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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.

In October 2004, the voter registration staff completed record processing that resulted in the largest number ever of registered voters in Travis County, 584,949. That number means 94.5% of the eligible population is registered to vote for the November 2, 2004 General Election.

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 Tests
- Suspended Voter Records
- Inactive Records
- Enhancing the Integrity of Voter Records
- Role of Voter Registration in Provisional Voting

Processing Applications

All applications undergo testing for accuracy and completeness. 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. Common errors in completing an application include failure to sign the application, failure to check the required boxes 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.

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Applications come from:

- Internet – 8½ x 11 sheets (1%)
- Post offices, libraries, grocery stores, substations – 4 x 8 fold over (45%)
- Department of Public Safety – 4 x 6 postcard (49%)
- All of the above types – in person Deputy Voter Registrars (5%)

Processing follows a first in first out system. After sorting by type (as described above) applications received become the “Daily Batch”. Each application in the Daily Batch is scanned and imprinted with date, time and county name. Applications are counted by type.

The next step is to review each application for accuracy and completeness. Is the address in Travis County? Is the applicant qualified by age and citizenship? Did the applicant provide an identification number? Based on the preliminary sort, applications are next distributed to appropriate stations for action.

Validation of voter applications begins with checking the current voter roll. Approximately 70% 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 certificate number.

According to law, the voter registration division must mail a letter within 48 hours to applicants who have submitted an incomplete and / or inaccurate application.

The Daily Batch entry into the voter registration database includes all applications that meet the test for accuracy and completeness. Each application is assigned a voter identification number or voter registration certificate number (VRC). Each application is labeled, scanned and indexed to produce an image. Imaging permits timely research of individual applications to confirm what an applicant submitted. Each application is boxed by scanned date and saved permanently.

Processing Applications That Do Not Meet Tests

When an application is incomplete or inaccurate, the date and time stamp on the application begins the 48-hour time limit imposed by law. 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 and failure to answer the U. S. citizenship question.

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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. 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. For the November 2, 2004 General Election, the deadline was October 4, 2004. “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. For the 2004 General Election, the effective date of registration required for a voter to cast a ballot is November 2.

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 November 2.

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, official reports 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 new voter registration certificates to all voters. If a new certificate is returned, the voter registrar sends a follow up mailing called a confirmation notice. The law also requires confirmation notices and the purpose is to update address.

A returned confirmation notice generates a flag that will remain on the record for four years or two consecutive Federal elections, whichever occurs first. If the voter does not update their address within the four-year or two consecutive federal elections period, the record is purged. Voters in suspended status are eligible to vote.

System Maintenance: Inactive Records

Inactive records are purged every two years. The election code requires the purge every two years after November 30 of a general election. Inactive records are kept on the database through the next purge. So, for example, if voter A registered in 2000 in Travis County but moved later that year to another county, the record in Travis County would be canceled, generating an inactive record that would remain in the voter registration database until the November 2004 purge. If Voter A returned to Travis County and registered again, the database would show both the inactive and active records. As mentioned earlier, all voter registration applications are maintained permanently.

Voters may have an inactive file and an active file, as they may have registered as a new voter during the two-year period. The inactive record does not appear online, which would confuse a voter who is researching his or her record.

The Integrity of Travis County Voter Registration Records

The Help America Vote Act (HAVA), mandated by the federal government, changed voter registration record validation and maintenance significantly. The purpose of the new 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 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. As a result, 70% of the Travis County file now contains driver's license number.

In addition to an identifying number, first time voters must provide a copy of a photo identification if registering by mail. If the voter does not provide a copy, a photo ID must be presented when voting.¹

The combination of identifying number and photo identification enhances the integrity of voter records as intended by HAVA. The data file is cleaner and more secure. Searching by driver's license has improved the quality and speed of searches. Locating voters who have already registered is faster and easier. Now there is less duplicity of voters registered due to this single identifier.

¹ Please note the Election Code changed with regard to identification. Voters are no longer required to provide a copy of a photo identification if registering by mail. Footnote created September 15, 2006

Carrying out the requirements of HAVA are 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 bi-weekly 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.
- Counties use file transfer protocol (FTP) to send updated files to the Secretary of State (SOS) each week.
- The SOS sends weekly statewide duplicate reports to counties of voters registered dually in two counties.

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.
- 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 shall copy the affidavit and enter the voter information to 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 will forward all documents to the County Clerk Elections Division.
- F) The Early Voting Ballot Board will be convened 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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