

ELECTIONS

General Information

Department Head: Melissa T. Johnson
Location: Shaw Building, 158 Worth Street, Asheboro, NC 27203
Phone Numbers: Main Number – 318-6900
Melissa Johnson – 318-6902
Fax – 318-6903

Mission

To promote consistent administration of all elections and campaign finance laws, rules, and regulations.

Summary

The election process in Randolph County is administered through fair and equal application of election laws for all participants in the electoral process. As part of this effort, the Board of Elections strives to provide important information to the public regarding the administration of elections in our county and state. There are five allocated positions for this department.

Overview

The Elections Office is located in the Shaw Building, which is shared with the Register of Deeds and Veterans Services. Elections is housed in the back of the building and also utilizes the space in the annex immediately behind the Shaw Building. The annex is used for storage of some equipment, supplies, and old records, and serves as an early voting site. It is also used for training of election officials. A warehouse located near the Maintenance Department houses the majority of voting equipment, and is used for testing and repair of voting equipment.

Elections is staffed by four full-time employees and one half-time employee, and as many as 25 seasonal workers may work during election times. The office has a three-member board. The members are appointed by the State Board of Elections in June of odd-numbered years; thus, they serve two-year terms. The selections are made from people nominated by the state chairs of the political parties. Only two of the members may be from the same political party. Traditionally, two members are appointed from the governor's party and one from the other major party. No one may serve on a county board if he or she holds an elected office, is a party official other than a convention delegate, is a candidate or campaign manager or treasurer, or is related to a candidate.

The county board elects one of its members as chair and one as secretary. It is required to meet at certain times. For example, the law specifies the date for the organizational meeting and for the meeting to appoint precinct officials—and meets generally monthly as business requires. The board employs a director of elections to manage the office. Dismissal of the director requires the approval of the executive director of the state board.

The election board sets precinct lines and arranges for a polling place in each precinct. They provide precinct officials with supplies, advertise elections, examine petitions for elections

and for candidates and prepare ballots. The deadline to register to vote is 25 days before an election. State laws and regulations dictate specific times and details election offices must advertise close of books, election dates and board meetings.

Also, the board hears appeals from people who have been denied registration by precinct or other registration officials, hears challenges to the qualifications of voters who have registered, issues absentee ballots, receives local campaign contribution reports, determines election results and certifies winners, and does all the other things necessary to register voters and hold elections. The county board may investigate alleged election misconduct in the county and report the findings to the state board.

The Director of Elections must be state certified within three years of taking office. The State Board of Elections conducts ongoing training classes. Individuals must attend a series of 12 classes and pass an exam on each to be certified. These classes are held around the state, and some are set up as webinars. Other courses are offered from time to time on such things as changes in elections laws.

The Elections Office's computers are a part of the County's computer network. When a new road is created in Randolph County, Information Technology sends a map with district information to Elections, who then enters that information into the State database. The same procedure is followed when a road is closed or changes name or when the county gets a new zip code.

The Strategic Technology Committee has recommended that Elections' computer system be a stand-alone system because of their tie-in to the State's computer system. When the County's system is down, Elections cannot communicate with the State database because they are connected to the State through the County's system.

Service Area: Campaign Finance

Mission

To provide information about the requirements, procedures and statutes governing campaign reporting.

Summary

Information on candidate contributions, committees and treasurers is collected; all candidate filings for upcoming elections are recorded; filing fee payments by candidates for elections are collected; reporting schedules for the different types of committees are posted; regulation advice for political advertising is provided; workshops relating to campaign reporting are facilitated; educational seminars are attended relevant to changes in election laws or policy procedures; required forms and supplies to candidates, treasurers or committees are provided; and election and voter registration information sought by candidates, treasurers or committees is distributed.

Operations

The Elections Office strives to provide public disclosure of campaigns, assistance to committees providing disclosure, and assurance that campaign finance laws are followed. Efforts are made to address questions asked frequently of our staff and to provide clear and complete explanations of many of the processes. Staff provides detailed, consistent instructions to committees so that we have consistent record keeping for every candidate running for office in Randolph County.

The term “candidate” refers to any individual who has filed a notice of candidacy for public office or a petition requesting to be a candidate. It also refers to an individual who has been certified as a nominee of a political party. A candidate may be partisan or nonpartisan.

The filing period usually begins at noon on the first Monday in February and ends at noon on the last Friday of February for most elected offices. The filing fee varies according to the office sought. If it is a salaried position, the filing fee is 1% of the yearly salary. If the position receives fees, the filing fee is between \$5 and \$20, depending upon the office and or the fee set by a municipality. Filing fees received by the Elections Office go into the County’s General Fund.

When a candidate files for office, the candidate must give his legal name and indicate how he wants his name to appear on the ballot. Elections staff verify candidates’ qualifications: a registered voter, place of residence and length of time there, and party affiliation and residential eligibility. The State Board of Elections office publishes a Campaign Finance Manual to help each candidate understand and follow complicated finance and election laws.

One of the biggest misconceptions candidates have when running for office concerns their political committee. Many candidates do not believe they have a committee. A candidate committee may be only the candidate, but it is a committee and, therefore, subject to the regulations of candidate political committees.

The appointment of a treasurer is the first step, along with the completion of the Statement of Organization and the Certification of Financial Accounting. A treasurer assumes all responsibilities for the requirements of the Campaign Reporting Act once a candidate files for office. A candidate may appoint himself or any individual, with the exception of the candidate's spouse, to serve as treasurer.

An individual appointed as treasurer has several vital responsibilities. This individual must maintain all financial records of the "committee." These records should document every transaction of the committee, including all documentation supporting contributions and expenditures. In addition, the treasurer is responsible for the timely filing of all required reports.

Candidate and party committees may be exempt from the reporting requirements if they certify that they will not receive or expend more than \$1000 during an election cycle. If a candidate raises or spends more than \$1,000, he must submit quarterly reports showing all contributions and expenses. The Director of Elections audits all the numbers on the reports for accuracy.

If a candidate's committee has not filed under the threshold, disclosure reports will be required. These reports can be filed either on paper or electronically. There are more than 50 forms in our candidate disclosure filing system. Most committees will use fewer than ten of these forms, but there is a form for all transactions, if needed.

Contributions are any advance, purchase, conveyance, deposit, distribution, transfer of funds, loan, payment, gift, pledge or subscription of money or anything of value *whatsoever* to a candidate, political committee, political party or referendum committee. This also refers to any contract, agreement or promise of an obligation to contribute to support or oppose the nomination, election, or passage of a ballot measure.

The election office must regulate in-kind contributions. This donation is not monetary in nature. It must be reported on required disclosure reports. The contribution may be a good or service. For example, an individual or committee may supply "cups and napkins" for an event. The "fair market value" of the cups and napkins would be the amount of the contribution and would add toward the maximum contribution limitation.

There are very few restrictions on how a committee may spend their money. However, all expenditures must be reported, along with the specific purpose of the expenditure. The limitations on expenditures exist mainly in contributing to other political committees.

North Carolina law dictates regulations for campaign literature and signage along state roads (rights-of-way) and service areas, and disallows such campaigning within 50 feet of a polling place. Candidates are required to remove their campaign signs and literature after the election. Some cities have ordinances that indicating how soon these materials must be removed. Elections staff have removed some signage from polling places in the past after receiving complaints.

The objective of Campaign Reporting is the regulation of contributions and expenditures of political campaigns through complete and full disclosure. Our office is committed to assisting committees in meeting this objective. We welcome any comments or recommendations that further our common objective.

Service Area: General Elections

Mission

To maintain the integrity of elections and ensure accuracy of voting results through equitable application of election laws for Randolph County voters and all participants in the electoral process.

Summary

The Elections office follows policies and procedures developed by the NC State Board of Elections to conduct business daily. Voter registration applications are received and accurately recorded; equipment is sustained and updated for daily production and election duties; new voter registration cards are mailed; voter registration files are maintained; no-contact notices and confirmation notices required by N.C. General Statutes are mailed; voters who no longer reside in Randolph County are canceled or removed; ballots and program tabulators for elections in Randolph County are designed; precinct boundaries for uniform voter registration counts are preserved; required forms and supplies are provided to precincts on Election Day; communication with polling places on Election Day is arranged.

Educational seminars relevant to changes in election laws or policy procedures are attended; national and state election administration certification and memberships are maintained; election and voter registration information sought by general public or elected officials is distributed; required media advertisement pursuant to N.C. General Statutes is published; required County Board meetings, including daily absentee conferences and election canvass are conducted.

The National Voter Registration Act established procedures to increase the registration of eligible citizens as voters in elections for federal office, to protect the integrity of the political process, and to assure an accurate voter registration roll.

Operations

The Elections staff handles all aspects of voter registration and general elections. The final responsibility for the conduct of elections in North Carolina belongs to the State Board of Elections.

To be eligible to register to vote, a person must be 18 years old by the next Election Day. Persons may register by coming into the Elections Office, or they may, by telephone or email, request that a voter registration application form be sent to them. They may also obtain a form through the State Board of Elections website. Citizens may also get forms from such agencies as the DMV, Social Services, public libraries, Employment Security Commission, Mental Health, WIC (program in Health Department), military recruitment offices, and high schools. These agencies are supposed to ask clients if they want to register to vote or if they need to make a change to their registration.

When registered voter moves out of Randolph County and registers to vote in a different county, that county sends Randolph a cancellation notice so that person can be removed from

records here. Elections also receives a monthly list of deaths and felony convictions from the State so that these people can be removed from the list of registered voters.

The State Board of Elections has a statewide database that looks for duplicates so that individuals cannot be registered to vote in more than one county. This situation might occur if someone who is registered in one county moves and registers in the new county but does not tell the new county he was registered in another county previously.

Periodically, the staff prints and sends out voter verification cards to everyone who has registered to vote or who has made a change in registration since the last mailing. If a card is not sent back, it is assumed that the information on it is correct. If it comes back with a forwarding address or with changes made on the card, a new verification card is then sent out to verify that information. If a card comes back as undeliverable with no forwarding address, a confirmation notice must, by law, be sent to the same address. If this notice comes back as undeliverable, that voter is moved to inactive status.

The Elections Office employs up to 25 seasonal workers who work during election times. Fewer are needed when the election is not a presidential election. These temporary employees generally work September-December. They handle the absentee voting at the Elections Office and at any satellite locations, key in voter registration data, process absentee requests by mail, prepare Election Day supplies, do canvassing audits, research provisional ballots to determine their validity, unpack and sort out polling place supplies, and assist with general clerical duties.

Most of the County's voting equipment was purchased in 2006 from Election Systems & Supplies and includes 38 M100 electronic tabulation machines. Ten new DS200 electronic tabulators were purchased in 2015-2016 for use at one-stop early voting. Election results are delivered to the Board of Elections Office then transmitted to Raleigh, where they are posted on the State Board's website. The Randolph County website provides a link to the SBOE website so that anyone can see the results on their own computer instantaneously. The M100s and DS200s use specialized marking paper ballots. These ballots can be printed only by certified vendors in the United States.

Elections staff and employees from the County's Information Technology Department do all the public testing of the tabulators before each election. County Maintenance employees deliver the machines and other equipment to the polling places on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday prior to Election Day. Then on Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday following the election, they pick up the machines and return them to the warehouse behind the Maintenance building. On Election Day, IT and Maintenance staff assists in a variety of ways, including doing repairs on the tabulators.

Federal ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) regulations require that all polling places must have at least one voting machine to accommodate voters with various disabilities. The Elections Office purchased 48 AutoMarks in 2006 to accommodate all handicapped voters. The machine "marks" the ballot for the voter according to the voter's preference, as recorded on a touch screen. The AutoMark provides sight and hearing assistance as well.

Every four years, the Elections Office completes an extensive survey for each polling site to assess accessibility and to determine any improvements that may be needed to maintain ADA compliance. All this information, plus photographs of the building exteriors and interiors and the parking lots, is sent to the State Board of Elections for review.

There are approximately 90,000 registered voters in Randolph County and 22 voting precincts, each with a designated polling place. Any organization receiving tax dollars (school, fire station, town hall) is required to allow the County to use its building as a polling place. If the facility is a church or community building, the County must obtain permission to use it and may be required to pay the organization for its use. The Elections Office holds a key for most polling places; otherwise, a contact person will unlock for the election officials and Maintenance staff. The County provides cell phones for every chief judge at each polling place to communicate on Election Day.

On Saturday night prior to each election, the Elections Director and staff download updated poll books and prepare laptop computers for voting on Election Day. Chief Judges come by the office on Monday to pick up the laptops, tabulators and ballots.

On Election Day, the Board of Elections members travel to different polling sites during the day to assist with any questions or problems that may occur. They can call a special meeting, if needed, to resolve any problem that arises. They meet near 3 p.m. to tabulate all absentee ballots.

After a primary election, the second place candidate may ask for a run-off election, if the number of votes he garnered is within a certain percentage of the number of votes received by the first place candidate. (This percentage varies according to the office being sought). If needed, a second primary (or run-off election) is held either seven or ten weeks after the primary.

Randolph Elections has four performance measures in the General Election Service Area. Our first goal is to accurately maintain all voter registration records. We measure the accuracy through a two-part detailed program of verifying each registration card after the data is keyed into SEIMS voter registration software, then auditing the data by running daily verification status reports. Elections specialists compare these printouts of the voter information to the original applications for exactness in recorded information.

Another measurement is to conduct fair and accessible elections for all voters. We are improving our success by surveying precinct structures with a comprehensive questionnaire assessing the qualifications the buildings. In 2012, our results showed that some polling places were not 100% compliant, but we used temporary relief on Election Day. In 2013, the County Board of Elections followed an extensive procedure approved by the State to combine 40 precincts into 22, and to move into polling places that are all ADA compliant.

One form of relief to help disabled voters who may have trouble entering a polling place building is to offer curbside voting. This allows voters to mark their ballot inside a vehicle. The ballot is placed inside a privacy folder and taken into the building to be cast into the voting tabulator.

Performance Measurements

Goal: Maintain precise Voter Registration files.

When registration forms are received in the Elections office, one employee keys in the information from the form, then another employee checks the card against what has been entered and corrects any information that was keyed in incorrectly. The keyed information is printed on cards once a month and mailed out to the registered voters. Measures for this goal are:

- Timely processing of State reports and death certificates.
- Timely processing of voter registration information received in person and through the mail.
- Number of verification cards mailed.
- Number of voter registration transactions.

Goal: Conduct fair and accessible elections for all voters.

- Number of elections per fiscal year.
- Total ballots cast in November General Election.
- Total ballots cast in all elections (fiscal year).
- Voter turnout - % of registered voters voting in November Election.
- Number of election judges recruited & trained for General Election.

Goal: Reduce wait times at Election Day polling places.

- Total voting at one-stop early voting sites.
- Percentage of total voting at one-stop early voting sites.

Goal: Increase use of voter services to improve registration and voter involvement during all elections.

- Number of voter awareness programs concerning election laws and voting.

Service Area: One-Stop (In-Person Absentee Voting)

Mission

To offer in-person absentee voting to all qualified voters of Randolph County who request this service.

Summary

The number of “early” voters during the in-person absentee voting period is projected; recording of all absentee requests and issuing of the correct ballot to each voter is performed; sufficient Election employees, supplies and ballots to meet the needs of the voters are provided; a safe and secure voting environment to each voter is provided; all worn election equipment is repaired or replaced; all required media advertisement from NC General Statutes is published; program ballots are designed in timely manner to permit voters to cast and mail ballots to the Election Office before voting deadline; educational seminars relevant to changes in election laws or policy procedures are attended.

Operations

In-person absentee voting, also known as one-stop voting, has been required by North Carolina law since 2000. This early voting period begins 19 days prior to the election and ends at 1 p.m. on the Saturday prior to the election. It is open to any qualified vote. Early voting in Randolph County is required to be offered only at the Elections Office, but satellite locations are usually open as well. The Board of Elections must approve a one-stop implementation plan before every election, which details the hours and locations of early voting. Generally, early voting is also offered at the Randolph County Office Building, the Randolph Community Services Building in Archdale, and the Randleman Community Center.

Offering one-stop voting at a satellite location presents security problems. Election supplies must be kept there and must be secured for the duration of the early voting period. One solution to this problem is to have the locks on the doors at the locations rekeyed, with the Elections staff having the only keys to it. The ballots are kept in a locked cabinet at night.

Employees working with one-stop voting rely on computers to verify that each voter requesting an absentee ballot is registered to vote in Randolph County. The employee then records via computer that that person has voted.

Most political district boundaries follow precinct lines. For example, Randolph County has two NC State House districts, the 70th and 78th. Everybody in precinct “A” votes for the 70th House candidate, while every voter in precinct “B” votes for the 78th House candidate. At our one-stop sites, voters from all over the county will converge at one location to cast their ballots. One of our goals for the One-Stop service area is to provide ballots with correct districts to each voter. The office can measure the success by reconciling ballots cast by districts to the number of voters in that district who voted in the one-stop period.

One-stop voting in Randolph County has worked very well. In 2000, a presidential election year, 5,503 voters took advantage of this service. In 2002, 3,200 voters participated in the one-stop voting. In 2012, the last presidential election, nearly 26,000 voters took advantage

of one-stop voting. One-stop voting has become more popular every year that it has been available, and it continues to grow.

Service Area: Precinct Training

Mission

Educate poll workers on election laws and voting procedures to ensure every precinct conducts fair and impartial elections.

Summary

Training of every poll worker before each election is conducted; precinct manuals are supplied to Chief Judges, Judges and Assistants for Election Day procedures and actions; all poll workers are notified of training dates before each election; “supply bags” are prepared for all polling places before elections; supplies and forms for each precinct are maintained; educational seminars relevant to changes in election laws or policy procedures are attended; and payment to each poll worker is provided in a timely manner.

Operations

The Board of Elections appoints a chief judge and two judges for each precinct during the third week in August in odd-numbered years. The appointments are for two years. The appointees must be selected from names recommended by the county political party chairs. No more than two of the three precinct officials may be from the same political party. Typically, the chief judge and one judge are from the governor’s party, and the second judge is from the other major party. The board may also appoint two or more assistants for each precinct.

The chief judge earns \$150 plus mileage for returning equipment and ballots after the polls close. The other two judges receive \$125 and the assistants \$115. All poll workers must be residents of the county. Of the chief judge and the two judges, only one may be an individual from outside the precinct.

No one may serve as a chief judge, a judge, or an assistant who is an elected official, a candidate for election, a political party official, or a manager or a treasurer for a candidate or party. Also, no one may serve as a chief judge, a judge, or an assistant in the same precinct in which his or her spouse, child, child’s spouse, brother, or sister already serves. Further, if the precinct official’s spouse, parent, child, brother, or sister is a candidate in a primary or general election, the precinct official may not serve at that election.

During the weeks prior to Election Day, the Elections staff trains poll workers to ensure that every precinct conducts fair and impartial elections. The training session takes about 2 hours, and each poll worker receives an election precinct manual detailing Election Day duties and procedures. A number of poll workers attend training to learn how to set up computer equipment and use the electronic poll book software on Election Day. Poll workers are paid \$15 for attending each training session. Elections staff train an average of 200 poll workers for each election, but the number may be as much as 300.

Precinct workers arrive at the polling place prior to the opening of the polls by 6 am and stay until the work is finished after polls close, generally around 8:30 pm. State law requires that precinct workers remain at their post all day. If they have to leave, for whatever reason, they may not return to work.

Generally, the chief judge and the judges conduct elections in their precinct. They take charge of registration records and other election materials before the election, open the polls on election day, check the registration of people who come to vote, mark the registration record and the electronic poll book (laptop), give ballots to the voters and instruct them in using the voting machine, hear challenges to voters' registration, count or supervise the counting of the votes, and report the results to the county board. They deal directly with the voters, and their conduct most directly influences whether the voters think the election has been conducted properly and efficiently.

The chief judge at each polling place handles all spoiled ballots, provisional ballots, transfers, and any other problems that occur during the day. A spoiled ballot is one that must be discarded because the voter has made a mistake in marking it. A voter is allowed a maximum of 3 spoiled ballots. All spoiled ballots must be kept and accounted for through the election canvass.

Precinct officials should not turn away any person who presents himself to vote. Anyone who wishes to vote must be allowed the opportunity to do so. Most voters will be properly listed in the registration records and will vote the regular ballot. Some individuals may not be listed in the precinct's records, however. Perhaps the registration records are wrong, the person has come to the wrong precinct, the person is not registered to vote at all or some other problem exists. Whatever the reason, the person is not to be turned away; instead, he is to be offered the opportunity to vote a provisional ballot.

A provisional ballot is one cast by an individual whose name is not in that precinct's poll book even though the voter resides in that precinct. All provisional ballots go into a sealed envelope, and each one must be verified later by Elections staff or it does not count.

If a person asserts that he is registered, the precinct official should contact the Elections Office to check the voter registration records there. If the office has no record, the precinct official will be instructed to have the provisional voter fill out a new registration application form and affirm on a separated form that he did in fact submit the application for registration in a timely way.

A voter who moves from one county to another in North Carolina is not eligible to vote in the new county until he registers in that county. Sometimes, however, voters will move from one precinct to another within the same county. In that case, they remain eligible to vote. They are supposed to notify the county board as soon as they move, but voters do not always do that. Instead, they may show up to vote at their new polling place and want to vote even though they have not reported their move. Where and how they vote depends on when they moved and whether they show up at the precinct for their old address or the precinct for their new address.

Precinct officials have only one duty in connection with absentee voting. On Election Day the county board will give each precinct chief judge two copies of the list of voters in that precinct who have voted by absentee ballot. One copy of the list is to be posted at the voting

place. As soon as the list is received, the chief judge is to call out the name of each voter on it and enter an “A” in the appropriate place on the voter’s registration record.