Introduction to the Election Reporting System

The Election Reporting System (ERS) is a web-based election management system which includes the following functionality:

- Candidate filing and ballot question entry
- Election night reporting of results and statistics
- Post-election review module for statutorily required manual results review following state general elections
- Recount module for federal, state or county level recounts
- Numerous reports related to above functionality

There are many benefits to using the system. For example, ERS enables:

- Creation of a ballot data export file for use by vendor/ballot programmer for building ballots
- Posting of candidate and ballot information on MNVotes web pages for public review:
  - Candidate Filings: http://candidates.sos.state.mn.us
  - MyBallot: http://myballotmn.sos.state.mn.us/
- Posting of election results and statistics on an Election Night Results (ENR) website that is permanently retained.
- Creation of abstract (canvass report) for use at canvassing board meetings

The following pages provide a brief introduction to ERS and its key functions.

Access and Navigation

ERS is access through the following link: https://acecounty.sos.state.mn.us.

A user account and password are needed to access the system. The accounts are county and user specific – e.g. each county election administrator has their own account and can access and edit data for their own county only. Municipal and school district user accounts, with limited functionality, are also available. OSS sets up user accounts; contact the office at elections.dept@state.mn.us to request an account.

Once logged in, users select an election.
The main menu of ERS is arranged vertically and divided by user group: County, Municipal, and School District.

NOTE: Image below has been split. Tasks are completed by selecting the link* in the appropriate user menu.

*A padlock denotes a function that is locked and not available at that time. For instance, Post Election Review is not available until the State General Election is passed.

**Election Set up**

OSS is responsible for setting up elections in ERS. The addition of an election to ERS is separate from the process done in the State Voter Registration System (SVRS) to add an election. While all elections are added in SVRS, not every election that occurs in the state is added to ERS.

ERS is used for federal and state level elections, both regularly-scheduled and specials. ERS is also used in odd years for the municipal/school district August primaries and November general elections. ERS is available upon request for county level special elections. Unless a local special election coincides with one of the elections previously described, ERS is not used.

Once the election has been added to ERS, it can be populated with offices, questions, and candidates.

**Offices**

ERS has a collection of office templates used to specify the offices on the ballot for a given election. Offices are organized by type, then arranged by title and term length. There are six office types:

- State and Federal (STFD)
- Judicial (JD)
- County (CO)
- Municipal (MCD)
- School District (SD)
- Hospital District (HD)

Offices are added to the General Election. OSS adds state, federal and judicial offices to an election. Counties select the appropriate county, municipal (city and township), school district, and hospital district offices that will be on the ballot at the general election for their jurisdiction. Offices are selected through the *Offices in Election* link in the appropriate User menu.
Candidates
Once the offices up for election have been selected in ERS, candidates can be entered into the election. Candidates are filed into the ERS general election through the Candidate Filing link in the appropriate User menu. As candidates are entered, they are assigned to the appropriate office and have their political party defined. (Those filing for non-partisan offices are automatically assigned the party Non-partisan.) Once a filing is complete, the candidate information is transferred out to the Candidate Filing website. (http://candidates.sos.state.mn.us)

Following the close of each candidate filing and withdrawal period (for primary-possible and primary-not possible jurisdictions), candidates are set in the ballot base rotation order by office. This order can be entered by the county after lots are drawn, or the system can randomly order the candidates.

Questions
Ballot questions are entered into the primary or general election in which they will appear on the ballot. There are five question types: Constitutional Amendment; County Question; City Question; Township Question and School District Question.

The OSS enters proposed Constitutional Amendments. The remaining question types are entered by the county.

All Questions have a system-generated title – e.g. ‘School District Question 1.’ Counties manually enter the additional title text provided by the jurisdiction, and text of the question itself.

Coding
In order to facilitate ballot programming and election night results reporting, offices, ballot questions, and candidates are numerically coded. Codes are used to identify and order offices and questions.

Each office template available for selection has an assigned office code. This code is determined by office type (county, municipal, etc.) office title (County Commissioner District 1, Mayor, etc.) and position on the ballot. For example, county offices have office codes between 390 and 500, while city offices have office codes between 1000 and 1999. The choice of coding is because county offices are printed above city offices on the ballot. Further, the office code for County Commissioner District 1 is 0391, while the office code for County Auditor is 0401, because commissioner seats are displayed before the county auditor seat. The office code for Mayor is 1001, which falls after all county offices. See further examples below:

Candidates are assigned a candidate ID number which is comprised of their office’s office code, their assigned political party’s ID number, and their ballot order number.

Ballot questions are also assigned office codes. This code is determined by the question type. For example, county questions have codes in the 400s, which position them after the other county offices as required by Minnesota law.
Ballot programmers can receive this information for ERS in an exported file. Counties can review this information in a number of reports.

“Expanding” the Election

When election set-up is complete, the process of “expanding” the election must occur. OSS triggers this process. During “expansion”, ERS applies the ballot base rotation assigned to each candidate, draws information from SVRS to determine the precincts that will be reporting, and finally combines these precincts with the appropriate offices and numbered candidates. Once the process is complete, the election has “expanded” to include every applicable combination of office, candidate and precinct.

Other SVRS data is also brought in to ERS during the expansion process. This includes:

- SVRS municipal and school district profile information, which is used for informational purposes in ERS to assist with office selection.
- The counts by precinct of voters registered at 7AM after rosters have been marked ready in SVRS, which is pre-populated in ERS results/statistics entry screens.

Reporting Results and Statistics

Once polls close on the night of the election, counties report precinct-level vote totals and voting statistics in the ERS election. For each precinct in the election, two sets of results/statistics are reported: Polling Place and Absentee/Mail Ballots. Results can be entered manually (by hand) from a precinct’s results tapes or uploaded in a text file which has been created by a county’s voting system software. Statistics must be entered manually.

Results are hand-entered into an election through the Manual Results Entry – Summary & Votes link in the County User menu. Results files are uploaded into the election through the File Upload link in the County User menu. The uploaded results populate the Manual Results Entry – Summary & Votes screen with the vote totals for all candidates and contests.

When complete results for a precinct (both Polling Place and Absentee/Mail Ballots) are entered/uploaded, this information is transferred to internal reports such as abstracts and out to the Election Night Results (ENR) public website (http://electionresults.sos.state.mn.us). See diagram below for a summary of the reporting stream on election night.

Post Election Review

A post-election review (PER) of voting equipment is required after each state general election. (M.S. 206.89) This review is a manual recount in randomly selected precincts for specific offices. The PER compares the hand count of
ballots with the results from the electronic voting system to determine if counting accuracy of the voting equipment meets a defined standard. The Post Election Review module in ERS assists counties in completing this requirement.

Users access Post Election Review through the County User level menu. Through the module, users can define the precincts selected for the PER, print the worksheets to be completed during the review, and upon the PER’s conclusion enter results and receive a results report confirming whether the defined accuracy standard has been met. For further information about the PER and how ERS is used during the process, refer to the current edition of the Post-Election Review Guide.

Recount

As its name suggests, the Recount module is designed to provide materials and functionality to aid in the conducting of a recount. It is available for federal, state or county level recounts of offices and questions. Users access Recount through the County User level menu. Through the module, users can print materials such as worksheets used to record recount totals as well as challenged ballot labels to label any ballots challenged by candidates. Users can also enter the results of the recount and review a variety of reports related to recounted votes and original votes. Finally, through the Recount module, the recounted results can be applied to the original votes reported in ERS, enabling a canvassing report to be generated for the canvass board.

Reports

Users are able to review the election information (offices, candidates, questions, results, etc.) entered into ERS through various reports. Reports are divided into three categories, each with its own menu link: Office and Candidate Reports, Results Reports, and Abstracts.

In general, the office and candidate reports are helpful during the candidate filing and ballot preparation periods. These reports enable users to review, by jurisdiction-type, the offices, candidates and questions entered into the particular election. Results reports aid users in results/statistics reporting. These reports enable users to track their progress entering/uploading votes and statistics, review what’s currently loaded, and proof for errors. Abstracts are available for each jurisdiction type – State, County, Municipal and School District. These reports contain the election results and statistics for a particular jurisdiction and can be presented to the appropriate canvassing board.

Further Resources

Further information on ERS is available in ERS User Documentation. Access ERS User Documentation through the County User level menu. User Documentation provides a variety of resources, including step-by-step instructions to completing ERS tasks, templates and guides.