

Election Procedures Review  
Of  
**Whitman County**  
State of Washington  
2007 General Election



Conducted by the  
Office of the Secretary of State  
Election Certification and Training Program



# Introduction

The Washington State Legislature enacted legislation in 1992 mandating that the Office of the Secretary of State review county election procedures and practices. The Election Certification and Training Program was established within the Elections Division of the Office of the Secretary of State to conduct reviews and to provide for the certification of election administrators. In 2005, the Legislature expanded the Election Certification and Training Program to require that each County Auditor's Office be reviewed at least once every three years. The Legislature also added a requirement that the Program conduct a follow-up visit to verify that the County Auditor's Office has taken steps to correct the problems noted in the report.

The election review process is governed by RCW 29A.04.510 through 29A.04.590 and Chapter 434-260 of the Washington Administrative Code.

Pursuant to RCW 29A.04.570(1)(b), the Election Certification and Training Program conducted an election review in Whitman County during the 2007 General Election cycle. Sheryl Moss, Certification and Training Program Manager, represented the Election Certification and Training Program during the review. Eunice Coker, Whitman County Auditor, Debbie Hooper, and other members of the staff participated on behalf of the Whitman County Auditor's Office.

Both the reviewer and the Whitman County Elections Department approached the review in a spirit of cooperation. The department allowed the reviewer to thoroughly review and examine all aspects of the election processes. The staff provided documentation and materials during the review which greatly contributed to a successful examination process.

The purpose of this review report is to provide the Whitman County Elections Department with a useful evaluation of its election procedures and policies and to encourage procedural consistency in the administration of elections throughout the state. This review report includes a series of recommendations and/or suggestions that are intended to assist the Whitman County Elections Department in improving and enhancing its election processes.

The reviewer is statutorily prohibited from making any evaluation, finding, or recommendation regarding the validity of any primary or election, or of any canvass of the election returns. Consequently, this review report should not be interpreted as affecting the validity of the outcome of any election or of any canvass of election returns.

# Table of Contents

Overview	Page 1
Recommendations	Page 2
Suggestions	Page 10
County's Response to Review Report	Page 13
Conclusion	Page 18

# Overview

In the course of this review, the reviewer observed pre-election tasks, election procedures, post-election procedures, canvassing, and certification of the election. The election staff verbally explained some tasks the reviewer was unable to observe.

Whitman County is a small county, largely rural, and is the location of a large university, Washington State University. This diverse population is a challenge for a small County Auditor's Office to administer, considering the size of their staff.

Whitman County has many challenges. Adequate workspace is a major concern. The workspace in the Auditor's Office does not provide adequate workspace or security. The location of their "vault" is inconvenient and has security issues.

The Help America Vote Act has placed more responsibility on the election staff. A new voter registration system, though needed, requires more time to learn and use. Staff must program the ballot tabulation system as the vendor no longer provides that service. Voting devices for disabled voters must be provided at the Auditor's Office and at voting centers. The two staff members have difficulty with the extra workload. Additional difficulties occurred when one person was out of the office for an extended time.

The past four years has brought 100's of changes in election law. The small, understaffed elections department has struggled to keep up with the changes required.

The following recommendations and suggestions will help improve and enhance Whitman County's election policies and procedures.

# Recommendations

The following recommendations identify areas in which the county is out of compliance with the Revised Code of Washington (RCW), the Washington Administrative Code (WAC), the Washington State Constitution, or Federal election law. The reviewer obtained information based on actual observation of a procedure, verbal explanation or written procedures. The reviewer provides a description of the county's procedure, a citation of the applicable law, and a recommendation based on the citation.

## Voter Registration

Voter registration applications that are lacking the required information are entered in the voter registration system as "suspended" and the voter is sent a verification notice. When the elections department receives undeliverable mail with the new address provided by the post office, the voter is sent a confirmation notice.

*The National Voter Registration Act of 1993 requires, "(B) if it appears from information provided by the Postal Service that –(i) a registrant has moved to a different residence address in the same registrar's jurisdiction in which the registrant is currently registered, **the registrar changes the registration records to show the new address and sends the registrant a notice of the change by forwardable mail and a postage prepaid pre-addressed return form by which the registrant may verify or correct the address information;**"*

*RCW 29A.08.110 states, "If the verification notice is not returned by the applicant within forty-five days or is returned as undeliverable, **the name of the applicant shall not be placed on the official list of registered voters.**"*

**Recommendation:** Voter registrations should not be placed in the voter registration system until all the required information is received from the voter. If the Post Office provides a new address for the voter within the county, the voter should be transferred to the new address in addition to being sent a notice that will allow the voter to confirm their new address or correct the information given by the Post Office. The notice should have prepaid return postage.

## Precinct Boundaries

Whitman County has 15 incorporated cities and towns. Thirteen of them are included in precincts with unincorporated areas. With the exception of Palouse and Pullman precincts, precinct boundaries follow township and range lines almost exclusively. Additionally, there is at least one precinct that has exceeded active voter limit.

*RCW 29A.16.050(1) states, "Every voting precinct must be wholly within a single congressional district, a single legislative district, a single district of a county legislative authority, and, if applicable, a single city...(3) Except as provided in this subsection, changes to the boundaries of any precinct shall follow visible, physical features delineated on the most current maps provided by the United States census bureau.*

*A change need not follow such visible, physical features if (a) it is necessitated by an annexation or incorporation and the proposed precinct boundary is identical to an exterior boundary of the annexed or incorporated area which does not follow a visible, physical feature; or (b) doing so would substantially impair election administration in the involved area.”*

*RCW 29A.16.040 (3) states, “Precincts in which voting machines or electronic voting devices are used may contain as many as nine hundred active registered voters.”*

**Recommendation:** Whitman County should create individual precincts for each of the 13 cities and towns by following the city boundary lines. Any precincts near or over 900 active registered voters must be split into smaller precincts. Additionally, the next time Whitman County changes precinct boundaries, they should be altered to follow physical features, such as roads, rivers, streams, etc. If there are districts boundaries, such as school districts, that follow township and range lines, it is permissible for a precinct line to follow a district line to aid in election administration.

### **Logic and Accuracy Test**

Whitman County was not prepared for the Logic & Accuracy test due to personnel issues. The test deck had not been completely prepared and vote tabulation equipment had not been tested prior to the scheduled test. The DRE was prepared and tested three days after the date it was to have been available for voters. The Secretary of State was correctly notified of the delay.

*WAC 434-335-440 states, “The county is responsible for preparing and testing the vote tabulating system prior to the official logic and accuracy test. This pretesting must be completed prior to using the equipment to process ballots. “*

*WAC 434-335-520 states, “The official testing must be completed before a direct recording device may be used for casting ballots. Counties must complete the testing to have in-person disability access voting available starting twenty days before the day of a primary or election.”*

**Recommendation:** The elections department should begin programming and testing their equipment well before official logic and accuracy test and before the 20-day deadline for disability access equipment must be available for voting. The test deck and the ballot tabulators should be thoroughly tested before the official test.

### **Notice of Election**

The Notice of Election was published in a timely manner. Every district appearing on the ballot was listed, as well as other required information. Two required pieces of information required for elections by mail was missing.

*WAC 434-250-310 (3) states, “In addition to the information required in the notice of election published pursuant to RCW 29A.52.351 and 29A.52.311, a county auditor conducting an election by mail, including a county auditor that conducts every election by mail, must also state:*

- (a) **The election will be conducted by mail and regular polling places will not be open;***
- (b) The precincts that are voting by mail if it is only specific precincts rather than the entire county;*
- (c) The location where voters may obtain replacement ballots;*

*(d) Return postage is required;*

*(e) The dates, times and locations of designated deposit sites and voting centers.”*

**Recommendation:** The following items should be added to the Notice of Election:

- The election will be conducted by mail and regular polling places will not be open
- Return postage is required.

Additionally, the reviewer suggests that all districts need not be listed when the entire county is participating in an election.

### **Request for Political Observers**

The elections department correctly notifies each major political party of the election and that political observers may be provided. They did not provide a schedule of events nor how many observers would be needed to cover all parts of the processing.

*WAC 434-261-020 requires, “ Prior to the primary or election, the county auditor shall determine the number of observers required in order to observe all aspects of the counting center proceedings, and shall request, in writing, that each major political party appoint representatives to fill the requirements. Where more than one observer is to be appointed, the political party shall designate one of their observers as supervisor. Counting center observers shall be provided training with respect to ballot processing procedures and the vote tallying system as required by RCW 29A.12.120.”*

**Recommendation:** Whitman County should determine the minimum number of observers needed to observe different events and request that number from each of the major political parties.

### **Ballot Security**

Two areas are used for processing ballots. The elections department receives ballots in the main portion of the Auditor’s Office, the signatures are checked, and then the ballots are transported to the vault work area to be opened and processed for tabulation. When it is time to tabulate the ballots, they are placed in open trays and taken to the main office for tabulation. There are two staff members with the ballots whenever ballots are taken to and from the vault work area.

The main portion of the Auditor’s Office does not have a secure area to store ballots. The reviewer observed ballots during initial processing , unattended and unsecured, on a staff member’s desk as well as unused ballots in a stack on a filing cabinet. This work area is crowded and used for purposes other than processing ballots.

The vault area is fenced, but the fencing is not high enough to prevent access. The vault area is used by many different county departments for storage. After tabulation, ballots were placed in the vault work area in open trays and on open shelves. Duplicated ballots were kept in file folders out on a table.

*RCW 29A.40.110 (2) states, “All received absentee return envelopes must be placed in secure locations from the time of delivery to the county auditor until their subsequent opening.”*

WAC 434-250-110 (2) states, “Following initial processing, all absentee ballots must be kept in secure storage until final processing. Secure storage must employ the use of numbered seals and logs, or other security measures which will detect any inappropriate or unauthorized access to the secured ballot materials when they are not being prepared or processed by authorized personnel.”

RCW 29A.60.110 states, “Immediately after their tabulation, all ballots counted at a ballot counting center must be sealed in containers that identify the primary or election ...”

WAC 434-261-045 states, “Received ballots and ballot images must be maintained in secure storage except during processing, duplication, inspection by the canvassing board, or tabulation. Secure storage must employ the use of numbered seals and logs, or other security measures that will detect any inappropriate access to the secured materials. Ballots and ballot images may only be accessed in accordance with RCW 29A.60.110.”

**Recommendation:** Ideally, the elections department should be in one location with adequate secure storage for ballots in all stages of processing. At the current location, secure storage for ballots must be used when ballots are not being processed. Secure storage may be in the form of a ballot box with a numbered seal, a locked drawer with the key in a box sealed with a numbered seal, locking cabinets, or other arrangements that meet the secure storage requirements. When transporting ballots to and from the vault, the ballots should be sealed in containers. The vault work area needs to have better fencing separating it from the other storage area. The ballots inside the fenced area should be placed in secure storage containers when not being processed.

### **Mismatched Signatures on Mail Ballots**

The Whitman County Procedures Manual describes the process when a signature on a ballot does not match the signature in the voter registration record. The manual indicates the elections staff sends a voter registration application to the voter and they may return the new registration form by mail no later than the day before certification of the election.

RCW 29A.60.165(2) states, “If the handwriting of the signature on an absentee or provisional ballot envelope is not the same as the handwriting of the signature on the registration file, the auditor shall notify the voter by first-class mail, enclosing a copy of the envelope affidavit, and advise the voter of the correct procedures for updating his or her signature on the voter registration file. If the absentee or provisional ballot is received within three business days of the final meeting of the canvassing board, or the voter has been notified by first-class mail and has not responded at least three business days before the final meeting of the canvassing board, then the auditor shall attempt to notify the voter by telephone, using the voter registration record information. In order for the ballot to be counted, the voter must either:

(i) Appear in person and sign a new registration form no later than the day before the certification of the primary or election; or

(ii) Sign a copy of the affidavit provided by the auditor and return it to the auditor no later than the day before the certification of the primary or election. The voter may enclose with the affidavit a photocopy of a valid government or tribal issued identification document that includes the voter's current signature. If the signature on the copy of the affidavit does not match the signature on file or the signature on the copy of the identification document, the voter must

*appear in person and sign a new registration form no later than the day before the certification of the primary or election in order for the ballot to be counted.”*

**Recommendation:** A voter may not send a registration by mail to cure a mismatched signature on a ballot. If the voter fills out a registration form, it must be done at the County Auditor’s Office. A mailed in registration to correct a signature may be used for future elections. Whitman County should change their procedure to comply with the RCW.

### **Provisional Ballot Envelopes**

The provisional ballot envelopes contain an outdated oath. The oath contains neither the new wording nor the old wording.

*WAC 434-253-045 requires the following oath: “I do solemnly swear or affirm under penalty of perjury that:*

*I am a citizen of the United States;  
I am a legal resident of the state of Washington;  
I will be at least 18 years old on or before Election Day;  
I am not presently denied my voting rights as a result of being convicted of a felony;  
I have not been judicially declared mentally incompetent;  
I have not already voted in this election;  
I understand it is illegal to cast a ballot or sign a ballot envelope on behalf of another*

*voter.*

*Attempting to vote when not entitled, attempting to vote more than once, or falsely signing this oath is a felony punishable by a maximum imprisonment of five years, a maximum fine of \$10,000, or both.*

**Recommendation:** The provisional envelopes should be printed with the new oath and used at the next election.

### **Certification of the Election**

Whitman County held a single Canvassing Board meeting on the day of certification. The board considered all questionable ballots and then adjourned. The election staff finished tabulation and prepared all the reconciliation and certification materials. The Board did not meet again to certify the election. Instead, election staff took the certification forms to each Canvassing Board member for their signature. The public meeting notice of the Canvassing Board stated the certification of the election would take place at the meeting on November 27.

*RCW 29A.60.140 (3)states, “ The county canvassing board may not delegate the responsibility of certifying the returns of a primary or election, of determining the validity of challenged ballots, or of determining the validity of provisional ballots referred to the board by the county auditor.”*

*RCW 29A.60.200 states, “Before canvassing the returns of a primary or election, the chair of the county legislative authority or the chair's designee shall administer an oath to the county auditor or the auditor's designee attesting to the authenticity of the information presented to the canvassing board. This oath must be signed by the county auditor or designee and filed with the returns of the primary or election.*

*The county canvassing board shall proceed to verify the results from the precincts and the absentee ballots. The board shall execute a certificate of the results of the primary or election signed by all members of the board or their designees. Failure to certify the returns, if they can be ascertained with reasonable certainty, is a crime under RCW 29A.84.720.*

*RCW 29A.60.140 (5) further states, "Meetings of the county canvassing board are public meetings under chapter 42.30 RCW. All rules adopted by the county canvassing board must be adopted in a public meeting under chapter 42.30 RCW, and once adopted must be available to the public to review and copy under chapter 42.56 RCW."*

*RCW 42.30.040 (1) states, "No governing body of a public agency shall adopt any ordinance, resolution, rule, regulation, order, or directive, except in a meeting open to the public and then only at a meeting, the date of which is fixed by law or rule, or at a meeting of which notice has been given according to the provisions of this chapter. Any action taken at meetings failing to comply with the provisions of this subsection shall be null and void."*

**Recommendation:** The Canvassing Board should meet to review and sign the official certification on the day the election is to be certified.

### **Canvassing Board Manual**

Whitman County has an extensive Canvassing Board Manual that appears to be in the process of revision. The manual indicates how ballots should be counted, but does not refer to nor list any of the directives found in the Statewide Standards on What is a Vote.

*WAC 434-261-086(1) states, "Pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 15481(a)(6) and Bush v. Gore, 531 U.S. 98 (2000), the following standards determine whether irregular marks on a ballot constitute a valid vote that may be counted...."*

**Recommendation:** The Canvassing Board Manual should be revised. Reference to how votes should be counted should be replaced by the Statewide Standards on What is a Vote where appropriate.

### **Notice to Candidates**

The notice to candidates winning the General Election incorrectly lists those who may administer an oath of office as "your council, your superintendent, or election personnel at the courthouse."

*RCW 29A.04.133, in the case of a candidate, states, "'Qualified" when pertaining to a winner of an election means that for such election:*

- (1) The results have been certified;*
- (2) Any required bond has been posted; and*
- (3) The winner has taken and subscribed an oath or affirmation in compliance with the appropriate statute, or if none is specified, that he or she will faithfully and impartially discharge the duties of the office to the best of his or her ability. **This oath or affirmation shall be administered and certified by any officer or notary public authorized to administer oaths, without charge therefor.**"*

**Recommendation:** Council members, superintendents, and others may not administer an oath of office unless they are authorized to do so in state law. This may be true in some cases, but not all. The letter should be revised to use the wording in statute and, other than Auditor’s staff, should not specifically list who can administer the oath.

**Disability Access Committee**

Whitman County has formed a disability access committee. The committee has adopted a plan that meets the requirements in state law. The committee is comprised of the County Auditor, two election staff, a representative of the Transit Authority, and a citizen representing the disabled community.

*RCW 29A.46.260 (2) requires, “Each county shall establish and maintain an advisory committee that includes persons with diverse disabilities and persons with expertise in providing accommodations for persons with disabilities...”*

**Recommendation:** Whitman County has a good start the requirements of a disability access committee, however additional members are needed. State law requires that the committee includes more than one disability be represented as well as more than one with expertise in providing accommodations. Whitman County should add at least one more person with a different disability and at least one more person who works with the disabled.

**Missing Documents**

As part of the review process, there were documents the reviewer requested that were not provided or were incorrect. A special absentee request form, a hospital request form, and the crediting reconciliation report were not provided. The notice provided for voters who need to provide identification was not the correct form.

*WAC 434-250-030(3) requires, “As authorized by RCW [29A.40.050](#), requests for a special absentee ballot must be made in writing and each county auditor must provide the applications. In addition to the requirements for a single absentee ballot, as provided in subsection (2) of this section, the form must include:*

- (a) A space for an overseas or service voter not registered to vote in Washington to indicate his or her last residential address in Washington; and*
- (b) A checkbox requesting that a single absentee ballot be forwarded as soon as possible...*
- (4) As authorized by RCW [29A.40.080](#), requests for an absentee ballot may be made by a resident of a health care facility, as defined by RCW [70.37.020\(3\)](#). Each county shall provide an application form for such a registered voter to apply for a single absentee ballot by messenger on election day. The messenger may pick up the voter's absentee ballot and deliver it to the voter and return it to the county auditor's office.”*

*RCW 29A.08.113(2) states, “If the voter fails to provide one of the above forms of identification prior to or at the time of voting, the ballot must be treated as a provisional ballot regardless of whether the voter is voting at a poll site or by mail. The ballot may only be counted if the voter's signature on the outside envelope matches the signature in the voter registration records.”*

*RCW 29A.60.235(2) requires, “ The county auditor shall prepare and make publicly available at the auditor's office or on the auditor's web site within thirty days of certification a final election reconciliation report that discloses the following information:*

- (a) The number of registered voters;*
- (b) The total number of voters credited with voting;*
- (c) The number of poll voters credited with voting;*
- (d) The number of provisional voters credited with voting;*
- (e) The number of absentee voters credited with voting;*
- (f) The number of federal write-in voters credited with voting;*
- (g) The number of out-of-state, overseas, and service voters credited with voting;*
- (h) The total number of voters credited with voting even though their ballots were postmarked after election day and were not counted; and*
- (i) Any other information the auditor deems necessary to reconcile the number of ballots counted with the number of voters credited with voting.”*

**Recommendation:** Whitman County should have applications available for special and hospital absentee requests. These forms have just been added to the Secretary of State’s website and may be downloaded if needed.

Whenever an ID check has failed or a voter indicates on their registration form they do not have the required ID, the county must ask for alternate ID from the voter. If the voter has not provided the ID prior to an election, a ballot must be sent to the voter with special instructions to return the alternative ID with the signed ballot. These ballots cannot be counted unless the ID is provided. The reviewer did not see a notice to the voter for these circumstances. If one does not exist, the county must create one for these situations.

The credited ballot reconciliation, due 30 days after an election, must be completed. The reviewer did not receive a copy of this report.

## Suggestions

The following are suggestions for increasing efficiency and improving operations within the County Auditor's Office. Although these suggestions do not address issues involving compliance with state laws or administrative rules, the reviewer identified the tasks as areas of election administration in which the County Auditor might improve the efficiency and operation of the office.

### Canvassing Board Delegations

The County Canvassing Board listed each staff person by name on the delegation of duties.

**Suggestion:** Personnel could change from election to election or in the middle of an election. The reviewer suggests the duties be delegated only to the County Auditor and her staff instead of listing individual names.

### Ballot Reconciliation

Whitman County Elections Department has all the pieces in place for a good reconciliation process. Even though there are tracking slips on the trays, the ballots are not kept in the same batch throughout processing. This does not allow the slips to follow the same ballots from receipt through tabulation. The tracking slips cannot be reconciled completely with the voter registration system.

**Suggestion:** Ballots should be grouped by batch when they arrive in the office, usually a tray of ballots, and a single batch sheet attached to each tray. As the ballots are processed and ballots are removed or added for various reasons, the adding and subtracting of ballots should be noted on the batch slips. A single batch slip should follow the batch throughout ballot processing. At the end of each day, the numbers should be checked with the numbers listed in the voter registration system to verify the accuracy. Once the ballots have been prepared for tabulation, they should be run through the ballot counters by batch. The number of ballots run through the tabulator should match the number of ballots in the batch. These extra checks throughout the process should make the end reconciliation an easier process.

### Election Certification

Whitman County had one Canvassing Board meeting for the election, scheduled for the day of certification. After the meeting, the election staff processed the approved ballots from the Canvassing Board, tabulated them, reconciled the results, and filled out the certification for the election. By doing it all in one day, it did not allow extra time to resolve any discrepancies or other difficulties that could have delayed the final certification.

**Suggestion:** Whitman County should schedule two Canvassing Board meetings—one for consideration of the ballots and one for certifying the election. The meeting to consider ballots should be scheduled a few days before certification. This will allow the election staff to reconcile all the ballots and prepare all the paperwork for the Canvassing Board to certify the election on the day of certification. If valid ballots arrive between Canvassing Board meetings, the additional ballots may be added quickly to the final results.

## **Procedures Manual**

A current procedures manual is an invaluable tool for election administration, especially when the county experiences turnover in personnel. The elections department has a good start on a procedures manual, however there are many more areas of election administration that need to be covered, so continuing to expand the manual is important. Additionally, the areas covered in the manual do not contain enough detail and, in some cases, do not reflect the actual procedures the department follows.

**Suggestion:** The reviewer has the following suggestions to improve the procedures manual:

1. Include all parts of elections and voter registration administration, including the disability access units.
2. Quoting state law/rule and using paragraphs to describe a procedure makes it difficult for the inexperienced user. Procedures should be detailed enough that a very inexperienced person can accomplish the task by simply following the manual. A step by step format is very effective. Testing the procedure using staff members from other divisions is a good indication if the procedure has been adequately written.
3. It appears that the procedures in the manual have been copied from another county. While there is nothing wrong with borrowing another county's procedures, they should be altered to fit the actual practice of the county.
4. One of the most difficult tasks is keeping a procedures manual up to date with changes in law or rule and changes in actual practice. The reviewer suggests an annual review of all procedures to ensure they are kept current.

## **Requests for Identification**

Notices requesting identification ask for one of the following: Washington driver license or ID card, last four digits of a social security number, or other from a list of approved documents. A Washington driver license or ID number are required if the voter possesses them.

**Suggestion:** Notices requesting identification should ask for a driver's license or ID number first. Then instruct the voter that if they do not possess one, then they can provide one of the other acceptable forms.

## **List Maintenance**

In Whitman County's procedure manual, a countywide mailing every two years is the method used for list maintenance.

**Suggestion:** Since Whitman County is now conducting all mail elections, the ballots mailings will qualify as NVRA list maintenance. The ballots must be sent, according to state law, in such a manner that address change information is received from the Post Office and the information used to update the voter registration records. As long as the county is following this law, additional list maintenance may not be required.

### **Ballot Service Centers**

Whitman provides two very good ballot service centers, one in the County Courthouse and one in the Pullman City Hall. Washington State University students must go to the Pullman City Hall to vote a provisional ballot.

**Suggestion:** 2008 will be a very busy Presidential Election year. More people vote in Presidential Elections than any other election. This is especially true for college students. The reviewer suggests that a third service center be set up on the University campus for 2008. There will most certainly be a large number of provisional ballots cast by college students. A proactive approach will allow the county to better manage the large number of provisional ballots anticipated.

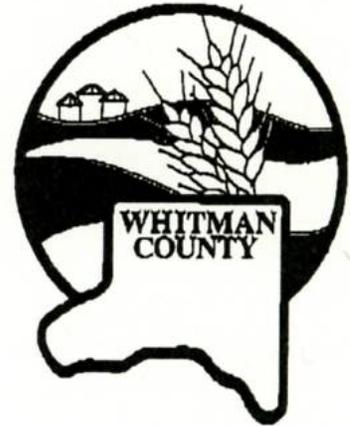
# County's Response to Draft Review Report

The Election Certification and Training Program issued a Draft Review Report to the Whitman County Canvassing Board in April 2008. In accordance with WAC 434-260-145, we provided Whitman County 10 days to respond, in writing, to recommendations listed in the draft report.

The Whitman County Canvassing Board provided the following response to the Draft Review Report. The signed original of their response is on file in the Office of the Secretary of State.

**WHITMAN COUNTY WASHINGTON  
OFFICE OF THE AUDITOR**

Eunice L. Coker; Auditor



5/21/2008

Sheryl Moss  
Elections Program Manager  
WA OSOS  
PO Box 40232  
Olympia, WA 98504

Re: Whitman County Response to the 2007 Elections Procedures Review

Dear Ms. Moss:

Following is the Whitman County response to your 2007 Elections Procedures Review.

I have stated our responses under the corresponding section titles in the draft review as submitted.

**Voter Registration**

- A. Voter registration applications that are lacking the required information are currently entered in the voter registration system as a "fatal (or soft) pend" and the voter is sent a verification notice. This initiates a new voter record, but the "new" voter is listed as inactive until the full information is received. If the voter responds with the missing data within 45 days, the data is entered and the voter's status is changed to active, effectively placing him on the official list of registered voters. If the missing information is not received within the 45 day limit, the voter is suspended off the voter rolls and notes are made on that record. This creates clear record of the fact that the initial application was received, but incomplete, that we notified the voter of the situation and how to rectify it, and that no response was received after the 45 days had passed. Not entering the initial data into the system until all information is received would require keeping a paper file of those applicants with missing information, and trying to track manually which applicant's time was up, and which was not. Using our voter registration system for electronic storage and documentation of the activity on these files is a cleaner, more efficient process with a good trail of activity for answering voter calls and inquiries.

- B. We agree and will implement this recommendation (Using the postal provided address to transfer the voter and send a confirmation notice).

**Precinct Boundaries**

- A. Creating precinct boundaries that follow city and town boundary lines
- B. Precincts over 900 active registered voters should be split
- C. Rural precinct boundaries should be changed to follow physical boundaries, and/or existing district boundaries

We agree and will carry out these projects with the 2010 census and subsequent redistricting. Note: City of Pullman will be sharing the cost and man hours as this will effect and also apply to their Ward Districts.

**Logic and Accuracy Test**

We agree and will implement this recommendation (Pre-testing the equipment before the official test and before the 20 day deadline for DAU availability).

**Notice of Election**

We agree and will implement this recommendation (Adding vote by mail and poll information, and that return postage is required).

**Request for Political Observers**

We agree and will implement this recommendation (provide a schedule of events, determine the number of observers needed, and request that number from the major political parties).

**Ballot Security**

- A. (Elections should be in one location) Whitman County is currently working with an architect on plans to remodel some county space into a new elections facility. We hope to complete the project and be moved in by late 2009 or early 2010.
- B. (Ballot Security) The 2008 elections will be processed in a more secure location with new and much improved storage and seal products and processes.
- C. (Ballots should be sealed when in transport from one process to the next) This will be remedied for 2008 by following B above, and will be permanently remedied as we complete the project in A.
- D. (Vault area needs better security) With the project in A completed, the only election function the vault will have is to store archived election records

until their retention deadline has passed. We will work with our facilities manager to add additional fencing that reaches the ceiling.

**Mismatched Signatures on Mail Ballots**

This process has been changed per the recommendation (a mailed registration form cannot "cure" a mismatched signature on a ballot envelope. If the registration form is used as "cure," that form must have been filled out in person in the County Auditor's Office).

**Provisional Ballot Envelopes**

We agree and will implement this recommendation (envelopes should be printed with the new oath).

**Certification of the Election**

We agree and will implement this recommendation (canvassing board will meet again after all numbers are in to certify the election).

**Canvassing Board Manual**

We agree and will implement this recommendation (manual should be revised to reflect current processes, law, and code)

**Notice to Candidates**

We agree and will implement this recommendation (revise the wording on the notice as to whom may administer an oath).

**Disability Access Committee**

We agree and have implemented this recommendation (More members with diverse disabilities, and members who work with the disabled).

**Missing Documents**

- A. Applications for special and hospital absentee requests
- B. Notice to voter for missing ID
- C. Credited ballot reconciliation should be turned in 30 days after an election

We agree and will implement these recommendations.

Thank you for your very thorough and pleasant review. We are always pleased and thankful for the support, training and advice available from you and

the entire Elections Division of the Washington Secretary of State Office.

The recommendations and additional suggestions in this review will make, and in fact already have in many cases made our process more efficient and open.

Sincerely,



Eunice L. Coker  
Whitman County Auditor &  
Ex-Officio Supervisor of Elections

## Conclusion

The areas listed in this report will help keep procedures in compliance with statute and rule. Many require only minor changes in forms, notices, or procedures. However, because elections are so complicated, even minor changes can have a major impact on the election process.

The Whitman County Elections Department has many of the pieces in place to have a first rate operation. They need to make a few important changes to improve their operation.

A larger workspace with adequate security will allow the secure processing of ballots in a vote by mail environment. This will be especially important in 2008 during the Presidential election.

The current permanent two-member staff is stretched too thin, especially during elections. The reviewer observed times when one person was absent and the remaining person was unable to handle the demands on their own. The Presidential Election will bring even more demands. When counties are understaffed, corners may be cut and important areas can be neglected. With the experience of 2004, counties can no longer under staff and underfund elections.

The reviewer found the election staff to be very conscientious and willing to consider making changes. Before the review was completed, the election staff had already begun making changes. A new location for the operation is being explored, voter registration and ballot procedures have been updated, Canvassing Board procedures have changed, and the recruitment for Disability Committee members has started.

Most of the recommendations contained in this report are updates to old procedures. Making the recommended changes will improve a good operation.

During the review, the staff members were professional and cooperative, even though they were unable to provide all the requested documentation. Following the recommendations and suggestions in this report will further improve the processes of the Whitman County Auditor's Office.

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Review Report Prepared by:

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Date: May 30, 2008

Signature