

Observer and poll watcher guidelines – the polling place

The set-up of the polls is open for observation. Observers are asked to hold their questions until after the polls have been set up and the Inspector has time to answer questions.

Polling places open at 7 a.m. and close at 8 p.m. Any voters already in line to vote at 8 p.m. may vote. The inspector will announce at 8 p.m. the polls have closed and every person in line at that time will have the opportunity to vote. Inspectors are instructed to position a poll worker at the end of the line at 8 p.m. to ensure that only voters in line at 8 p.m. are able to vote.

The closing procedures at polling places are open to the public and observers.

Observers & poll watchers

Poll watchers are appointed by political parties or campaigns and will often present an introductory letter to the Inspector signed by the county party chair or campaign.

Anyone may observe elections without authorization.

All observers and poll watchers may:

- Observe the voting process before, during or after voting hours.
- Copy voter names from the pages of the Inspector's List of Precinct Voters, which are posted on the wall.
- Observe the opening or closing process only if they remain quiet and at least an arm's length away from the poll workers' tables.
- Pictures can be taken at the polling place as long as it does not interfere with the voting process. Also, they cannot take pictures of ballots and should ask voters for their permission before taking pictures of them.
- Any questions you have regarding procedures at the polling place should be directed to the Inspector. Please be respectful of the Inspector's time, their priority is voting and polling place management.

All observers and poll watchers may not:

- Handle ballots, poll books or interfere in any way with the voting process.
- Electioneer within 300 feet of the polling place entrance or exit.
- Remove any items from the poll workers' tables.

- Approach the privacy booths.
- Use a cellular phone in the polling place.
- May not use electronic devices such as radios, televisions, or laptop computers in the polling place.

Media observers:

Observers from the media should check in with the polling place Inspector to arrange to observe the voting process with the least possible disruption to voters. Please ensure that media representatives do not record or photograph voters unless the voter has granted permission to do so. Media observers must respect the privacy of the voting booth.

Note: As they are representing King County on election day, images of poll workers may be used by the media without their permission.

Poll workers roles and responsibilities

Poll workers serve important roles in administering one of our fundamental democratic freedoms: the right to vote. As with any organizational structure, however, there must be clear lines of responsibility and authority. In the polling place, there are five primary roles: Inspector, Poll Book Judge(s), Provisional Judge, Accessible Voting Unit (AVU) Judge, and an AccuVote Judge. Together these poll workers are referred to as the election board for their polling place.

All poll workers are considered representatives of King County Elections on election day and are subject to King County standards of conduct.

Inspectors

Inspectors are the leaders and supervisors of their assigned election board and their assigned polling place. The Inspector is in charge and is responsible for the board's conduct.

Inspectors are responsible for picking up all election materials prior to the election and ensuring that the polling place is unlocked on election day.

It is the Inspector's duty to ensure poll workers adhere to the standards of conduct outlined in the "Standards of Conduct" section in this guidebook.

Inspectors set the tone for other poll workers, from following procedures to treating all voters, co-workers and polling place staff with courtesy and respect.

Inspectors are responsible for ensuring that election operations at their polling places meet established standards and procedures. An Inspector has a duty to prevent other poll workers from proceeding incorrectly.

As a poll watcher or observer, any questions you have regarding procedures at the polling place should be directed to the Inspector.

Poll Book Judges

Poll Book Judges are polling place workers who are responsible for issuing ballots, assisting voters, and ensuring that all voting procedures are followed. There may be one or several Poll Book Judges at a polling place, depending on the size of the polling place.

AccuVote Judge

AccuVote Judges assist voters in submitting their ballots into the AccuVote and base unit, while still protecting voter privacy. This role includes responsibility for troubleshooting any problems that arise with the AccuVote device. Each polling place typically has one person assigned to this role.

Provisional Judge

The Provisional Judge is primarily responsible for managing provisional ballot distribution, tracking, and accounting. In addition to managing provisional ballots, challenged ballots are also issued and handled by the Provisional Judge.

Accessible Voting Unit (AVU) Judge

AVU Judges assist voters who choose to cast a touch screen or audio ballot on the AVU. This role includes responsibility for setting up the equipment and programming the voter access cards with the information from the encoding slip. The AVU Judge must also ensure that the AVU is accessible by wheelchair and inform the voter about the accessibility options available on the touch screen machine.

Depot Judge

One polling place worker is selected as Depot Judge by the Inspector. This should be a person of the political party opposite the Inspector's party when possible and cannot be a member of the Inspector's family. The Depot Judge will accompany the Inspector to the depot in the same car at the end of the night when the Inspector returns all polling place items in the car. There is a designated line on the pay voucher to note which judge served this role. Please remember to complete this portion of the pay voucher in order to be properly paid.

If there can not be an agreement reached as to who will be the Depot Judge, the Inspector will notify King County Elections and one will be assigned.

Help Desk

The Help Desk is comprised of King County Elections staff who provide assistance to polling places on election day over the phone. The Help Desk resolves issues ranging from supply shortages to resolving technical difficulties associated with voting equipment. If the polling place needs additional assistance, the Help Desk can dispatch a Troubleshooter. On election day, poll workers should always follow suggestions and input from the Help Desk.

Troubleshooter

The Troubleshooter is a King County Elections staff person assigned to a geographic area to provide on-call assistance to polling places on election day. Troubleshooters resolve issues ranging from supply shortages to resolving technical difficulties associated with voting equipment. Troubleshooters are dispatched by the Help Desk. Troubleshooters are also responsible for making sure official election signage is visible throughout the polling place. On election day, poll workers should always follow suggestions and input from Troubleshooters.

How are poll workers hired?

According to state law, where possible, poll workers are to be appointed from a list provided by the major political parties. The inspector and one judge are to be appointed from the list provided from the party whose candidate for president received the most votes in the county at the last presidential election. The other judge is to be appointed from the list provided by the party whose presidential candidate received the second-highest number of votes. If the lists submitted by the political parties do not contain enough poll workers to fully staff all of the poll sites, then King County notifies the political party chair, who may submit additional names. If the party still does not provide enough poll workers to fully staff the poll sites, then the county may appoint other qualified individuals to serve as poll workers, even though their names do not appear on any list from the political parties.

Regardless of a poll workers political party affiliation, it is your job as a poll worker to remain politically neutral and to properly conduct the election in a fair and impartial way.

All poll workers are required to sign an oath prior to undertaking their duties.

Electioneering

No signs advocating passage or defeat of a measure or candidate on the ballot should ever be posted on public property or brought into the polling place. Poll

workers are authorized to remove such signs if they are brought into a polling place on election day.

- Signs on private property or within a private building may not be removed, except when the private property is being used as a polling place.
- Informational vs. campaign materials: The law allows informational materials which are neutral in language to be published by a jurisdiction. However, any information promoting passage or defeat of a measure or the election or defeat of a candidate is not allowed in a polling place.
- Campaign buttons, articles of clothing, and other campaign materials that voters may wear are allowed provided that the voter leaves immediately after voting and takes all such items away.
- Signs in or on cars parked within 300 feet of the polling place for longer than it takes a voter to vote must be removed from the car.
- Poll workers must be careful to avoid remarks that may be construed as electioneering. Comments about candidates or issues on the ballot should be avoided altogether. If a voter tries to engage in a discussion of political issues or asks an opinion about an election, poll workers should say: "I am not allowed to comment on that."
- Signs or posters in polling places having nothing to do with measures or candidates on the ballot are the responsibility of the property owner or proprietor.

Additional information regarding electioneering can also be found in RCW 29A.84.510.

Exit polling

Exit polling occurs when poll takers question voters about how they voted as they leave the polling place. No one is obliged to answer the questions of an exit poller. The exit pollers might be media representatives, representatives of political parties, or campaign workers.

Exit polling may be conducted within 300 feet of the polling place but not within the actual polling place itself. It is the responsibility of poll takers to make arrangements with the polling place building owner. The polling place lease between King County Elections and the property owner does not cover exit polling activities.

Exit pollers are prohibited from engaging in any activities that would interfere with the freedom of voters to enter or leave the polling place or to cast their vote. If told in advance that exit polling will be conducted at specific polling places, King County Elections staff will notify Inspectors.

Additional information

U.S. Voting Rights Act minority language requirement for King County
As required by Section 203 of the federal Voting Rights Act, King County produces all election materials in both English and Chinese. In addition to providing translated materials, King County employs a full-time Chinese translation staff as well as bilingual poll workers to assist voters. Federal law requires counties to provide language assistance if more than 5 percent of voting age citizens in a jurisdiction are members of a single-language minority group who do not "speak or understand English adequately enough to participate in the electoral process."

In the 2000 Census, more than 10,000 Chinese American voting-age citizens indicated they have limited English proficiency and that their English literacy rate is below that of the national standard, fifth grade equivalency.

What this means at the polls:

King County Elections has taken a number of steps to ensure Chinese-speaking voters in King County have materials and information available to them in the polling place. In addition to having Chinese language translations of election materials, King County Elections provides bilingual, Chinese speaking poll workers in many, targeted King County polling places on election day.

Other Resources:

King County requires all new poll workers and inspectors to attend training before election day. If you would like to read more about the procedures used on election day, download the manual by clicking here.

To learn more about being an election day observer, visit the Secretary of State's Web site at:

<http://www.secstate.wa.gov/assets/elections/2008ObserversGuide.pdf>