



Auditor's Office | Elections Office

Last Modified: [January 13, 2025](#)

See Also: [RCW 29A.60.170](#) [RCW 29A.64.041](#)

[RCW 29A.12.120](#) [WAC 434-261-020](#)

[WAC 434-264-030](#) [RCW 29A.84.510](#)

[RCW 29A.84.250](#)

Procedure | Observer Training and Rules (C-24)

Rules for Observers, Media, and Public at the Voting Center:

It is the policy and intent of Cowlitz County Elections to conduct elections in the most accessible and secure manner possible. All aspects of the process are open to observation by political party observers, the media, and the public.

To ensure access and transparency, while safeguarding the election process, all observers shall adhere to the following rules:

- Observers must always be in the presence of a designated staff member while in ballot processing areas to mitigate physical and cyber security risks.
- The number of observers allowed in secure areas is dependent upon staffing levels. For this reason, appointments are encouraged.
- Observers must check in with Elections Staff, sign in on a log, and obtain an observer's badge prior to entering any ballot processing areas.
- Observers may not touch envelopes, ballots, machinery, or equipment at any time.
- Electronic recording devices of any kind are forbidden to be used. Observers must secure any recording device or cell phone in the provided lockers before entering the ballot processing area.
- A designated staff member shall answer questions from observers.
- Conversation should be kept to a minimum and at a level that will not disturb the process.
- Observers must refrain from any form of electioneering.
- Observers may not use threatening or unreasonably hostile language or gestures or otherwise act in a way which disrupts ballot processing or the election process.

- Media are allowed to document elections processes, with pre-approval from the Auditor, following applicable state law.

At least 28 days prior to a primary or election, the Elections Office shall request from the Chair of the Democratic and Republican Central Committee, names of individuals interested in observing, and notify the parties of the anticipated dates and times in which specific election processes shall be performed.

The Elections Office shall conduct Observer Training annually. Those that have participated in Observer Training will receive priority admittance. Additional training may be scheduled at the Auditor's discretion.

Observers are encouraged to view and listen to the Opening Board through a live feed LCD display located in the Administration Building cafeteria and Auditor's Office.

If, at any time, the conduct or activities of an observer or visitor becomes a distraction or otherwise impedes the process, the Auditor or Elections Manager will stop the process and instruct the individual causing the disruption to leave the area.

Rules for Observers, Media and Public during a recount:

Observers must be permitted to witness activities associated with the recount.

In addition to the admittance of two observers for each side of a recount as required by RCW 29A.64.041, a county canvassing board is encouraged to request additional observers from each of the two major political parties, as space allows. If provided, the additional party observers may be stationed to observe each counting board's process and must be considered official observers of the recount.

Priority for viewing space shall be given in the following order:

- (a) Candidates or their designated representative, or the designated representative for the proponents and opponents of a ballot measure;
- (b) Counsel for a candidate or ballot measure campaign;
- (c) Designated party observers;
- (d) Media; then
- (e) General public.

Any questions or objections by observers must be directed toward the county canvassing board, supervisory personnel or another designated staff person present at the recount. Under no circumstance may an observer interrupt the recount process in objection to the decision to count or not count a ballot.

The county auditor shall provide any additional guidelines that are established by the county canvassing board to each observer.

The county canvassing board or its designated representative may ask any observer who is causing a disruption to the recount process to leave the area.