NEW MEXICO

HOW TO BECOME A POLL WORKER

PROTECTING THE RIGHT TO VOTE

New Mexico
Poll Worker Toolkit
# Table of Contents

I. Introduction ................................................................................................................. 1  
II. Overview of New Mexico’s Election System ................................................................. 1  
III. Description of Roles .................................................................................................. 3  
   a. Categories of Precinct Board Member/Responsibilities and Duties ...................... 3  
   b. Qualifications ........................................................................................................... 4  
   c. Party Affiliation ....................................................................................................... 5  
   d. Term of Office .......................................................................................................... 5  
   e. Compensation .......................................................................................................... 5  
IV. Application Process .................................................................................................... 6  
   a. How to Apply ............................................................................................................. 6  
   b. Deadlines for Filing .................................................................................................. 7  
V. After Applying ............................................................................................................. 7  
   a. Following Up ............................................................................................................. 7  
   b. Overcoming Objections ......................................................................................... 8  
VI. Training Resources .................................................................................................... 10  
VII. Election Protection Organizations in New Mexico ..................................................... 10  
VIII. High-Priority Issues ................................................................................................. 11  
   a. Options for Voters Without Proper ID ................................................................. 11  
   b. Voters Who Have Moved ...................................................................................... 11  
   c. Provisional Ballots .................................................................................................. 11  
   d. Right to Voting Assistance ................................................................................. 12  
   e. Voter Mistakes on Ballots ...................................................................................... 12  
   f. Voting Machine Breakdowns ............................................................................... 12  
   g. Voters Standing in the Line by 7:00 p.m. Must Be Permitted to Vote ................. 12  
   h. Polling Place Accessibility ................................................................................... 12  
   i. Campaigning at the Polling Place ...................................................................... 13  
   j. Voter Intimidation and Disruption ...................................................................... 13  
   k. Recent or Potential Changes in Election Law to Consider .................................. 13  
   l. COVID-19 Concerns .............................................................................................. 13  
IX. Be a Proactive Precinct Board Member .................................................................... 14
I. Introduction

Thank you for your interest in becoming a precinct board member in New Mexico. By coming this far, it’s clear that you cherish the principle of “one person, one vote” — a bedrock of our democracy. At the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University School of Law (BC) and the Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law (LCCR), we also cherish that principle and therefore work every day to preserve and protect the right to vote for every eligible citizen. Election inspectors are an essential part of the voting process. Informed and engaged election inspectors contribute to that process, benefit their communities, and help ensure the right to vote is not unduly impeded. Indeed, a lack of qualified election inspectors (different from poll watchers) has been a serious impediment to voter access. When states face difficulties attracting and hiring qualified election inspectors, polling places are often understaffed or mismanaged, resulting in long lines, the spreading of misinformation, and even incidents of bias and intimidation. Additionally, election inspectors are often the only election officials with whom voters interact, and so they play an important role in how voters experience and think about the voting process.

To address these issues, we have teamed up with the Association of Pro Bono Counsel (APBCo) to create state-specific guides to encourage qualified candidates to become election inspectors — poll workers who know the relevant laws and processes, how to assist and troubleshoot effectively, and how to help voters have a positive experience on Election Day.

This toolkit for New Mexico provides an overview of the process for becoming an election inspector. We hope it is useful to you as both a technical and practical guide, including pointers we have gleaned from experience. It is NOT a substitute for training materials provided by the state, county, or local government. Instead, it is meant to equip qualified people like you with the information you need to become an election inspector and enjoy the important job of serving your fellow voters well. We hope that guide encourages you to join the movement and make a difference!

II. Overview of New Mexico’s Election System

The voting policies of New Mexico are enacted and enforced primarily at the state level. The secretary of state delegates election oversight to the clerks of each county. New Mexico has 33 counties, each of which is divided into designated precincts accompanied by appointed poll workers, collectively called the “precinct board.”

The precinct board has a significant impact on the voting experience of New Mexico voters. Ultimately, the precinct board is in charge of monitoring the polling place and the election process. Recruiting qualified candidates and training them properly is essential to minimizing mistakes, hassle and wait time. A shortage of well-trained precinct board members is not uncommon, however, especially in New Mexico.

This problem correlates with issues that occur in New Mexico’s polling places on Election Day, including:

- Voters being denied the right to vote if they are in line when polls close;
• Candidates for office and poll workers intimidating voters at polling places;
• Distribution of improper literature within 100 feet of the polls;
• Voting machine problems, confusion about how to mark ballots, or use of pencils instead of pens to mark ballots;
• Misuse of paper ballots when voting machines malfunction;
• Poll workers denying voters the ability to vote by provisional ballot;
• Lack of adequate accommodations for voters with disabilities.

The importance of the precinct board members’ role cannot be overstated. This job is vital to the voting process and essential to the well-being of our democracy. Accordingly, well-trained qualified precinct board members are severely needed. This New Mexico precinct board member Toolkit will present you with an easy guide on how to become a New Mexico precinct board member:

• Part III will give you an example of the roles and duties of precinct board members on Election Day. In addition, it details the necessary qualifications needed to become a precinct board member under New Mexico election law.
• Part IV will describe the process for applying to be a precinct board member.
• Part V will outline the process after you file the application to become a precinct board member; such as, how to make sure your application is properly filed, tips to overcome objections, and the timeline of the appointment process.
• Part VI will provide numerous available resources for precinct board member training.
• Part VII will list the election protection organizations in New Mexico.
• Part VIII will detail some hands-on issues that a precinct board member should be particularly prepared to handle, with tips on how to respond.
• Part IX will provide advice on how to be a proactive poll worker.
III. Description of Roles

a. Categories of Precinct Board Member/Responsibilities and Duties

New Mexico has three general categories of precinct board members found on every precinct board, while the appointment of additional categories, such as messenger and interpreter, vary between polling locations. Below is the appointment information for each of the categories, along with the general duties and responsibilities of the precinct board:

**Presiding Judge:** The county clerk appoints one board member in each precinct to be the presiding judge. As the lead board member, the presiding judge may reassign any prescribed board duties between election judges and clerks. The presiding judge is charged with maintaining order within the polling place.

**Election Judge:** The county clerk appoints two election judges, one of which must be of a different political party from the presiding judge.

**Election Clerk:** The county clerk appoints one election clerk. If deemed necessary, the county clerk can appoint additional election clerks.

**Messenger:** The county clerk may appoint messengers to deliver ballot boxes, poll books, keys, election supplies, and other materials pertaining to the election.

**Interpreter:** Election interpreters are appointed in certain precincts to translate the ballot information into a minority language for voters as necessary. When appointing American Indian election interpreters, the county clerk will ask for advice from the pueblo or tribal officials residing in that county.

**Essential Duties and Responsibilities of Precinct Board Members:**

- Open and close the polls
- Set up and break down voting equipment
- Register and sign-in voters
- Process voters and provide support
- Issue ballots to eligible voters
- Record and certify vote totals
- Determines voter eligibility through residential verification and poll lists
- Respond to voter questions regarding voting processes
- Adheres to election laws, policies, rules and regulations
- Performs other duties as required
b. **Qualifications**

To be a precinct board member:

You must be a qualified and registered voter of the state of New Mexico.²

- **The voter eligibility requirements are:**
  - A resident of New Mexico
  - A citizen of the United States
  - Not legally declared mentally incapacitated
  - Not a convicted felon, or a felon who has completed all of the terms and conditions of sentencing
  - 18 years or older at the time of the next election
  - A New Mexico resident for at least 12 months³

You must be able to read and write and have the necessary capacity to perform the duties of the office.⁴

- **Other desirable qualifications:**
  - Ability to work effectively and cooperatively with fellow election workers, other poll workers, and the general public;
  - Ability to learn to use voting equipment, computers, and other related machines;
  - Ability to sit or stand for an extended period of time;
  - Ability to work a long day.

**Disqualifications:**

- You are a candidate or any member of a candidate’s immediate family; “Immediate family” includes an individual’s father, mother, son, daughter, brother, sister, or spouse.
- You are a sheriff, deputy sheriff, marshal, deputy marshal, or state or municipal police officer.
- You have been convicted of a felony or infamous crime, unless restored to political rights.
- You are legally declared mentally incapacitated.⁵

**Requirements:**

- **Oath:** All board members must execute the precinct board’s oath of office.⁶
- **Training:** Training requirements, whether online or in-person, vary by county. In general, all precinct board members must attend a training class before EACH election. Each judge must attend a school of instruction in the calendar year in which they are appointed.⁷ Before serving as a presiding judge, a person

---

**TO BE A NEW MEXICO PRECINCT BOARD MEMBER**

You must:

- Be a qualified and registered voter of New Mexico (unless you are 16 or 17 wanting to serve as Student Election Clerk)
- Be able to read and write, and have sufficient ability to perform the duties of an election board member
- Submit an application to the clerk in the relevant county
- Receive training and be certified for the position by the county clerk
- Take the election board member’s oath office

You must not:

- Be a candidate or an immediate family member of a candidate
- Be a sheriff, deputy sheriff, marshal, deputy marshal, or state or municipal police officer
- Have been convicted of a felony or infamous crime
- Have been legally declared mentally incapacitated
must receive training in the duties of that position and be certified for the position by the county clerk.8

Student Election Clerk Program

New Mexico state law allows qualified high school juniors and seniors who are 16 or 17 years old to serve as Student Election Clerks. Up to two minors under the age of 18 can be appointed to serve on a precinct board. The requirements are:

✓ He/she must meet all requirements for appointment, other than being a qualified and registered voter of the county in which he/she serves;
✓ He/she is 16 or 17 years old;
✓ He/she has the consent of a parent or legal guardian, unless emancipated; AND
✓ He/she must attend at least one training seminar.9

c. Party Affiliation

Affiliation Considered. Appointment of poll workers varies according to numbers of voting machines, but the various formulae maintain a balance so that representation from all major political parties is assured.10

Appointment Order Based on Affiliation:

• The county clerk shall appoint the precinct board for each precinct in the following order: from the list submitted by the major party county chairmen, from the standby list, from any other list of voters eligible for precinct board appointment.11

d. Term of Office

The members of the precinct board shall be appointed for that election.12

e. Compensation

While compensation for precinct board members varies from county to county, it must be at least federal minimum wage but may not exceed $200 for Election Day.13 Messengers shall be paid mileage each way over the usually traveled route.14 Compensation must be paid within 30 days after the election.15

Some examples:

• Rio Arriba County pays election judges/clerk $140.00/day and presiding judge $170.00/day.16
• San Juan County pays election judges/clerk $125/day and $25 for attending the two-hour training session. Presiding Judges make an additional $25 and are also paid an additional $35 if they pick up the supply box the day before the election. Interpreters make $100 for serving on Election Day and $25 for each training session they attend.17
• City of Albuquerque pays the election judges/clerk $175.00/day, while the presiding judge earns $200.00/day.18

IV. Application Process

a. How to Apply

If you are qualified to become a precinct board member, fill out an application and submit it to the clerk in the county where you want to serve.

Application information can be found on individual county clerk websites. Some of the larger counties have online applications available on their web pages, while some of the smaller counties only offer applications by phone or email.

Many of the smaller jurisdictions within New Mexico don’t need to hire as many poll workers as Bernalillo County does, which is a contributing factor for the lack of web applications (For example, Bernalillo County typically needs anywhere from 600–1,200 individuals, whereas other places only need a far fewer number of poll workers). See Bernalillo County and San Juan County links below as two such examples, respectively.

• Bernalillo County:
  • County residents (registered voters that do not fall into either of the categories below):
    o https://www.shiftboard.com/BernalilloCountyElections/registration_form_1.html
  • Bernalillo County employees (they can only work in limited capacities, so their application is slightly different):
    o https://www.shiftboard.com/BernalilloCountyElections/registration_form_3.html
  • Student Election Clerks:
    o https://www.shiftboard.com/BernalilloCountyElections/registration_form_2.html
  • Bernalillo’s main poll worker info page which has an instructional video and a brochure on becoming a poll worker:

• San Juan County:
  o http://www.sjcclerk.net/index.php/pollworkers

Local government units may have their own application for municipal elections, which can be accessed through their websites. For example, while Albuquerque falls within the boundaries of Bernalillo County,
which does assist with some facets of the City’s municipal election, the City of Albuquerque ultimately administers its municipal election and therefore has its own process for recruiting poll workers.

- **City of Albuquerque: Poll worker Interest Form**

Additional information about the 33 county clerk offices in New Mexico can be found at:

- [http://www.sos.state.nm.us/Voter_Information/County_Clerk_Information.aspx](http://www.sos.state.nm.us/Voter_Information/County_Clerk_Information.aspx)

★★★★★★★★★

JUST APPLY.

b. **Deadlines for Filing**

Although there is no specific filing deadline, the appointment process begins on or before 42 days preceding Election Day. Accordingly, if you are applying to become a precinct board member for the first time and want to be considered for the upcoming election, make sure to file your application well before 42 days prior to the election.

If you already submitted an application to become a precinct board member, you do not need to resubmit an application again; the precinct board member application is valid as long as it accurately sets forth the required information.

V. **After Applying**

a. **Following Up**

You should first make sure that your county clerk has received your application. You can do this by sending your application by certified mail with receipt of delivery, or by delivering the application to the county clerk in person. After submitting your application, you can contact your local clerk for follow up questions.

To find contact information for your local clerk, visit: [http://www.sos.state.nm.us/Voter_Information/County_Clerk_Information.aspx](http://www.sos.state.nm.us/Voter_Information/County_Clerk_Information.aspx)
If further follow up is needed beyond your local clerk’s office, you can contact the New Mexico Secretary of State, Bureau of Election Resources at:

New Mexico Secretary of State
Bureau of Election Resources
New Mexico Capitol Annex North
325 Don Gaspar, Suite 300
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87501
(505) 827-3600

b. **Overcoming Objections**

- Make sure that you are registered to vote before you file your application, by checking the New Mexico Secretary of State’s “My Registration Information” web page at:
  
  [https://voterportal.servis.sos.state.nm.us/WhereToVote.aspx](https://voterportal.servis.sos.state.nm.us/WhereToVote.aspx).
New Mexico conducts closed primary elections. This means you must be registered for one of the major parties in order to participate. **Always** sign and certify your political party affiliation in the application.

When filling out the application, take time to provide all requested information so that the Bureau of Election Resources can review and confirm your application and qualifications if there is a challenge.
VI. Training Resources

The New Mexico Secretary of State provides the following training materials:

- Election Handbook\textsuperscript{20} – contains standard guidelines for operations and processes of statewide elections:
  - [https://www.sos.state.nm.us/voting-and-elections/voter-information/election-resources/](https://www.sos.state.nm.us/voting-and-elections/voter-information/election-resources/) (Click on “NM Election Handbook” on the webpage).

Individual counties may provide their own additional training materials.\textsuperscript{21}

VII. Election Protection Organizations in New Mexico

**ACLU of New Mexico**
- Website: [https://www.aclu-nm.org/](https://www.aclu-nm.org/)
- Address: P.O. Box 566
  - Albuquerque, NM 87103
- Phone: (505) 266-5915

**Common Cause – New Mexico**
- Address: 527E Alameda #2
  - Santa Fe, NM 87501
- Phone: (505) 379-9470

**Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law – Voting Rights Project**
- Website: [www.lawyerscommittee.org](http://www.lawyerscommittee.org)
- Address: 1401 New York Avenue, NW, Suite 400
  - Washington, D.C. 20006
- Phone: (888) 299-5227 (toll free)

**League of Women Voters of New Mexico**
- Website: [http://www.lwvabc.org](http://www.lwvabc.org)
- Address: 2315 San Pedro NE, Suite F-6
  - Albuquerque, NM 87110
- Phone: (505) 884-8441

**New Mexico Election Oversight**
- Address: PO Box 1707
  - Capitan, NM 88316
- Phone: (505) 990-3573
VIII. High-Priority Issues

a. Options for Voters Without Proper ID

Voters who have voted in New Mexico previously do not need to show any ID. Voters will be asked for their name, year of birth, and registration address.

Voters who registered in New Mexico for the first time, submitted their registration by mail, and didn’t include a copy of their ID when they registered need to produce a current “physical ID” to cast a ballot. The “physical ID” does not need to include a current address or be a photo ID. Acceptable forms of “physical ID” include, but are not limited to:

- driver’s license;
- utility bill;
- bank statement;
- pay check or government check;
- student or tribal ID;
- voter ID; OR
- other government document that shows voter name and address.

If a voter does not provide the required voter identification, they shall be allowed to vote using a provisional ballot, but must provide the required voter identification to the county clerk’s office before 5:00 p.m. on the second day following the election or to the precinct board before the polls close on Election Day.

b. Voters Who Have Moved

If a voter has moved, they will be required to fill out a new voter registration form and submit it to the county clerk’s office. Currently, New Mexico law does not specify what voters should do if they have moved but have not updated their voter registration. In these instances, Election Protection suggests that contact their county clerk’s office directly and request guidance.

- For county clerk contact information please visit: [http://www.sos.state.nm.us/Voter_Information/County_Clerk_Information.aspx](http://www.sos.state.nm.us/Voter_Information/County_Clerk_Information.aspx)

c. Provisional Ballots

There are a variety of circumstances that would require a New Mexico voter to cast a provisional ballot. Such instances include:

- The voter does not have proper identification;
- The voter’s name does not appear on the roster at the polling place, or
- A challenge to the voter was unanimously affirmed by the presiding judge and the two election judges.
Remember, using a regulator ballot is always the preferred method of voting. Provisional ballots should only be used as a last resort. As a precinct board member, you should work to ensure that all voters who are able to vote using a regular ballot.

d. **Right to Voting Assistance**

If a voter is blind, has a physical disability, is unable to read or write, or is unable to read or speak English, that voter has a right to assistance in casting their ballot. The voter shall be able to select an individual of their own choosing to accompany them to the voting booth, so long as that individual is not the voter’s employer or agent of the employer, officer or agent of the voter’s union, or a candidate who appears on the ballot in this election.²⁹

e. **Voter Mistakes on Ballots**

If a voter makes a mistake or “spoils” their paper ballot, and has not cast the ballot, the voter may return the ballot to the presiding judge and receive a new paper ballot.³⁰

f. **Voting Machine Breakdowns**

Report to the clerk’s office immediately to dispatch a technician if a machine malfunctions at any point, while permitting voters to place their ballots in the auxiliary bin until the voting machine problem is resolved. If it cannot be repaired, declare an emergency and issue an emergency paper ballot to each voter trying to vote thereafter.³¹

g. **Voters Standing in the Line by 7:00 p.m. Must Be Permitted to Vote**

On Election Day, each polling place will be open from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.³² When the polls have closed, the precinct board shall proclaim that fact aloud in the polling place. A voter in line at the polling place or in a line at the door at the time of this proclamation shall be allowed to vote.³³

h. **Polling Place Accessibility**

All polling places should be accessible to voters with disabilities and should have at least one voting system available for disabled voters.³⁴ For example:

- Outside the polling place, remove or modify any physical obstacles that might prevent voters from entering the polling place.
- Inside the polling place, make sure there are adequate seating and lighting.
- Provide access to paper ballots for all blind voters.
- Display signs containing voting instructions printed in large type at each polling place.
- Take every report of actions or barriers preventing voters with disability from casting a ballot seriously.
i. Campaigning at the Polling Place

Voters have the right to wait to vote (and to vote) without anyone electioneering or trying to influence their vote in any way within 100 feet of the building in which the polls are located.

On Election Day, it is unlawful for any person to distribute or display any type of campaign literature or place any political posters within 100 feet of any entrance used by the voters to enter a polling place. It is the duty of the precinct board to keep this prohibited area clear of political literature and displays.35

j. Voter Intimidation and Disruption

On Election Day, the precinct board should take all intimidation reports seriously and immediately warn any violators of possible removal from the polling place should the disruption continue. If the unlawful conduct continues, the violator should be removed from the polling place with law enforcement being contacted if the violator refuses to leave.36

While the right to vote in private without distraction should be ensured, media is allowed inside a polling place to photograph and film, as long as those actions do not interfere with voting or indicate how a voter is voting. Specific guidelines for who constitutes the media and what non-media individuals are allowed to do are made on a county by county basis, so precinct board members should contact their county clerk for details.37

k. Recent or Potential Changes in Election Law to Consider

Same Day Voter Registration

In March 2019, New Mexico began to phase in same day voter registration. While regular voter registration closes 28 days prior to an election, the new policy currently allows voters register or update their registration at the County Clerk’s office until the Saturday before the election.38 Voters will be able to register to vote on Election Day beginning in 2021.39 Voters will not be permitted to change party affiliation on Election Day.40

l. COVID-19 Concerns

The spread of COVID-19 means that information and election practices are changing rapidly. You should contact your local election administrator to verify all information in this guide before relying on information contained herein.
IX. Be a Proactive Precinct Board Member

A good precinct board member is proactive and focused on the voter’s experience. You should be sensitive to voters’ needs and treat every voter like a valued guest. When in doubt, err on the side of protecting the voters’ right to vote. If you are prepared, respectful, positive, attentive, and courteous, voters will come away satisfied and more eager to return for the next election.

Be Prepared
Preparation is key to ensure Election Day runs smoothly at your polling place. One of the most common voter complaints on Election Day is the long line at the polling place. You can significantly reduce this hassle through organization, anticipating issues, and quickly resolving problems as they arise. For example, a precinct board member can be prepared by:

- Regularly checking the supplies (like ballots or pens) to prevent a shortage that would halt the voting process;
- Ensuring that entryways are not blocked;
- Researching available resources in advance;
- Having a cheat-sheet with answers to frequently asked questions and references you can contact immediately for help; and
- Having alternatives at hand (what alternative IDs are valid, etc.)

The Voter Is Your Guest:

- Be Prepared
- Be Respectful
- Be Positive
- Be Attentive
- Be Courteous

Be Respectful
Be respectful to each and every voter. Treat all voters with courtesy, regardless of differences in political affiliation, race, gender, age, ethnicity, or religion. The voter has the right to vote without feeling uncomfortable or discouraged.

Be Positive
The voter’s experience, whether good or bad, is marked by your attitude. Work to de-escalate tension if there is confrontation or frustration. If you are supportive and solution-oriented, the voters will have a positive impression of the voting process.

Be Attentive
As is the case with any customer service, be attentive and responsive. If a voter seems confused, ask if he or she needs help. Be inquisitive, but not disruptive, to make sure voters who want assistance can get it quickly. But be mindful of cues that a voter may want some space.
Be Courteous
When the voters enter, offer a warm greeting, make eye contact, introduce yourself and let them know you are there to help. Welcome voters by name, if you know them. By making the voters feel valued, they will have a positive impression of the election process and will be more likely to return.
4 N.M. Stat. Ann. §1-2-7(A) (2) & (3).
5 N.M. Const. Art. 7, §1.
8 Id. §1-2-7(B).
9 Id. §1-2-17.
10 Id. §1-2-12(B) – (D).
11 Id. §1-2-10
12 Id. §1-2-6(A).
13 Id. §1-2-16.
14 Id. §1-2-20.
15 Id. §1-2-16.
23 Id; N.M. Stat. Ann. §1-1-24
24 N.M. Stat. Ann. §1-12-7.1(D)
26 N.M. Stat. Ann. §1-12-7.1(D); N.M. Stat. Ann. §1-12-10(B).
27 Id. §1-12-8.
28 Id. §1-12-22.
29 Id. §1-12-15(A).
30 Id. §1-12-62.
31 Id. §1-12-43.
32 Id. §1-12-1.
37 Dan Gillmor, State Laws Vary on Polling Place Photography, CENTER FOR CITIZEN MEDIA (Nov. 6, 2006), http://citmedia.org/blog/2006/11/06/state-laws-vary-on-polling-place-photography/.
41 We credit BOARD OF ELECTIONS IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK, POLL WORKER’S MANUAL 9-11 (2012) for many of the tips included here. Special thanks to Sharon Dolente, ACLU of Michigan, for her insight and direction on this section.