



Election Officials Manual

Chapter 9: Election Ballots

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I. Introduction

This chapter covers ballot preparation, proofing, and printing. Questions about the content of this chapter should be directed to Elections@Michigan.gov.

II. Ballot preparation, proofing, and Michigan's ballot production standards

All ballots must be prepared in conformance with Michigan's *Ballot Production Standards*.¹ Adherence to the standards is mandatory for all election officials and vendors.

After preparation, the clerk should carefully proof each ballot to ensure that the ballots conform to all technical and legal requirements and that the ballots are free of errors and omissions.

Ballots prepared by the county election commission

Ballots prepared for use in federal, state, or countywide elections, as well as certain school district elections, are prepared, proofed, and printed under the authority of the county election commission.

A county election commission may delegate all ballot proofing responsibilities to the county clerk or the county clerk's staff.

Ballots prepared by the local election commission

Ballots prepared for use in city, township, village, and certain school district elections are printed by the authority of the city or township election commission.

A city or township election commission may delegate all ballot proofing responsibilities to the city or township clerk or their staff.

¹ Available at <https://www.michigan.gov/sos/-/media/Project/Websites/sos/01mcalpine/BallotStandards.pdf>.



Ballot proofing best practices

After ballots are prepared by the appropriate election commission, but before they are printed, the printer provides proof copies of the ballots to the commission. The commission is responsible for verifying that the various proof ballots are free of errors and omissions. Commissions should conduct the following checks:

- Ensure that all office, candidates, and ballot questions that should appear on the ballot actually appear on the ballot.
- Where appropriate, verify ballots conform to precinct splits, and that the precinct splits are properly documented.
- Ensure that the ballot heading includes the following information:
 - The text "OFFICIAL BALLOT"
 - The election type for which the ballot will be used
 - The date of the election
 - The name of the county, in the form "[NAME] County, Michigan"
 - The name of the city or township in which the ballot will be used
 - The number of the precinct where the ballot will be used
- Ensure section headers are correctly printed. Examples of section headers include: PARTISAN SECTION, NONPARTISAN SECTION and PROPOSAL SECTION.
- Ensure that offices and ballot questions are properly divided. Examples of dividers include: STATE, COUNTY, CITY and TOWNSHIP.
- Ensure that office titles are properly printed. Examples of office titles include: CLERK, TREASURER and TRUSTEE.
- Ensure that the notification of the number of individuals to be elected to each office on the ballot is correctly printed. An example of the notification of the number of persons to be elected is: "Vote for not more than 1."
- Ensure that the placement of candidate names is correct, that the form and spelling of each candidate name is correct, that the candidate names are properly rotated, and that any special ballot designations are properly printed.



- Ensure that ballot questions are properly laid out and the ballot question wording appears exactly as the wording was approved.

Candidate review of ballot proofs

Upon receipt of the ballot proofs, the election commission should immediately send a copy of each ballot proof on which a candidate's name appears to the candidate for review. If the candidate provides an email, the county clerk must email the proof ballot to the candidate. For any state election, the county clerk must sign an affidavit stating that each candidate appearing on a ballot within the county clerk's county received a copy of the proof for every ballot on which they appear. The affidavit must list the candidates to whom the proofs were mailed, the addresses at which each candidate was mailed a proof, and the date on which the proofs were mailed to each candidate.

Candidates who receive a proof must make any corrections by 4 p.m. on the fifth business day after the proof copy was mailed or emailed. After the fifth business day, the county clerk may begin printing.

Bureau of Elections review of ballot proofs

Upon receipt of the ballot proofs, the election commission should also immediately send a copy of each ballot proof to the Bureau of Elections (BOE) for review. BOE inspects the form of the ballot proof for technical sufficiency. BOE does not verify the substance of the proof – BOE does not check for problems including a failure to print all offices or ballot questions that should appear on the ballot, that candidates' names are spelled correctly, or that ballot questions are properly worded. If the proofs are technically sufficient, BOE approves the ballots. If the proofs are technically insufficient, BOE informs the relevant election commission of the errors and the steps the commission must take to correct the errors. The commission must resubmit the corrected proofs to BOE for technical approval before the ballots can be printed.

Printing of ballots

Once BOE has verified the technical sufficiency of the ballots, and the window for candidate corrections has lapsed, the election commission should proceed with ballot printing.



Final inspection by county election commission

After ballots are printed, the county election commission conducts a final inspection of the ballot. If the ballots pass the final inspection, the ballots are wrapped and delivered to the county clerk. The county clerk then delivers the ballots to the cities and townships in the county. If convenient, the county clerk can arrange for the printer to send the ballots directly to the local jurisdictions after the election commission's final review. The printer must not ship ballots to local jurisdictions before the county election commission has conducted the final ballot inspection. As a final check, city and township clerks should carefully inspect the ballots upon receipt to ensure that the county election commission has not overlooked an error or omission on the ballot.

Ballot error or omission correction after ballots have been printed

The ballot proofing procedures are designed to identify and correct all errors and omissions appearing on ballot proofs prior to printing. If a ballot error or omission is identified after the ballots have been printed, the county election commission must reprint the ballots before the election. The commission should contact BOE immediately for further instruction. Ballot errors or omissions may allow a candidate to petition for an election to be rerun by mail at the jurisdiction's expense if a defective ballot is found after the polls open on Election Day.

III. Candidate name rotations

In certain instances, candidate names must be rotated on the ballot to eliminate the chance that a candidate may be unfairly advantaged or disadvantaged due to the candidate's position on the ballot. Under the rotation requirements, the order in which candidate names are listed on the ballot is rotated from one precinct to the next.

Rotation requirements

The rotation requirement depends on the office and election type.



Nonpartisan primary ballots and nonpartisan general election ballots

Candidate names in a nonpartisan primary or general election must be rotated elections when the number of candidates running for an office exceeds the number of candidates to be elected to the office. If the number of candidates appearing on the ballot in a nonpartisan general election is equal to or less than the number of candidates to be elected to the office, the candidates' names are listed alphabetically. In most, but not all, cases where the number of candidates seeking a nonpartisan office is equal to or less than the number of vacant positions, the office does not appear on the ballot. In other words, if a nonpartisan race appears on the ballot, candidate names must be rotated.

Partisan primary ballots

Candidate names in a partisan primary must be rotated when the number of candidates running for nomination for an office at the primary exceeds the number of candidates to be nominated to seek that office in the general election. If the number of candidates seeking office is equal to or less than the number of candidates to be nominated at the primary, candidate names should be listed on the ballot alphabetically and do not need to be rotated.

Partisan general election ballots

Candidate names are not rotated on general election ballots. Candidates are listed alphabetically under the appropriate party header.

Rotation procedure

The election official responsible for printing ballots should arrange candidate rotations with the printer. As a starting point, candidates' names are placed in alphabetical order. With each subsequent rotation, the name in the first position at the top of column is shifted to the last position at the bottom of the column. The rotations must be planned to ensure that the various precinct rotations are, to the extent possible, evenly distributed throughout the city, township or county.



IV. Office order

When ordering offices on the ballot, the election commission must follow the order specified by Michigan Election Law, which is set out in this chapter. Office titles must be printed in boldface uppercase type.

Partisan ballot

State and federal offices

- ELECTORS OF PRESIDENT AND VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES (general election ballot only)
- GOVERNOR AND LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR (lieutenant governor appears only on the general election ballot)
- SECRETARY OF STATE
- ATTORNEY GENERAL
- UNITED STATES SENATOR
- REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS
- STATE SENATOR
- REPRESENTATIVE IN STATE LEGISLATURE
- MEMBER OF THE STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION
- REGENT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
- TRUSTEE OF MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY
- GOVERNOR OF WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY

County offices

- COUNTY EXECUTIVE (if elected in county)
- PROSECUTING ATTORNEY
- SHERIFF
- CLERK (if the office has not been combined with the office of register of deeds)
- CLERK/REGISTER OF DEEDS (if the offices of county clerk and register of deeds have been combined)



- TREASURER
- REGISTER OF DEEDS (if office has not been combined with the office of county clerk)
- AUDITOR (if elected in county)
- MINE INSPECTOR (if elected in county)
- COUNTY ROAD COMMISSIONER (if elected in county)
- DRAIN COMMISSIONER
- CORONER (if elected in county)
- SURVEYOR (if elected in county)
- COUNTY COMMISSIONER

City offices

The order in which city offices appear on the ballot is governed by the city charter.

Township offices

- SUPERVISOR
- CLERK
- TREASURER
- TRUSTEE
- CONSTABLE (if elected in township)
- PARK COMMISSIONER (if elected in township)

Precinct delegate positions

- DELEGATE TO COUNTY CONVENTION

Nonpartisan ballot

Judicial offices

- JUSTICE OF SUPREME COURT
- JUDGE OF COURT OF APPEALS
- JUDGE OF CIRCUIT COURT



- JUDGE OF PROBATE COURT
- JUDGE OF PROBATE DISTRICT COURT
- JUDGE OF DISTRICT COURT
- JUDGE OF MUNICIPAL COURT

Community college and intermediate school district offices

- COMMUNITY COLLEGE BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEMBER
- INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL DISTRICT BOARD MEMBER

City offices

The order in which city offices appear on the ballot is governed by the city charter.

Township offices

- TOWNSHIP LIBRARY BOARD DIRECTOR (if elected in township)

Village Offices

- PRESIDENT
- CLERK (if elected in village)
- TREASURER (if elected in village)
- TRUSTEE or COUNCIL (per village charter)
- VILLAGE LIBRARY BOARD DIRECTOR (if elected in village)

School district and district library board offices

- LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICT BOARD MEMBER
- METROPOLITAN DISTRICT OFFICER
- DISTRICT LIBRARY BOARD MEMBER

Other offices

Township Library Board Director, a nonpartisan office, is placed after all judicial offices on optical scan ballots. Precinct Delegate positions are placed after all other partisan offices. (Precinct Delegate positions appear on the August primary ballot only.) The order and placement of city offices on a



primary ballot are governed by the charter of the city involved in the primary.

