

A Field Guide for Domestic Election  
Monitoring Groups in the  
Southern African Development Community

# RECRUITING AND TRAINING OBSERVERS



## **RECRUITING AND TRAINING OBSERVERS**

This field guide is designed as an easy-reference tool for domestic non-partisan election observers. Field guides are intended to complement other reference tools available on domestic election observation, and in particular the NDI Handbooks, *How Domestic Organizations Monitor Elections: An A to Z Guide* and *The Quick Count and Election Observation*. These handbooks and other materials are available on the NDI website: [www.ndi.org](http://www.ndi.org).

The “Recruiting and Training Observers” field guide includes best practices for selecting and preparing observers for a successful observation effort.

This field guide was inspired by the proceedings of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Regional Election Monitoring Workshop, “Recruitment and Training of Election Observers and Drafting of Election Statements” held October 30 - November 1, 2007 in Lusaka, Zambia. The 15 domestic observer groups represented at the meeting lent their ideas, expertise and enthusiasm, which are the basis for these field guides.



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## 1. Planning for Recruitment and Training

It is important to plan ahead of time for the recruitment and training of observers. Even prior to the announcement of elections, your group can discuss its needs for the election observation project and its approach to the key issues of recruitment and training. A recruitment plan and training calendar can be prepared for use regardless of when the election is called. This will also allow your group to react quickly, should an unexpected or “snap election” be called.

Here are some basic issues to consider when planning for recruitment and training:

### **How many volunteers do you need?**

Your recruitment and training plans depend on what size and scope of operation you plan to conduct, as well as other factors such as:

- *Long Term or Election Day Observation*  
Long-term observation tends to require fewer observers, but they must be more skilled and willing to take on a longer-term commitment.
- *Level of Election Day Coverage*  
Is there a reason for comprehensive coverage of 100% of polling stations, or is it possible to observe a representative sample, which would require fewer observers? Will you cover the whole country with your Election Day observation? Or focus your efforts on particular regions?

### **How many volunteers do you already have?**

Make an inventory of all the people you know who are available to observe, either as long-term observers or Election Day observers. Are there other organizations in your network that have volunteers available?

### **What are the job requirements?**

Observers will need to be able to read and write. Will they need to be in good physical condition to walk long distances? Are there certain language skills they will need in various parts of the country? Are there other requirements to consider?

### **How will the training program be implemented?**

Levels of funding, size of the country, and capacity level should all play a role in determining whether a centralized training program will be more effective than a Training of Trainers (ToT) approach, or mobile teams of elite trainers will be more effective than a national training day..

### **When will observer trainings be conducted?**

It is good practice to train observers as close to Election Day as possible, so they do not forget what they have learned and any last minute changes to the election procedures can be reflected. However, this is not always possible and there may be reasons to hold trainings earlier, e.g. because of accreditation deadlines.



#### ***Budget for proper training.***

The amount of money in your budget will impact your recruitment and training plan, but make sure you plan for adequate training of observers. Fewer well-trained observers are much more effective

## **2. Recruitment of Observers**

Successful volunteer recruitment is critical to any observation effort. Observers will be your “eyes and ears” in the field and you cannot conduct election observation without them. Do not underestimate the effort it will require to find enough willing and able volunteers, and allow adequate time for your recruitment drive.

### **Publicize your campaign**

Consider how you can most effectively communicate to the public that you are recruiting election observers. Is it possible that a media outlet (TV, radio, newspapers) might sponsor a message? Or will you rely on posters and canvassing? What is the message your group wants to communicate?

### **Approach pre-existing organizations**

The most effective way to find interested and capable volunteers is by approaching pre-existing civic organizations that might have members who are interested in election observation. In various countries, church groups, women’s groups and youth groups have been active in election observation.

### **Hold recruitment meetings**

Once you identify potential volunteers, it is useful to invite them to a recruitment meeting to explain what election observation is and what is expected of election observers. Be candid about the requirements of the job as well as your group’s ability to cover expenses. Also explain the code of conduct and the need to be nonpartisan.

### **Set recruitment criteria**

Consider what requirements your group needs in an observer and strictly adhere to your recruitment criteria.

Recruiting an observer who does not meet the criteria might cause problems later on in the process.

### **Ask each new volunteer to recruit friends and family**

New recruits are usually enthusiastic about the chance to observe and are happy to pass on information to family and friends. This is an easy way to quickly expand volunteer networks.

### **Keep a volunteer database**

Ask volunteers to fill out an information card with their basic details and contact information. If possible, enter this information in a computer database. However, it is important to store this information securely and ensure that it is not used for any unintended purposes.

### **Sign Observer Pledge**

Some observer groups ask their volunteers to sign observer pledges (see sample on following page) that they understand the code of conduct and will act in a nonpartisan manner. This is an effective way to emphasize the importance of these principles to your new recruits.



#### ***Aim for Diversity in Recruiting***

Try to recruit observers that reflect different sectors of society. Consider ethnicity, language group, religion, social class, age and gender when selecting observers. Having a diverse group of observers will strengthen the credibility of your observer group and help to counter any allegations of bias.

### 3. Approaches to Training

There are several possible approaches to training large groups of people. The approach an observer group chooses for training observers will depend on the size and infrastructure of the country, the number of people to be trained, time and budget constraints and staff availability. While it might be possible for long-term observers to travel to the capital to participate in one centralized training, this will not be possible for the hundreds or thousands of Election Day observers.

There are three possible models for observer training, all of which have advantages and disadvantages. It is also possible to use a combination of approaches.

#### **Pyramid (or Cascade) Training**

In the “pyramid” or “cascade” training model, lead trainers from the observer group headquarters train regional trainers, who travel back to their regions and train municipal trainers, who train local observers in their area. The “pyramid” can continue down to more levels, if necessary, depending on the size of the country and the number of people to be trained.

*Advantage:* The pyramid model is low cost, time efficient and can also help to build regional and local capacity and strengthen regional networks.

*Disadvantage:* Training is “passed down” from level to level, it can also lose a degree of uniformity and might not be the same quality as the initial training.





### **Mobile Teams**

Another commonly used model for training is to send teams of trainers to various regions of the country to train observers directly. This model requires a core group of central staff to devote time to training, which may take needed personnel away from the headquarters during a key period. However, if funding allows, the observer group can hire trainers solely for this purpose to maintain central office staff at headquarters.

*Advantage:* This approach allows the headquarters to ensure that observers around the country are receiving relatively uniform training of the same or similar quality.

*Disadvantage:* This approach takes more time to implement, particularly in a large country, and does not involve regional and municipal coordinators in a direct way.

### **National Training Day**

It can be a useful public relations exercise to hold a “National Training Day” when observers around the country are all trained on one day.

*Advantage* This model ensures a relatively uniform quality of training and has the advantage of training people very quickly. It is also more feasible in smaller countries with fewer observers to train

*Disadvantage* This approach requires a lot of prior organization and is more expensive, as a large number of trainers must travel simultaneously to locations all over the country.

#### 4. Producing Training Materials

It is essential to produce a clear and concise training manual for every observer that outlines his or her role and responsibilities. Distributing manuals during training also helps to ensure that all observers receive uniform information across the country, for instance if a pyramid approach to training is used. As much as possible, the manual should include all necessary details that observers need to know to prepare for Election Day.

##### **Content of Observer Training Manuals**


Although it will vary depending on the country and election context, observer training manuals should generally include the following:

An **introduction** giving the background of observer group and its principal goals.

An **overview** explaining why domestic nonpartisan election observation is important and how it has been developed. Can also mention basic principles of democratic elections and international standards.

The observer group's **Code of Conduct**, as well as any observer guidelines issued by the election authorities. The Code of Conduct should include clear media guidelines for how observers should react to any media inquiries.

Passages from relevant **election law** provisions, particularly the duties of election administration on Election Day, voting and counting procedures and how to file complaints and appeals. Any provisions regulating observers should also be included.



A **description of the observer's role** before and during Election Day, especially when to arrive at the polling station, what to bring, who to contact at arrival.

A list of **possible irregularities**.

A complete list of **reporting requirements**

- When to report
- What should be reported
- Who to contact and how (include contact numbers)
- Urgent incident reporting

**Sample checklists** for various phases of observation and explanations how to fill the forms. (Note: observer checklists must be finished in time for inclusion in the manuals)

**Key contact information** for local and regional coordinators to be called in case of a question or problem.

### **Additional Training Manuals**

For a Training of Trainers approach, then it is useful to produce a Train-the-trainers Manual that includes information about the training plan, training techniques and possible role-play activities. If your group is observing pre-election processes, then it will be necessary to produce a **long-term observer training manual** or **specific manuals** on the aspects of the pre-election period your group plans to observe (e.g. voter registration, media monitoring, election-related violence, etc).

## 5. Types of Training

Depending on the types of activities your observer group plans to carry out, you will need to conduct several different types of trainings. While much of your energy and resources are likely to be spent training the large numbers of Election Day observers, it is equally important to plan carefully for the trainings of trainers and trainings of long-term or pre-election observers.

### Training of Trainers

Regardless of which training model your group chooses to follow, you will need a core group of trainers who will train others. This group might be specific staff trainers, central office staff, or regional coordinators. Whoever they are, they will play an important function and need to be properly trained to be trainers. The Training Coordinator, or whoever among the central office staff is responsible for overseeing training, is usually the person who leads the train-the-trainers course.



#### ***Start Developing Materials Early***

Observer groups often underestimate the time it will take to draft, edit and print training manuals. This process should be started as early as possible. Check with printing companies to find out how much time they need to print the necessary number of manuals, and plan your deadlines backwards accordingly.

While the content that is to be delivered at trainings is important, training techniques in how to be a trainer are equally important. Make sure you include such elements as agenda preparation, public speaking, how to be an interactive speaker, how to lead a discussion and how to prepare role-play activities. It is useful to break into groups and ask each “trainee” to lead a mock training in front of colleagues who then offer a critique of what the person did well and what they can improve in their training technique.



#### ***A Successful Training of Trainers Approach***

Prior to the 2006 presidential election, *Le Comité National Observation des Elections* (CNOE) adopted a cascade training model. Three months prior to Election Day, CNOE trained six master trainers who were in turn responsible for recruiting and conducting trainings for 116 district coordinators. This initial training covered objectives of the observation effort, electoral framework, technical aspects of the elections, operational procedures for observation, and financial issues. Beginning one month before Election Day, the 116 district coordinators trained 1,993 volunteer observers on the methodology of Election Day observation and rapid transmission of results. The structure used for training was reversed for the collection of Election Day data from observers – volunteer observers reported findings to district coordinators who in turn reported to the six master trainers. This model sped up the process and allowed CNOE to release a preliminary statement more quickly than ever before.

## 6. Training of Observers

### Long-Term or Pre-Election Observers

Depending on the scope of your group's observation activities during the pre-election period, you might need to have one or several trainings for long-term observers or observers focusing on particular aspects of the pre-election period.

- ü If your group is assigning long-term observers to cover a broad range of pre-election processes, then each issue area should be covered in the training (e.g. candidate registration, selection of election commissions, campaign events, complaints and appeals, etc).
- ü Training for long-term observers should focus in particular on investigation skills such as how to distinguish hearsay from fact, how to accurately record direct observations and how to verify information obtained from other sources.
- ü If your group is carrying out specialized observation of certain aspects of the pre-election period (e.g. voter registration, media monitoring, election-related violence, etc), then it is likely you will need to have separate specialized training for those observers involved in each type of observation.
- ü It may also be useful to include a conflict resolution component to training for long-term and pre-election observers, since their work is likely to bring them into sensitive situations.

## Election Day Observers

Depending on the size and population of the country, your group is likely to train hundreds and even thousands of observers. Plan a curriculum that will be easy for trainers to replicate across the country.

- Ü While the length of training will depend on budget and time constraints, it is generally recommended that Election Day observers receive at least two days of training.
- Ü Trainings will be more effective in smaller groups. If possible try to keep training sessions to 25-30 participants or less.
- Ü Training should be as participatory as possible:
  - Allow time for questions and discussion during the session
  - Break out into small group sessions when possible to carry out activities that reinforce what has been learned
  - Include role-plays such as what happens in a polling station or how to report findings and make sure each participant has a turn to be included.
- Ü Accurately recording finding and transmitting them are the two most important tasks for an observer on Election Day. Make sure you devote particular attention and time to data collection.



### ***Motivate your volunteers***

Try to make your trainings as interesting and fun as possible, and always remember to emphasize the importance of every observer in contributing to the overall goal.

## **7. Preparing a Training Agenda**

The training agenda will of course be tailored to meet the specific objectives of your observer effort. As a starting point, the following are some topics typically covered in an Election Day observer training. (See sample training agenda on next page)

- Ü Introduction of trainers and participants;
- Ü Background of the observer group, its previous activities, and its objectives for these elections;
- Ü Explanation of the importance of domestic nonpartisan election observation;
- Ü Overview of international and regional standards for elections;
- Ü Distribution of training manuals and any other materials;
- Ü Review of the Code of Conduct and role and responsibilities of observers;
- Ü Discussion of timeframe for planned activities during the election period;
- Ü Overview of relevant legal provisions and election procedures;
- Ü Structure of the election administration;
- Ü Instructions for observers on Election Day;
- Ü Techniques of observation – what to look for;
- Ü How to record observer findings (data collection);
- Ü How to transmit observer findings (reporting structure);
- Ü Role play exercises (Election Day simulation);
- Ü Security considerations;
- Ü Questions and Answers.





### ***Setting the Agenda***

Prior to the 2008 harmonized elections, ZESN used a cascade training model to train its observers for deployment on Election Day. The agenda below was used by master trainers for the training of district coordinators who in turn were responsible for training volunteer observers. The training was for district coordinators comprehensive in scope and included a detailed analysis of the electoral law, discussion of the responsibilities of election observers, a breakdown of what Election Day should look like, illustrations of potential violations and how to report them, and a simulated training exercise by which trainers could practice trainings for volunteer observers.

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#### ZESN Training of Trainers Agenda

9:00-9:15	Welcoming Remarks
9:15-9:45	Introduction
9:45-10:00	Materials Received
10:00-10:15	About ZESN
10:15-10:30	About the Election
10:30-10:45	Break
10:45-11:00	Why Observe?
11:00-11:30	How to Observe
11:30-12:30	What to Observe
12:30-13:15	Lunch
13:15-14:15	How to Report
14:15-14:45	How to Conduct the Training
14:45-15:15	Break
15:15-16:30	Trainer Presentations and Feedback
16:30-17:00	Logistical Issues
17:00-17:30	Q&A
17:30-18:00	Evaluation and Closing Remarks

## **8. Maintaining Your Volunteer Network**

Through election observation, your group has recruited a nationwide network of capable volunteers. This is a valuable resource and to the degree possible should be maintained. Depending on the objectives of your group, you may want to conduct activities in the future that require the participation of large numbers of volunteers. Or you may wish to observe elections in the future, in which case it is much easier to begin with an inventory of experienced volunteers rather than starting your recruitment at the beginning. Regardless of your future plans, your group should find ways to recognize the efforts of your observers and keep them engaged.

### **Award certificates of participation following elections**

Giving personalized certificates to observers is a very low-cost way to show appreciation to volunteers.

### **Distribute your group's statements to all observers**

Observers will be interested to see how their findings contributed to a broader effort in the form of the preliminary statement. Also, observers will likely share preliminary statements with their friends and family, increasing the reach of your findings, particularly in areas with limited media access or in political contexts where the media is unlikely to transmit your findings.

### **Consider holding post-election appreciation events**

Consider suggesting to local coordinators that they hold post-election social events to appreciate observers.

### **Maintain the volunteer database**

Ask volunteers whether they would like to be considered for future activities. Make an effort to keep the volunteer database updated.

### **Distribute newsletters to your volunteer list**

Keep volunteers updated on the activities of your group and political developments through periodic newsletters. This is particularly easy if you distribute them by email.

### **Identify activities where volunteers might be needed**

Think of ways that volunteers might remain active with your group in the future, through additional activities or election observation efforts. One possible follow-on activity is to run an advocacy campaign based on your group's election findings. Such a campaign could benefit from volunteer participation.



#### ***Beyond Elections***

The Foundation for Democratic Process (FODEP) in Zambia is an umbrella organization comprised of several church groups, women's organizations, the Law Association and the Press Association. In the long period between the 2001 and 2006 Presidential and Legislative elections, FODEP began to broaden its mandate to cover civic education for the purposes of enhancing the general awareness of the population. Drawing on its experience in election monitoring, FODEP began focusing on promoting civic participation on the national, regional and local government levels, including enhancing the capacity of political parties and elected officials to provide civic education and consolidate their role in the democratic process. FODEP also conducted human rights monitoring and human rights education for citizens and law enforcement, as well as offering referral services where victims of human rights violations can voluntarily present their complaints and seek redress. In addition, FODEP utilized this interim period to focus on institutional development and continue observation exercises by monitoring by-elections. These activities helped FODEP enhance their organizational capacity, contribute to other aspects of the democratic process and maintain country-wide recognition and credibility during an otherwise dormant period.

The **SADC Election Support Network (SADC-ESN)** is a loose network of civic organizations from across southern Africa engaged in domestic election monitoring; member groups exist in all 14 SADC countries. Beyond election monitoring, these groups also advocate for electoral reforms, conduct civic and voter education, and observe elections as a body in all SADC countries.

The **National Democratic Institute (NDI)** is a nonprofit organization established in 1983 working to strengthen and expand democracy worldwide. Calling on a global network of volunteer experts, NDI has worked to form and develop nonpartisan domestic election monitoring groups in more than 60 countries and has helped to develop regional associations of monitors in Africa, Asia, Latin America, Eastern Europe, Eurasia and the Middle East.

The **Electoral Institute of South Africa (EISA)** is a nonprofit organization established in 1996 focusing on promoting credible elections, participatory democracy, human rights culture, and the strengthening of governance institutions for the consolidation of democracy in Africa. EISA serves as the secretariat of SADC-ESN.

