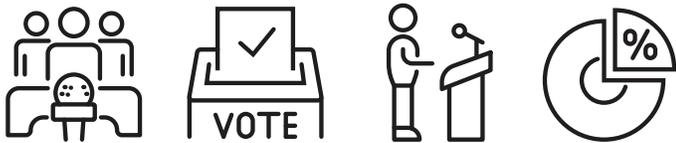


# LOCAL ELECTION ADMINISTRATION **101** KIT

## County Board of Elections (CBOE) Monitoring 2021

This year's elections face unique challenges. COVID-19 has dramatically changed the way we vote in North Carolina, delaying census data and impacting 2021 redistricting and municipal elections. We also know that 2021 voter roll removals, expected changes to voting rules and new county board membership could all impact voters' ability to make their voices heard.

We need to be prepared to support transparent, well-funded, and accessible elections. Democracy NC created this toolkit to equip you with the basics of conducting elections oversight in your community.



Our goals for CBOE monitoring in 2021 are:

- Ensuring transparency, opportunities for public comment, and basic access
- Building local relationships and educating our communities about the nuts and bolts of running elections
- Advocating for well-funded county boards of elections and good voting options
- Making sure all eligible votes cast are counted

After receiving our training, you'll be a local elections expert, ready to attend monthly meetings, spot key election issues, build relationships with local officials, and join with others across your county and the state working to win fair elections.

## Who Runs Elections in North Carolina?

Multiple institutions fund, support, administer, and set the rules for elections in North Carolina. Here are the players you need to know:

### Federal Government

- The federal government establishes laws that govern elections via congressional legislation.
- Federal regulations interpret aspects of election law providing contour to the law and how it is implemented.
- SCOTUS interprets federal and state laws and can substantially change election law and voting rights.

### North Carolina General Assembly (NCGA)

The NCGA funds elections and passes laws governing election administration. Examples include the following:

- HB 1169 – Promoted safe and expanded voting access in response to COVID-19 through poll worker flexibility, an online absentee ballot request portal, and more.
- HB 589 – 2013 law requiring voter ID in North Carolina, which was promptly challenged in court by the NAACP

### North Carolina State Board of Elections

- The NCSBE is the state agency charged with administration of the elections process and campaign finance disclosures and compliance.
- The Governor appoints all 5 board members and the Executive Director. The board must have two members from each major political party, and the Chair is appointed from the Governor's party.
- The Executive Director oversees the administrative and legal staff who carry out the decisions of the State Board, provide technical support, and provide legal guidance to 100 county boards of elections.

### County Commissioners

- Commissioners set the county budget, which includes deciding on the budget for their local county board of elections.
- Commissioners can decide on the total amount of money available for the county board of elections, including salary and benefits for CBOE personnel.
- Commissioners have the ability to reduce funding to the CBOE at any time during the fiscal year.

## County Boards of Elections (CBOE)

The CBOE structure mirrors the State Board and consists of five members who are registered voters in their county. The NCSBE appoints two Republicans and two Democrats to the county board for two-year terms. (The state party chairpersons recommend three potential appointees to the NCSBE.) The Governor appoints the CBOE Chair. CBOE members take on various duties — more information can be found at [ncsbe.gov/about-elections/county-boards-elections](https://ncsbe.gov/about-elections/county-boards-elections). If you're interested in becoming a member of your CBOE, consider talking to a current member!

- Each of North Carolina's 100 counties has a Board of Elections that conducts local elections, operates voting sites, maintains voter registration lists and handles numerous aspects of election administration.
- The State Board of Elections appoints and removes members of the CBOE.
- Each county board includes a director and paid elections staff tasked with carrying out decisions governing election law and policies, and utilizing guidance from the NCSBE and their local CBOE.

## CBOE Monitoring During a Pandemic: What Happened in 2020?

In 2020, Democracy NC's elections advocates monitored Board of Elections to ensure equitable and efficient absentee vote-by-mail, safe in-person voting, and thorough processes to count every eligible vote at the Day of Canvass

Elections advocates were present in all North Carolina counties building relationships with members of their CBOE, observing and reporting on meetings, and intervening in key moments to address major issues. Democracy NC provided local, state, and national partners with trainings, toolkits, one-pagers, and research throughout 2020.

In 2020, lawmakers and state decision-makers passed necessary legislation to host safe elections during a pandemic. In 2021, Democracy NC is fighting to preserve these hard-fought victories and improve our elections, including:

- The absentee ballot "cure" process
- Single witness signature requirement
- Poll worker flexibility within precincts
- Increased appropriations to the NCSBE and CBOEs

Our work begins at the county level with your advocacy at local board of elections meetings. In 2020, working with local advocates, Democracy NC helped to:

- Support virtual meeting access options for the public
- Identify external funding so that CBOEs could provide additional pay to poll workers
- Recruit additional poll workers in counties facing shortages

## What Do County Boards of Elections Do Each Year?

### Winter and Spring (January - March)

In North Carolina, County Boards of Elections (CBOEs) must regularly update their voter registration lists to maintain accuracy and efficiency in administering elections. In odd years, CBOEs undergo a "big" list maintenance process, officially called "Biennial List Maintenance." During this time, they also prepare budget requests for county commissioners, set calendars and deadlines for the year's elections, and prepare for spring or summer primary elections.

### Spring and Summer (April - August)

The county budget process occurs, and CBOEs prepare and approve Early Voting plans for fall elections. Additionally, they are running primary elections that occur during this time.

### Summer and Fall (August - November)

CBOEs prepare for November elections, including poll-worker recruitment, ballot design, and more, and then conduct the elections themselves.

### Fall and Winter (November - December)

During the rest of the year, CBOEs audit vote counts, update voter files, and certify elections winners via canvass processes.

# What is a County Board of Elections Meeting Like?

County Boards of Elections hold regular meetings monthly, and often hold special meetings near Election Days to review absentee ballots, prepare polling sites, conduct audits and test their systems, and certify the outcomes of the election.

County Boards of Elections should post information at a central location (usually their website) about:

1. how to access their meetings
2. the meeting agenda, and
3. the method to offer public comment.

Meeting notices are also posted with the county commissioners and at the CBOE's physical office. Meetings held outside the regular schedule require 48 hours' notice. Emergency meetings require notice as soon as possible, but state law does not set a specific time. If in doubt, call your Board of Elections! You can find the contact information at: [demnc.co/yourboe](http://demnc.co/yourboe)

Board meetings should make time for public comment, where citizens like you can advocate for

better Early Voting plans, problems at polling sites, or any other concerns you have.

The Chair usually runs Board meetings with a procedure called "Robert's Rules of Order." Robert's Rules allows the Chair to facilitate meetings so they are orderly and allow every Board member equal time to voice their opinion.

Members can make "motions" which allow them to hold discussion and take action on a specific issue. Other members then second the motion and, if approved, debate takes place. Members can change motions or "call to question" to end the discussion.

All Board of Elections in North Carolina run their meetings according to these rules. Don't be intimidated if you hear unfamiliar phrases! You can always ask for clarification via the public comment option at the meeting.

County Board of Elections members deliberate and make decisions on relevant elections issues. Once decisions are approved, the CBOE Director and their staff are responsible for implementation.

## Glossary

**CBOE & BOE** = County Board of Elections (could refer generally to all or to a specific one)

**Cure (Process)** = Uniform method for voters to fix issues with their ballots

**EA** = Election Administration (not laws! EA = local CBOEs & NCSBE activities & policies)

**ED** = Election Day

**EV** = Early Voting

**NCSBE & SBOE** = North Carolina State Board of Elections

**VBM** = Vote by Mail (sometimes called Absentee Vote By Mail or Absentee)

**VR** = Voter Registration

**VRA** = Voting Rights Act (important federal voting rights law)

**HB & SB** = "House Bill" or "Senate Bill" in the North Carolina General Assembly

**NCGA** = North Carolina General Assembly

**Appropriations** = the government process of spending money for public projects or programs

**Witness Signature** = state requirement that a witness sign to ensure the validity of your returned absentee ballot

**Robert's Rules** = a formal procedure for running various types of meetings

**List Maintenance** = In North Carolina, a routine review process done by CBOEs to ensure accurate information about eligible voters in their voter registration lists

Sign up to be a County Board of Elections Monitor at: [demnc.co/boemonitor](http://demnc.co/boemonitor)

For more information and resources, email [elections@democracync.org](mailto:elections@democracync.org) or visit: [demnc.co/electionsadvocacy](http://demnc.co/electionsadvocacy)

**DEMOCRACY NC**

*Document last updated April 2021*