



CHAPTER 1: ELECTION OFFICIAL MANUAL (EOM) INTRODUCTION¹

Forward

Millions of registered voters in Ohio depend on a small number of election professionals to ensure secure and convenient elections. We have established a reputation for thoroughness, professionalism, and hard work, making our elections the benchmark that other states aspire to achieve. In short, Ohio's elections are America's gold standard. This Election Official Manual (EOM) provides the necessary tools for our dedicated election officials to uphold and enhance the high standards that Ohioans expect and deserve.

The EOM is the "permanent directive"² under Ohio law and provides a formal guide issued by the Secretary of State to boards of elections. It gives instructions for how to manage the board office and elections for board members, directors, and deputy directors.

Sometimes, additional directives are provided throughout the year to update or supplement the EOM. In urgent situations, special interim directives may be issued that take precedence over the information in the EOM.

When reading the EOM, it's important to understand how the plain English words "must," "should," and "may" relate to you and your board responsibilities under Ohio election law.

- "Must" means you or your board is required to do something. It is similar to saying "shall." Required tasks may also be phrased as imperative sentences.³

¹[Directive 2026-28](#)

²[R.C. 3501.053\(A\)\(1\)](#)

³Imperative sentences use active voice and the subject is understood. For example, "you must use the following rules" is presented as "use the following rules" in some cases and the reader should understand that these statements are required actions of you or your board.

- “Should” indicates that you or your board is encouraged to do something, but it is not mandatory.
- “May” signifies that you or your board has permission to do something or that it is a possibility.

Remember that the EOM is updated regularly. Check the Secretary of State’s website to find the most recent version of the manual.

Section 1.01 A Legacy of Trust in Your Hands, an Introduction to Your Role

Your promise to support the United States Constitution and the Ohio Constitution is the same one made by many officials throughout history. This promise protects one of our most basic rights — the right to vote. This manual will help you do this important job.

Our election system is built on three key parts:

- The U.S. Constitution (1789) set up our system of government. Changes to it have made sure all citizens can vote, no matter their race, gender, or wealth.
- The Ohio Constitution (1851) created the rules for our state and explains how Ohioans choose who represents them.
- State implementation of federal laws such as the Voting Rights Act (1965) and the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) (2002) helps ensure fair and accessible elections.

As an election official, your job is to turn these laws and rules into real-world practices on Election Day.

Section 1.02 Oath of Office

Ohio election officials must take an oath to support the laws of the U.S. Constitution and the Ohio Constitution. These laws, along with the revised and administrative code, directives from the Secretary of State, and local charters help guide you and your board in your work. As board members, you hold ultimate responsibility for how elections are conducted in your county. Your signature on the election results represents your ownership of the process and reflects the integrity of the elections in your county.

Election officials must take an oath prior to beginning official work of the board.⁴ Your oath is a solemn commitment that is both legally binding and carries a moral obligation to do your best for the people you serve. Oaths for board members must be filed with the clerk of court of common pleas of the county where the member resides within 15 days of appointment. Election officials also receive a formal copy of their oath from the Secretary of State's office. The text of the oath is included for your reference.

Election Official - An "election official" includes: (1) Secretary of State; (2) Employees of the Secretary of State serving in an elections-related capacity; (3) Members, director or deputy director, and/or employees of a board of elections (including part-time and temporary employees); and (4) Voting location manager and other precinct election officials (PEOs).

⁴[R.C. 3501.08](#); [R.C. 3501.14](#); [R.C. 3501.01\(U\)](#).

BOARD OF ELECTIONS OATH OF OFFICE ⁵

State of Ohio

_____ County.

I, _____, do solemnly swear that I will support the Constitutions of the United States and of the State of Ohio, that I will faithfully perform all the duties of _____ of the Board of Elections of _____ County to the best of my ability, enforce the election laws, and protect and preserve all records, documents, and other property pertaining to the conduct elections placed in my custody, , so help me God.

Signed, _____
(Signature of Official Taking the Oath)

Sworn to and subscribed before me, this _____
day of _____, in the year two
thousand and _____.

(Title of Official Administering the Oath)

(Signature of Official Administering the Oath)

⁵ [R.C. 3501.13\(B\)](#); [R.C. 3501.14](#)

Section 1.03 Election Laws

The oath you take connects you to the U.S. and Ohio Constitutions. Your work follows federal laws like the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and the Help America Vote Act of 2002. Ohio Revised Code (mainly Title 35) provides your authority, and local charters may have additional rules that apply to your county.

Below is more background information on these laws and guidelines.

THE UNITED STATES CONSTITUTION

Adopted in 1789, the U.S. Constitution is the highest law in the country. It outlines the structure of our federal government. The first 10 amendments, known as the Bill of Rights, protect citizens' freedoms. Later amendments expanded voting rights to women, 18-year-olds, and people of all races, and banned poll taxes.

THE OHIO CONSTITUTION

Adopted in 1851, the Ohio Constitution is the foundation of the state's laws and government. It guarantees rights for the people of Ohio and outlines election laws.

Initiative and Referendum (Article II) -

Allows citizens to propose or repeal laws through a vote.⁶

Elective Franchise (Article V) - Establishes who can vote⁷ and sets term limits for Ohio lawmakers.

Vacant public offices - Various sections cover how to fill government vacancies.

US Constitution - Federal Elections

[Article I, Section 4](#) allows each state to set its own election procedures, including determining the time, place, and manner of holding the election, but Congress can make changes. For example, Congress set the federal election date as the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November of even-numbered years.

[The Right to Vote](#)

1870 - 15th Amendment
(Prohibits discrimination.)

1920 - 19th Amendment
(Grants women the right to vote.)

1964 - 24th Amendment
(Eliminates poll taxes.)

1971 - 26th Amendment
(Lowers the voting age to 18.)

⁶[Ohio Constitution, Article II.](#)

⁷[Ohio Constitution, Article V, Section 1.](#)

You can use the hyperlinks throughout this manual to find specific sections. You can also find the [full text of the Ohio Constitution](#) on the Secretary of State's website, [OhioSoS.gov](#).

FEDERAL LAWS

There are several federal laws that affect elections. Federal laws are cited in this manual as "U.S.C.A." followed by the section number.

STATE LAW

Ohio Revised Code

The Ohio Revised Code contains all state laws. Election laws are mainly in [Title 35](#), which has 14 chapters, but other titles also include election-related rules. For example, [Title 57](#) covers ballot language for tax levies, and [Title 43](#) has laws about local liquor options.

Ohio laws are cited in this manual as "R.C." followed by the section number. You can use the hyperlinks to find specific statutes or search the entire [Ohio Revised Code](#).

Ohio Administrative Code

The Ohio General Assembly assigns certain offices or agencies to create administrative rules that provide details on how laws are implemented. These rules, which can be complex, go through a review process by the Joint Committee on Agency Rule Review (JCARR) to be sure that an office or agency has not exceeded its authority.

[Chapter 111 of the Ohio Administrative Code](#) contains the Secretary of State's administrative rules. Specifically, [Chapter 111:3](#) contains the rules for elections.

Federal Election Laws

- [Voting Rights Act of 1965](#)
- [Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act \(52 U.S.C.A. § 20301\)](#)
- [Military and Overseas Voter Empowerment Act \(52 U.S.C.A. § 20301\)](#)
- [Americans with Disabilities Act \(52 U.S.C.A. § 20101\)](#)
- [National Voter Registration Act \(52 U.S.C.A. § 20503\)](#)
- [Help America Vote Act \(52 U.S.C.A § 20901\)](#)

State Election Laws and Rules

- [Ohio Revised Code Title 35](#)
- [Ohio Administrative Code Chapter 111](#)

These rules are cited as “O.A.C.” followed by the chapter and rule number. You can use the hyperlinks to find the rule being cited. You can also search the entire [Ohio Administrative Code](#).

Municipal and County Charters

Cities or villages (as defined in [R.C. 703.01](#)) can create or amend **municipal charters** under [Article XVIII, Section 8 of the Ohio Constitution](#).

County voters can create or amend a **county charter** for their county government under [Article X, Section 3](#).

Details on how to frame a municipal or county charter can be found in Chapter 10 of the [Ohio Ballot Questions and Issues Handbook](#). You should consult with your municipality’s or county’s legal counsel when you have questions about charter provisions.

Opinions of the Ohio Attorney General

The Ohio Attorney General issues opinions to public officials on legal issues they face while doing their jobs. These opinions are not binding laws, but they can help guide public officials.⁸

For example, the Ohio Attorney General has provided many opinions on compatibility of public offices and positions. If you or your board needs guidance, refer to these opinions and seek private legal counsel for advice.

Attorney General opinions are cited throughout this manual as “(the year the opinion was issued) Op. Att’y. Gen. No.” followed by the opinion number. You can use the hyperlinks to access the opinion or search the opinions at the Ohio Attorney General’s website, [OhioAttorneyGeneral.gov](https://www.ohioattorneygeneral.gov).

⁸See <https://www.ohioattorneygeneral.gov/About-AG/Service-Divisions/Opinions>.

Section 1.04 Types of Elections

ELECTION CALENDAR ESSENTIALS⁹

Type	When	What
General	First Tuesday after the first Monday in November	Choose representatives at different levels of government. Applies to federal, state, and county on even-numbered years. Applies to city, village, township, and school board on odd-numbered years. State, county, district, and local issues can be on the ballot at any general election.
Primary	First Tuesday after the first Monday in May (non-presidential years) or third Tuesday after the first Monday in March (presidential years)	Vote to elect the candidates that represent political parties for different offices in the general election. Also, elect members of the political party controlling committee and delegates and alternates to party conventions. Some issues can be on the primary ballot. Charter municipalities may have different primary dates.
Special	The same day as a primary or general election, per R.C. 3501.02 , per municipal charter, or in August per R.C. 3501.022 where a political subdivision has a fiscal emergency.	Fill a vacancy in the office of a U.S. Representative. Vote on constitutional amendments submitted by the general assembly. A question or issue of a county, township, city, village, or school district.

⁹ [R.C. 3501.01](#); [R.C. 3501.02](#).

Advisory		Only applies to municipalities. Hold a non-binding vote on a question to gauge voter opinion. These do not result in a change in the law. Include “Advisory Election” in the issue's title on the ballot. See also Chapter 16, Section 16.04.
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NOTIFICATION

Boards of elections must notify the Secretary of State’s Elections Division in writing about any election in a charter municipality held outside of a regularly scheduled election. This notification must be sent to Intake@OhioSoS.gov at least 46 days before the election or as soon as the charter timeline allows. The notification must include any changes to the early in-person absentee voting schedule. All voting schedules must be made public.

Chapter 1 Checklist: EOM Introduction

Key Takeaways on Your Role and Oath

- ☐ Take your oath to support the U.S. and Ohio Constitutions.
- ☐ Know that you are promising to protect election records and property.
- ☐ Sign your oath document and keep it on file.
- ☐ Know that you will follow directives from the Secretary of State.

Key Takeaways on Laws and Rules

- ☐ U.S. Constitution - Sets up our voting system.
- ☐ Ohio Constitution - Creates state election rules.
- ☐ Federal Laws - Including Voting Rights Act and Help America Vote Act.
- ☐ Ohio Revised Code - Especially Title 35 for election laws.
- ☐ Local Charters - Check if your county or city has special rules.

Key Takeaways on Important Election Types and Dates

- ☐ General Elections: First Tuesday after first Monday in November.
- ☐ Even years: Federal, state, and county positions.
- ☐ Odd years: City, township, and school board positions.
- ☐ Primary Elections: First Tuesday after first Monday in May.
- ☐ Presidential Primaries: Third Tuesday after first Monday in March.
- ☐ Special Elections: Can be held in May, August, or November.
- ☐ Check for special rules during presidential election years.
- ☐ Advisory Elections: For cities/towns only, non-binding.

Key Takeaways on When to Get Legal Help

- ☐ Talk to your county prosecutor about charter questions.
- ☐ Check with the county prosecutor about advisory elections.
- ☐ Look up Attorney General opinions for help on compatible office questions.

Key Takeaways on Required Notifications

- ☐ Tell the Secretary of State about any charter municipality elections that will take place outside of the regular schedule.
- ☐ Send notice to Intake@OhioSoS.gov at least 46 days before the election.
- ☐ Include any changes to early voting schedules.
- ☐ Make all voting schedules public.