It is essential for localities to proof their ballots at the local level before submitting proofs to ELECT to catch errors and prevent delays and denial of approval. This checklist will help you succeed! Vendors and localities should be mindful of the items in this list during ballot creation, review, and submission. **Note:** this is **not** an all-encompassing checklist for the ballot proofing process, but more so a list to prevent the most common mistakes seen during proofing.

**Overall Ballot Design** ([SBE Ballot Standards](https://www.elections.virginia.gov/media/formswarehouse/election-management/ballots/2022-08-SBE-Ballot-Standards-and-Verification-Procedures.pdf) pages 7-12)

1. Direct voters to the back of the ballot if 2-sided. 
   1. On 2-sided ballots, while not a Code or SBE requirement, it is a strongly encouraged best practice to include instructions at the bottom front of the ballot directing voters to the back of the ballot.
2. Place the seal or seal placeholder on the back of the ballot.
3. Check for and correct spelling errors throughout the entire ballot.

**Ballot Header** ([SBE Ballot Standards](https://www.elections.virginia.gov/media/formswarehouse/election-management/ballots/2022-08-SBE-Ballot-Standards-and-Verification-Procedures.pdf) pages 13-15)

1. Use the correct election designation in the header. 
   1. ***General and Special Elections*** is used only when there **is** a special election or referendum on the ballot.
   2. ***General Election*** is used only when there are **no** special elections or referendums on the ballot.
   3. Exception: If your vendor can only do one or the other across the board, then you would need to use "General and Special Elections" if **any** of your ballots have a special or referendum.
2. Include both the **precinct number** and **name** in the header or footer of the ballot.

**Voting Instructions** ([SBE Ballot Standards](https://www.elections.virginia.gov/media/formswarehouse/election-management/ballots/2022-08-SBE-Ballot-Standards-and-Verification-Procedures.pdf) pages 16-18)

1. Include write-in instructions.
2. Include referendum instructions, when applicable.

**Office Ballot Order and Headers** ([SBE Ballot Standards](https://www.elections.virginia.gov/media/formswarehouse/election-management/ballots/2022-08-SBE-Ballot-Standards-and-Verification-Procedures.pdf) pages 19-28)

1. List offices in the correct order on the ballot. 
   1. If you are unsure how to fix office ballot order, email [ea@elections.virginia.gov](mailto:ea@elections.virginia.gov).
   2. Note: if the same office is on the ballot, once for the general election and once for a special election, the general office is always listed before the special office (For example, in the case of a staggered town council where some members are up for election this year and some are up for election in two years, but one of those resigned, requiring a special this year).
2. Do **not** put parenthesis around *Vote for...* or *Unexpired term…* in the office header.

**Candidate Ballot Order and Name Formats** ([SBE Ballot Standards](https://www.elections.virginia.gov/media/formswarehouse/election-management/ballots/2022-08-SBE-Ballot-Standards-and-Verification-Procedures.pdf) pages 29-32)

1. If an office does not have any qualified candidates, then only the write-in line(s) should appear on the ballot. 
   1. You do **not** indicate that there are no candidates.
2. List candidates in the correct order on the ballot. 
   1. Correct party order and abbreviations can be found on ELECT-613 Explanation of Political Party Abbreviations Sign (located in FormsWarehouse > [Posters and Publications](https://www.elections.virginia.gov/formswarehouse/posters-and-publications/)).
   2. Correct candidate order information can be found in the Official ELECT Advisory: 2025-05-07 Determining Candidate Time of Filing/Ballot Order for General and Special Elections (located in the Advisory Archive).
3. Verify that candidate’s middle name/initial (and suffix, if applicable) is included for all candidates. 
   1. If the candidate's voter record indicates they have a middle name or suffix, it **must** be represented in their ballot name.
   2. If you are unsure if the ballot name requested by the candidate is acceptable, email [ea@elections.virginia.gov](mailto:ea@elections.virginia.gov).
4. List the candidate's nickname in quotes and in the correct location within the ballot name. 
   1. Follow this formula: First name or initial + middle name or initial + (optional) “nickname” + last name + suffix.
   2. If you are unsure if the ballot name requested by the candidate is acceptable, email [ea@elections.virginia.gov](mailto:ea@elections.virginia.gov).
5. Check to ensure there are no incomplete candidate ballot names. 
   1. For ballot names that are **longer than 25 characters** (including spaces, periods, and commas), every time you open the candidate's record in VERIS using the edit (pencil) icon, VERIS will cut off everything after the 25th character in the Ballot Name box.
   2. Ensure all ballot names are complete on the ballots and in VERIS. If VERIS has cut off some of the candidate's ballot name, you will need to go back into the record, complete the name in the Ballot Name box, and click “save” **every time** the record is opened using the pencil icon.
6. Fix candidate ballot names in VERIS. 
   1. If a VERIS entry error is found during ballot proofing, **it must be fixed in VERIS and on the ballot**.
   2. Elections are created in Enhanced Ballot and Enhanced Results using VERIS data. Democracy Works also uses VERIS data for the Voter Information Lookup Tool on ELECT's website. **If something is wrong in VERIS, it will be wrong in Enhanced and in the lookup tool.**

**Submitting Ballots to ELECT**

1. Allow sufficient time for ELECT review: Do not submit your proofs the day before/day of L&A testing. 
   1. ELECT proofs ballots first in, first out. Localities should plan for a **24- to 72-hour approval turnaround time** and schedule L&A testing accordingly.
2. Submit ballot proofs using the [Ballot Proofs Submission Formsite form](https://fs28.formsite.com/vaelect/ballotproofs/index.html) (not by email). 
   1. Proofs sent by email will **not** be reviewed; you must submit them through the [Ballot Proofs Submission Formsite form](https://fs28.formsite.com/vaelect/ballotproofs/index.html).
   2. If you need help completing the online form, contact your ERS Liaison.
3. Submit the final ballot proofs only (do not submit vendor mock-ups/reports or VERIS reports). 
   1. Generally, mock-ups will not have the full header or any instructions.
   2. If it does not look exactly\* like the final ballot, it is **not** what ELECT needs and will **not** be reviewed.

\*ELECT encourages sending the final ballot proofs with **no timing marks**, but if the vendor cannot produce a final ballot proof without timing marks, submit with them.

1. Submit proofs as a PDF or jpeg.
2. Submit the front and back of the ballot.
3. The back of the ballot **must** be submitted to confirm that the seal or seal placeholder is present.
4. Use a single Formsite Submission form. 
   1. All proofs should be submitted using one [Ballot Proofs Submission Formsite form](https://fs28.formsite.com/vaelect/ballotproofs/index.html).
   2. If you need help uploading multiple PDFs to one form, contact your ERS Liaison.