

# Contra Costa County

Clerk-Recorder-Elections

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**Tommy Gong**



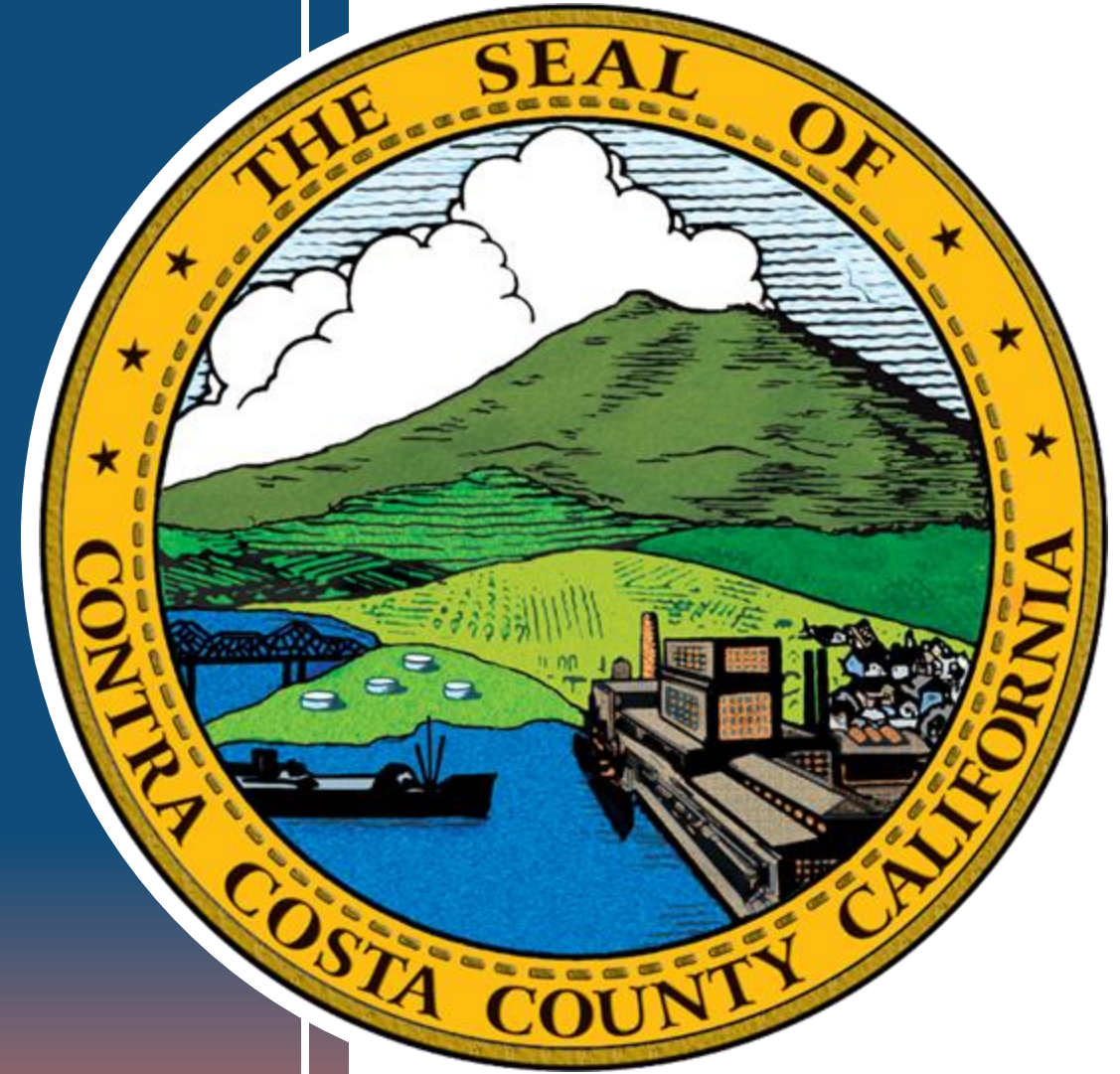
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# The Certified Election Observer (CEO) Program

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## Why is there a need for public observation?

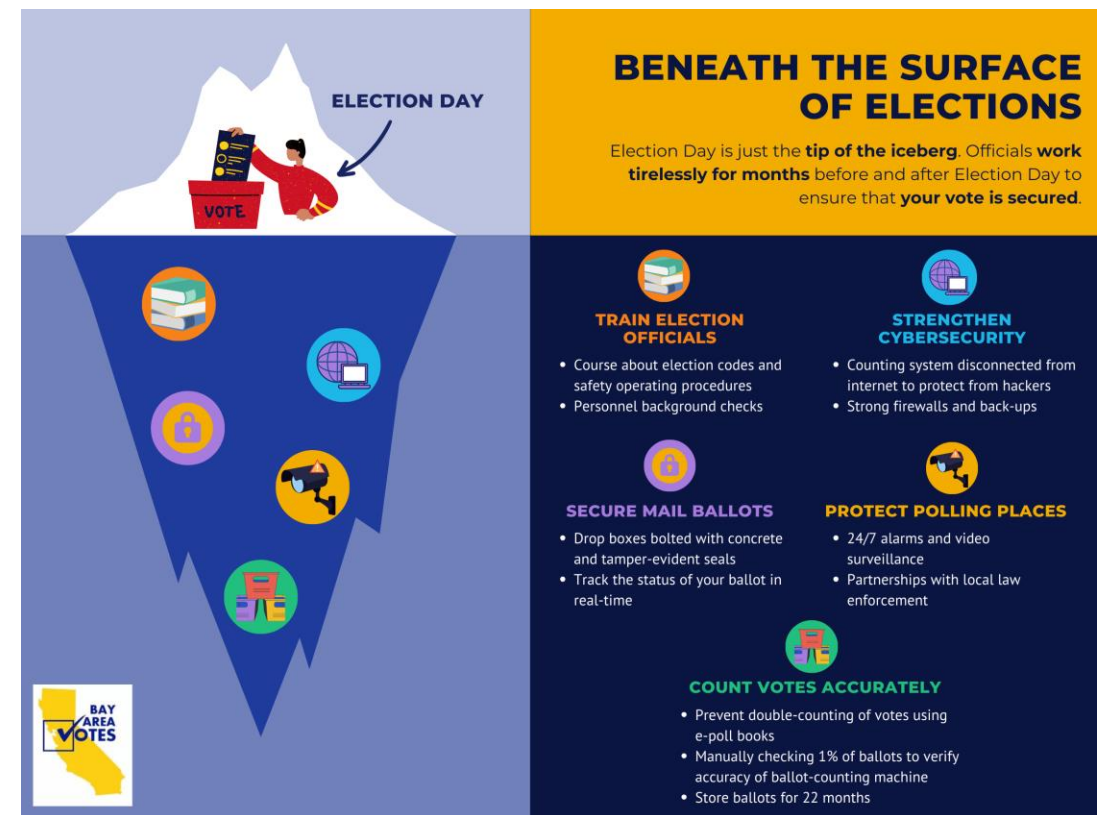
- Many election offices are required by state law to allow public observation of its processes throughout an election cycle
- Election officials often view this a "necessary evil"
  - Create delays to accompany observers and answer questions instead of carrying out their usual election duties (amplified with understaffed offices)
  - Organized observation challenging - repeat performances for different shifts
  - Space requirements are another obstacle, especially with maintaining security



# The Certified Election Observer (CEO) Program

## The need for public awareness of election safeguards

- The general public understands little of the myriad of processes and safeguards in place to ensure the integrity of an election
- Election officials recognize the need for robust voter education programs to build public trust in elections and to inoculate against falsehoods
- Share details of the checks and balances that ensure the will of the voter is reflected



Prototype designed for Coalition of Bay Area Elections Officials

# The Certified Election Observer (CEO) Program

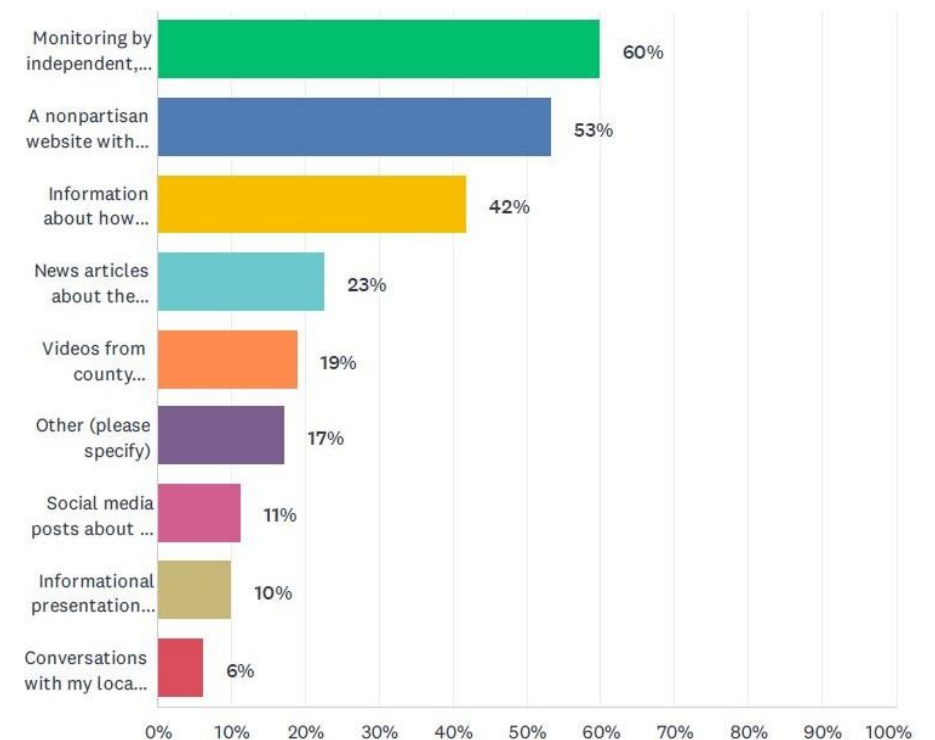
## The need for public awareness of election safeguards

- Local survey of Contra Costa voters (1,249 voters, 147 distrustful voters) Top 3 things that would improve your trust in elections
  - Monitoring by independent, non-partisan election observers (60%, 71%)
  - Nonpartisan website about the voting process, the election process and election security (53%, 37%)
  - Information about how elections work and how ballots are counted (42%, 30%)

Opinions about Elections

Q15 Of the list below, which are the top three things that would improve your trust in elections?

Answered: 1,248 Skipped: 0



# The Certified Election Observer (CEO) Program

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## Origins and Goals of the CEO Program

- Piloted in June 2022 after being inspired by The Carter Center's Non-Partisan Observer program of international elections
- Reimagined observation as an educational opportunity to increase awareness and to leave with a deep understanding of the elections process to members of the public (i.e. behind the curtain)
- Aim to reduce election skepticism, mistrust, and mis- & dis-information by bringing the public up close and personal into the elections process



# The Certified Election Observer (CEO) Program

## Inviting the Public In

- Intensive, guided, multi-day tour of key election processes
- CEO members follow the election process from "soup to nuts" and learn what, how, and why each part is important and protects voters
- "Behind the scenes" of the multiple election process, including in-person and online sessions



# The Certified Election Observer (CEO) Program

## Why the CEO Program is important

- Public observation is an opportunity to give observers a deep understanding of the election process
- Increased transparency builds trust
- Contra Costa County invested the time and effort to formalize election observation as an educational opportunity

**CONTRA COSTA COUNTY ELECTIONS DIVISION**  
www.contracostaelections.org

**FACT SHEET**  
Topic: Voter Registration & List Maintenance

**California Code of Regulations, Title 2, Section 20960 – Signature Verification Process**

(a) For signature verification, the elections official must compare the signature on an initiative, referendum, recall, nominating petition or ballot, handwritten in the signature in the other portion of registration or election official signature on envelope in voter's signature counting a (b) On will shall seal identification signature review a prefer (c) The signat ident weath state is th (d) out

**VoteCal**  
VoteCal is the California statewide voter registration database that is required by the Federal Help America Vote Act of 2002. It went live in 2018.

- VoteCal essentially links up all 68 counties voter lists.
- If a voter moves from one county to another in California, their voter registration is updated via VoteCal.

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**FACT SHEET**  
Topic: Voting Systems & Security

**Election Security**

- Election security is a major concern at all levels of government. Elections have been designated as critical infrastructure by the Federal Department of Homeland Security.
- The end goal of election security is to deliver a process that is not only safe and secure, but also fair, accurate, and accessible. In California, at both the state and county level, there are a multitude of layered security protocols in place.

**Voting Systems Certification**

- The state has developed one of the most strenuous voting systems testing and certification programs in the country.
- Vendors applying for voting system certification have their equipment and software undergo months of extensive testing before they can be used by counties to tally votes.
- While the hardware is delivered from the voting system vendor to a county, the software which controls the system and used to conduct an election is delivered directly from the Secretary of State into the hands of the Elections Official, only

this "trusted build" (the certified version of the software and firmware) shall be installed prior to any election.

**Voting Systems Rules & Regulations**

- Voting systems must be a paper-based, optical scan ballot system.
- The voting system is NEVER connected to the internet or county network.
- The voting system is physically restricted under lock and key and only authorized personnel are allowed in the area.
- Access to the voting system is password-protected and all activity is logged by the voting system. Administrative passwords are only known by designated elections officials.
- Elections staff ensure that specific procedures for programming, deployment, and use of voting equipment during elections are met.
- Strict chain of custody procedures and ballot inventory controls are required.
- Prior to counting, counties are required to perform a Logic and Accuracy Test of the ballots and voting system to ensure votes are tabulated accurately.

**Election Security Safeguards**

Contra Costa County partnered with the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) to implement resources for securing all aspects of election infrastructure.

Securing NETWORKS	Securing FACILITIES	Securing PROCESSES	Securing PEOPLE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Vote counting system is not connected to the internet</li> <li>Networks in high-security locations only</li> <li>Robust backup and patching policies</li> <li>Password policy</li> <li>Ports on systems are sealed to prevent access</li> <li>Multi-factor authentication</li> <li>Cybersecurity awareness, phishing and other trainings for all staff</li> <li>Cyber hygiene vulnerability scans</li> <li>Internal/external system testing</li> <li>Monitor and track system changes</li> <li>Apply principal of least privilege access</li> <li>Hardened networks</li> <li>Multiple firewalls, network segmentation</li> <li>Intrusion detection system (active intercept)</li> <li>VoteCal Statewide database</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Physical security assessment</li> <li>Designated high security areas</li> <li>Staff only access areas they need to do their jobs</li> <li>ID badges, access control, log</li> <li>Alarm systems and/or 24/7 video surveillance</li> <li>Partnerships with local law enforcement</li> <li>Security and ADA assessments of all voting locations</li> <li>Separate entrances for staff and public observers</li> <li>Visitors and observers escorted</li> <li>Tamper evident seals / security features</li> <li>VBM ballot drop boxes (bolted to concrete)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Elections designated as "critical infrastructure" by Homeland Security</li> <li>Always two people with the ballots</li> <li>Chain of custody protocols, access management</li> <li>Voting systems must be certified by the SOS prior to being used at any election</li> <li>"Trusted build" version of software must be reloaded before each election</li> <li>Paper-based, digitally scanned vote system</li> <li>Pre-election logic and accuracy testing</li> <li>Post-election audits to confirm equipment operated correctly</li> <li>Paper ballots stored for 22 months</li> <li>VBM ballot security, bar codes, signatures verified, signature cure process</li> <li>E-poll books – real time access to registration data and voter history</li> <li>Conditional Voter Registration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Oaths of Allegiance and/or background checks of all staff</li> <li>Training and supervision on safety, security, election codes, and procedures</li> <li>Staff only access those systems they need to do their job</li> <li>Periodic training on phishing and cybersecurity best practices</li> <li>Two people are always with ballots and voting equipment</li> <li>Observers and tours – transparency of our processes</li> <li>Emergency planning – prepare for fires, flood, PSPS, earthquake, etc.</li> <li>Visitors and observers identified with unique badges</li> <li>Observers must review and agree to observer rules prior to access</li> <li>Staff follow standard uniform operating procedures across the department.</li> </ul>

**CISA Resources** | Election Security Snapshot | EHSAC Membership | Risk and Vulnerability Testing | Remote Penetration Testing

**#TrustedInfo2022** | Physical Security Walkthrough | Election Emergency Response Guide | Vulnerability Scanning | Albert Sensors

**WHY DOES IT TAKE SO LONG TO COUNT THE VOTES?**

Counting votes includes more than just scanning ballots and tallying results. The roadmap below shows what happens from the time polls close until the election is certified in the Bay Area.

**Election Day**

1. Saus Official Results contain:
  - In-person ballots
  - VBM ballots prior to election night
2. Canvass begins, the thorough process ensuring integrity of elections. In California, counties have 28 days to complete the canvass and certify the election.
3. Vote By Mail Ballots properly postmarked by 8 pm on Election Day, accepted for 7 calendar days.
4. Ballot Processing:
  - Signature Checking
  - Duplication of damaged ballots
  - Scanner Preparation
5. Cure Letters: For signature challenges received until 2 days prior to election certification.
6. Provisional Ballots and same day registration.
7. Ballots received from other counties – up to 15 days after Election Day
8. Voter Reconciliation: Ensuring voters only voted once.
9. 1 Manual Tally and verification that the ballot count is accurate.

**Did you know?** All processes are open to the public for observation

**Certification of Election**

**HOW DO I KNOW MY VOTE WAS COUNTED?**

Every vote by mail return envelope contains a unique ID to help with the signature verification process ensure it matches with the signature on the envelope and that voters only vote once.

**Registered voters can drop off their voted ballots:**

- In a drop box
- In person
- At a vote center
- At a polling place
- At the Elections Office

1. Voters return their Vote By Mail Ballot

2. All received Vote By Mail Ballots are sorted to ensure that they are for the appropriate election.

3. All Vote By Mail Ballots go through signature verification. Voters are notified by mail if their signature cannot be verified.

4. All challenged Vote By Mail Ballots are sorted out for further review.

5. Accepted Vote By Mail Ballots are sent to processing where they are prepared for counting.

6. I VOTED

**Did you know?** Voters can track their Vote By Mail Ballots through the entire process with BallotTrax!

To learn more, scan this QR code or visit [california.ballottrax.net/voter](http://california.ballottrax.net/voter)

Division of Bay Area Election Officials  
[bayareavotes.org](http://bayareavotes.org)

# The Certified Election Observer (CEO) Program

## How the CEO Program has grown

- Each successive programs has grown larger with the number of people interested in joining
  - Our first cohort started with 6 initial participants but has risen to more than 15 participants now
- With each cohort, we gain additional ambassadors to spread the word about the great work being done in elections

15+  
↑  
6





# The Certified Election Observer (CEO) Program



## Getting feedback on the CEO Program

- Upon completion of the program, the CEOs are recognized by the County Board of Supervisors and receive a certificate of appreciation and a special CEO pin
- We ask for their feedback about what they learned:



“I was not aware of the adjudication and one percent tally, but it was very helpful that I learned it. I have gained more trust in the election process because of not only the accommodation of mail-in ballots, but the security as well.” -**Dhrti**

(participant in the June 2022 Primary Election CEO cohort)

“I was not aware of all the procedural steps and safeguards, the number of workers involved in each election, and the outreach to voters to cure their ballot.” -**Renee**

(participant in the 2022 General Election CEO program)

# The Certified Election Observer (CEO) Program

## The CEO Program going forward

- Continue to grow the number of residents to become aware and wish to participate in the CEO program
- "CEO on the Road" - civic events throughout the community
- "CEO in the Schools" - age-appropriate content in schools
- With academia, utilize surveys to gauge trust in elections before and after the program to measure success



Dhrti receiving her award

# We're Easy to Reach!

Follow us on:

Instagram



*QR Code to our Instagram*

TikTok



*QR Code to our TikTok*

## Social Media:

**Twitter** – @cocoelections

**YouTube** – Contra Costa Clerk Recorder

**Facebook** – Contra Costa County Elections

**Instagram** – @contra\_costa\_elections

**Tik Tok** – @cc.clerkrec.elect

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Check out our Website:

***ContraCostaVote.gov***