PLEJ | PARTNERSHIP FOR LARGE ELECTION JURISDICTIONS

TOOLKIT

# Ballot Issues

For election officials, it's important to quickly address any ballot delivery issues or content issues that may disrupt the voting process as they arise. This generic, nonpartisan resource includes operational response best practices as well as starter templates for social media and news releases. These can be easily adapted for any election office and provide a starting place for nonpartisan communication with voters about ballot issues. Keep in mind, these are just samples and guides. We encourage you to adapt them to your jurisdiction's needs and make them your own, as well as to consult your state, county, or city attorney where necessary.

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## OPERATIONAL RESPONSE BEST PRACTICES

This Operational Response Template outlines the steps that election officials can take to help ensure quick and comprehensive responses to ballot delivery or content issues as they arise. These guidelines are based on best practices and are organized based on the situation and audience.

| PLANNING PHASE | STEPS TO CONSIDER |
|---|---|
| **PREPARATION** (EXTERNAL) | **Pre-established Communication Channels:**<br>• Ensure clear and quick communication lines with print vendors, postal services, local mail couriers, and other key stakeholders.<br>• Have direct contacts with key stakeholders, such as local media, community partners, and voters to rapidly disseminate updates.<br>**Redundancy Plans:**<br>• Establish backup printing vendors or on-demand printing solutions in case of delays or errors; or in the event you have to reprint a large quantity in a pinch.<br>• Think through alternative ways to reach voters: (i.e. courier services, drop-offs) if there are disruptions in regular postal services.<br>**Ballot Quality Control:**<br>• Conduct thorough pre-press checks, including proofing ballots for accuracy and compatibility with election technology (i.e., scanning systems).<br>• Implement a tracking system to verify that ballots are printed, packaged, and sent without issues. Consider having a member of your team to help with quality control.<br>**Real-time Monitoring & Alerts:**<br>• Use tracking software to monitor each step of ballot printing and delivery, setting up alerts for delays or disruptions; or flag when ballot stock is low for a given ballot style.<br>• Have a response team ready to quickly troubleshoot and resolve any detected issues. |

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| **PREPARATION** (EXTERNAL)<br><br>*CONTINUED* | **Public Communication Strategy:**<br>• Draft prepared statements for a range of scenarios (printing issues, delayed delivery, etc.) to update voters, media, and stakeholders transparently and promptly.<br>• Set up a dedicated voter hotline and/or online portal for affected voters to report and get real-time information on issues, even if it is after normal business hours.<br><br>**Mail & Delivery Timing Adjustments:**<br>• Factor in potential postal service delays and ensure contingency plans for getting ballots to voters on time, whether it's a one-off or a mass ballot replacement. Communicate with municipal clerks and/or other local government officials.<br>• Coordinate with local stakeholders to navigate best contacts to provide guidance if significant delays could affect adherence to deadlines and/or voter participation. |
| **PREPARATION** (INTERNAL) | **Staff Training and Resource Allocation:**<br>• **Comprehensive Training:** Train all election staff on handling common ballot issues, including protocols for addressing ballot style issues, lost ballots, and late arrivals.<br>• **Response Team:** Work with your public engagement team so they are knowledgeable on your office's response plans, how to search information, and how to remedy issues calmly and swiftly.<br>• **Resource Allocation:** Ensure sufficient resources are available, including replacement ballots, expedited shipping options, and advanced tracking systems. Consider the use of "go teams" or trained staff from other areas that can help with replacement ballots.<br><br>**Voter Education and Communication Plan:**<br>• **Informative Campaigns:** Launch media and social media outreach efforts well ahead of the election to inform voters about how to check their registration status, how they can view a sample ballot (or even a customized sample ballot with the actual ballot content they will have an opportunity to vote on), when they should expect to receive their mail ballots, how they can communicate questions and concerns (including outside normal business hours), and alternative voting options. For example: "if you make a mistake and need a replacement ballot;" "if you believe you received the wrong ballot style," etc.<br>• **Communication Channels:** Utilize multiple communication channels, including social media, local news, and direct mail, to keep voters informed and prepared.<br>• **Contact Information:** Clearly communicate the contact information for voter assistance, including hotlines, emails, and websites.<br><br>**Engage with Postal Services and Vendors:**<br>• **Postal Coordination:** Work closely with postal services to ensure smooth ballot delivery.<br>• **Expedited Shipping:** Arrange for expedited shipping options for reissued or replacement ballots as the election date approaches to guarantee timely delivery. |

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| **PREPARATION** (INTERNAL) | **Engage with Postal Services and Vendors:**<br>• **Vendor Partnerships:** Connect with vendors to ensure they understand the importance of accuracy and timeliness in printing and distributing ballots. |
| *CONTINUED* | **Contingency Planning:**<br>• **Alternative Voting Options:** Develop and publicize alternative voting methods, such as in-person voting or ballot drop-off locations, to mitigate potential ballot delivery issues.<br>• **Crisis Management Plan:** Create a crisis management plan outlining steps to take in case of widespread ballot issues, including communication strategies and escalation procedures.<br>• **Emergency Resources:** Ensure availability of emergency resources, such as additional ballots and support staff, to handle unforeseen problems. |
| **NAVIGATING BALLOT ISSUES** | **Voter Raises Concern with Ballot Style Issued**<br>***(Missing/incorrect contest or candidate, redistricting issue has voter linked to a different district, etc.)***<br>• **Identify the Issue:** Confirm if the voter has been issued the appropriate ballot style by verifying their current information in the registration system.<br>  ◦ *If yes*: Educate the voter on their current district assignments, approved candidates and more so they know the ballot they received was correct.<br>  ◦ *If no*: Determine what the issue was and take corrective action to issue the voter the appropriate ballot style. Work with your team to determine if this was an isolated incident or if it impacts other voters (i.e. district assignment issue affecting a portion of a precinct).<br>• **Corrective Action:** If voter has not already returned a completed ballot, issue the correct ballot immediately (or offer alternate in-person voting opportunities) and provide clear instructions for returning/destroying the initial ballot as required by law. If the voter has already returned a completed ballot, educate the voter on permissible options within state law (i.e. provisional ballot, going to vote in-person before the ballot is received by the local elections office, etc.).<br>• **Documentation:** Record the incident in the central voter file, including the voter's information and the corrective action taken.<br>• **Follow-Up:** Ensure the voter receives the appropriate ballot and has adequate time to return it before the election deadline. If more than one voter is impacted, this may require drafting special messaging to let them know of the issue and remedy. |

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| **NAVIGATING BALLOT ISSUES**<br><br>*CONTINUED* | **Voter Made a Mistake Marking the Ballot**<br>• **Spoiled Ballot Procedure:** Inform the voter of the in-state process for spoiling the original ballot and getting a replacement.<br>• **Clear Instructions:** Provide easy-to-understand instructions on how to spoil a ballot as required in your state (i.e., writing "spoiled" across it or placing it in a specific envelope).<br>• Ensure the voter knows to return the spoiled ballot before receiving a new one (if applicable) and the number of total replacement ballots permitted in your state.<br>• **New Ballot Issuance:** Track requests for new ballots to ensure no double voting. Issue the replacement ballot quickly and provide clear deadlines for when it must be returned.<br>• **Accessible Voter Assistance:** Make information available on how to properly fill out and correct their ballot, if necessary. Ensure voters have access to a hotline, help desk, or a website where they can quickly get assistance if they're unsure of the process (perhaps even on your main homepage at the top when mail ballots go out so it's easier to locate).<br><br>**Voter's Ballot Never Arrived**<br>• **Verification:** Confirm the voter's address and registration status. Check mailing records to identify any potential delivery issues.<br>• **Resend Ballot:** Issue a new ballot promptly and use expedited shipping (as available) if close to the election date.<br>• **Documentation:** Record the incident and actions taken. Track the re-sent ballot to ensure delivery.<br>• **Follow-Up:** Contact the voter to confirm receipt of the new ballot, particularly if the delivery time is outside of your standard benchmarks.<br><br>**Voter's Ballot Arrived Too Late to Mail Back**<br>• **Assessment:** Determine the cause of the delay by reviewing mailing and delivery records.<br>• **Immediate Action:** Provide alternative voting options, such as in-person voting or dropping off the ballot at a designated location.<br>• **Documentation:** Record the incident and any solutions provided. Ensure all late ballots are accounted for.<br>• **Follow-Up:** Work with postal services to prevent future delays and improve ballot delivery times. |

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| **NAVIGATING BALLOT ISSUES**<br><br>*CONTINUED* | **Changes to the Ballot**<br>***(candidate/contest added, removed, or amended after ballots printed)***<br>• **Immediate Communication:** Notify voters, media, and key stakeholders of the ballot change through multiple channels (email, website, social media, mailers, etc.). Provide a clear explanation of what has changed, why, and how it affects the voter's choices.<br>• **Ballot Reprinting:** Coordinate with the printing vendor to reprint ballots that reflect the changes. Ensure quality control to prevent errors during the reprinting process, and check that all relevant contests and candidates are accurately updated.<br>• **Ballot Version Tracking:** Track different versions of the ballot to ensure that the correct version is sent to voters, and maintain records of which version each voter receives. If multiple ballot versions are in circulation (i.e., some voters already received the original ballot), put safeguards in place to prevent confusion or double voting.<br>• **Handling Ballots Already Sent Out:** Issue replacement ballots to voters who have already received the original version, clearly indicating that their old ballot is no longer valid. Provide instructions for how to return the outdated ballot or ensure it is not counted.<br>• **Extending Deadlines if Necessary:** If ballot changes occur close to the election date, work with local authorities to extend voting deadlines or adjust the voting timeline to ensure that all voters can participate with the updated information.<br>• **Public Education:** Run an education campaign explaining the change and what actions voters need to take (i.e. whether they need to request a new ballot or return a spoiled ballot). Use FAQs, hotlines, and community forums to answer voter questions and address concerns about the change.<br>• **Poll Worker Training:** Ensure that poll workers are fully briefed on the changes and prepared to assist voters in person, especially if the change impacts the voting experience on Election Day.<br><br>**Elections Office Omitted a Contest on Some Ballots:**<br><br>**Pre-Election Day**<br>• **Identify:** which precincts/ballot styles are affected.<br>• **Determine:** how many voters are impacted and whether any affected voters have already cast their ballots.<br>• **Record:** how the omission occurred (i.e., vendor setup error, data merge problem) and timestamp each discovery and corrective action.<br>• **Notify:** appropriate stakeholders (county board of elections, legal team, mayor, state elections director, etc.) for corrective action.<br>• **Reprint and reissue:** corrected ballots to affected voters (with clear instructions and deadlines); consider expedited delivery if available.<br>• **Cancel original ballot:** (missing contest) to flag erroneous ballots in the system to prevent double voting. |

## OPERATIONAL RESPONSE BEST PRACTICES

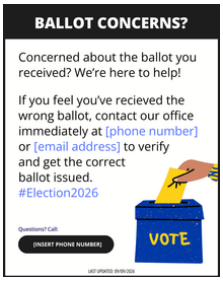
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| **NAVIGATING BALLOT ISSUES**<br><br>*CONTINUED* | **Elections Office Omitted a Contest on Some Ballots:**<br><br>**Pre-Election Day:**<br>• **Contact impacted voters:** so they understand the issue and next steps.<br>• **Engage media:** proactively to manage the narrative (i.e. put out a short news release about the issue, those impacted, the corrective actions you have taken, and your preferred form of contact for anyone who would like additional information).<br><br>**On Election Day or After:**<br>• **Determine:** how the number of impacted voters might impact the election outcome (margin of victory).<br>• **Seek additional authority:** If discovered post-election, the election authority or a third-party may have to seek a court order to remedy the error (i.e. reopening polls, reissuing ballots, scheduling a new election, etc). |

## SOCIAL MEDIA TEMPLATES

Here are some generic sample social media posts addressing ballot issues. Keep in mind, these are designed to be a starting point. They can (and should) be adapted to meet your election office's particular need and based on the urgency of the situation, as well as the specific social media platform you're using. These sample posts may also be used on other platforms to reach community members, like Nextdoor. The platforms provided below are examples.

**PREVIEW** **SCENARIO AND USE**

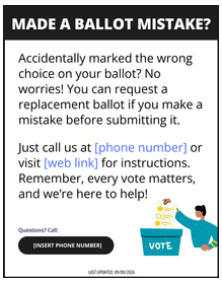



**Scenario 1 |Voter Raises Concern with Ballot Style Issued | Customize on Canva ↗**

**USE WHEN:** A VOTER HAS RAISED A SIGNIFICANT CONCERN WITH THE BALLOT STYLE ISSUED.

**Sample copy**

CONCERNED ABOUT THE BALLOT STYLE YOU RECEIVED?
We're here to help! If you feel you've received the wrong ballot, contact our office immediately at [phone number] or [email address] to verify and get the correct ballot issued.
#Election2026, #YourVoteMatters.

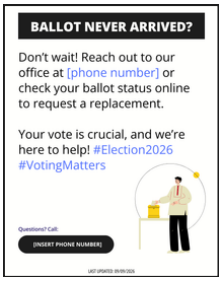



**Scenario 2 |Voter Made a Mistake Marking the Ballot | Customize on Canva ↗**

**USE WHEN:** YOU WANT TO REMIND VOTERS THEY CAN REQUEST A REPLACEMENT BALLOT AND AGAIN IF YOU HAVE HAD A HIGH NUMBER OF MAIL BALLOTS WITH ERRORS.

**Sample copy**

ACCIDENTALLY MARKED THE WRONG CHOICE ON YOUR BALLOT?
No worries! You can request a replacement ballot if you make a mistake before submitting it. Just call us at [phone number] or visit [website link] for instructions. Remember: every vote matters, and we're here to help!
#Election2026 #YourVoiceYourVote.




**Scenario 3 |Voter's Ballot Never Arrived | Customize on Canva ↗**

**USE WHEN:** VOTERS REPORT THEY HAVE NOT RECEIVED THEIR BALLOT AFTER THE DATE THAT THEY SHOULD HAVE ARRIVED.

**Sample copy**

DIDN'T RECEIVE YOUR BALLOT? Act now! Contact our office at [phone number] or [website link] to check your ballot status and request a replacement. Don't miss out on your chance to vote! #Election2026 #MakeYourVoiceHeard

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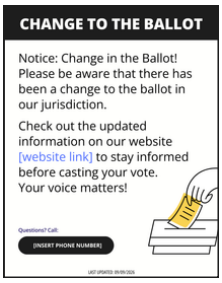



**Scenario 4 |Voter's Ballot Arrived Too Late to Mail Back | Customize on Canva ↗**

**USE WHEN:** VOTERS REPORT THEY HAVE NOT RECEIVED THEIR BALLOT LESS THAN TWO WEEKS BEFORE ELECTION DAY.

**Sample copy**

BALLOT ARRIVED TOO LATE TO MAIL BACK?
No worries! You can drop off your completed ballot at any official ballot drop-off location or voting center. Find your nearest location at [website link]. Make sure your vote counts—don't delay!
#Election2026 #YourVoiceYourVote.




**Scenario 5 |There Is a Change in the Ballot | Customize on Canva ↗**

**USE WHEN:** YOU HAD TO MAKE A CHANGE TO THE BALLOT AFTER SENDING OUT PROVISIONAL BALLOT INFORMATION.

**Sample copy**

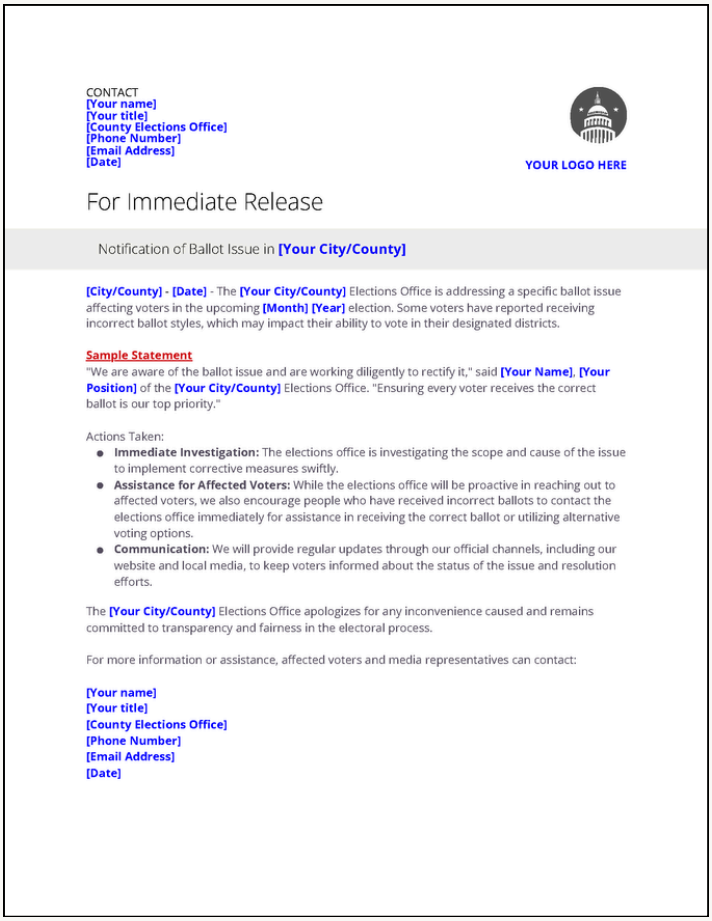
NOTICE
Please be aware that there has been a change to the ballot in our jurisdiction. Check the updated information on our website [website link] to stay informed before casting your vote. Your voice matters, and we want to ensure you're voting with the most current information!
#Election2026.

For more examples of social media posts and other sample content, reference the Election Assistance Commission's **"Election Official Social Media Toolkit"**.

## PRESS RELEASE TEMPLATE

This news release template is a starting point to help you provide public guidance about ballot issues. This is customizable for your jurisdiction. The **Blue text** notes places where jurisdiction specific text is particularly important. It's a best practice to keep news releases to one or two pages at most.

**PREVIEW** [Customize on Canva ↗]



CONTACT
[Your name]
[Your title]
[County Elections Office]
[Phone Number]
[Email Address]
[Date]

YOUR LOGO HERE

For Immediate Release

Notification of Ballot Issue in [Your City/County]

[City/County] - [Date] - The [Your City/County] Elections Office is addressing a specific ballot issue affecting voters in the upcoming [Month] [Year] election. Some voters have reported receiving incorrect ballot styles, which may impact their ability to vote in their designated districts.

Sample Statement
"We are aware of the ballot issue and are working diligently to rectify it," said [Your Name], [Your Position] of the [Your City/County] Elections Office. "Ensuring every voter receives the correct ballot is our top priority."

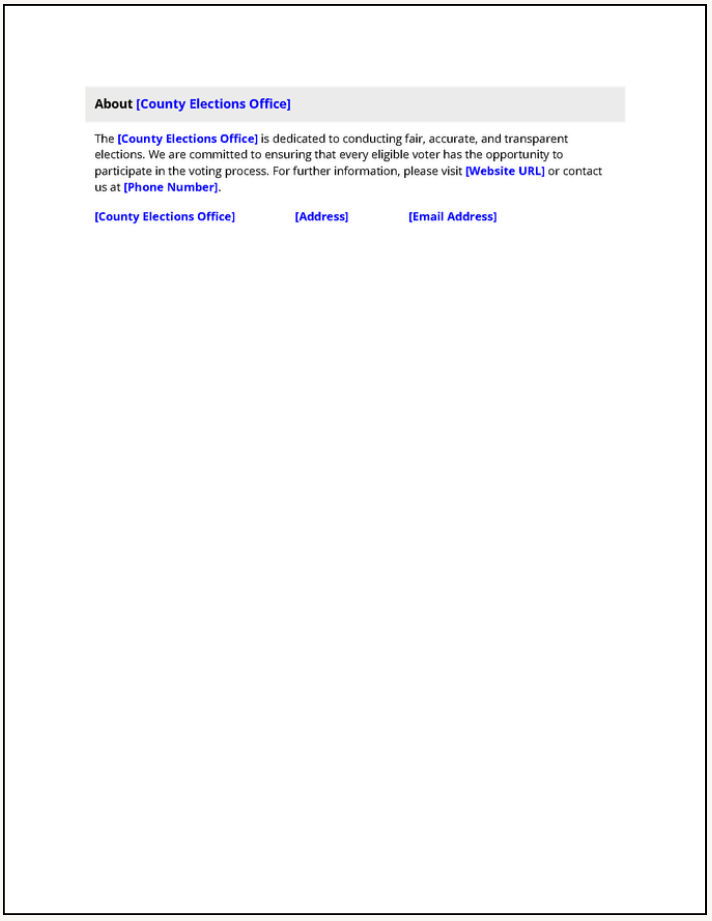
Actions Taken:

- **Immediate Investigation:** The elections office is investigating the scope and cause of the issue to implement corrective measures swiftly.
- **Assistance for Affected Voters:** While the elections office will be proactive in reaching out to affected voters, we also encourage people who have received incorrect ballots to contact the elections office immediately for assistance in receiving the correct ballot or utilizing alternative voting options.
- **Communication:** We will provide regular updates through our official channels, including our website and local media, to keep voters informed about the status of the issue and resolution efforts.

The [Your City/County] Elections Office apologizes for any inconvenience caused and remains committed to transparency and fairness in the electoral process.

For more information or assistance, affected voters and media representatives can contact:

[Your name]
[Your title]
[County Elections Office]
[Phone Number]
[Email Address]
[Date]



**About [County Elections Office]**

The [County Elections Office] is dedicated to conducting fair, accurate, and transparent elections. We are committed to ensuring that every eligible voter has the opportunity to participate in the voting process. For further information, please visit [Website URL] or contact us at [Phone Number].

[County Elections Office] [Address] [Email Address]