

SANTA FE COUNTY CLERK'S OFFICE

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January 29, 2026

Santa Fe County Clerk's Office Wins Two National Awards for Election Innovation and Voter Engagement

Santa Fe County, NM – The Santa Fe County Clerk's Office has been selected as a recipient of two 2026 People's Choice Awards by Election Center for "Machine-Assisted Hand Tally: Santa Fe County's Digital Accuracy and Bipartisan Verification" and "Calm at the Polls: Engaging Communities to De-Escalate Early Voting." Also known as the National Association for Election Officials, Election Center is the largest national professional association for election officials in the United States.

Each year, members can submit professional practice papers detailing innovations in election administration in June. Submissions are reviewed by the Program Development and Awards Committee and Election Center's Board of Directors in eight different award categories presented at the annual conference ceremony. This decades-old program was expanded in 2024 to include the People's Choice Award, allowing members of the National Association for Election Officials to have a direct say in which of their peers receive recognition for outstanding efforts.

"The innovation that is created by local offices all across the country and the sharing within the election administration community is the hallmark of the Election Center and its contribution to improving elections and supporting the work of these public service professionals," said Tom Wilkey, Chair, Board of Directors of the Election Center.

The Machine-Assisted Hand Tally award recognizes Santa Fe County's innovative approach to ensuring accuracy, transparency, and bipartisan verification when ballots must be counted by hand. Designed by Santa Fe County Clerk Katharine E. Clark and implemented in partnership with election technology vendor ROBIS, the system standardizes and digitizes key steps in the hand tally process while maintaining human tabulation. Clerk Clark is championing this initiative through the Voting Systems Change Committee (VSCC) so that other counties can ensure 100% accuracy of any hand tally ballots. Additionally, this system was designed with election risk management in mind should tabulators become unavailable due to decertification, court decisions or mechanical failure.

Prior to implementation of this process, hand tally reviews identified an initial error rate of approximately four percent. Through the development of standardized procedures, enhanced verification steps, and staff training, the Clerk's Office has since reduced that error rate to zero. The two-step verification process now in place significantly reduces the potential for human error, creates a clear audit trail, and strengthens public confidence that every ballot is counted

accurately if and when machine tabulation is not possible. Santa Fe County is proud to lead the state in ensuring New Mexico has fair and secure elections.

The Clerk's Office was also recognized for *Calm at the Polls*, a coordinated early voting initiative launched in 2024 as part of a broader voter education and communications strategy aimed at reducing confusion, lowering tension at polling locations, and countering misinformation through proactive outreach. Calm at the Polls is part of a larger 5-year communications management strategy championed by Clerk Clark.

The program integrated three complementary efforts—KidsVote, Paws at the Polls, and Drop, Don't Mail—to engage families, create a calmer and more welcoming voting environment, and encourage timely ballot returns. Together, these initiatives supported voter confidence, improved the overall voting experience, and contributed to strong early and absentee participation during the 2024 General Election.

“Receiving two People's Choice Awards is a tremendous honor and a testament to the dedication of our entire Clerk's Office team,” said Santa Fe County Clerk Katharine E. Clark. “Whether we are ensuring perfect accuracy in the most technical aspects of election administration or creating a calmer, more welcoming experience for voters, our goal is always the same: to uphold transparency, security, and public trust. Being recognized by our peers nationwide means a great deal to us.”

The Election Center is a non-profit association of voter registrars, election administrators, and service providers throughout the United States and the U.S. territories. Its membership, which includes township, city, county, and state elections officials and other election-related organizations, is dedicated to promoting and supporting continuous improvement in the administration of elections and voter registration through research, professional education, conferences, networking, and consulting.

For more information about the Election Center and its activities, please visit our website at electioncenter.org.

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