted is one less than expected (ballot removed from batch).
b. The batch number is written on the ballot and the ballot is stored in a sealed container, with a chain of custody log, until it is re-batched into an adjudication batch and counted.
c. Ballots that are re-batched into adjudication batches are reconciled against the ballot reconciliation log to ensure that every ballot outstacked during deconstruction for adjudication is counted.

Next steps: Scan, Adjudicate, and Store

Lane County Elections
Mail Ballot Processing Guide - Step 6

SCAN

Previous steps: Receive, Sort, Signature Review, Deconstruct, and Reconcile

This step: Scan

Counting room staff process one ballot box at a time. Each ballot box contains one batch of ballots.

Ballots are run through the voting system ballot scanner. After all ballots in the batch are scanned, election workers write the number of ballots counted by the scanner on the ballot box label.

If the scanner count does not match the number of ballots hand-counted by the deconstruction team, the entire batch will be deleted from the scanner and re-run.

If after re-running the ballots the counts still do not match, counting room staff will notify the reconciliation team who will troubleshoot the issue and notate the ballot reconciliation log.

During the scanning process, unscannable ballots may be outstacked to be adjudicated in a new batch. If this occurs, the unscannable ballot will be securely stored and counting room staff will notify the reconciliation team who will update the reconciliation log.

After scanning, ballots and tray headers are returned to their ballot box and moved to secure storage. Ballot boxes are sealed and retained as part of the official election records.

Every day, after ballots are scanned, a ballot box count report is generated, showing the total number of ballots counted per box (batch). That number is entered into the ballot reconciliation log to ensure the exact number of ballots for each batch is accurately counted.

Next steps: Adjudicate, and Store

Lane County Elections
Mail Ballot Processing Guide - Step 7

ADJUDICATE

Previous steps: Receive, Sort, Signature Review, Deconstruct, Reconcile, and Scan

This step: Adjudicate

Adjudication teams are made up of election workers, never from the same political party, who work together, using the Oregon Vote-By-Mail Manual, to ensure the voter's choice is correctly recorded by the voting system.

Adjudication teams also ensure that choices from damaged or unscannable ballots are correctly recorded by the voting system.

All original and adjudicated ballots are flagged and can be married together later for review/audit purposes.

Next step: Store

Lane County Elections
Mail Ballot Processing Guide - Step 8

STORE

Previous steps: Receive, Sort, Signature Review, Deconstruct, Reconcile, Scan, and Adjudicate

This step: Store

All election records are securely stored in accordance with OAR 166-150-0035. During an election cycle, access to secure ballot storage is limited to authorized, sworn election staff. Anyone entering with an authorized election staff member must sign a secure ballot storage access log.