

# Iowa Ballot Proofing

## WHAT IS BALLOT PROOFING AND WHY SHOULD WE DO IT?

The process of producing a ballot is complex. County election officials do their best to make sure they have listed every contest and every candidate correctly. But **mistakes happen**. Ballot proofing helps catch mistakes before official ballots are printed. And that's important because mistakes caught after ballots are printed often cannot be fixed. Ballot proofing is therefore one of many tools to ensure that election results accurately reflect voter intent.

So who does this proofing? County officials will proof each ballot before sending it to the printer, but **you have a role to play too**. The more eyes on the near-final version of the ballot, the better. You should feel free to invite staff, voter protection volunteers, and others to participate.

## HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE TO PROOF A BALLOT?

Not long. It will take one person a few minutes per ballot to perform a complete review. Because mistakes are usually noticed by a fresh set of eyes, consider bringing in a second person to review.

## HOW DO WE PARTICIPATE IN THE PROOFING PROCESS?

In Iowa, state law does not require that county commissioners send "specimen" (or near-final versions) of the ballot to candidates to review, but counties are **permitted** to do so. So start by asking the county how to get involved at this early stage.

State law does require that county commissioners make "sample" ballots available for inspection upon request.<sup>1</sup> Two important notes: (1) Sample ballots are versions of ballots that already are deemed final. Making changes at this point will be more difficult than if you

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1 [I.C.A. § 49.63](#).

can work with the county to review the near-final specimen version. (2) Counties will not send sample ballots to you automatically; you must request them.

Remember, each county handles the proofing process differently and so you should reach out to any target counties now to confirm their process, including the date you could expect to receive a ballot to review.

## WHEN DOES THE PROCESS START?

The proofing process in Iowa will likely start in late August or early September—and will finish no later than September 14. At the latest, **you should contact counties by early August so you know what to expect.**

## HOW SHOULD WE REPORT ERRORS OR OMISSIONS?

You should first attempt to notify the county via email of the error and your proposed correction. So long as you timely notify the county election official, she or he will correct the error promptly.<sup>2</sup>

## OTHER THAN ITEMS ON THE PROOFING CHECKLIST, IS THERE ANYTHING SPECIFIC TO IOWA THAT WE SHOULD BE LOOKING FOR?

The State Commissioner will determine the order of the candidates on the November ballot. In half of the state's 99 counties, the Democratic candidate will appear first; in the other half, the Republican candidate will appear first.<sup>3</sup>

## CONNECT WITH US!

Have questions? Need help?  
Please reach out to us at:

[ballotquestions@digidems.com](mailto:ballotquestions@digidems.com)

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2 Per state law, “[i]f mistakes are discovered, they shall be corrected without delay...” [I.C.A. § 49.63.](#)

3 [I.C.A. § 49.31.](#)