



## ***Chapter 4:***

# ***Election Preparation***

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# Section 4.1: Precincts & District Boundaries



[RCW 29A.16](#)

A precinct is the smallest unit of governance assigned to each residential address. Precincts may be further divided into precinct parts or splits when a portion of the precinct includes jurisdictions that do not extend to the entire precinct. Precincts (and precinct parts or splits) are used to provide voters specific ballots. Groups of precincts (and precinct parts or splits) make up larger districts, such as cities, towns, special purpose districts, legislative districts, and congressional districts.

## Precinct Boundary Rules

Each precinct must be entirely within a single:

- ☐ Congressional district
- ☐ State legislative district
- ☐ County legislative district
- ☐ City

Physically, a precinct must (as nearly as practicable) be:

- ☐ Contiguous or “touching” — A single precinct may not be made up of separate parts.
- ☐ Compact — For instance, precincts should not be long, narrow, or have parts that significantly extend beyond the main precinct body.

Visible physical features are used to describe precinct boundaries, such as:

- ☐ Streets
- ☐ Power lines
- ☐ Bodies of water
- ☐ Ridges
- ☐ Exceptions:
  - City/town boundary lines
  - Use of physical features would substantially impair election administration in the involved area.

Precincts cannot exceed 1,500 active registered voters.

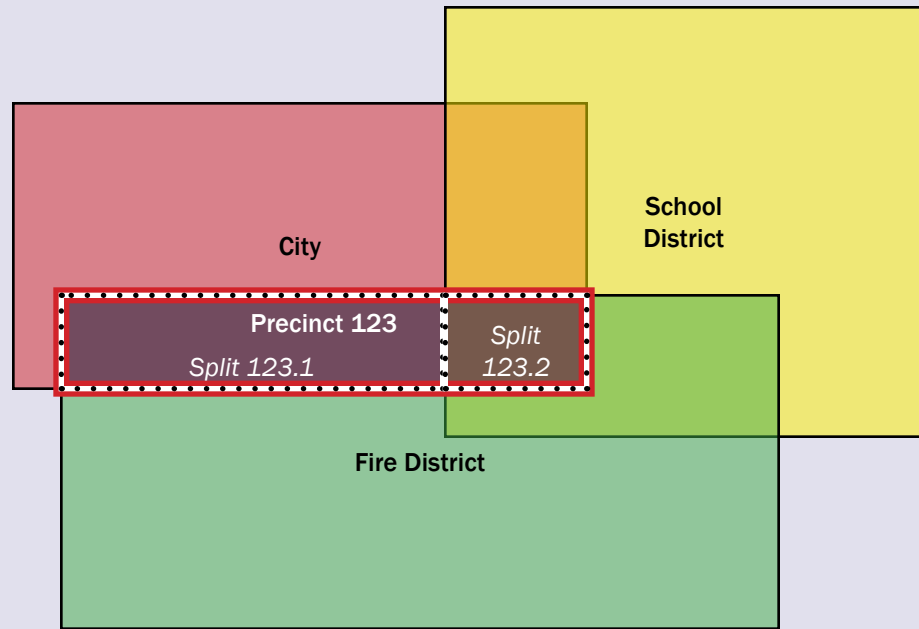
The county legislative authority may establish a different limitation, but it must be less than the maximum established by state law.

## Making Changes to Precinct Boundaries

The county legislative authority adopts precinct lines (unless otherwise stated in a county charter).

Notes

## Notes

**Example of Precincts and Precinct Parts/Splits**

In this example, a city, a school district, and a fire district all partially overlap. The area where the city and fire district overlap has been identified as Precinct 123. This precinct is further divided into two “precinct parts” or “precinct splits.” Precinct Part 123.1 includes portions of the city and fire district only. Precinct Part 123.2 also includes a portion of the school district.

Precinct line changes must follow certain rules:

- ☐ Changes cannot be made starting seven days before candidate filing through the general election.
- ☐ Permanent changes may be adopted as long as sufficient time exists to make the changes.
- ☐ Temporary precinct changes may accommodate a city or town annexation of unincorporated territory. The changes must be limited to the minimum changes necessary to accommodate the annexation and remains in effect only until the precinct modifications are adopted by the county legislative authority.
- ☐ Cities and towns may annex at any time. If the annexation affects an election, the voters are eligible to vote in the city or town election even if the annexation is just a few days before Election Day.

## Redistricting




[RCW 29A.76](#)

Redistricting apportions congressional, legislative, and internal director/commissioner districts' population based on the US Census. This happens at least every 10 years to guarantee equal representation and starts the year after the U.S. Census is taken. The county legislative authority must adopt

new precinct lines to comply with the state redistricting plan and the county commissioner or council internal district boundaries.

The changing of internal district lines is not limited to this ten-year event; for example, county commissioner districts may be changed as often as every four years. ([RCW 36.32.020](#))

The County Auditor has the responsibility to maintain voter registration records, which includes adjusting precinct lines, creating new maps, updating voter registration records, and notifying voters of their new districts and precincts. These procedures take place every year in some form.

 *After redistricting, voters must be notified of any precinct changes. For more information about notifying voters of changes to their registration, see [“Acknowledgment Notice” on page 49](#)*

## Section 4.2: When Are Elections Held?



[RCW 29A.04](#), [RCW 29A.52](#)

### Notes

Elections in Washington include the state primary, the general election, and special elections. There are also some special circumstance elections, such as the presidential primary and recall elections.

### State Primary

The state primary is held the first Tuesday in August.

A primary winnows the number of candidates in a race to two for the general election ballot. Voters may vote for any candidate in a race.

### Nonpartisan Offices

Nonpartisan races skip the primary to appear only on the general election ballot:

- ☐ When it is a cemetery district or park and recreation district;
- ☐ When it is an unexpired county partisan race with one candidate; and
- ☐ When fewer than three candidates file for office. This applies to all nonpartisan positions, including Superintendent of Public Instruction and judicial offices.



**Partisan races have a primary regardless of the number of candidates filed unless the office is an unexpired county race and only one candidate filed for the position.**

### Precinct Committee Officers

In even-numbered years, the state primary also includes precinct committee officers (PCOs); however, when there is only one PCO candidate for a party in a precinct, the candidate is deemed elected without appearing on the ballot.



*For more information about precinct committee officers, see [“Precinct Committee Officers \(PCOs\)” on page 77.](#)*


## General Election


The general election is held the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November. A general election is scheduled at regular intervals for a specific purpose, such as electing the officers for any of these jurisdiction types.

General elections include:

- ☐ Federal offices
- ☐ State offices
- ☐ County offices
- ☐ Municipalities
- ☐ Special purpose districts (school, fire, water, etc.)

If a voter must own land to participate in a district election, there may be a different election date. Refer to the jurisdiction-specific RCW titles specific to the jurisdiction

 For more information about jurisdiction-specific laws, see [“Election-Related RCW Chapters” on page 10.](#)

 For information about elections not covered in Title 29A RCW, see the [Diking, Drainage, and Flood Control District Elections](#) clearinghouse notice on the Office of the Secretary of State website.

## Special Election

Issues or races not regularly scheduled may appear on a special election ballot. There are four dates available for special elections:

- ☐ Second Tuesday in February
- ☐ Fourth Tuesday in April
- ☐ First Tuesday in August (primary)
- ☐ The Tuesday after the first Monday in November (general election)

Special elections may be held in conjunction with the primary in August or the general election in November.

Issues concerning levies, bonds, levy lid lifts, annexations, changes in government structure, and even local advisory issues may appear on the ballot on any of these dates.


Notes

## Notes

## What Triggers a Special Election?

A county or district submits a resolution or measure to the County Auditor by the deadline specific to the election. Depending on their laws, districts may have different deadlines.

- ☐ Spring special elections — 60 days prior to the election date
- ☐ August primary — Friday before regular candidate filing
- ☐ November general election — the day of the preceding primary

 For more information about jurisdiction-specific laws, see [“Election-Related RCW Chapters” on page 10](#).


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## Special Circumstance Elections

 [RCW 29A.56](#)

### Presidential Primary

The presidential primary is held on the second Tuesday in March. [RCW 29A.56.020](#) permits selection of an alternate date.

 For more information about the presidential primary, see [“Presidential Primary Ballots” on page 70](#) and the [Presidential Primary Resources & Training Materials](#) on the Office of the Secretary of State website.

### Recall Election

Respond to all requests for information on recalling elected officials by providing copies of [RCW 29A.56.110 through RCW 29A.56.270](#). Notify the Office of the Secretary of State whenever your office files a recall charge.



# Section 4.3: What Is on the Ballot?

The races and measures that appear on the ballot are determined by:

- ☐ The type of election
- ☐ The year of the election
- ☐ The type of office
- ☐ The term of office
- ☐ The number of candidates in a race
- ☐ Jurisdiction resolutions requesting measures (issues) appear on a ballot



For more information about candidate filing, see the [Filing for Office](#) clearinghouse notice on the Office of the Secretary of State website.

Notes

## Election Races & Measures



[RCW 29A.36](#), [RCW 29A.52](#), [WAC 434-230](#)

Each election type serves a different purpose. The races and measures on the ballot will vary.

Election Type	Appearing on the Ballot
Primary <sup>1</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> Scheduled nonpartisan races with three or more candidates</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Partisan races</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Local district measures</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Some charter county offices</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Precinct committee officer (PCO) races with two or more candidates in the same party</li></ul>
General election	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> Top two vote-getters in the primary (partisan and nonpartisan)</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Nonpartisan races that skipped the primary</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> State initiatives and referenda</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Local district measures</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> President and Vice President</li></ul>
Special election	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> Local district measures:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Advisory votes</li><li>■ District formations</li><li>■ Changes in government structure</li><li>■ Levies and bonds</li></ul></li></ul>

<sup>1</sup> The following races skip the primary: park & recreation districts, cemetery districts, some judicial districts, any unexpired county partisan race with one candidate, and PCO races with fewer than two candidates in the same party.



Internal districts representing a geographical sub-district (often defined as “District No.”) may require different primary ballots within that jurisdiction. Refer to the statutes relevant to that jurisdiction for more information.

## Notes

## Presidential Primary Ballots

[RCW 29A.56](#)

The presidential primary does not determine the actual presidential candidates appearing on the general election ballot. It operates under different rules than the state top two primary.

- ☐ A political party may choose to use, or not use, the results of the state's presidential primary to determine the delegates sent to the national conventions.
- ☐ Only major political parties may participate.
- ☐ If a party requests an oath, the voter is required to declare a major political party by signing an oath written by the political party.



*For more information about the Presidential Primary, see the [Presidential Primary Resources & Training Materials](#) on the Office of the Secretary of State website.*

## Elections Requiring Property Ownership

Some special purpose district elections require voters to own property in the district, such as diking, drainage, and flood control districts. When conducting a general election for one of these types of these districts, always refer to that jurisdiction's statutes.



*For more information about jurisdiction-specific laws, see ["Election-Related RCW Chapters" on page 10](#).*



*For more information about elections not covered in Title 29A RCW, see the [Diking, Drainage, and Flood Control District Elections](#) clearinghouse notice on the Office of the Secretary of State website.*

## Election Year



[RCW 29A.04](#), [RCW 29A.52](#), [RCW 29A.80](#)

The year of an election determines the jurisdictions participating. For example, U.S. President and Vice President appear only on the general election ballot every four years. Charter counties may adopt different schedules for county or special purpose elections.

### Notes

Year of Election	Scheduled Jurisdictions	Primary	General Election
Odd Year	<input type="checkbox"/> City, town and special purpose districts <input type="checkbox"/> Vacant partisan offices <input type="checkbox"/> Vacant judicial offices (other than district court) <input type="checkbox"/> Regularly scheduled charter county and judicial offices	<input type="checkbox"/> Nonpartisan offices (except cemetery and park & recreation districts) with three or more candidates <input type="checkbox"/> Partisan offices except unexpired term county offices with a single candidate <input type="checkbox"/> Judges — refer to the use the jurisdiction's statutes and the <a href="#">Judicial Elections</a> clearinghouse notice as a reference <input type="checkbox"/> Local measures	<input type="checkbox"/> The top two vote-getters from the primary <input type="checkbox"/> Any races skipping the primary <input type="checkbox"/> State initiatives and referenda (provided by the Office of the Secretary of State) <input type="checkbox"/> Judges — refer to the use the jurisdiction's statutes and the <a href="#">Judicial Elections</a> clearinghouse notice as a reference <input type="checkbox"/> Local measures
Even Year	<input type="checkbox"/> Federal and state offices <input type="checkbox"/> Judicial offices <input type="checkbox"/> Partisan county offices <input type="checkbox"/> Public utility districts (PUDs)	<input type="checkbox"/> Partisan offices — all races <input type="checkbox"/> Nonpartisan offices with three or more candidates <input type="checkbox"/> Judges — refer to the use the jurisdiction's statutes and the <a href="#">Judicial Elections</a> clearinghouse notice as a reference <input type="checkbox"/> Local measures <input type="checkbox"/> PCO with two or more candidates in major party race	<input type="checkbox"/> Presidential nominees (every four years) <input type="checkbox"/> The top two vote-getters from the primary <input type="checkbox"/> Any races skipping the primary (except PCO) <input type="checkbox"/> State initiatives and referenda (provided by the Office of the Secretary of State) <input type="checkbox"/> Judges — refer to the use the jurisdiction's statutes and the <a href="#">Judicial Elections</a> clearinghouse notice as a reference <input type="checkbox"/> Local measures



For more information about when judicial offices appear on primary and general election ballots, see the [Judicial Elections](#) clearinghouse notice on the Office of the Secretary of State website.

## Notes

## Office Types

[RCW 29A.04](#)

### Classifications of Elective Offices

Two classifications apply to elective offices.

**Partisan** — Any public office where a candidate may indicate political party preference on the ballot. State executive officials, federal senators and representatives, state senators and representatives, and most county officials hold partisan offices.

Candidates may indicate a party preference when filing, but this declaration is not a political party affiliation. Candidates are not nominees of that party.

President/Vice President and precinct committee officers affiliate with political parties. These candidates have the party affiliation printed on the ballot; the presidential and vice-presidential candidates are nominees of their party.

**Nonpartisan** — Any public office where a candidate does not indicate political party preference on the ballot. Includes the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, justices and judges, cities, towns, special purpose districts (school, fire, water, etc.) and some charter county officials.

Designation of an office as partisan or nonpartisan will determine when, or if, an office appears on the ballot.



*For more information about when judicial offices in primary and general elections, see the [Judicial Elections](#) clearinghouse notice on the Office of the Secretary of State website.*

# Office Terms



The term of office describes the length of time an elected official will serve.

## Regular Term


Also described as full term.

- ☐ For most offices, the regular term is two, four or six years.
- ☐ The length of regular terms does not need to be printed on the ballot.
- ☐ Winners assume the office at the official beginning of the new term which is usually:
  - Second Monday in January for state offices.
  - January 1 for other elected officials unless determined by statute or charter.

## Unexpired Term

An unexpired term is caused by a vacancy occurring more than one year before candidate filing for the regularly scheduled election.


- ☐ An appointee may temporarily fill the vacancy.
- ☐ Unexpired terms are at least one year in length. If the unexpired term is less than one year, the unexpired term is considered a short term.
- ☐ It is required to list the length of the unexpired term on the ballot.
- ☐ Winners assume office immediately following certification of the general election.

 **PCOs do not have elections for unexpired or short terms. All vacancies are filled by party appointment, not by election.**

## Short Term

A short term is the brief period starting upon certification of the general election and ending with the start of the next full term. (Short terms last about one month.) By definition, an appointee should be filling the office or the office is vacant at the time of candidate filing.

- ☐ A short term appears on the ballot in conjunction with a full term and is printed on the ballot as a single phrase (short and full term).
- ☐ The winning candidate fills both the short and regular term. The same candidate swears to an oath and takes office immediately after certification of the general election and again when the regular term begins.

 **School directors never have a short-term position. All school director regular terms begin as soon as the election is certified.**

Notes

## Candidates



[RCW 29A.04](#), [RCW 29A.24](#)

The number of candidates filing for an office may determine if a race appears on the primary ballot, the general election ballot, or skips to the next scheduled election. For more information on when elections appear on the ballot, see [“Election Year” on page 71](#)).

### Notes

Office Type	Skips the Primary	Skips the General Election
Partisan office — Unexpired term	<input type="checkbox"/> County office with only one candidate <input type="checkbox"/> No candidates filed in a regular filing period	<input type="checkbox"/> No candidates filed in a regular filing period
Partisan office — Regular term	<input type="checkbox"/> No candidates filed in a regular filing period <input type="checkbox"/> Fewer than two PCO candidates file for a party position	<input type="checkbox"/> No candidates filed in a special filing period
Nonpartisan offices (other than judicial)	<input type="checkbox"/> Fewer than three candidates file <input type="checkbox"/> Parks and recreation district <input type="checkbox"/> Cemetery district <input type="checkbox"/> No candidates filed in a regular filing period	<input type="checkbox"/> No candidates filed in a special filing period
Judicial	<input type="checkbox"/> Use the jurisdiction's statutes as necessary and the <a href="#">Judicial Elections</a> clearinghouse notice as a reference	<input type="checkbox"/> Use the jurisdiction's statutes as necessary and the <a href="#">Judicial Elections</a> clearinghouse notice as a reference
Charter county offices	<input type="checkbox"/> Refer to county charter	<input type="checkbox"/> Refer to county charter

You must notify any candidate when their race skips the primary ballot and moves directly to the general election.

## Judicial Elections in Washington State

The chart below explains the framework for judicial elections.

Candidates	Municipal Court District Court; Court of Appeals; Supreme Court		Superior Court	
	Primary	General Election	Primary	General Election
One	<input type="checkbox"/> No <sup>1</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <sup>2</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/> County population less than 100,000: No <sup>1</sup> <input type="checkbox"/> County population 100,000 or more: No; certificate of election is issued after candidate filing. <sup>3</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/> County population less than 100,000: Yes <sup>2</sup> <input type="checkbox"/> County population 100,000 or more: No; certificate of election is issued after candidate filing. <sup>3</sup>
Two	<input type="checkbox"/> No <sup>1</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <sup>2</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/> No <sup>1</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <sup>2</sup>
Three or more	Yes	Yes <sup>2</sup>	Yes	Yes <sup>2</sup>
<sup>1</sup> <a href="#">RCW 29A.52.220(1)</a> <sup>2</sup> <a href="#">RCW 29A.36.170(1-2)</a> <sup>3</sup> <a href="#">WA Const. Art. IV § 29</a> (Note: When applied to multi-county jurisdictions, all counties in the jurisdiction must meet the population threshold.)				



For more information about when judicial offices in primary and general elections, see the [Judicial Elections](#) clearinghouse notice on the Office of the Secretary of State website.

## Measures



[RCW 29A.24](#), [RCW 29A.36](#)

Ballot measures requires a ballot title. Ballot titles include the name of the jurisdiction, a concise description of the measure, and a question. Upon accepting a resolution, request a ballot title from one of the following:

- ☐ The city attorney, if a city or town passed the resolution.
- ☐ The county Prosecuting Attorney for all other local jurisdictions.



When sending the resolution to your Prosecuting Attorney, set a deadline for receiving a ballot title.

After receiving the ballot title, you must send a copy to the jurisdiction for review even if there were no changes to the title submitted with the resolution. The jurisdiction has 10 working days to appeal to the Superior Court.

Notes

## Section 4.4: Candidate Filing



[RCW 29A.24](#), [WAC 434-215](#)

In order to appear on a ballot, candidates must file an official declaration of candidacy with the designated filing officer. Filing officers may only accept declarations of candidacy during specific periods.



*For more information about candidate filing, see the [Filing for Office](#) clearinghouse notice on the Office of the Secretary of State website.*

### Notes

## Pre-filing Considerations

### Public Disclosure Commission



[RCW 42.17A](#) (will be recodified as [RCW 29B.05](#) in January 2026)

The [Public Disclosure Commission \(PDC\)](#) monitors state and local candidate campaign financing, financial compliance with state law, and political advertising. Candidates running for US Congress or President/Vice President report directly to the [Federal Election Commission \(FEC\)](#).

County election administrators must notify the PDC of the following information:

- ☐ The names of incumbents and the number of registered voters in each jurisdiction based on the last general election. The PDC requests counties provide this information each January.
- ☐ Names of all candidates filing for, or withdrawing from, the ballot/election. (Filings for cemetery districts and districts where voters must meet special qualifications such as ownership of land are exempt.)

#### Retention of Public Disclosure Commission Reports

The County Auditor must retain any copies of PDC reports provided by candidates according to the County Auditor Retention Schedule.

PDC contact information:  
<https://www.pdc.wa.gov> or (360) 753-1111.



**The Office of the Secretary of State will use information in VoteWA to notify the PDC of candidate filings and withdrawals. Ensure complete and timely data entry into VoteWA.**



## Candidate Packets

The PDC provides candidate packets electronically and online. Printed forms are available if requested by the County Auditor around January 1 of each year.


### Precinct Committee Officers (PCOs)

 [RCW 29A.80](#), [WAC 434-230](#)

Precinct committee officers (PCOs) are political party positions voted upon and elected in the Primary of every even-numbered year. Candidates compete against other candidates of the same political party within a single precinct.


- ☐ Each major political party has an elected position in every precinct. Minor political parties do not have elected precinct committee officers.
- ☐ If a single candidate files for a PCO position in a precinct, the candidate is considered elected. The position does not appear on the ballot.
- ☐ If no candidates file for a PCO position in a precinct, the party fills the position by appointment.
- ☐ PCOs may not submit a Voters' Pamphlet profile and do not appear in pamphlets.
- ☐ Write-in candidates are not permitted for PCO races.


Do not open a special filing period for voided or vacated PCO positions.

 For more information about precinct committee officers, see the [Precinct Committee Officer Elections](#) clearinghouse notice on the Office of the Secretary of State website.

### Special Purpose Districts

Districts requiring land ownership may conduct candidate filing according to that jurisdiction's laws, and it may occur at a different time of the year. The district may also require use of a different candidate declaration form and have different qualifications.

 For more information about jurisdiction-specific laws, see ["Election-Related RCW Chapters" on page 10](#).

 For more information about elections not covered in Title 29A RCW, see the [Diking, Drainage, and Flood Control District Elections](#) clearinghouse notice on the Office of the Secretary of State website.

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## Lists of Offices Open for Election

[WAC 434-215-005](#)

### Information from Jurisdictions

Prior to **February 1**, the County Auditor sends a questionnaire to each local jurisdiction scheduled to elect officers in the next general election. The questionnaire confirms information regarding open offices. At a minimum, jurisdictions need to confirm:

- ☐ The offices open for the general election of that year, including vacancies.
- ☐ The names of incumbents currently in those offices, including appointees.
- ☐ The annual salary for each office at the time of candidate filing.

Additional information may be included.

The questionnaire should request response from jurisdictions prior to March 1.

### Offices Open for Filing

Prepare a list of offices sorted by jurisdiction. This list must include office positions or district designations and filing fees. Post the list online or distribute to the public at least two weeks before candidate filing.

Offices open for filing during the regular filing period:

- ☐ An office regularly scheduled for the ballot that year.
- ☐ A vacancy open prior to the first day of candidate filing and the jurisdiction notifies the County Auditor of the vacancy prior to the last three days of candidate filing.



*For more information about voids and vacancies, see [“Special Three-Day Filing Periods” on page 80.](#)*

### Filing Fees & Filing Fee Petitions

Some offices require a filing fee. The salary at the time of filing determines the filing fee for an office. Salary does not include compensation based on meetings attended or expenditures covered as per diem.

A candidate lacking sufficient funds to pay a fee at the time of filing may submit a filing fee petition with the declaration of candidacy.

A sufficient filing fee petition must have one valid signature of a registered voter in the jurisdiction for each dollar of the filing fee. The filing officer is responsible for checking each petition signature against the voter registration

signature. A signature is not required for portions less than one dollar. Do not round the amount up or down.

Amount of Annual Salary	Filing Fee	Filing Fee Petition Sufficiency Requirement
No salary	No filing fee	No petition signatures required
Less than \$1,000	\$10.00	10 signatures
\$1,000 or greater	1 percent of the annual salary	Signatures equal to whole dollar amount of the filing fee

Notes

Example: The filing fee is \$406.98, so the petition must have 406 valid signatures of voters registered within the jurisdiction of the office.

***May I accept a combination of money & signatures?***

No. The candidate either pays the full filing fee or submits a petition with the required signatures. Candidates filing with a filing fee petition may not file online.

***May I accept a copy of petition signatures?***

Petitioners must submit the original signatures.

***May a candidate bring in more signatures after submitting a declaration?***

The candidate must submit all signatures at the time of filing the declaration of candidacy. Do not accept additional signatures later.

***Who may sign the filing fee petition for candidates of an internal nominating district?***

If voters of the entire jurisdiction are allowed to vote on the position in the general election, any voter in the jurisdiction may sign the filing fee petition. For example, port commissioner races are restricted in the primary to voters of the internal district, but all voters of the port district may sign the petition because they will all vote on the position in the general election.

No voter may sign two petitions for the same office.



**Petition sheets are subject to public records requests.**

## Notes

## Where to File

### Office of the Secretary of State

Candidates file with the Office of the Secretary of State for:

- ☐ Federal offices
- ☐ Statewide offices
- ☐ State Legislature
- ☐ Supreme Court Justices
- ☐ State Senators
- ☐ State Representatives
- ☐ Court of Appeals Judges
- ☐ Superior Court Judges

#### Notification to the Public Disclosure Commission

VoteWA may be used to notify the Office of the Secretary of State and joint jurisdictions upon approval of a candidate's filing.

### County Auditor

All other offices not filing with the Office of the Secretary of State file with the appropriate County Auditor. These offices include but are not limited to:

- ☐ City and town elected offices
- ☐ Minor taxing district offices

In multi-county districts (joint districts) other than school districts, the county with the most registered voters for that district is the filing officer. The Superintendent of Public Instruction designates the county filing officer for all shared school districts.

## When to File

### Regular Filing Week

The filing office must be open all five days of candidate filing week, even if the office is not regularly open all five days. Candidate filing:

- ☐ Begins at 8:00 am the first Monday in May.
- ☐ Ends at the 5:00 pm the following Friday.
- ☐ Filing offices maintain regular business hours (8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.)

### Special Three-Day Filing Periods

When there are no candidates who file for an office during the regular filing week, a void in candidacy occurs. A void happens if no one has filed for an office after the end of the official filing period.




**PCO vacancies do not trigger a special three-day filing period.  
The parties are responsible for filling any PCO vacancies.**

If no one files for an office during the regular filing period, provide a second opportunity for that office by opening a three-day special filing period.

If a vacancy occurs prior to the first day of regular filing week and was not open for filing during regular candidate filing, this can also result in a special three-day filing period.

The County Auditor determines when to open a special three-day filing.

 For more information about publication of notices for special three-day filing periods, see [“Targeted Notices” on page 92](#).

Notes


## Lapsed Election

If an office has no candidates after the regular and special filing periods, the election lapses and office skips the current year’s ballot.

- ☐ The office is not printed on the ballot.
- ☐ No write-in votes will be counted.
- ☐ The incumbent remains in office until the election of a successor in the next regularly scheduled election for such offices.
- ☐ At the next regularly scheduled election, the office will appear on the ballot for the remainder of the term.

These vacancies appear in the next election scheduled for that type of office, either as an “unexpired” or “short term.” The incumbent stays in office until then.


If the incumbent resigns after the special filing period, an appointee fills the position until the next election for that position. Appointments to fill vacancies are the responsibility of each jurisdiction.

 For more information about voids in candidacies or lapsed elections, see the [Filing for Office elections clearinghouse notice on the Office of the Secretary of State website](#).

## How to File

Candidates may file a Declaration of Candidacy in person, by mail, electronically, or online.

Deadlines and rules apply to regular filing and special filing periods. A declaration received after the filing period has closed must be denied.

 Declaration of Candidacy forms are available on the [Candidate Filing Forms](#) page on the Office of the Secretary of State website.

## Notes

**In Person**

A candidate may submit an official Declaration of Candidacy form in person or by messenger. Candidates should fill out their own declaration forms; refrain from doing it for them.

**By Mail**

By mail means delivery through the USPS or other commercial mailing service.

- ☐ Declarations submitted electronically (fax, email) are not considered by mail.
- ☐ Do not accept declaration forms that are received earlier than 10 business days before the first day of filing week. Return these to the candidate with a notice that it was received too early to be processed.
- ☐ Wait until the first day of the filing period to process and publicize mailed declarations.

The filing office must receive declaration forms no later than 5:00 p.m. on the last day of candidate filing. Delivery to another department in the county or state does not qualify as valid delivery.



*For more information about filing offices, see [“Where to File” on page 80.](#)*

**Electronic (Fax, Email)**

[RCW 29A.04.255](#)

With the exception of filing fee petitioners, candidates may submit declarations of candidacy electronically. The filing officer should accept faxed or emailed declaration forms during the filing period.

- ☐ The same deadlines apply.
- ☐ If payment of a fee is required, electronic filing is not complete until receipt of the fee.

**Online Filing**

The VoteWA online candidate filing function is available for all candidates. Post a link on your county website for candidate access.

All online filing systems must be available 24 hours a day.

- ☐ Online filing begins exactly at 8:00 a.m. on the first day of filing and ends precisely at 5:00 p.m. on the day filing closes.
- ☐ Online candidate filings must be reviewed and approved prior to publication on your website.
- ☐ Candidates filing online must pay any applicable filing fee before the filing is complete.



**Online candidate filing is not available for Address Confidentiality (ACP) participants. ACP voters who wish to run for office must file by mail, fax, email, or in-person.**

Notes

## Contingency Planning



[WAC 434-215-040](#)

If there is an Internet outage or disruption to the online candidate filing system, candidates can submit their declarations of candidacy and filing fees in person to any County Auditor during the last two hours of the filing period. All filing information must be sent to the Office of the Secretary of State as soon as possible after it is accepted.

## Filing Procedures



[WAC 434-208, RCW 434-230](#)

At the time of filing, a candidate must be:

- ☐ Registered to vote in the district of the office and any applicable internal district. You must confirm the candidate's voting residence lies within the jurisdiction and internal district, if applicable, of the office prior to approving the declaration.
- ☐ Qualified to serve if elected. It is the responsibility of the candidate to know if they have all the qualifications required for the office (e.g., residency). The County Auditor does not determine if the candidate is qualified.

Prospective candidates may register to vote or update their voter registration at any time prior to filing.



**Remember to confirm internal taxing district boundary lines with the taxing districts prior to filing week.**



**Future Voters who will be 18 years old at the time of the primary are eligible to be PCO candidates. They are not eligible to run as candidates for other offices.**

## Notes

## Processing a Declaration

For each declaration, you need to:

- ☐ Verify the receipt of the filing is within the filing period, particularly if the candidate files online, electronically or by mail.
- ☐ Confirm the applicant is currently a registered voter within the jurisdiction of the office. The information on the declaration must match the information on the voter registration. If the candidate has moved, process any applicable voter registration update for the candidate before accepting the declaration.
- ☐ If the office requires a candidate registration in an internal sub-district (e.g., county commissioner district or school director district) you must verify this also. Possible resources: maps, assessor's lookup system or other county geographic information system.
- ☐ If necessary, accept and receipt the filing fee.
- ☐ Make any notations on the declaration required by your office procedures.
- ☐ Notify the candidate of the deadline for withdrawing from the ballot and that filing fees are not refundable.

### Party Preference

Candidates for partisan office, other than US President/Vice President and PCO, may indicate a party preference. This is the candidate's preference and does not indicate if the candidate is endorsed by or affiliated with that political party.

- ☐ If no choice is indicated, apply the default phrase "States No Party Preference" to the candidate's ballot information.
- ☐ Except as described in [WAC 434-215-120](#), there are no restrictions to the name of a political party.
- ☐ If a candidate indicates both a party preference and "States No Party Preference," use the party preference written in.

### ***President/Vice President and PCOs Must Declare a Party Affiliation.***

- ☐ Political supporters nominate candidates for US President/Vice President using a convention process. These candidates affiliate with a political party or convention. In this case, party preference language is not used.
- ☐ PCO, a political party office, requires candidates indicate political party affiliation when filing. Party preference language is not used.



**Exception: While nominated by convention, independent Presidential candidates do not affiliate with a political party.**



## Write-in Candidates

### Declared Write-in Candidates

Any qualified person may become a declared write-in candidate by filing a Declaration of Write-in Candidacy with the appropriate filing officer.

Write-in candidates must file a declaration to have votes tallied for a race. They may file a declaration of candidacy form up until 8:00 p.m. on Election Day.

Write-in candidates who file more than 18 days before an election do not pay a filing fee. Those that file 18 days or less before an election must pay a filing fee. For offices with a fixed annual salary of more than \$1,000, the filing fee is 1 percent of the annual salary. For offices with a fixed annual salary of \$1,000 or less, the filing fee is \$25. Candidates for offices without a fixed annual salary must also pay the \$25 filing fee, including those paid on per diem or per meeting basis.

Declared write-in candidates may submit a filing fee petition in lieu of the filing fee.



*Write-in Declaration of Candidacy forms are available on the [Candidate Filing Forms](#) page on the Office of the Secretary of State website.*

### Who May Not File as a Write-In Candidate?



[RCW 29A.24.311](#)

Do not accept a write-in declaration when:

- ☐ The candidate filed as a regular candidate or a declared write-in candidate for the same office in the primary. This candidate may file a write-in declaration for a different office in the general election.
- ☐ The candidate has already filed for another position on the ballot.



**Exception: Candidates for the offices of precinct committee officer, charter review board member, and freeholder may run for other offices in the same election.**

### Undeclared Write-in Candidates

Voters may cast votes for a person simply by writing in the name on the ballot; however, votes for these names will not be tallied without a timely declaration of write-in candidacy filed by the candidate.



**State law prohibits write-in candidates for PCO elections.**

Notes

## Notes

## Processing Filing Fee Petitions

[RCW 29A.24.101](#) and [WAC 434-215-025](#) prescribe filing fee petition formats. Process filing fee petitions in four steps.

1. Verify each voter signing the petition is a valid voter in the district (not the sub-district if all voters in the district vote on the general election ballot).
  - Count the first valid signature — Reject any subsequent signatures of a voter on the same petition.
  - No voter may sign two different petitions for the same office. Reject all signatures from a person if they sign more than one petition.
  - You may stop checking signatures when the number of valid signatures equals the number required.
2. Certify the petition as:
  - Sufficient — If the number of valid signatures equals or exceeds the number of filing fee dollars required.
  - Insufficient — Reject the petition because there are not enough valid signatures. Once submitted, do not accept additional signatures.
3. Notify the candidate of the sufficiency or insufficiency of the petition.
4. Sufficient and insufficient filing fee petitions have different retention schedules (See the [Records Retention Schedules for County Auditors on the Office of the Secretary of State website.](#))

### What Happens When a Petition Is Missing Essential Information?

Filing fee petitions may be rejected if:

- ☐ The petition is not in the proper form.
- ☐ The petition clearly bears insufficient signatures.
- ☐ The petition did not accompany a declaration of candidacy.
- ☐ The petition did not meet the filing deadline.

### May I Reject a Candidate's Declaration?

Yes, but only if the declaration is “defective as to face.”

- ☐ Example 1: A candidate lists an address outside the district on the declaration form.
- ☐ Example 2: The candidate is not a registered voter.
- ☐ Example 3: A candidate has already filed for another office on the ballot (with the exception of PCO or temporary position).

## May a Candidate Submit Two Declarations?

A candidate's name may not appear more than once on a ballot unless one of the positions is for the following:

- ☐ Charter review board
- ☐ Freeholder
- ☐ Precinct committee officer

Additionally, a filed candidate cannot also be a declared write-in candidate for another office appearing on the same ballot.

A candidate must withdraw the initial candidate filing before filing for another position. This rule applies to all instances including candidates filing for the wrong office, or candidates submitting more than one filing electronically. Filing fees are not refundable.

A candidate may not reactivate or resubmit any withdrawn declaration of candidacy. In this instance, the candidate must file a new declaration and pay the filing fee (if any) again before candidate filing ends.

### *May an individual hold more than one office?*

A person may serve in more than one office during the same time as long as there is no conflict of interest as determined by the courts.

## Withdrawals



[WAC 434-215](#)

Candidates wishing to withdraw from the ballot may do so no later than close of business the Monday following the regular candidate filing period. Special three-day filing periods do not have withdrawal periods.

At the time of filing, candidates must be informed that:

- ☐ The deadline to withdraw is 5:00 p.m. the Monday following regular candidate filing.
- ☐ The filing officer must receive a signed request for withdrawal.
- ☐ A candidate may not revoke a withdrawal.
- ☐ Filing fees are not refundable.

When a candidate withdraws, unless using the VoteWA candidate filing module, you must notify the Public Disclosure Commission.

If a race has no candidates after the last day for withdrawals, a void in candidacy exists and you must conduct a special three-day filing period.

Notes

## Notes

*Can a filing officer accept a withdrawal after the deadline?*

No candidate may withdraw from the ballot after the close of business on the Monday following the last day of filing week.

If a candidate wishes to withdraw after the deadline:

- ☐ A court must remove the name from the ballot.
- ☐ The candidate may contact the PDC to declare that, if elected, they will not serve.

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## Lot Draw & Ballot Order



[RCW 29A.36](#)

Determine the order of candidate names on the primary ballot by lot draw. A lot draw randomizes the order of the candidates' names on the ballot so they do not inherently appear in their filing order. Order of the lot draw also applies to the ballot order for primary sample and provisional ballots.

Conduct the lot draw immediately following the close of Candidate Filing Week.

The Office of the Secretary of State conducts a lot draw to determine the order of names for:

- ☐ Federal offices
- ☐ Statewide offices
- ☐ State legislative and judicial offices

County Auditors conduct a lot draw to determine the order of names for all other contests.



For more information about filing officers, see [“Where to File” on page 80](#).

## Primary Ballots

The County Auditor determines the order of names:

- ☐ **Cities, towns, and minor taxing districts** — The lead county (the county with the majority of voters) determines ballot order for shared jurisdictions. Notify joint counties of the ballot order.
- ☐ **School districts** — The lead county is determined by State Superintendent for Public Instruction.

## General Election Ballots

The top vote-getter of a primary race appears first, followed by the second-place vote-getter.

Exceptions are:

- ☐ If an office did not appear in the primary, the names appear in lot draw order.
- ☐ Presidential/Vice Presidential nominees' order is determined by political party. The candidates from the major party which received the most votes in the last presidential election are listed first, then the candidates from the major political party with the second most votes are listed second. Minor party and independent candidates are listed in the order that the nominations were received by the Office of the Secretary of State.
- ☐ If the top two vote-getters have the same number of votes in a primary, determine the order of names for the general election ballot by lot.

Notes

## Special Cases

### Judicial Offices

Judicial offices are generally managed in the same way as other nonpartisan offices. However, there are exceptions, especially for superior court judges.



*For more information, refer to the jurisdiction's statutes as necessary and the [Judicial Elections](#) clearinghouse notice on the Office of the Secretary of State website.*

### Precinct Committee Officer (PCO)

- ☐ Only PCO races with two or more candidates for the same party office appear on the ballot.
- ☐ The order of the PCO races depends on the number of votes cast statewide in the last Presidential election for each major political party. PCO offices are listed in the same order as presidential candidates.

### The Office of President and Vice-President



[RCW 29A.04](#), [RCW 29A.56](#)

Declarations of candidacy and filing fees are not required.

**Major Political Party** — A major political party is one whose nominees for President and Vice President received at least 5 percent of the total votes cast at the last preceding Presidential election. For major political parties:

- ☐ National conventions nominate candidates and submit official nominations to the Office of the Secretary of State.
- ☐ Nomination certificates must include names of official electors to serve at the Electoral College.

Notes

**Minor Political Party** — A political organization other than a major political party; and

- ☐ State conventions with at least 100 attendees nominate candidates and submit official nominations to the Office of the Secretary of State.
- ☐ Petitions signed by at least 1,000 valid Washington registered voters must be signed at the conventions.
- ☐ Candidates may hold multiple conventions to collect signatures.
- ☐ Nomination certificates must include names of official electors to serve at the Electoral College.

**Independent Candidates** — A candidate nominated by convention without a party affiliation. Independent candidates must submit the same paperwork as minor political parties.

# Section 4.5: Election Planning

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Elections 101 Manual  
Chapter 4  
Section 4.5

## Notices Published in the Newspaper of General Circulation

County Auditors must publish certain notices in a newspaper of general circulation, including a notice of election and notice of availability of accessibility services. These two notices may be combined into a single legal advertisement that is published in the newspaper.

### Notice of Election

 [RCW 29A.52.355](#)

#### *Deadline:*

- ☐ 15 to 5 days before the deadline for voter registration applications by mail.

#### *Required content:*

- ☐ Voter registration information:
  - Last day to register online or by mail
  - Last day to update an existing registration
  - Last day to register in person
  - Registration locations
- ☐ Election information:
  - Type of election
  - Date of election
  - How to obtain a ballot
  - List of jurisdictions participating in the election
  - Positions appearing on the ballot (Candidate names and addresses are not required)
  - Short titles of ballot measures (see [WAC 434-208-140](#))
  - Where to find additional information about the election
- ☐ Public meetings:
  - Canvassing Board Meeting Notice
  - Dates, times and locations of public meetings associated with the election

If a local voters' pamphlet is mailed to all residences in the jurisdiction, only the items listed under Voter Registration Information and Public Meetings must be in the notice. If the local voter's pamphlet is not mailed to all residences (e.g., is included in the ballot packet that is mailed to each voter), the notice must include the items listed under Election Information.

Notes

## Notice of Availability of Services


[RCW 29A.04.220](#)

### Deadline

- ☐ Publish no later than 13 days before Primary or election. (Linked to the deadline to publish the Notice of Election)

### Required content

- ☐ Assistance information to the elderly and persons with disabilities.
- ☐ Availability of voter registration aids.
- ☐ Availability of voting aids.
- ☐ Procedures for voting calculated to reach the elderly and persons with disabilities.

### Notification

- ☐ **Either** publish separately or incorporate into the Notice of Election.

## Targeted Notices

You must notify the listed persons in some fashion. You may use a combination of press releases, announcements on your web pages, letters, or email to get the word out.

Notice Type	Deadline	Must Include	Recipients
Notice of Logic & Accuracy Test <sup>1</sup>	24 hours before testing.	<input type="checkbox"/> Date and time of test	<input type="checkbox"/> Press <input type="checkbox"/> Political parties <input type="checkbox"/> Public <input type="checkbox"/> Candidates
Notice of Special Filing Period <sup>2</sup>	No later than 24 hours prior to conducting special filing period	<input type="checkbox"/> List of offices open for filing <input type="checkbox"/> Dates, times, and location for beginning and ending of filing period	<input type="checkbox"/> Newspapers <input type="checkbox"/> Radio <input type="checkbox"/> Television in the county <input type="checkbox"/> Post online (optional)
Notice of Recount <sup>3</sup>	At least one day before recount	<input type="checkbox"/> Dates, times, and location of the recount <sup>4</sup> <input type="checkbox"/> County's observer rules <sup>5</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/> Applicant or affected parties <sup>6</sup> <input type="checkbox"/> Candidates for that office <sup>6</sup> <input type="checkbox"/> Media

<sup>1</sup> [WAC 434-335-320](#). See also "[Official Logic & Accuracy Tests](#)" on page 103.

<sup>2</sup> [RCW 29A.24.171](#), [RCW 29A.24.181](#). See also "[Special Three-Day Filing Periods](#)" on page 80.

<sup>3</sup> [RCW 29A.64.030](#). See also "[What Initiates a Recount?](#)" on page 154.

<sup>4</sup> Recounts begin when you begin sorting ballots by precinct ([WAC 434-264-090](#)).

<sup>5</sup> [WAC 434-264](#)

<sup>6</sup> Each person entitled to receive notice may attend accompanied by counsel

### Notes



## Less Frequently Used Notices

Not all required notices are found in RCW 29A. The following are some of the notices required for special purpose elections:

- ☐ Notice of election for organization/reorganization of school districts ([RCW 28A.315.275](#))
- ☐ Election on question of incorporation ([RCW 35.02.100](#))
- ☐ Notice of election to disincorporation ([RCW 35.07.050](#))
- ☐ Election of charter adoption for first class cities ([RCW 35.22.070](#))
- ☐ Notice of election for annexation by code city ([RCW 35A.14.070](#))
- ☐ Petition and notice of election for transfer of city harbor ([RCW 36.08.010](#))
- ☐ Notice of election for removal of county seat ([RCW 36.12.030](#))
- ☐ Notice of election for bonds to fund roads and bridges ([RCW 36.76.100](#))
- ☐ Notice of special Primary and special election to fill congressional vacancy ([RCW 29A.28.050](#))

Notes

## Staffing

Base staffing on the anticipated number of returned ballots. Increased staffing for an election requires:

- ☐ **Training** — Signature verification has a mandatory training requirement. Workers need training in public information, office procedures and policy, document management and specific tasks.
- ☐ **Oaths** — Signature checkers and ballot box attendants require oaths.
- ☐ **Equity** — If possible, appointees working at voting centers and staffed deposit sites should represent both major political parties. Obtain a list of potential workers from each party.



**Do not forget to allow for unplanned absences.**

## Official Observers



[RCW 29A.40.100](#), [RCW 29A.12.130](#), [WAC 434-261-020](#),  
[WAC 434-250-110](#)

Major political parties may appoint official observers to watch the election process. Prior to every election, the County Auditor must submit to the major political parties in writing:

- ☐ A request for observers to observe all mail ballot and counting center activities.
- ☐ The request must state the maximum number of observers allowed to observe ballot processing for each processing location.

Notes

County Auditors must provide training for official observers. A best practice is to provide written guidelines for your observers. Anticipate their questions and concerns with a set of written instructions describing:

- ☐ Duties and responsibilities of observers
- ☐ The processes they will observe
- ☐ Legal requirements for the various processes

Be a considerate host:

- ☐ Set the boundaries. Clearly define the areas observers may freely access. If you have restrictions on activities (such as potlucks) make it known early on.
- ☐ Prepare and share staff schedules. Knowing when staff takes breaks or takes lunch will help observers arrange their day.
- ☐ Have sign-in sheets and name badges ready.
- ☐ Provide a space for observers to call their own. Designate a table, locker or shelf for purses, coats, and personal items.
- ☐ Outline the appropriate ways to ask questions. Providing written guidelines allows for effective and accurate information and speeds up communication between observer and the elections department.