

FAQs: Appointment of Election Inspectors from Party Lists

Q: What county party representative(s) is required to submit the list of inspectors and to whom?

A: This depends on the location of the municipality and the structure of local political committees. Please see the chart “Guide to Political Party Submission of Election Inspector and Municipal Board of Absentee Ballot Canvasser Nominees,” posted with these FAQs.

Q: What is the procedure when submitting additional names to a party’s original list? To whom is the list submitted?

A: Additional names are submitted to the same authority to which the original list was submitted. In the City of Milwaukee, the list must be provided to the Municipal Board of Election Commissioners.

Q: How should a public records request for the list of election inspectors be responded to? And is it reasonable to expect the information of current election inspectors provided to contain contact information and including all names and whether they are political party appointees?

A: The response to a public records request will vary depending on the request, but if someone requests the names of all current election inspectors, they should receive the names of everyone who was appointed an inspector in December 2021 and whether they were political appointees. If there have been appointments since December 2021, those names should appear also and if the appointment came from a party list, the party with which the appointment was affiliated. Clerks may not possess all the information requested or in the format requested and are not required to create a new document or seek additional information but should provide whatever records show the names of all election inspectors. The home email and home telephone numbers of public officials cannot be released under the public records law, however, any “work” email address or telephone number used by the election inspector in their public capacity would be a public record. Regarding a home address, election inspectors are required to live in a specified area, and thus the address is likely not protected by the public records law. Questions about responses to public records requests should be directed to your local counsel.

Q: How should political party nominees for SVDs and absentee ballot canvassers be submitted to ensure their inclusion in the appointments?

A: These lists should be separate from the lists of inspectors. Or, if you submit one list, list the nominees under the categories for which you are nominating them. The submission process is the same. Nominees for the board of absentee ballot canvassers must be qualified electors of the municipality but nominees for SVDs may reside in the same county. The party whose candidate for governor or president prevailed at the last general election in the municipality (currently the November 8, 2022, General Election) is entitled to the extra canvasser. Wis. Stat. § 7.52(1)(b).

Q: How will party balance be handled for Election Day EROs who also handle ballots and for specialized poll workers who exclusively process absentee ballots at polling sites?

A: Election-Day EROs are not included when determining party balance of inspectors. Election-Day EROs have one job, which is to register voters. However, the ERO could also be appointed as an alternate inspector (provided the municipality has an ordinance that allows for alternates) who would take over when another inspector takes a break. During that time, he or she is no longer serving as an ERO. When the absent inspector returns, the alternate inspector resumes the duties of the ERO.

“Specialized Poll workers” are simply election inspectors who have been assigned to a specific task. They are included as part of the odd number of inspectors assigned to the polling place. Whenever a task is required to be conducted by more than one inspector, party imbalance must be considered.

Example: If there are 7 total poll workers (4 Democrats and 3 Republicans) and 1 Republican and 1 Democrat process absentee ballots, 1 Republican and 1 Democrat handle the poll lists, that leaves 2 Republicans and 1 Democrat to issue ballots, monitor the voting equipment and register voters—tasks that do not require more than 1 person.

Note: Greeters are not appointed with regard to party affiliation and are not included when counting the number of inspectors.

Q: With nominees allowed to come from the county of residency, can the same person be nominated on multiple municipal lists?

A: Yes, and one person can be appointed by more than one municipality. The party representative submitting the list must certify on the list that they have contacted each nominee and that each nominee has agreed to serve as an election official. This means that the nominee must agree to have their name submitted to multiple municipalities. Please be advised that submitting one appointee to more than one municipality increases the risk of not having sufficient appointments at the polling places the person does not choose to serve in.

Q: Can SVDs and absentee ballot canvassers be nominated from the county of residence as well?

A: Nominees for a Municipal Board of Absentee Ballot Canvassers (MB-ABC) must be qualified electors of the municipality. Special voting deputies may reside in the same county.

Q: Since the political parties are allowed to add names to their original lists at any time, will the supplemented names to the original list of nominees be given priority in making assignments for the remaining vacant designated party positions, or for any vacant position, regardless of party affiliation?

A: Whether an inspector position is considered Republican, Democratic or Unaffiliated is determined at the December meeting of the governing body when appointments are made. If there are insufficient names on the list received on November 30th to fill the number of positions to which the party is entitled, the remaining positions are filled by unaffiliated inspectors.

If there is a vacancy in a position that had been filled by a party appointee, the position is filled from any additional names the party may have submitted after November 30th. A vacancy in a position that was filled with an unaffiliated inspector due to a lack of names on the original list should be filled from the list of additional names submitted by the party if that will maintain the partisan imbalance. Supplemental lists submitted prior to November 30th are treated as part of the original list of nominees. Names submitted after that date are only used to fill vacancies. An unaffiliated inspector does not lose their position as an inspector just because the party submitted additional names.

Q: Is there a difference in procedure when a political party supplements its list before vs. after the initial appointment by the municipal governing body in December?

A: Supplemental lists submitted prior to November 30th are treated as part of the original list of nominees. Names submitted after that date are only used to fill vacancies.

Q: If some positions remain vacant after the initial appointment by the municipal governing body, will the supplemented names to the political party lists receive priority for assignment by the clerk?

If a position remains vacant because the party entitled to the position did not submit sufficient names and there were no unaffiliated inspectors to place in the position instead, this leaves the party without representation in that position. Therefore, if the party submits a supplemental list, the list should be used to fill that position.

If due to lack of names on the party list, an unaffiliated inspector was appointed to fill the party position, and the position later became vacant, the supplemental list from the party should be used to fill the position. If there are no more names remaining from the original or supplemental list, the position is again filled with an unaffiliated inspector.

Q: If all the names on a political party list are to be assigned to positions, what impact does the designation of “first choice nominee” have on the process?

A: If there are 5 positions to which a party is entitled and the party submits 10 names, the governing body can choose whichever 5 they wish from the list. If first-choice nominees are indicated, the governing body must select those names first.

Q: If there are more names on a list than positions available and the clerk has permission through an ordinance to establish different working hours for different officials, does the clerk have the authority to arbitrarily divide an election official position between all the nominees/appointees from a party list, giving each person “a shift” to work, sometimes for only 1 -2 hours during election day?

A: The intent of the law that provides for shifts of election inspectors is to lessen the hours the inspectors must work, not to give everyone whose name was submitted a chance to work. Most ordinances specify the duration and time of each shift. If shifts are used, each shift should reflect the proper party imbalance if inspectors from each party are available.

Q: Is there any difference in the process when nominating election officials to municipalities located on Native American Reservations?

A: No.

Q: It has been reported that some municipal clerks plan to have training sessions this fall before election inspectors have been appointed to their positions. How can this happen?

A: Municipal clerks may conduct training at any time. The current inspectors' terms do not end until December 31st. However, the governing body or clerk cannot use non-attendance at a training held before appointment as a reason to not appoint a political party nominee.

Q: With inspectors being nominated from the county of residence, is there reciprocity in training between municipalities?

A: A municipal clerk can choose to accept training attended by an inspector while serving in another municipality.

Q: What is the procedure for addressing problems that may arise during this process?

A: Document any problems encountered and contact the WEC.