

# **ELECTION OBSERVER MANUAL 2023**

**SPECIAL ELECTION: FEBRUARY 14, 2023  
SPECIAL ELECTION: APRIL 25, 2023  
PRIMARY ELECTION: AUGUST 1, 2023  
GENERAL ELECTION: NOVEMBER 7, 2023**

**ISLAND COUNTY AUDITOR**



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# Introduction

**Welcome to Island County Elections.** We appreciate your participation as an Official Party Observer or as an interested voter. The presence of observers increases transparency and helps to enhance voter confidence in the process.

*Anyone has the right to observe any part of the election process.* The Island County Auditor and staff welcome and encourage the participation of observers. Observers fulfill the fundamental purpose of ensuring transparent review of the elections process and instilling voter confidence in the conduct of elections. Observers may include the media, representatives of the political parties, campaigns and the general public.

The role of the observer differs vastly from that of an election team member. As an observer, it is important to understand the election process, but you are prohibited by law from touching or handling any ballots, processing equipment or containers (RCW 29A.60.170). ***Observers must: refrain from interacting directly with temporary elections team members; not disrupt the process; and remain in the designated observer areas. We request that observers refrain from extraneous conversations among themselves – conversations are a distraction for team members tasked with exacting work.***

The official observer program is dictated by State law. If you have questions, direct them to the ***Auditor, Elections Supervisor, or Voter Registration Coordinator.*** Only they are authorized to represent the county in matters of elections. Temporary election team members perform specific tasks and duties during elections processes, and do not have the authority to speak for the Auditor or County.

Auditor .....Sheilah Crider  
Elections Supervisor .....Michele Reagan  
Voter Registration Coordinator .....Scott Works

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# Duties and Responsibilities

1. To provide a truly independent perspective of the election.
2. Sign-In and follow the Observer Guidelines.
3. All observers must wear a name tag identifying them and their organization.
4. Address questions to the Auditor, Elections Supervisor, or Voter Registration Coordinator.
5. To observe any aspect of absentee ballot processing.
6. Observer scheduling is between the observer and their political party. *Ballot processing will proceed according to schedule, regardless of whether observers are present or not.*

## Observer Guidelines

We have included the following guidelines to help you understand the official observer program and what is expected of you, as an official observer.

1. Prior to an election, all official observers are required to receive training.
2. Each party is responsible for recruiting and scheduling their Official Party Observers as they choose. *Ballot processing will be ongoing whether observers are present or not.*
3. Official Party Observers must wear a badge identifying them. Badges will be provided by the Elections Office. The badge must be visible at all times.
4. Observers representing the general public will be issued a guest badge.
5. All observers must sign in and out at the front counter AND at the entry doors prior to entering the secured ballot processing area and tabulation room.
6. **Cell phones and electronic devices must be turned off prior to entering the Elections Office. Phone calls/texts must take place outside of the Elections Office.**
7. No pictures may be taken in the work area. *Exception: Media, with permission.*
8. Observers will be escorted by election staff to the area where they are to observe. Observers may move between workspaces and outside *during assigned breaks only.*
9. Conversations between fellow observers must occur outside of workspaces. Disruptions affecting the performance and accuracy of elections work must not occur in workrooms.
10. Questions must be directed to the Auditor, Elections Supervisor or Voter Registration Coordinator. Do not attempt to talk with staff processing ballots or petitions.
11. Observers are to remain behind the markings - away from any ballots/petitions being processed. Observers must not touch any ballots/petitions nor be in proximity to do so. Any questions or concerns will be addressed by the observer to a supervisor.
12. Observers must be respectful of the staff and workers' personal space.
13. Observers are responsible for asking for any written references to the processing that they will be observing.
14. Observers are expected to remain objective and independent from the Elections Department. Remember: ***Observers are to observe the process, not be a participant.***
15. Due to sensitivity and/or allergic reaction to some odors, chemicals and/or fragrances, please avoid use of fragrances or other odors that may be offensive, cause allergic and/or other adverse reactions for staff, visitors or other workers. *If you have specific allergies, please let us know so that we can accommodate your needs within reason.*

## Elections Overview

Population:	86,857 (2021 Census data)
Registered Voters:	61,287 (January 19, 2023)
Precincts:	90
Jurisdictions:	66

- Federal
- State
- Congressional
- Legislative
- Judicial
- County
- Cities/Towns
- Hospital
- Parks & Recreation
- Schools
- Ports
- Libraries
- Public Utilities
- Fire & Rescue
- Conservation
- Sewer
- Water
- Diking
- Drainage
- Cemetery

## Processes to Observe

- Petition Signature Verification
- Logic and Accuracy Test prior to Election Day
- Sorting, signature verification, opening and canvassing of ballots
- Election Night procedures
- Ballot duplication or resolution
- Scanning of Ballots
- Post Election Audit
- Storing and securing of ballots
- Reconciliation of ballots and ballot totals
- Canvass Board Meetings
- Certification of the election
- Recounts, if necessary

## Election Activities Overview

The process of an election may reach its pinnacle on Election Night, but the work actually begins weeks earlier and continues for several days after the election.

### Before an Election:

- *Registering voters* – this is a continual process year-round. There are clear statutory guidelines for voter registration.
- *Candidate and ballot measure filings* – All candidate filings must be verified and processed. Ballot measure filings must be verified and a legal ballot title acquired.
- *Designing ballot layouts* – All offices, candidates and measures for a particular election are verified. Offices and measures must be programmed into the ballot layout based on the order defined by statute. Ballot order for candidates is determined by lot draw.

- *Testing of systems and equipment* – All Elections are programmed into the Hart Intercivic VERITY Vote Tabulation System. The programming goes through extensive testing prior to generating the ballots. The voting equipment is also programmed and put through the same extensive testing.
- *Mailing of Ballots* – UOCAVA Ballot packets and those for small local elections are prepared by the ballot assembly teams and delivered to the Post Office for mailing. In larger elections, the ballots are assembled and mailed by a vendor.
- *Processing returned ballots* – As ballots are received in the mail and from ballot drop boxes, they are processed but not tabulated. Tabulation takes place beginning after 8:00 pm on Election Day and continues daily thereafter when we have 500 or more ballots to count.

**On Election Day:**

- Processing returned ballots
- Beginning at 8:00 p.m., tabulation of ballots

**After Election Day:**

- Processing and tabulating returned ballots
- Auditing of results
- Certification of final results
- Conducting necessary recounts

## Petition Signature Verification

Petition Signature Verification is the process of researching voter information to determine valid signatures on a petition. Elections staff determines if the signature is a valid signature on the petition, including whether they are properly registered.

*Observers are not allowed to:*

- *express their personal opinion of whether a signature is valid or not*
- *touch any petition page, container holding petition pages or equipment used for validating signatures*
- *interfere with the operations of the validation process or the Elections staff performing the functions.*

All questions regarding petitions must be directed to the Auditor, Elections Supervisor or Voter Registration Services Coordinator.

## Logic and Accuracy Testing

Logic & Accuracy Testing is the process of testing the programming of the vote tallying system and Accessible Voting Units (AVU) that will be used in any primary, general or special election. The tests verify that the systems will correctly count and/or read and print the votes cast for all candidates and measures that appear on the ballot and that the machines are functioning to required specifications for that election. A pre-approved test deck of ballots will be used for the test. The test is to be conducted at least 3 days prior to an election. Political parties, the press, the general public and candidates are notified of dates and times of the tests and may attend as observers. After testing has been completed, the Certification of Witnesses must be signed by all attendees and, along with all test ballots and printed results, shall be sealed for security purposes until the day of the primary or election.

### Emergency Logic and Accuracy Test

This test must be conducted if, for any reason, changes have to be made to the ballot programming after the official logic and accuracy test has been certified or if the official test cannot be completed as scheduled.

### Test Deck

Ballots marked in a pattern, pre-approved by the secretary of state, will be put through the tallying system during the official logic and accuracy test. The deck shall be marked in such a way that it tests the ability of the tabulating system to correctly count the ballots. The deck shall test the system's ability to accurately count all candidates, measures, write-in votes, overvotes and blank ballots along with ballots marked by the Accessible Voting Units (AVUs).

## Ballot Processing

**Receiving of ballots** - Ballot envelopes are placed in trays. Each tray contains approximately 300 ballots. A paper tracking sheet is made for each tray and accompanies each tray of ballots from beginning to completion of processing.

**Signature Verification (First Review)** – This is the process of comparing the voter's signature on the ballot declaration envelope with any signatures in the registration file. If the signature meets the standards set forth in statute, the voter is given credit for voting and the ballot is approved for processing. If the signature is missing, does not appear to match or has anomalies, the verifier will flag the envelope for Second Review.

**Signature Verification (2nd Review)** – This is the process of reviewing all signatures that were not accepted the first time. 2nd Reviews are conducted by staff with a higher level of training and experience. The process is the same as above except any ballot envelopes with signatures that are not accepted will be sorted out of the tray during 2nd review for hands-on comparison by the Elections Supervisor, the Voter Registration Coordinator or other Washington State Patrol (WSP) trained personnel.

*Observers may not express their personal opinion of whether or not a signature appears valid.*

**Election Official Signature Review** – is the process of reviewing unaccepted ballots due to signature verification issues and researching voter records for further information. This process is conducted by supervisors or key personnel who are well-trained by the WSP in signature verification. Ballots are grouped in the following categories: valid – verifiable signatures; no signature, mismatch, other and wrong signature. Signature issues that can be resolved are processed. Ballots which cannot be resolved are coded so notification can be sent immediately to the voter. The voters of unresolved signature ballots, which have been coded as such, receive a notification letter from Island County Elections. The letter includes information and a form for the voter on how to correct the issue so their ballot can be counted.

**Staging Step 1 and Envelope Slitting Step 1** - Ballots in declaration envelopes are taken from the front office to the work room and run through the electric envelope slitter. The tray is then placed on the shelf to await extraction by a team of two election team members.

**Extraction - Stage 1** – this is the process of separating the ballot declaration envelopes from the secrecy sleeves. This step removes the identity of the voter before the secrecy sleeve is removed. The empty declaration envelopes are placed in one stack and the secrecy sleeves are placed into a separate stack. Once this stage is complete, a string is run through the declaration envelopes to ensure that nothing remains in any envelope and these are set aside.

**Extraction - Stage 2** – this is the process of removing the ballot secrecy sleeve and extracting each ballot by a team of two. The empty secrecy sleeves are placed in one stack and the ballots are placed into a separate stack. Once this stage is complete, a string is run through the empty secrecy sleeves to ensure that nothing remains in any sleeve.

**Ballot Pre-inspection** - This process is completed by teams of two staff members. Ballots are unfolded and inspected for processing. Ballots that are not “readable” by the tabulators due to voter correction, physical damage or other issues are processed for duplication. Staff verifies the tray count and sorts ballots into smaller batches for processing based on how the ballot will be reconciled;

- Auto-Resolve – ballots that can be processed by the system exactly as marked
- Manual Resolve – ballots that require manual attention to corrections, write-ins and overvotes

All sorting results are logged on the batch sheet and this data is used for daily reconciliation report.

*Observers are not to make any tally or count of the votes on the ballot*

**Duplication** – is the process of transferring the voter’s intent from the original ballot to an unmarked blank ballot, provided this may be done in compliance with the Statewide Voter Intent Manual issued by WA State SOS. This process is always completed by a team of two workers. A unique sequence number is assigned to both ballots and they are put into a sealed container to await verification by a different team of two workers.

*Observers are not to make any tally or count of the votes on the ballot.*

Once the tray of ballots has been pre-inspected and sorted, a team of two will transport the tray to the secured cabinet in the vault to await scanning.

**Provisional Ballot Administration** – is the process of sorting, researching, documenting and duplicating provisional ballots that were issued at the elections office or by another county at the request of a voter. Elections’ staff researches the voter registration within the county and statewide to determine if the voter is eligible to vote. If the voter is registered in another county, the provisional ballot is sent to that county. If the voter is eligible to vote in Island County, the signature is verified and the voter’s record is researched. If the voter has not previously voted, the voter is given credit for voting, the provisional ballot is duplicated to a ballot of the voter’s precinct and all eligible votes are transferred and the ballot is sent to tabulation. If the voter is not eligible to vote in Washington, they are sent a letter explaining why their vote was not able to be counted.

*Observers are not to make any tally or count of the votes on the ballot.*

**Scanning and Resolving of voted ballots** – is the process of scanning the ballots into the system and resolving any issues (i.e. overvotes, undervotes, corrections, write-ins) that will impact how a ballot is tabulated.

A team of two election team members will scan the ballots into the processing program. As each batch of ballots is scanned into the system, the information is recorded on the corresponding batch sheet. Ballots that require attention by the Canvassing Board are removed from the tray, noted on the batch sheet and placed in an envelope for Canvass review. The scanned ballots are then placed into a secure storage container.

Once the ballots have been scanned, two election team members will resolve the ballots. This is done by bringing up the digital images of the ballots with issues (undervotes, overvotes, write-ins, corrections) and indicating in the system how the marks on the ballot will be recorded. This is done in strict compliance with the “What is a Vote” guidelines provided by the Secretary of State’s Office and mandated by statute. Any ballots containing marks that cannot be resolved within the confines of the guidelines are removed from the system and forwarded to the Canvassing Board for review. The information regarding resolution is recorded on the batch sheet.

*Observers are not to make any tally or count of the votes on the ballot.*

*Observers are not to interfere with the teams’ processing of the ballots in any way.*

**Tabulation** – is the process of recording the ballot information onto the memory drives and placing them into the Count portion of the Hart Verity System. The tabulation of ballots must not commence prior to 8:00 p.m. on Election Day per statute. Once the data is compiled in the system, the cumulative results report is generated and the information is provided to the public via the County’s website, the Secretary of State’s website, and printed reports available in the Elections Office.



Following Election Day, ballot processing and tabulation continues daily, provided that 500 or more ballots remain to be counted. If fewer than 500 ballots remain to be processed, they will be held until the day of certification and will be part of the final tally and certification.

## Audit

**Random Batch Audit** – takes place no later than forty-eight hours after Election Day. Six batches of ballots are randomly selected during processing for the audit. The contest to be audited is randomly selected from the ballot. The audit compares the hand count of the selected batches and contest to the electronic results of the contest. The random check procedures include a process for expanding the audit to include additional ballots if the random check results in a discrepancy.

## Certification

**Certification of Election** – takes place 10 days after a Special Election, 14 days after a Primary and 21 days after a General Election. The Canvassing Board is presented with the final tally of votes and supporting documentation. Once the Canvassing Board adopts final reports, the election is certified by the Board and is officially closed.

## Canvassing Board

Membership on the board is defined by statute:

- County Auditor, or delegate
  - County Board of Commissioners Chair, or delegate
  - County Prosecuting Attorney, or delegate
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- Only the Canvassing Board can reject a ballot.
  - The Canvassing Board makes all decisions on voter intent not specifically contained in the Secretary of State Voter Intent Statewide Standards on *What Is A Vote*.
  - The Canvassing Board certifies final election results.
  - Meetings are open to the public and the schedule is posted.