

Mono County Election Procedures: Challenges and Opportunities



Foreword

The Mono County Grand Jury is an official judicial body with independent authority that is not answerable to administrators or legislatures. The Civil Grand Jury is an investigative body created to ensure that the best interests of all citizens of the County are being served legally and effectively by local government including all the departments, agencies, and special districts that are under the purview of Mono County government and the Town of Mammoth Lakes.

Summary

The Mono County Civil Grand Jury for the year 2016-2017 published a Report about Mono County Elections and the Office of the Registrar of Voters. That Report had five Findings and five Recommendations. All the Recommendations were accepted in full by the Board of Supervisors.

The 2025-2026 Mono County Civil Grand Jury chose to follow-up on the original report to determine which Recommendations and subsequent legislative and regulatory changes to the management of elections had been effectively implemented. The Grand Jury also inquired about challenges preventing the Office of the Registrar of Voters from effectively and accurately conducting elections in accordance with all federal, state and Mono County requirements.

The Grand Jury found that although the 2016-2017 Recommendations have been mostly implemented, the administration of elections has expanded and become more complex in the intervening years. This expansion and complexity in administrative responsibility has led to a substantially increased workload that has not been matched by an increase in the number of staff. The Grand Jury also found that the expected expansion of outreach and voter education work has not occurred and that some communities were under-served in options for casting ballots.

Background

The 2016-2017 Mono County Civil Grand Jury Report found that:

1. The Registrar of Voters Office was generally unprepared to the elections held in 2016;
2. The Registrar of Voters lacked the skill required to manage a complex department;
3. Mono County could lobby the State to expand the number of voters eligible to cast absentee ballots;
4. Mono County's voting machines were obsolete;
5. The Office should conduct additional voter education and outreach, should ensure sample and absentee ballots are accurate and are distributed and received by voters in a timely manner.

These Findings resulted in five Recommendations, all of which were agreed to by The Board of Supervisors in their Response to the Report dated August 8, 2017. The Board of Supervisors agreed to implement the Recommendations within the timelines specified in the Report.

Briefly, these Recommendations were that: R-1 Staff should receive continuing training and education, and procedure manuals should be updated and additional staff should be employed during election periods; R-2 An experienced Registrar of Voters should be appointed; R-3 Research should be undertaken to see whether Mono County might increase the number of voters able to cast absentee ballots; R-4 New voting machines should be purchased if budgets allowed; and R-5 The Registrar of Voters should communicate to voters information about the voting process, the regulations and procedures; and produce accurate printed information, and maintain the elections page on the Mono County website.

The 2017-2018 Mono County Civil Grand Jury sent a letter of Inquiry to the Registrar of Voters asking about the status of the previous Grand Jury's Recommendations. The County Clerk replied on October 3, 2017 stating that modifications in election processes and procedures had been implemented. No further follow-up has been undertaken by the Grand Jury. Since then, numerous legislative and regulatory changes have been made to the management of elections, all of which impact the Office of the Registrar of Voters and its ability to conduct elections in Mono County.

The 2025-2026 Civil Grand Jury formed an Election Procedures Committee to investigate, firstly, whether the recommendations of the 2016-2017 Grand Jury had been implemented in full; secondly, whether subsequent legislative and regulatory changes to the management of elections had been effectively implemented by the Office of the Registrar of Voters; and, thirdly, whether any challenges currently exist that prevent the Office of the Registrar of Voters from conducting elections in Mono County effectively, accurately, and in accordance with all applicable requirements.

It should be noted that the Registrar of Voters in Mono County also serves as the Clerk to the Board of Supervisors, as the Mono County Recorder, and the Mono County Clerk. The combination of roles is similar to that found in several other small California counties. The Registrar of Voter's deputy, who also deputizes in these other roles, is additionally responsible for the office budgets. Whilst this combination of roles is not of itself problematic, it is a point to bear in mind when looking at the adequacy of staffing levels.

Methodology

The Election Procedures Committee determined the initial focus would be to follow up to the 2016-17 Report specific to the recruitment of a qualified and experienced Registrar of Voters, the accuracy of written material for candidates and voters, the production of procedural manuals for all aspects of the election process, the training and on-going education and development of election staff, and the adequacy of outreach and voter education work.

When considering the five Recommendations in the 2016-2017 Report, the Election Procedures Committee accepted that the obsolete voting machines had been replaced and the Recommendation to increase the number of voters eligible for absentee voting had been overtaken by events (as of September 2021, California became the 8th US state to permanently provide mail-in ballots to all active registered voters). Recommendations relating to these findings were not, therefore, further examined.

In addition to follow-up on the previous Report, the Committee chose to examine the methods and efficiency of maintaining the Voter Roll and the procedures and security of collecting ballots from Drop Boxes.

The Election Procedures Committee interviewed three individuals - two members of the Registrar of Voters Office and an experienced Poll Worker who performs supervisory duties on election days.

The Election Procedures Committee would like to extend their thanks and appreciation to these individuals, who gave us their time, candid views, and full co-operation.

The Elections Procedures Committee examined extensive documentation relating to the administration of elections. The Committee also asked for, and was provided with, staffing comparisons between Mono County and similar sized California counties; those counties were Calaveras, Sutter, Inyo, Mariposa, Colusa, Trinity and Tuolumne. The list of examined documents can be found at the Appendix to this report.

Discussion

1. Maintenance of the Voter Roll and Implementation of New Legislation and

Regulations. Since the 2016-2017 Grand Jury Report, much of the work undertaken by the Registrar of Voters Office has become year-round rather than seasonal. The administration of elections has expanded due to new state and federal requirements, increased public scrutiny, and increasingly complex election operations. Maintaining the Voter Roll, registering new voters, and implementing new legislation and regulations requires consistent, full-time staff to carry out responsibilities in a timely manner. Although much of the maintenance of voter rolls is automated, a significant amount of staff time is devoted to manually checking, correcting, and amending voter registrations. For example, DMV registrations are checked weekly by Mono County staff, more often at election times. Whilst the Mono County system scans for possible duplicates, manual checks are done to identify and deal with any changes identified by such

scans. Notifications of voter deaths come throughout the year from various entities; all are followed up manually for confirmation. The State of California system flags possible duplicates across different counties and staff review duplicates locally to ensure no one is registered twice in California. Duplicate registrations within California should be non-existent, but voters could possibly be registered in more than one place if they move out of State and fail to notify the first State of the move. Duplicate registration does not however equate to duplicate voting. Voters who move out of California without notification will remain on the voter roll in California until undelivered ballots, or some other notification, alerts election personnel to their status. Election personnel are then required to follow up before removing voters from the voter roll. The Mono County election personnel have written procedures to adequately manage the maintenance of the voter roll. However, the maintenance of voter rolls is now a year-round task and not an activity concentrated only around election time.

2. Polling Days. Despite the use of ballot machines, much of the work on and around election days requires extensive staff hours. Provisional ballots, which are issued to voters for a number of reasons, are separated from regular ballots and are individually scrutinized after election day by election personnel. In nearly all cases provisional ballots are subsequently validated.

Validation can be conducted through the verification of a new address, proper identification of first timer voters, checking to ensure only one vote has been cast, etc. While voting machines will reject a second ballot from the same voter, much of this work is done manually and is time consuming. The signature on every mail-in ballot is checked manually and compared to the signatures on record. The office maintains historical signatures for all voters so that comparisons can be effectively made even where a signature has ‘evolved’ over time; where there is any

doubt, further investigation is undertaken. Ensuring that only properly registered and eligible individuals are able to cast a vote is a critical part of the Office of the Registrar of Voters duties. The Election Procedures Committee heard testimony suggesting that changes in legislation and procedures, as well as an increasing number of elections and special elections, mean current staffing levels will need to increase to ensure high levels of integrity and reliability are maintained.

3. Drop Box Collection and Chain of Custody Procedures. Clear policies and procedures have been developed for Drop Box Collection and Chain of Custody responsibilities. Ballots must be retrieved from drop boxes every 96 hours (excluding Saturdays and Sundays) between the 29th and the 10th day before an election. They then have to be retrieved every 48 hours after the 10th day prior to an election and the closing of polls on election day. Two properly authorized individuals are required to collect from each location and transport the ballots to the elections office in Bridgeport. Ballot retrievers are required to sign an oath, and to individually account for the number of ballots retrieved and the time and date of retrieval. Given the geographical spread of the locations, this process is as efficient and secure a system as possible yet is incredibly time consuming, particularly when the frequency of collection and time on the road is considered. The Elections Procedures Committee received testimony suggesting that additional overview of this process would be desirable to ensure that procedures are fully adhered to on every occasion and that the integrity of the system is transparent.

4. Location of Polling Places and Drop Boxes. Mono County provides six polling places that serve the precincts of: Antelope, Bridgeport, Tri-Valley, June Lake, Long Valley, Mammoth

Meadow, Mammoth Minaret, Mammoth Pinecrest, Mammoth View and Old Mammoth. Mono County also provides drop boxes in six locations: Walker, Bridgeport, Chalfant, June Lake, Crowley and Mammoth Lakes. Note that three communities - Benton, Lee Vining and Swall Meadows - have neither a polling place nor a drop box location. Voters in these precincts must mail-in their ballots using the USPS, or drive to another community to deliver their ballot. The Elections Procedures Committee received testimony that ballots returned via the USPS are taking increasingly long times to reach the Elections Office in Bridgeport; in some cases in the recent Primary Election on June 2, 2026 there was a delay of two to three weeks.

5. Temporary Staff. Temporary staff are employed as poll workers. These individuals provide an essential service on polling day by staffing and managing polling stations and any drop boxes at those locations. Poll workers check-in voters, verify eligibility, deal with anomalies, issue ballots or provisional ballots, manage wait lines, ensure supplies (pens, etc.) are available, assist voters with disabilities, and generally ensure things run smoothly. Mono County is fortunate to have many experienced poll workers and Mono County personnel from various departments volunteering at elections on polling day. New poll workers are, however, always needed and poll workers require training, supervision, and support. Personnel from the Registrar of Voters Office reported that current staffing levels do not allow for sufficient training and supervision of temporary staff, particularly given more frequent and special elections alongside the implementation of new voting systems, protocols and procedures.

6. Office Staff. The combined Clerk/Recorder/Registrar Department has 6 FTE staff, none of whom work exclusively on the management of elections. There is a budget to add one additional,

temporary, part-time position over election periods. It has, however, proved difficult to recruit an appropriately qualified and experienced individual for this short term position. This position has been unfilled for the last two elections (November 2024 General Election and November 2025 Special Election) a situation that only adds to the staffing shortage.

The Elections Procedures Committee was interested to know how election staffing levels in Mono County compared to comparative counties in California. As no two counties are exactly the same, the committee asked which counties might provide useful comparisons in terms of size, population, and service profile. This information was provided by the Registrar of Voters. In comparison to seven peer counties/towns, Mono County was shown to have the fewest number of full-time staff equivalents.

7. Voter Education and Outreach. Whilst some voter education has been done in the past, in particular with young people, there is currently no outreach or voter education program. There was a partnership with Mammoth High School where students volunteered as poll workers to learn about the democratic process but this has not operated in recent elections. Current outreach is limited to personal visits by the Registrar of Voters when requested by community groups. There is insufficient staffing for a more proactive program.

Findings

F-1 The 2025-2026 Mono County Civil Grand Jury commends the Board of Supervisors on their swift reaction to the Findings and Recommendations in the Report of the 2016-2017 Mono County Civil Grand Jury.

F- 2 The 2025-2026 Grand Jury found that, where still relevant, the Recommendations of the 2016-2017 Grand Jury had, for the most part, been implemented. The Grand Jury found the current Registrar of Voters to be experienced, competent, thorough, and more than capable of carrying out the job requirements. Clear and comprehensive procedures have been written for every aspect of the election process. Staff are trained in these procedures, and staff development and education is on-going. Regular staff meetings are held, with the number of such meetings increasing at critical times during the election period. All written material is currently proof-read by the Registrar and her Deputy and then further scrutinized by one or two additional staff members who provide fresh eyes and a final review. The elections page on the Mono County website has been updated and is kept current. However, despite the fact that the 2016-2017 Grand Jury Report found that the “Mono County’s Registrar of Voters Office needs to conduct additional voter education and outreach to eliminate confusion during elections”, the Election Procedures Committee received testimony that, at this time, zero staff hours are allocated to voter education and outreach.

F - 3 The current Registrar of Voters is to be commended on her management of the election process, the production of comprehensive procedural manuals, the training of staff, the production of accurate written materials, and the resulting positive staff attitude within her department.

F - 4 Whilst the Registrar of Voters and her staff are to be commended on the quality of their work, the Elections Procedures Committee heard testimony reporting an inability to perform to the standard and timeliness desired because staffing levels have not increased to meet the current workload. The testimony stated that existing staff are operating at or beyond capacity, which increases the risk of errors and delays in the administration of elections.

F - 5 The Grand Jury noted the observation made by election staff that ballots returned via the USPS are increasingly delayed, on occasions by a matter of weeks. This has a particular impact on voters in Benton, Swall Meadows and Lee Vining who must mail-in their ballots using the USPS or drive to a neighboring community to deliver their ballots, as their locations do not offer polling places or drop boxes. The Grand Jury found this to be unsatisfactory.

Recommendations

R - 1 In accordance with the findings of the 2016-2017 Grand Jury, the Registrar of Voters should institute a program of outreach work and voter education to eliminate confusion during elections. Such program might include:

- Expanding community partnerships, e.g. collaborating with County libraries and schools to host voter education workshops and voter registration drives
- Increase Multilingual Engagement
- Strengthen Youth Engagement
- Ensuring that all voters are aware of locations of polling places and drop boxes, and options for returning ballots.

Action: Chief Administrative Officer. Registrar of Voters

Timeframe: 3 months

R - 2 Mono County should increase the staff of the elections office by a minimum of one full-time person to work on election management. This would enable outreach and voter education work proposed in Recommendation 1 to be carried out, ideally allowing one day per month for this work. The additional staff time would also ensure that the increasingly complex and evolving election laws and regulations are implemented in a timely manner; the more frequent and special elections can be efficiently managed; voter rolls are accurately maintained; written materials are produced that are accessible and accurate; and that all election procedures including the recruitment, training, and supervision of temporary staff is carried out.

Action: Board of Supervisors. Chief Administrative Officer. Registrar of Voters.

Timeframe: 3 months

The Mono County Civil Grand Jury is pleased to note that the Board of Supervisors, on 04.21.2026, approved an increase in staffing for the Office of the Registrar of Voters.

R - 3 Consideration should be given to increasing the number of polling places and/or the location of drop boxes to ensure that all communities are equally able to cast a vote or return their ballots in a nearby location.

Action: Board of Supervisors.

Timeframe: 3 months

Responses

Penal Code Section 933.05(a) requires that for each relevant Finding the respondent must give one of two possible responses: 1. Agrees with the Finding; or 2. Disagrees wholly or partly with the Finding, with an explanation of the reasons for the disagreement. For each relevant Recommendation, the respondent is required to select one of the four possible responses per Penal Code 933.05(b): The Recommendation has been implemented, with a summary of the action taken; or 2. The Recommendation will be implemented, with a time frame for implementation; or 3. The Recommendation requires further analysis, with an explanation and the scope of the analysis, and a time frame for further discussion of up to six months from the release of this report; or 4. The Recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable, with an explanation.

Required Responses

The Board of Supervisors is *required* to respond to F-2, F-4, and F-5 and to R-1, R-2 and R-3 within 90 days of receipt of this report.

Invited Responses

The Chief Administrative Office and the Registrar of Elections are *invited* to respond to F-2, F-4 and F-5 and to R-1, R-2 and R-3 within 60 days of receipt of this report.

Appendix

Documents reviewed by the Election Procedures Committee:

1. Mono County training and/or procedure manuals:
 1. Checking In Ballots and Verifying Signatures Procedure – Office procedures for receiving vote-by-mail ballots and verifying signatures.
 2. Inactivating Undeliverable-RTS Voters – Office procedures for inactivating undeliverable ballots, depending on return reason.
 3. Poll Worker Poll Pad Roster Guide and Instructions – Guide for Poll Workers to use to check in voters at poll places.
 4. Ballot Styling Sign-Off Forms – Sample sign off form used by Liberty Vote (formerly Dominion) during ballot proofing. These are reviewed by multiple department staff before final sign off.
2. Voter Registration, Cancellation, Revocation and Restoration
 1. County Clerk/Registrar of Voters (CC/ROV) Memorandum # 25051 re: “VoteCal: Voter Registration Cancellation, Revocation, and Restoration” – Memo from the California Secretary of State about new processes pertinent to the cancellation, revocation, and restoration of voter registration records, and associated notices, for the following reasons: mental incompetency/conservatorship, felony, death, and certain changes of address.

2. Cancellation Notice - Deceased Records (Mono) – Template letter used to send to deceased voters before cancelling. Plus, Return Form.
 3. Cancellation Notice - Change of Address (Mono) - Template letter used. Plus Return Form.
 4. Voting Rights Restored - Felony Imprisonment (Mono). Template letter. Plus Return Form.
 5. Same Day Voter Registration Option (Mono). Template Letter
 6. Voter Registration Cancellation/Restoration - Mental Incompetency/Conservatorship. Plus Return Form.
 7. Change of Address and inactive voter Protocols
 8. ID Requirements for first time voters.
 9. Protocols for voter not found/voter at wrong location/other unique situations
3. The procedures and protocols for collecting ballots from drop boxes.
 1. Drop-Box Ballot Collection and Chain of Custody Procedures 2025 – Current procedures for drop-box ballot collection.
 2. Drop-Box Chain of Custody Log
4. Election Education Series: <https://monocounty.ca.gov/elections/page/election-education-series>
 5. FAQs page for each election. June 2026 Primary pages still being updated, this is a link to the 2025 Special Election: <https://monocounty.ca.gov/elections/page/frequently-asked-questions-faqs-0>
 6. Departmental Structure for the office of Clerk-Recorder-Registrar.
 7. Staffing comparisons with peer counties/towns