

COOKE COUNTY CENTRAL COUNT STATION PLAN

Section I

Legislative Requirement

Chapter 127.007, Election Code: PLAN FOR COUNTING STATION OPERATION.

- (a) The manager shall establish and implement a written plan for the orderly operation of the central counting station.
- (b) The plan required under this section must address the process for comparing the number of votes cast for the entire election.

NEW LAW: HB 1735. The central counting station plan must be made available to the public on request not later than 5 P.M. on the fifth day before the date of election.

The mission of the COOKE COUNTY CENTRAL COUNTING STATION PLAN is to first and foremost maintain the integrity of the electoral process, vote counting must produce results that are valid and accurate. We must have effective planning and management.

Section II

Composition of the Central Counting Station Personnel Appointment

The Commissioners Court of Cooke County with the help of the County Clerk will appoint the Central Counting Station Manager, Tabulation Supervisor and Assistant Tabulation Supervisor by the SOS recommended date (71st day before Election Day).

Central Counting Station Manager - Pam Harrison, County Clerk
Tabulation Supervisor - Gina Long, Chief Deputy Clerk
Assistant Tabulation Supervisor - Michelle Zimmerer, Chief Deputy Clerk

The manager, the tabulation supervisors, and the clerks must meet the eligibility requirements for a precinct election judge and must be registered voters of the political subdivision. However, a clerk is not ineligible if he or she is an employee of the political subdivision because the clerk is a qualified voter of another county.

The manager oversees the overall supervision of the CCS. The manager, as well as the presiding judge, may appoint clerks to perform the duties at the CCS. The CCS personnel will all be assigned jobs and name tags when they arrive at the Central Counting Station on Election Day.

Section III

Testing the Election equipment

Cooke County counts the paper ballots using an automatic tabulating system. The system is maintained by the county's vendor Elections Systems & Software (ESS).

The presiding judge and CCS Manager will perform three tests by running a pre-completed test deck provided by ESS. The first test will be conducted on Friday or at least 48 hours before Election Day. The second test will be conducted using the same test data immediately before the official ballots are to be counted. The final test will be performed immediately after all ballots have been counted.

After running the test deck through the tabulator, we will print out a cumulative report showing the vote totals of each test and then we will compare the tally from the test deck to the report printed from the tabulator. We also compare the report from the tabulator with the official ballot to ensure all the candidates are represented on the report from the test. If the first test is successful, we will secure the test deck with the program until Election Day.

As soon as we receive the ballots and test ballots from our vendor the CCS Manager will test each ballot type in all Precinct ExpressVotes (Hava Compliant Voting System) to ensure the ExpressVote can read each ballot type and put the marks on the test ballot. Then, we will save the test ballot count to a disk and import it into the Election Reporting Manager (ERM) and test the reports for accuracy.

Section IV

Procedures for Convening the Early Voting Ballot Board and the Central Counting Station

The EVBB will be convening in the Judges Conference room the morning of Election Day, where they will start the process of reviewing the ballots by mail. The Early Voting Judge will administer the Oaths of office and Oath of Election. The Early Voting Clerk will deliver the list of voters who voted by mail, ballot by mail applications and the locked ballot box of voted BBM envelopes. The EVBB will prepare a ballot transmittal form that contains the number of accepted mail ballots that will be counted at the central count station. The EVBB will deliver the form to the CCS manager and the secure ballots to be counted. The CCS manager will accept the ballots and sign a receipt acknowledging receipt of ballots and check that the seals are intact.

The EVBB will reconvene on the 7th day after Election Day to process the provisional ballots and use the same process as the BBM ballots.

The CCS manager will provide a plan with the date and time that the CCS personnel will convene to the Central Counting Station. Depending on the size of the election will determine the time. When all personnel arrive the Early Voting Clerk will administer the oaths and assign jobs. The CCS personnel will reconvene on the 7th day after Election Day to count the Provisional and late FPVA Ballots.

Duplication Procedures

Certain ballots that are counted with automatic tabulating equipment may have to be duplicated if the ballot is damaged or cannot be read with the equipment. Those ballots will be duplicated according to the procedures outlined in Section 127.126 of the Texas Election Code.

The Early Voting Ballot Board or Central Counting Station will be responsible for the duplication of ballots that are irregularly marked or damaged. Those ballots will be duplicated to reflect the intent of the voter. (Sec. 87.102) / If CCS: (Sec. 127.126)

If duplication is performed at the Central Counting Station: When the ballots are duplicated, the duplicate ballot will be clearly labeled “Duplicate”, and the serial

number of the original ballot will be placed on the duplicate ballot. After the ballot is duplicated and the ballots have been approved for counting by the Manager, the duplicate ballot will be counted using the automatic tabulating equipment. The original ballot and the duplicate ballot will be retained together, and will be retained with the other voted ballots for the duration of the preservation period. (Sec. 127.126)

Section V

Poll Watchers

Poll watchers are entitled to be present during the time the CCS has convened for the purpose of processing or preparing to process election results and until the election officers complete their duties at the station. The poll watcher must deliver their certificate of appointment to the Presiding Judge of the CCS and the Presiding Judge must countersign their certificate. The CCS manager will go over the Poll Watcher's Guide issued by the Secretary of State Elections Division and stipulate the areas where the poll watcher is permitted to stand or sit to observe the counting activities.

Section VI

Ballot Box Security and Counting Ballots at the Central Counting Station

The ballot boxes used at the voting precincts on Election Day for the deposit of voted ballots are locked and sealed prior to the precinct judges picking up the box. We use wire seals with serial numbers; the numbers are recorded on the Ballot Box Seal list form. The voting slot on the box is also sealed before pickup. After voting is closed the judge reseals the box to ensure no additional ballots can be deposited into the box. As the precinct Judges bring in their voting supplies and ballot boxes the clerk will verify that the serial number is the same serial number on the seal list to ensure the seal was not removed or tampered with. The precinct Judge will then sign a ballot box receipt confirming the ballot box seals match. If there is a discrepancy in the serial numbers, the presiding judge must make a notation of this on the receipt. The original receipt is then given to the early voting election judge and a copy of the receipt is kept by the precinct judge. We will then inspect the box for its contents and make sure the numbers of ballots match the number of voters.

The counting station clerks will unlock and open all the ballot boxes to do a preliminary sort of ballots before counting. The clerks will separate out the provisional ballot envelopes and verify the number of provisional ballots in the box to the list of provisional ballots. The provisional ballots are then sealed in a box to be delivered to the Voter Registrar. The Voter Registrar will sign the back of the provisional envelope to be accepted or rejected for counting.

After the ballots have been sorted, they are delivered to the manager. The manager will feed the ballots into the CCS tabulator (650), which will sort over votes, write-ins, blank ballots, and problem ballots that the tabulator cannot count. The ballots that are tabulated will be bagged by precinct and put back into a locked ballot box for 22 months. The ballots that the tabulator sorted because the intent of the voter was not known will go to a resolution board. The resolution board will consist of three people that the Early Voting Judge appointed. The resolution board will determine the intent of the voter. The resolution board must record the serial number of the original ballot and the serial number of the duplicated ballot on a duplicate ballot list. The original ballot is sealed in an envelope to be put with all election forms. Then the duplicated ballots will be accepted for counting. If there are any write-in ballots the judge will assign a three-clerk team to hand count and tally the write-ins.

After all ballots have been counted through the CCS tabulator a precinct return report will be printed and posted on the outside wall of the Annex Building for the public to view. The vote count will then be saved to a disk and imported into the Election Report Manager System (ERM). The ERM will produce a precinct by precinct return election results report that shows the unofficial final count and number of overvotes and undervotes. The election results are electronically reported to the State. The unofficial election results are posted on the County Website and on the County notice board. The results report is preserved with the other election records for the twenty-two-month federal retention period.

Prior to the local canvass, the CCS manager will compare the number of early votes, ballot by mail votes and election day votes on the voting roster forms to the number of ballots cast.

The Commissioners Court will sign off on an order to canvass the votes and make them official.

Reconciliation Procedures

Section 127.007 of the Texas Election Code requires the central counting station plan to address a process for comparing the number of voters who signed the combination form with the number of votes cast for the entire election. The reconciliation procedures for the central counting station are outlined below. The Tabulation Manager, CCS Supervisor, and Presiding Judge will perform a reconciliation for each category of ballots as follows:

Early Voting in Person

To reconcile the results for early voting in person, County Clerk will compare the total number of voters that signed in on the combination form or poll book, as applicable, to the total number of votes cast during early voting.

Early Voting by Mail

To reconcile the results for early voting by mail, the Presiding Judge will compare the number of ballots entered on the “Ballot Transmittal Form” from the EVBB to the number of ballots counted.

Election Day

To reconcile the results for Election Day, the Presiding Judge will compare the number of voters that signed in on the combination forms or poll book, as applicable, to the total number of ballots cast on Election Day.

Final Reconciliation

To reconcile the total results for the election after the central counting station has completed the final tabulation of results after Election Day, the Presiding Judge will compare the total number of voters who are listed as having voted in the election on the combination form or on the poll book and the number of ballots listed on the ballot transmittal form to the total number of votes cast during early voting in person, ballot by mail, and Election Day.

Reconciliation Form – Election Night

The Presiding Judge will provide and attest to a written reconciliation of votes and voters on election night by completing the Preliminary Election Reconciliation Form at the close of tabulation on election night. The completed form will be posted at: <https://www.co.cooke.tx.us/page/cooke.Elections>. (Sec. 127.131(f))

Reconciliation Form – Final Totals

The Presiding Judge will provide and attest to a written reconciliation of votes and voters at the close of tabulation after the central counting station meets for the last time to process late-arriving ballots by mail, corrective action ballots that were cured after Election Day, and provisional ballots. The completed form will be posted at:

<https://www.co.cooke.tx.us/page/cooke.Elections> (Sec. 127.131(f))

Security Procedures

A licensed peace officer will be posted when the central counting station is convened to ensure the security of ballot boxes containing voted ballots throughout the period of tabulation, in accordance with the requirements of Section 127.1232 of the Texas Election Code.

Following these procedures ensures that state laws are correctly followed; but even more importantly to ensure that the election authority has taken all precautions to ensure accurate election night results. If you have any questions about any of these procedures, please contact the Cooke County Clerk's Office at 940-668-5437.

Pam Harrison
Cooke County Clerk