

Vermont Elections 101: 2026 Reference Guide
VMCTA Spring Training 2026
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I. GOVERNANCE & ROLES

- **The Municipal Clerk:** The "key player." Manages the statewide voter checklist (VEMS), processes absentee ballots, posts legal warnings, and serves as the Presiding Officer.
- **Board of Civil Authority (BCA):** Composed of the Clerk, Selectboard/Council, and Justices of the Peace. They oversee election conduct, establish local polling policies, and appoint election officials.
- **Presiding Officer:** The chief official at the polls. By law, they must attend a Secretary of State (SOS) workshop every two years.
- **Election Officials:** Appointed by the BCA at least 3 days prior to assist with the checklist, ballot counting, and tabulator oversight.

II. 2026 ELECTION CALENDAR

- **Town Meeting Day:** Tuesday, March 3, 2026
- **Statewide Primary Election:** Tuesday, August 11, 2026
- **General Election:** Tuesday, November 3, 2026

Create a timeline to meet statutory deadlines:

- **Ballot Readiness:** 20 days prior for local; 45 days prior for State/Federal.
- **Equipment Testing:** Logic & Accuracy (L&A) tests on tabulators and Democracy Live machines must be completed **10 days** before the election.

Town Meeting (March 2026)

- **Jan 15:** Last day to file petitions (signed by 5% of voters) for articles to be included in the warning.
- **Jan 26 (5:00 PM):** Deadline for candidates to file a **Consent of Candidate form** to appear on the Australian ballot for local office.
- **Feb 1:** Deadline to post the updated Voter Checklist at the Clerk's office.
- **Feb 21:** Last day to post Sample Ballots and distribute the Annual Auditor's Report.
- **March 2 (5:00 PM):** Final deadline to request an absentee ballot for Town Meeting Day.

Primary & General Election

- **April 27:** First day candidates for statewide, legislative, or county office may file their Consent of Candidate and financial disclosure forms.
- **May 28 (5:00 PM): Primary Filing Deadline.** Last day for major party candidates to file to appear on the August Primary ballot.
- **June 27:** Early/Absentee voting begins for the Primary Election (45 days prior).
- **July 20:** Deadline for major and minor parties to hold caucuses for Justice of the Peace nominations.
- **July 20 (5:00 PM):** Deadline for Independent Justice of the Peace candidates to file consent of candidate & petition.
- **July 27 (5:00 PM):** Deadline for major party committee chairs to file nomination list of Justice of the Peace candidates.
- **Aug 13:** Deadline ORV.
- **Aug 14 (10:00 AM):** Representative District Clerk Canvassing.
- **Sept 19:** Early/Absentee voting begins for the General Election (45 days prior).
- **Nov 5:** Deadline ORV.
- **Nov 10 (10:00 AM):** Representative District Clerk Canvassing.

III. VOTER REGISTRATION & VEMS

- **Vermont Voter Portal:** The primary online resource for voters to check registration status, request absentee ballots, and view sample ballots.
- **Daily Maintenance:** Clerks must log into VEMS daily to process registration applications and "reminders."
- **3-Day Rule:** Applications should be processed within 3 days of receipt.
- **Election Day Registration (EDR):** Vermont allows same-day registration. No qualified voter should be turned away for not being on the list.
- **Safe at Home:** These voters appear as "Voter #XXX Blind Ballot." Their physical address must **never** be placed on the public checklist.

IV. ABSENTEE BALLOTS & THE CURING PROCESS

- **Absentee Requests:** Clerks must receive absentee ballot requests by the close of business the day before any election (March 2, August 10, and November 2).
- **Secure Storage:** All returned ballots must be date-stamped in VEMS and kept in a locked vault/safe until Election Day or authorized pre-counting.
- **Defective Criteria:** A ballot is defective if the certificate envelope is **unsigned**, **unsealed**, or if a Primary voter fails to return unvoted party ballots.
- **The "Curing" Mandate:**
 - Clerks **must** notify voters of a defect within **one business day**.
 - Notification should be via the most efficient means (phone, email, or VEMS postcard).
 - Voters have until **7:00 PM on Election Day** to fix the issue (signing the envelope or requesting a replacement).

V. ELECTION DAY OPERATIONS

- **Campaigning:** No campaign materials (stickers, buttons, signs) are permitted inside the building. Outside campaigning must not obstruct the entrance or walkways.
- **Accessibility:** The **Omni Ballot tablet/accessible voting system** provided by Democracy Live machine is mandatory for all state and federal elections to ensure a private, independent vote.
- **Voter Intent:** During hand-counts, the primary goal is to determine the voter's clear choice, even if the mark is unconventional.
- **2026 Write-in Rule:** Candidates must file a formal form by the Thursday before the election to have their names individually reported on the Return of Votes.

VI. POST-ELECTION DUTIES

- **Reporting:** Unofficial results must be entered into VEMS as soon as practicable on election night.
- **Official Return of Votes (ORV):** Must be submitted via VEMS within **48 hours** for State/Federal elections.

- **Certification:** Local Australian ballot results must be certified within **5 days**.
- **Ballot Retention:** Bags must be sealed and tagged with a completed form in the front pocket. Refer to the VSARA/SOS Retention Schedule.
- **Canvassing:** Single-town districts meet Wednesday at 10 AM; multi-town districts meet Friday at 10 AM following the election.

VII. CONTACT DIRECTORY

Organization	Contact Method	Website/Resource
Vermont Elections Division	(802) 828-2363 / SOS.Elections@vermont.gov	sos.vermont.gov/elections/
LHS Associates (Tabulators)	(888) 547-8683 / VT@lhsassociates.com	lhsassociates.com
Democracy Live (Accessibility)	(603) 800-6889 / Juliet@democracylive.com	democracylive.com
VLCT (Legal/Training)	(802) 229-9111 / info@vlct.org	vlct.org/about-vlct
VMCTA		https://vmcta.org/
Sara Haskins (Presenter)	(802) 888-6669 / shaskins@morristownvt.gov	Morristown Town Clerk