

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.

Why write Standard Operating Procedures?

Drafting standard operating procedures (SOPs) is a daunting task. Even when an elections office has written SOPs, they often go years without revision. But drafting, revising, and following SOPs is essential to evidence-based elections and continuity of operations. Election officials can point to their SOPs as evidence of the steps they take to ensure the integrity of the entire elections process, from voter registration to certifying election results. SOPs help employees understand their role and ensure uniformity in completing tasks. Further, they act as institutional memory for essential office tasks that facilitate a smooth transition for a new administration or employee.

Tips for Writing Effective SOPs



- **Review** your state's election manual and use it as a starting point. States often provide baseline guidance for certain processes that can be the foundation for many of your SOPs.
- **Detail** chain of custody procedures for all election materials.
- **Include** an organizational chart to help employees understand how their role fits within the larger organization.
- **Incorporate** alternative mediums to demonstrate processes. For example, screen recording software enables you to record computer-based processes.
- **Include** layouts and forms typically used for polling places, early voting, audits, canvassing, and recounts.
- **Enlist** the help of office staff to draft the procedures for their respective departments or responsibilities.
- **Take** it one section at a time. Especially in offices with few employees, prioritize the most important sections and focus on drafting those procedures.
- **Establish** regular intervals for review and revision in addition to incorporating law and policy changes as they occur.

Sample Contents

- **Voter Registration** - procedures for processing new registrations, updates to existing registrations, list maintenance, and cancellations
- **Candidates & Ballot Issues** - procedures for candidate filing, petition filing, checking signatures, and campaign finance filing
- **Poll Workers** - detail methods of recruiting, placing, and training poll workers
- **Election Equipment** - plan for election deployment and inventory and maintenance procedures
- **Election Preparation** - ballot building, proofing procedure, ordering ballots and supplies, logic and accuracy testing, accessibility, and contingency plans
- **Voting** - include procedures for:
 - Absentee - application processing, returned ballot processing, curing, and counting
 - In-person voting - resource allocation, communications, location diagrams, and security
- **Post-Election** - procedures for canvassing, audits, and recounts
- **Security** - address both physical and cyber security and include policies on restricted access, visitors, training, password requirements, and incident response
- **Records Retention** - include retention schedule and procedure for tracking storage and destruction
- **Organizational Chart**

Contingency Planning

SOPs cover the regular operating procedures of an elections office. However, election officials also must plan and develop procedures for emergency situations. The Contingency Planning Quick Start Guide provides information on identifying and planning for emergencies or natural disasters.

