



MEDIA
FREEDOM &
INFORMATION
ACCESS CLINIC



Media Access Overview: Wisconsin

Polling Place Access:

- Wisconsin is permissive of both the press and the public having access to the polling locations, so long as they are not disruptive of the proceedings. Wis. Stat. § 7.41, [Wisconsin Election Day Manual for Election Officials from the Wisconsin Elections Commission \(Election Day Manual\) 86](#). The chief inspector or municipal clerk may designate separate observation areas, provided those areas still provide a clear view of the proceedings. Wis. Stat. § 7.41 (2).
- Exit polls are also permitted, provided that they do not interfere with the election proceedings. [85](#).
- Photography is permitted both outside and inside the polling location. [Election Day Manual 83](#). Photographers may not depict a marked ballot, nor may they induce an elector to display a marked ballot. Wis. Stat. §§ [12.13 \(1\)\(F\)](#), [12.13 \(1\)\(Q\)](#).

Access to Vote Tabulation Processes

- The public must have notice of the canvassing activities, and these meetings must be reasonably accessible to the public. Wis. Stat. §§ [1982 \(3\)](#), [1984](#).
- During the vote count process, the board of canvassers must accommodate the use of photography or video. Wis. Stat. § [19.90](#).
- Members of the public may observe the counting of ballots at both polling places and central counting locations. Wis. Stat. § [7.51 \(1\)](#).
- If the municipality is using a separate absentee canvassing facility, this location must be made public and the public must be allowed reasonable access. Wis. Stat. § [7.52 \(1\)\(a\)](#).

Access to Information/Records

- All records retained by the Wisconsin Elections Commission are available for inspection and copying, except as otherwise provided by law. Each agency is required to post the organization and contact information for public records requests. Wis. Stat. § [19.34 \(1\)](#). [Here](#) is the link for the Wisconsin Elections Commission page on public records.
- The voter registration list is available for a fee as a matter of public record. Wis. Stat. § [6.36 \(6\)](#).

Potential Issues

- Wisconsin has very open accessibility to polling locations, so there is a possibility for issues with too many individuals there.
- Wisconsin also allows other electors to challenge a vote in-person if the challenger knows or suspects that the challenged elector is not qualified. EL 9.02. If this is abused, this could prove to be a tool of voter suppression, though, if the challenged elector swears an oath that they are in fact qualified, they will still be issued a ballot.

Key Resources

- [Here](#) is the directory providing the contact information for the clerks of each municipality. They can be contacted to address issues such as improper denial of access. If the municipal clerk cannot resolve the issue, the Wisconsin Government Accountability Board is available at (608) 266-8005.

Contact the Reporters Committee Legal Hotline at 1-800-336-4243 or hotline@rcfp.org if you have questions about reporting on the general election or run into issues while covering the election.