Registering voters at your office or voting center

In this article, we are going to cover best practices for processing in-person registrations and when to issue a ballot to voters over the counter.

When voters come to your office or voting center, we recommend entering information for a registration or update with the voter present in front of you. This can be helpful for a number of reasons:

1. The voters' information is entered directly into VoteWA and is visible to all counties, which increases system security and transparency of the voter registration information.
2. This will improve your customer service and will help you if there are any issues with the voter registration information. For example:
    a. The voter forgot to enter a required piece of information
    b. The voter's residential address is not in your county or there are issues with precinct placement
    c. You are unable to complete a transfer because the voter has already had a ballot accepted for the current election
3. For transactions taking place close to Election Day, you can issue a ballot to the voter directly, ensuring they have one in-hand the election in which they are eligible to participate.

Best practices for in-person voter registration

Move towards using the online voter registration portal to register in person voters

If a voter has a Washington State ID or driver's license, have them submit an online voter registration at your office rather than fill out a paper form. This may take an extra minute or two to process, but has added benefits overall. For example:

1. Signatures are automatically added to the record. This will reduce delays when scanning paper registration forms and adding the signature to their voter record. This will also reduce delays when verifying signatures from incoming ballots, especially if the voter receives their ballot and votes on the same day.
2. Data entry errors will be reduced, since you are not trying to read handwriting and the online application requires voters to input certain information before submitting a form.
3. No more retention and archiving of paper registration forms.

Depending on your setup, your office may have a couple of different options for processing online registrations in-person:

1. Have your staff work through a registration with the voter at your counter
2. Have kiosks available for voters to enter information themselves, then confirm their registration and issue ballots at your counter

What about paper registration forms?

Paper forms will still have a place in our procedures. Even with the added work of grabbing signatures and retention of paper records, there are ways in which paper forms can be useful:

1. You have long lines. Having the voters fill out paper registration forms while they wait in line can reduce processing time per voter
2. If you lose access to the online voter registration portal, paper is a great back up

King County has implemented some of these processes. Here are some numbers and lessons learned:

To complete an in-person registration online, King County currently performs the following steps

1. To submit an online registration in person, ask the voter if they have a WA ID or driver's license
2. Check our local EMS to verify whether or not the voter is registered
3. Check the VRDB to verify whether or not the voter is registered
4. Access the online registration portal and complete the registration
5. Access our EMS to process the registration
6. Verify the voter is active after processing

This process takes approximately 5-7 minutes per voter to complete the transaction.

To complete an in-person registration by paper, we perform the following steps

1. Have the voter fill out a paper registration form
2. Review the paper form, no missing information that is required
3. Check our local EMS to verify the voter is not registered
4. Check the VRDB to verify the voter is not registered
5. Access the online registration portal and complete the registration
6. Access our EMS to process the registration
7. Verify the voter is active after processing

This process takes approximately 4-6 minutes per voter to complete the transaction. You then need to send the form back to your data entry staff to scan the form, clip the signature, and archive the records.

Some lessons we learned over time with our in person registration process

1. It is much faster to have your staff complete online registrations with voters giving you the information in-person
   a. Many voters had questions when filling out online registrations, which pulled staff members to assist them. This is negated when staff work with each voter directly and fill out the registration together.

2. A public-facing monitor helps with the process
   ➔ When you have a second monitor, turn it towards the voter so they can see and confirm the information you enter into an online form. This helps ensure accuracy and keeps the voter engaged in the process. Here is an example of a set up:

Issuing ballots to voters in person

The closer we are to Election Day, the more important it is to issue the voter a ballot the day they register in your office. Mail delivery can take between 3-5 days to arrive at a voter's home. If you can hand the voter a ballot while you have them in your office, we can ensure they have the opportunity to vote in that election. This can also reduce the number of online replacement ballots if there are any delays in mail delivery.