



Communicating About Audits

Quick Tips for Election Officials



When election officials talk to the public, it's important to describe audits simply and accurately. Here are some tips to help you communicate successfully.

Highlight the fact that audits are routine

Voters need to know that election audits are a regular part of the election process, done after every election, and not a response to any particular concern. Describing audits as “regular,” “routine,” or “standard” can be helpful. You can also talk about audits as “double checks,” “checks and balances,” or “quality control/quality assurance processes” to help voters understand the role audits play in the election process.

Put your audit in context

Audits rely on and complement other quality control processes throughout the election cycle. Emphasizing that audits are part of a larger system of checks and balances – chain of custody, logic and accuracy testing, etc. – can help voters understand the big picture. It can give you an opportunity to talk about other election security measures, too. Along with these other measures, audits provide additional evidence that elections are trustworthy and secure.

Use plain language and simple terms

Jargon and technical terms can be hard for the public to understand. For example, terms like “confidence” have statistical meanings that are different than their everyday usage. A word like “risk” can give the wrong impression – even when it’s describing a “risk limit.” Be cautious about using technical terms, and if you must use them, review the language carefully to be sure you’re using the terms correctly. Try to offer a plain language explanation whenever you can.

Be transparent about process and results

Transparency is key to a successful audit. Provide and publicize opportunities for the public to observe your audit and invite the media to attend. If possible, include candidate or party representatives in your process, either as observers or members of bipartisan audit teams. Share the results of the audit widely and provide full documentation on your website.

Tailor Post-Audit Communication to Your Audience	
For the general public:	For those who want more detail:
<p>Stick to the basics. Avoid math and jargon, focusing instead on a high-level description of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What you did• What you found• What it means• Why it matters• Where they can go for more details	<p>Consider a fact sheet that can be handed out at in-person events and posted on your website with your audit results. Include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• When the audit happened• Who conducted the audit• The procedures or methods used• The size of the sample and how it was selected• The results of the audit, including:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Whether you found anything out of the ordinary○ The cause of any issues identified, if known, or the plan to follow up○ What you plan to do in response to any issues

Try it out:

Imagine you are conducting an audit, and a reporter asks to interview you for that evening’s local news broadcast. In two-to-three sentences, how would you respond to the question, “Tell me what you’re doing here today?”
