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Defining the Integrity of Voter Registration Division Records

The Voter Registration Division of the Travis County Tax Office adheres to clearly defined, standard procedures to process and maintain voter records. The procedures are based on state and federal laws.

The purpose of this report is to describe division procedures in six parts. Each will be described in detail. They are:

- Processing Applications
- Processing Applications That Do Not Meet Review Tests
- Suspended Voter Records
- Inactive Records
- Enhancing the Integrity of Voter Records through the Help America Vote Act (HAVA)
- Role of Voter Registration in Provisional Voting

Processing Applications

All State issued registration applications undergo review for accuracy and completeness.¹ The law requires the applicant to complete each part of the application with the exception of telephone number, which is optional information. In the past, an identification number, such as driver's license number, was optional. Now that information is required.² Common errors in completing an application include failure to sign the application, failure to check the required fields regarding citizenship, and mistakenly inserting the current date instead of birth date.

In the past, there was no variation in the size and shape of a standard voter registration application. With changes in the law and the onset of technology, the standard has changed. Today applications may come in a variety of forms and from multiple sources.

¹ Texas Election Laws, 2010 – 2011 Edition; Section 13.071

² Laws, Section 13.002

Application forms come from:

- Internet – 8½ x 11 sheet (4%)
- Post offices, libraries, grocery stores, agencies, substations – 4 x 8 fold over (30%)
- In person – including Elections, Deputy Voter Registrars (24%)
- Department of Public Safety /Texas Online – No forms. Data passed to counties (42%)

Each document received in the Voter Registration Division is scanned, data entered, and indexed to ensure and to provide complete customer service! In other words, the imaging system provides the means to track and account for every piece of information received by mail, electronically and in person. As a result, all applications that must be sent to another county for processing are referenced here, allowing us to provide comprehensive service to ALL customers, including those who do not reside in Travis County.

Document processing follows a first in first out system. After sorting by type (as described above) each application is reviewed for accuracy and completeness. Is the address in Travis County? Is the applicant qualified by age? Did the applicant affirm US citizenship? Did the applicant provide a Texas identification number? Next, applications are scanned, counted by type and then distributed to appropriate stations for action.

Once the application is entered into the voter registration database it is then indexed and becomes part of the permanent voter record. Imaging permits timely research of individual applications to confirm what an applicant submitted. Each application is boxed by scanned date and saved permanently.

Validation of voter applications begins with checking the current voter roll. Approximately 77% of all records contain driver's license number, which facilitates the search for duplicate records. For example, if Charles Edward Littleton registered 2 years ago with complete name and registered again before the deadline as Ed Littleton, a driver's license search would likely identify the original record. The new information, if any, would be added to the older record and the voter would retain his original Voter Unique Identification Number (VUID).

The Integrity of Travis County Voter Registration Records through HAVA

The Help America Vote Act (HAVA), mandated in 2002 by the federal government, changed voter registration record validation and maintenance significantly. The purpose of the law is fraud prevention. What was once optional information, such as driver's license identification, became mandatory. Voters who do not provide a driver's license number must provide a government issued identification number or if the voter does not have either, the last four digits of their social security number. HAVA and "Motor Voter" laws have worked together to improve the quality of record keeping.

Motor Voter requires the Department of Public Safety to offer drivers an opportunity to register to vote or update voter registration.

Every evening, each record entered or updated to the county database is sent electronically to the Secretary of State's Texas Election Administration Management system (TEAM) for validation.³ If the record is validated, TEAM qualifies the voter and issues a Voter Unique Identification Number (VUID). The qualified voter record is returned to the county for issuance of a voter certificate. If the record is not validated, the county must send the voter a letter requesting additional information.

Carrying out the requirements of HAVA is just part of what takes place to ensure the integrity of voter records. Other systematic checks designed to prevent fraud and errors occur through state-wide and local review including:

- County Duplicate Voter reports are run and verified daily prior to routine mailing of voter certificates
- If a voter is registered twice, the newer record is cancelled and the data is transferred to the older record.

Processing Applications That Do Not Meet Review Tests

When an application is incomplete, inaccurate or is not validated by TEAM, the postmark date on the application begins the 48-hour time limit imposed by law.⁴ During this timeframe, the voter registration division must mail a letter to the applicant explaining what is needed to meet the qualifications for registering to vote. Examples are absence of voter signature, absence of physical residence address, failure to answer the U. S. citizenship question, or TEAM did not validate the voter record.

The applicant has 10 days to return the completed, corrected application. Applications received within 10 days receive the original effective date of registration reflected when the application was first received by the office. Applications that are not returned within 10 days receive an effective date of registration on the day the completed application is received.⁵ This can be a critical factor if the voter sent the application near the deadline to register.

"Too late" applications are those postmarked or received in person after the registration deadline. "Too late" applications are entered into the voter registration system after all "on time" applications have been processed. "Too late" applications receive an effective date that reflects the postmark on the application. Postmarks are captured by the imaging system.

³ Laws, Section 18.061

⁴ Laws, Section 13.073(a)

⁵ Laws, Section 13.073(c)

None of the “too late” records have been included in the Travis County online records at www.traviscountytax.org . The intent was to avoid misguiding voters who may think they are eligible to vote on Election Day.

System Maintenance: Suspended Voter Records

Until verification is received that disqualifies a voter, registration is permanent. Verification includes voter certificates (or other correspondence) returned by the U. S. Postal Service as undeliverable mail, TEAM data and court documents. In the absence of notification from one of these sources, and / or, when a family member or other person fails to return a voter certificate received by mail for someone who is deceased or who no longer lives in Travis County, the record remains unchanged. Some voter records are flagged as suspense to signify that the voter may have moved. A suspension flag appears in records of those voters who did not respond to two mailed notices. For example, every two years, the law requires the mailing of renewal voter registration certificates to all voters. If a renewal certificate is returned, the voter registrar places a suspense flag on the voter record and then sends a follow up mailing called a confirmation notice.⁶ If the voter responds to the confirmation notice and remains a qualified voter, the suspension flag is removed.⁷

The suspense flag will remain on the record for two consecutive general elections for state and county officers. By law, if the voter does not update their address within the two consecutive general election period, the record is cancelled.⁸ Voters in suspense status are eligible to vote in the election precinct where registered if the voter submits a completed statement of residence form.⁹

System Maintenance: Inactive Records

The election code requires the cancellation of suspended records every two years after November 30 of a general election for state and county officers.¹⁰ If a voter returned to Travis County and registered again, the database would show both the inactive and active records. As mentioned earlier, all voter registration application forms are maintained permanently.

The Roll of the Voter Registrar in Provisional Voting

- A) A provisional ballot is used when someone is not listed on the voter roll and the voter indicates that they meet all qualifications for voting.

⁶ Laws, 14.021

⁷ Laws, 15.022

⁸ Laws, 16.032

⁹ Laws, 15.112

¹⁰ Laws, 16.032

- B) Provisional ballots are sent to the Voter Registrar to examine, determine the voter's registration status and to make a final determination whether or not the voter is qualified to vote.
- C) The voter registrar has three days to make a final determination and complete each provisional ballot envelope.
- D) The provisional ballot affidavit serves as a voter registration application. The voter registrar enters the voter information into the registration database using the Election Date as the effective date of registration.
- E) After all provisional ballots have been examined and a final determination made, the voter registrar forwards all documents to the County Clerk Elections Division.
- F) The Early Voting Ballot Board convenes to review each affidavit and approve or reject each provisional ballot. Not later than the 10th day after the local canvass, the Early Voting Ballot Board presiding judge shall deliver written notice regarding whether the provisional ballot was counted and if not counted, the reason the ballot was not counted.

Travis County Voter Registration

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