

**About the Quick Start Guides:** The EAC's Quick Start Guides are intended to familiarize local election officials with various topics they will likely encounter in election administration. The guides are a starting point to identify areas of concern and give officials a broad idea of factors they should consider in approaching a given topic.

## What is a Poll Watcher?

Each state defines the role of a poll watcher differently. Poll watchers (watchers) are typically individuals appointed to observe a portion of the elections process. Often, political parties, candidates, or issue groups supporting or opposing a ballot measure are permitted to appoint watchers. Election officials should familiarize themselves with their state's laws and procedures for watchers, including who is eligible to be a watcher and how they become one. Below are a few ideas to educate watchers on their role in the election process and give watchers insight into how election officials uphold the integrity of the vote.

Poll watchers are frequently called **observers** or **challengers**, depending on the jurisdiction.

## General Considerations



- **Communicate** with groups who appoint watchers. Notify them of important deadlines and dates, available resources or training, rules (highlighting any recent changes), and provide appointment forms (if necessary).
- **Designate** an area for watchers when laying out polling places and areas where absentee ballot processing, audits, canvassing, and recounts will occur. Ensure watchers can observe all procedures, as applicable.
- **Provide** training for watchers and include information about watchers during poll worker training.
- **Designate** a staff member to serve as a point of contact for any questions or concerns watchers have while observing the election.

## Polling Places



- **Provide** watchers with a badge to wear, a list of the rules they must follow, and contact information for the elections office.
- **Notify** poll workers of the name of any watcher who may observe their location.
- **Invite** appointed watchers to attend poll worker training.

## Central Ballot Processing



- **Provide** watchers with written procedures to be followed while processing ballots (e.g., ballot duplication and adjudication procedures and the process for resolving non-matching signatures or other identifying information). Include information about key staff and describe their role in each process.
- **Allow** watchers to view all public data needed to understand the process they are observing.

## Canvass, Certification, Audits, and Recounts



- **Provide** watchers with a schedule of activities.
- **Identify** key staff and describe their role in the process.
- **Allow** watchers to inspect chain of custody and reconciliation documents.
- **Explain** how ballots and election materials are secured throughout the process.

**Protect PII**  
Allowing third parties to observe election processes promotes transparency and fosters trust, but elections officials must ensure voters' personally identifiable information (PII) remains private.