



# San Mateo County Election Observer General Guidelines

## COUNTY CONTACT AND VOTING SYSTEM INFORMATION

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Voting System & Vendor: *Democracy Suite*, by Dominion

## PURPOSE

The San Mateo County Registration & Elections Division welcomes all observers. Our Election Observer Program is designed to:

- Provide the public with the opportunity to observe and make suggestions to improve the election process
- Help ensure the integrity and transparency of the election process
- Remove any mystery associated with the election process and procedures
- Build voter confidence and encourage more people to engage in civic life

## PARTICIPATION

To encourage people, including members of the public, many of the election processes described below under "Scope of Observable Activities" are announced in press releases. Additionally, the Registration & Elections Division is active in promoting our work on twitter or Instagram, using the handle @smcvote.

## OVERVIEW

When organizations or individuals express interest in observing election processes, the Registration & Elections Division will contact them to arrange a meeting with the Elections Office. The purpose of this meeting is to:

- Provide participants with information about the time and location of all election processes
- Assign an Elections Specialist to assist the participant in understanding each specific election process

Observers are welcome to visit all processes at the various locations where they occur. Participants interested in visiting Vote Centers are encouraged to arrange their visit with the Registration & Elections Division to obtain a letter of introduction.

Election processes take place at the following sites:

- Registration & Elections Division, 40 Tower Road, San Mateo:  
Petition processing, voting, ballot printing, voting equipment testing, central scanning and counting location for all paper ballots, Vote by Mail ballot eligibility qualification, Vote by Mail ballot processing, provisional/conditional ballot processing.

- Vote Centers in San Mateo County:  
Voting starts E-29 through Election Day.

## **SCOPE OF OBSERVABLE ACTIVITIES**

Individuals who are interested in participating in the Election Observation Program are invited to observe and ask questions about the following:

### **Prior to Election Day**

#### **Petitions**

- View the processing of petition signatures

#### **Security Measures and Materials**

- View the card key access log for the Vote by Mail work area and the equipment warehouse
- View the access logs for the storage vaults for ballots and security seals
- View the Tally Room where votes are tallied on Election Night
- Two-Person-Integrity procedures.

#### **Ballot and Equipment Preparation**

- Ballot creation in Dominion's Election Event Designer (EED)
- Logic and Accuracy Testing (L&A) of voting machines, including:
  - Marking and printing ballots on a ballot marking device ImageCast X (ICX)
  - Printing paper ballots via the Mobile Ballot Printing (MBP) System
  - Scanning and resolving voted paper ballots on the ImageCast Central (ICC) scanners

By law, all voting equipment must be verified for 100% accuracy before it can be used in each election

- Vote Center supplies assembly and distribution

#### **Functional Testing of the ICX Ballot Marking Tablets**

This process ensures the proper operation of every screen, button, connector and other hardware component of the voting machines. Observers may view the testing of:

- ICX ballot marking device, including the Audio Tactile Interface (ATI) which connects with assistive devices

#### **Functional Testing and configuration of Mobile Ballot Printers**

This process consists of loading official ballots onto the Dominion Mobile Ballot Printing System by flash drive. Observers may view the testing of:

- Functionality of full system

- Printing ballots
- Scanning of ballots

### **Vote Center Representative Training**

- Learn Election Day procedures and observe the mandatory training for all Vote Center staff.
- Visit a Training Lab where Vote Center staff get hands-on practice with the voting equipment.

### **Vote by Mail Processing**

Beginning 29 days prior to Election Day, Election Officials can open the return Vote by Mail envelopes containing voted ballots. The ballots are only opened after each voter's qualifications and signature on the outside of the envelope has been verified. Envelope verification begins as soon as the voted ballot envelope is received by the Elections Division. Observers may view the:

- Sorting and scanning of the returned envelopes on the Bluecrest envelope sorting machine known as the Vantage
- Verification of the signature on each returned Vote by Mail ballot
- Removal of the voted ballot from the qualified Vote by Mail envelopes
- Digital scanning of Vote by Mail ballots into the vote counting system called ImageCast Central (ICC)

### **Vote Centers**

Beginning 29 days prior to Election Day, observe voting on the Ballot Marking Tablet or on paper ballots at any of our Vote Centers:

- 3 Vote Centers will be open Tuesday, October 11, 2022 – Tuesday, November 8.
- 6 eleven-day Vote Centers opening on Saturday, October 29, 2022 – Tuesday, November 8
- 36 four-day Vote Centers opening on Saturday, November 5, 2022 – Tuesday, November 8
- 3 Pop-Up Vote Centers opening on Monday, November 7, 2022 – Tuesday, November 8, 2022

All Vote Centers will be open on the weekend before Election Day from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. On Election Day, all Vote Centers will be open from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m.

A complete list of all Vote Centers can be found at [smcvote.org](http://smcvote.org)

## **Election Day**

### **At Vote Centers**

- Visit Vote Centers (during operating hours only.)
- Observe the set-up and/or the closing of the Vote Centers
- Observe the conduct of the election at any Vote Center

### **At the Elections Division Office**

- Watch and listen to our Phone Bank operators as they assist voters who call our Voter Hotline
- Watch and listen to our Vote Center Help & Support (VHS) staff as they provide technical guidance by phone to our Vote Center personnel
- Observe warehouse staff during the return and processing of voting equipment, and Ballot Boxes after the polls close
- Vote tabulation and reporting of semi-official results

### **After Election Day:**

#### **The Official Canvass**

During the Official Canvass, Election Officials will continue to process ballots, and conduct a 1% manual tally to verify the accuracy of the tally. Observers are encouraged to view the following processes:

- Verification of voter eligibility for Conditional, Provisional and Vote by Mail ballots
- Duplication of unreadable paper ballots
- Processing ballots with write-in votes
- Resolving ballots with questions about voter intent
- Ballot reconciliation and accountability
- Random selection of precincts for the One Percent Manual Tally
- One Percent Manual Tally
- Returning voting equipment securely to the warehouse.
- Recounts (If Applicable)

#### **Voter Requested Recount**

The California Secretary of State Regulations define the requirements and procedures for the conduct of a voter requested recount. The Regulations can be found at:

<https://www.sos.ca.gov/administration/regulations/current-regulations/elections/recounts> Observers are subject to the same rules and requirements as all other observable activities listed in this guide.

### **FEEDBACK**

We continually work to improve our methods, procedures and performance, and an observer's thoughtful participation, feedback, insights or suggestions can provide valuable support. Some past recommendations from observers have been implemented, while others remain under future consideration. While some suggestions are not workable, we still want to hear them. We highly encourage all interested observers to call, write, email, or arrange a meeting with our election staff.

## **COVID-19 REQUIREMENTS**

In compliance with Public Health Orders, all elections staff and observers are required to follow key prevention practices when performing or observing elections processes. These include:

- Physical distancing to a minimum of 6 feet
- Use of face coverings by all participants is encouraged
- Frequent handwashing with available sanitizing supplies
- Refraining from attending while experiencing COVID-19 symptoms or having recently been in contact with an individual who has tested positive for COVID-19

## **OBSERVER RESPONSIBILITIES**

- Checking in at each location they wish to observe
- Wearing a badge identifying them as an observer
- Maintaining a professional manner
- Ensuring that they do not interfere with the election process
- Following established county observation rules and policies

## **OBSERVER RIGHTS**

- Observe the proceedings at Vote Centers, including opening and closing procedures
- Obtain information from the index of voters maintained in electronic format
- Take notes on any election procedures
- View election-related activities at the central counting site on Election Day
- View the canvass of the vote activities following the election
- View Vote by Mail, Provisional and Conditional ballot processing
- Ask questions of Vote Center representatives or voters at Vote Centers, providing they do not interfere with any part of the voting process
- Ask questions of supervisors at the central counting site providing they do not interfere with the conduct of the election procedures
- Conduct exit polling provided it is conducted 25 feet away from the entrance to the voting room or Vote Center

## **OBSERVER LIMITATIONS**

- Interfere in the judgment of an elections official or the conduct of the election
- Physically handle any voting materials or equipment
- Directly question the staff performing their work without prior permission
- Communicate with voters by encouraging them to vote for or against a person or measure, or regarding the voter's qualifications to vote within 100 feet of the entrance to the Vote Center, a Ballot Dropbox, or the central counting site
- Display any election material or wear campaign badges, buttons or apparel

- Directly challenge a voter's right to vote – only a member of a precinct board may challenge a voter, based on evidence presented
- Wear the uniform of a peace officer, a private guard, or security personnel
- Carry a firearm
- Bring items such as purses, packs or backpacks into the Vote Center or central counting site.
- Sit at the official worktables or view confidential voter information on any work terminal
- Move or rearrange any furniture in a Vote Center or the central counting facility
- Talk to or attempt to stop the central counting site workers while they are processing ballots
- Use personal phones or computers inside voting rooms or in the central counting work area
- Use blue or black ink pens anywhere voted ballots are present
- Make physical contact with election personnel
- Eat or drink in a Vote Center or the central counting work area
- Assist in operations at any Vote Center or the central counting site
- Prevent any observers from viewing materials or an election process
- Enter secure areas without the explicit permission of an elections official

## **ELECTIONS OFFICIAL RESPONSIBILITIES**

- Establish security rules for public observations. Examples include the use of sign-in sheets, identification badges and escorts
- Maintain the integrity of the administration of the election
- Determine observer misconduct or interference, or ask an observer who does not follow observation rules to leave the premises
- Restrict the number of observers permitted in a room to prevent interference with the administration of the election
- Use discretion in determining a sufficiently close distance for observers to stand from the process they wish to observe
- Require observers to be quiet inside the observation area
- Use discretion to determine how and to whom observers may pose questions and challenges during the observation process. Examples include written or verbal, or end-of-day review
- Prohibit the use of cell phones, cameras, audio or video equipment or electronic devices
- Provide notice to the public of dates, times and locations of election-related activities that may be observed by the public as required by law. For example, election officials are required to provide notice for Vote by Mail ballot processing (48 hours) and the post-election one percent manual tally (five days)

## **ELECTIONS OFFICIAL LIMITATIONS**

Election Officials may not delay or interrupt scheduled operations and processes due to the presence of an observer.

**Check-in and Arrange Escort**

Observers must sign in at reception and receive a visitor's badge. The badge must be worn at all times while in the elections facility. All observers will be escorted by at least one staff member.

**Observer Interference**

Observer activity is limited to witnessing whether proper procedures are followed. Observers may not interfere with the observed process. Touching of election-related materials, equipment or elections staff is not permitted.

Observers may approach sufficiently close to the observed process to determine reasonably whether a challenge of the process is warranted, but no closer than **6 ft.** Observers may not directly question the staff performing their work.

The number of observers and the location of the viewing area may be restricted if the elections official determines it interferes with the observed process.

**Noise Disturbance**

You may talk briefly and quietly with your escort, but please move other discussions outside the observation area. Once the observed process has begun, disruptive conversation or comments are prohibited. Cell phones must be set to silent or turned off. No phone calls are allowed, except in the lobby.

**Posing Questions and Challenges**

Before and during the observed process, you may quietly ask questions of the escort. You may not directly communicate with any staff member who is engaged in the observed process. In many cases the escort will be unable to answer the question so written questions and comments may be submitted to the Elections Manager throughout each process. All challenges must be logged in the manner provided by law. If a challenge unduly impedes or interferes with the work process, challenges shall be discontinued.

**Limited Use of Electronic Equipment in Work Areas**

Photographs or videos of a process are permitted with prior, written, permission. No photos or videos may be taken of staff members without consent of the individual. The escort will ask for consent on your behalf. No photos or videos may be taken of confidential voter information, including but not limited to voter signatures. No audio recorders are allowed. Use of a silent electronic device for texting or internet access is permitted.

**Special Rules for the Ballot Canvass Work Area**

Observers may enter the ballot canvass area only during canvass operations and only in the presence of an escort. Inside the ballot canvass work area, no phone conversation is allowed. Observers may get close enough to observe the information on the workstation, including the computer screen, if it does not interfere with the worker. All questions about content or procedures must be submitted in writing.