

ELECTIONS UPDATE

Additional insights into early voting



With the first election requiring nine days of early voting approaching—though that date, the 2024 presidential primary, is not yet known—MTA has sought additional clarification from the state Bureau of Elections (BOE) on lingering questions around this new requirement.

How do townships inform voters about early voting sites and dates?—Clerks must notify voters, by mail, each time there is a change in voting—including the location of an early voting precinct (even if it is the same precinct the voter would normally vote at on Election Day). According to the BOE, during their presentation at MTA's *Clerks' Professional Development Retreat* in September, the notice can be a letter or postcard, and can be sent one per household to all voters within the household. One notice can be sent to cover all elections in the year. For townships that have entered into an early voting agreement, the agreement should state how costs are covered for the mailing.

To ensure that municipalities are sharing consistent information about early voting instructions, the bureau is developing language, flyers, website copy, etc. Watch BOE and MTA communications for availability to share widely among your community.

Can townships amend their early voting agreement following the 2024 presidential primary?—Early voting agreements are one-year agreements—thus, townships that have entered into an agreement with other municipalities or the county for 2024 elections cannot withdraw or amend the agreement until a new agreement for subsequent years is negotiated. Agreements—which must include termination dates and how to withdraw—must be entered into no more than 125 days before the first regularly scheduled statewide or federal election to be held in an even-numbered election year. (MCL 168.720d(3)) A municipality may elect to conduct early voting on its own for a presidential primary, and join in a new or amended municipal or county agreement for the remaining statewide or federal elections. (MCL 168.720d(4))

Does our township board have to approve the township's early voting plan?—While the township board does not have to approve early voting plans, it does have to approve entering into a municipal or county early voting agreement, which includes areas that must be negotiated, including total and division of costs, equipment usage and storage, etc.

How will townships that entered into a municipal or county agreement conduct preliminary and public testing?—The municipal or county agreement must state the election commission for the involved municipalities; that appointed election commission conducts testing for early voting sites. If the township is conducting its own early voting, its election commission conducts the testing.

How are ballot numbers tracked in the electronic pollbook if the program allows for tabulation of absent voting (AV) ballots in an early voting precinct or in precincts on Election Day?—Clerks and election inspectors will be trained on a new “early voting tool”—software developed by the same company that created the Qualified Voter File (QVF)—which will eliminate ballot numbers on the actual ballot and assign them through the software tool. For example, if a voter is issued an AV ballot, but votes at an early voting precinct, their AV ballot number will automatically be converted to an early voting ballot number.

What early voting sites must have a voting site supervisor?—In single jurisdictions (those not entering into a multi-jurisdictional early voting agreement), the clerk supervises and coordinates early voting (MCL 168.720j(10)), though an additional voting site supervisor may also be appointed, which should be included in the township's early voting plan. In townships involved in a municipal or county agreement, clerks will likely split the role of site supervisor, as the role cannot be filled by an election inspector.

In addition, for those municipalities in an agreement, an early voting coordinator shall also be appointed, who is responsible for organizing and monitoring the administrative requirements of early voting. (MCL 168.720f(2)) This coordinator must:

- be a county clerk (if part of a county agreement), clerk of a municipality who is a party to the agreement, or member of the county or municipal clerk's staff. (MCL 168.720g(2))
- provide oversight to ensure sufficient resources are available and are timely dispatched to each early voting site.
- develop the early voting plan and the early voting budget for each election.

A municipal agreement shall also designate a participating municipal clerk to download the early voting pollbook as the QVF coordinator. (MCL 168.720f(3)) The BOE has indicated that each of the three positions—site supervisor, early voting coordinator and QVF coordinator—should take the oath of office. It is not yet clear from the bureau if individuals can serve dual positions.

For more information, including closing of early voting sites, early voting site equipment and more, download a PDF of the BOE's retreat presentation (visit our Proposal 2 webpage under “Advocacy,” then “MTA On the Issues” on www.michigan townships.org) or purchase MTA's “Elections Update” *Now You Know* webinar, available on demand in MTA's Online Learning Center (<https://learn.michigantownships.org/nyk>).