

THIN LINE SOFTWARE

TEXAS MUNICIPAL COURT OCA REPORTING GUIDE

How to prepare, review, and submit the Texas Municipal Court Monthly Report.

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How Texas municipal courts prepare, review, reconcile, and submit the monthly court-activity report as a repeatable close process.

Monthly OCA reporting is a routine responsibility for Texas municipal courts, but producing an accurate report requires more than running totals at the end of the month.

The numbers depend on how cases and court activity were classified and recorded throughout the reporting period. If a case was filed under the wrong category, counted in the wrong month, or left unfinished in the docket, the monthly report will carry that problem forward. A reliable report begins before month-end.

This guide is not a substitute for the Texas Office of Court Administration's current Municipal Court Monthly Report instructions or CARD validation. Those materials remain authoritative. The purpose here is to turn those requirements into a practical monthly operating process: capture activity correctly, understand what OCA is measuring, review and reconcile before submission, submit and confirm, and correct the original reporting period when necessary.

The goal should be to make OCA reporting a predictable monthly close process-not an emergency that begins on the twentieth day.

OCA reporting at a glance

These points reflect current official OCA and CARD materials reviewed in September 2026. They are a starting orientation, not a substitute for the current instructions.

Topic	Current official practice
Reporting period	Monthly. A report is required each month, including months with no activity.
Deadline	No later than 20 days after the end of the month being reported.
Submission	Electronic through CARD unless the court has an applicable good-cause waiver from OCA.
Method	CARD manual entry or XML upload, using the workflow that applies to the court.
Authority	Current Official Municipal Court Monthly Report instructions and CARD guidance. Official OCA material controls.

Understand what the monthly report is measuring

The monthly report is a required court-activity report to the Texas Judicial Council, submitted through the Office of Court Administration. It is a statistical snapshot of specified activity for one reporting month. It is not a complete inventory of everything the court did.

The Official Municipal Court Monthly Report Instructions effective January 1, 2026 make that distinction explicit. The report is designed to collect statistics that can be used by the judicial, legislative, and executive branches. It is not designed to record 100 percent of the court's responsibilities, and it may not provide the full picture of what the court does. It provides a snapshot based on specific data points OCA is required to collect.

That framing matters operationally. A clerk who treats the report as a reconstruction of the entire month will spend the deadline week trying to force every action into a statistic. A clerk who treats it as a defined set of court statistics can spend that time asking a better question: did the activity that belongs on this report get classified and recorded correctly while the work was happening?

The report measures court activity

The current municipal-court report is organized into four major areas. Use these as orientation. The official instructions define what belongs in each area and how individual lines are counted.

- **Criminal.** Municipal Class C misdemeanors, counted by individual violation charged and grouped into traffic and non-traffic categories.
- **Civil / Administrative.** Civil or administrative matters the court handles under the current instructions.
- **Juvenile / Minor.** Specified activity involving juveniles and minors. Some criminal juvenile or minor cases are also reported in the Criminal section.
- **Additional Court Activity.** Other specified court activity, including certain magistrate duties and information on fines, court costs, and amounts collected or otherwise satisfied.

Not every action performed by the court appears as its own report statistic. Magistrate work that is not a case filed in the court, internal clerk processes, and other necessary court work may be real work without being a line on the monthly report. The report answers the questions OCA asks. It does not attempt to represent the whole docket experience.

Classification determines where activity is reported

Accurate reporting depends on correctly identifying the type of case or activity before month-end. The current criminal section, for example, distinguishes traffic non-parking, traffic parking, traffic city-ordinance, Penal Code, other state-law, and other city-ordinance cases. Those categories are not interchangeable labels. A parking ordinance counted as a state traffic case, or a Failure to Appear counted in the wrong criminal category, can produce a report that is internally consistent and still wrong.

OCA publishes a criminal-section cheat sheet and a DPS violation-code list categorized by OCA case category. Those resources exist because classification is part of reporting, not an afterthought. If the court's offense or case setup does not point to the applicable OCA category, the monthly report will faithfully reproduce the wrong classification.

If the underlying activity is classified incorrectly, the monthly report can faithfully reproduce the wrong classification.

That is why OCA reporting begins with the case record. The disposition, the reporting period, and the applicable OCA category are all properties of the activity itself. The monthly report is downstream from those decisions.

The reporting month matters

The current instructions tell courts to include only the activity that occurred during the month for which the report is being submitted. The court should be able to explain why an activity appears in a particular month: because that is when the case was filed, reactivated, disposed, or otherwise became reportable under the current instructions-not because that was when someone had time to enter it.

This becomes especially important when a later review finds an error. The question is not merely whether the current month can be made to look right. The question is which reporting period the activity belongs to, and whether that period's report still tells the truth.

Prepare the month before you submit it

The twentieth day is a deadline, not a starting gun. By the time the report is due, the underlying activity has already happened. The court can either review a month it has been keeping in order, or it can try to reconstruct that month under time pressure.

OCA reporting should be the result of the court's normal case activity, not an attempt to rebuild the month immediately before the deadline.

Establish a monthly close routine

A court should have a predictable internal reporting cycle. One practical model looks like this:

```
Month ends
->
Reporting data prepared
->
Clerk reviews
->
Exceptions investigated
->
Balances and classifications reconciled
->
Report generated
->
Final review
->
CARD submission
->
Confirmation retained
```

That sequence is an operational model. It is not an OCA-required checklist unless a current official instruction specifically requires a particular step. What OCA requires is a complete, timely, and accurate monthly report under the current instructions and CARD validation. How the court organizes the work that produces that report is a local operating decision.

The value of a close routine is that the same people do the same review every month. The twentieth day then becomes the last step in a known process, not the first time anyone seriously looks at the month's reporting data.

Review before submission

Before the report leaves the court, someone who understands the docket should look at it as a clerk, not as a data-entry operator. The goal is not to make every month look similar. Months differ. The goal is to understand unusual results before they are submitted.

Current official review guidance, including CARD training materials still linked from the Justice and Municipal Court Reports page, points clerks toward problems such as unexpected zeros, filings or dispositions that are far too low or too high, classifications that do not make sense, missing activity in a section the court uses, unexplained docket adjustments, and out-of-balance conditions. Do not invent numeric tolerances. A quiet month can be a quiet month. A zero can be correct. The question is whether the court can explain the result from the work that actually happened.

Review is not cosmetic

A report can be complete enough to submit and still contain a classification, timing, or pending-balance problem. Review exists to find those problems while the court still owns the month.

Use the source case to investigate problems

When a number looks wrong, the useful question is not merely "How do I change this total?" It is "Which underlying case or activity caused the total?"

Where practical, corrections should originate in the underlying court record so the report and the operational history continue to agree. Changing only the monthly total can make CARD look settled while the docket still contains the same error. The next month, or the next person who opens the case, inherits the disagreement.

Court-management systems and CARD do not all support the same investigation path. This is an operational best practice, not a claim about any particular software. If the court cannot get from a report line back to the cases that produced it, the monthly close will remain a reconstruction project.

Reconcile the report before it leaves the court

Review asks whether the month looks like the work the court actually did. Reconciliation asks whether the report holds together under the rules OCA and CARD use to accept it. Those are related jobs, but they are not the same job.

Understand out-of-balance conditions

CARD flags an out-of-balance section so the court will stop and investigate. OCA's May 2025 Data & Research guidance describes an out-of-balance error as occurring when submitted monthly-report numbers do not add up correctly or contain negative numbers. The affected section appears in red. That guidance also states that out-of-balance data cannot be used by OCA and will be deleted if not corrected, and that one out-of-balance error can create problems in the next month's section.

The current municipal-court instructions also identify specific balancing relationships, especially in the criminal section. Cases pending at the beginning of the month should match cases pending at the end of the prior month. If they do not, a docket adjustment is required. Active pending, new filings, reactivations, and other additions have defined relationships to the total on docket and to later dispositions. Those relationships are signals. They are not numbers to force into agreement without understanding why they disagree.

An out-of-balance condition is a signal to investigate, not a total to force into agreement.

Not every discrepancy has the same cause. A pending-balance problem, a misclassified filing, a disposition counted in the wrong month, a skipped section, and an XML calculation error can all produce a red flag. The court has to find the cause before it "fixes" the number.

Investigate exceptions systematically

When a section does not reconcile, a practical investigation pattern is:

1. Identify the section or category that does not reconcile.
2. Determine which source activity contributes to that result.
3. Trace the issue back to the applicable case or activity.
4. Determine whether classification, disposition, timing, or another field caused the result.
5. Correct the appropriate source information where applicable.
6. Regenerate and review the report.
7. Document any legitimate exception that remains.

This is practical workflow guidance. It is not an OCA-prescribed seven-step procedure unless a current official instruction specifically requires those steps. What OCA and CARD require is that the submitted report satisfy the current instructions and validation. The investigation pattern above is how a court can get there without guessing at totals.

XML submissions still need review

Courts whose case-management system can produce the monthly report as XML may upload that file through CARD instead of keying every line. Automation changes the method of submission. It does not remove the court's responsibility to review the reporting data.

OCA's current XML submission FAQs, revised May 27, 2026, tell courts to test a file in the XML tester before relying on it. The tester at xml.card.txcourts.gov checks whether the file's structure is valid against the applicable schema. It does not confirm that every underlying court record was classified correctly, that the activity belongs in that month, or that the report is in balance.

A valid file is not a reviewed month

A technically valid XML file is not automatically proof that the month is correct. CARD can also display calculated totals that are not in the uploaded file. Current OCA XML guidance warns that accepting those calculated numbers can bring a report into balance without fixing the source file. The underlying problem will likely reappear in later months unless the source data or the file generation is corrected.

Submit, confirm, and correct the right month

Once the month has been prepared, reviewed, and reconciled, the remaining work is to submit it through the current CARD workflow, confirm that it was received as applicable, and keep the reporting history honest if a later correction is needed.

Submit through CARD

Electronic reporting occurs through the Court Activity Reporting and Directory System, CARD, unless OCA has granted an applicable good-cause waiver. Current official materials describe two electronic methods: manually entering the report in CARD, or uploading an XML file. Courts with a waiver may continue to send the Official Municipal Court Monthly Report to OCA for data entry by the method OCA still accepts for waived courts.

This guide is not a click-by-click CARD tutorial. Exact screens, labels, and upload steps can change. Use the current CARD instructions linked from the Justice and Municipal Court Reports page for the submission procedure that applies to the court.

Submit the sections the current instructions require, including a No Activity indication where a required section had no reportable work. Do not treat a skipped section as a completed month.

Confirm the submission

The monthly workflow should not end with "I clicked Submit." Current CARD guidance tells courts to look at the court's CARD home page after submission, review the submitted report, and watch for sections displayed in red as out of balance. Reports submitted for the current state fiscal year appear on that home page after they are submitted.

Confirm the report was received and accepted as the current CARD workflow indicates. If a section is flagged, stay with that month until the condition is understood and resolved. Retain appropriate evidence of completion using what CARD actually provides—such as the submitted report on the court's CARD page—together with the court's own source report or tracking form. Do not invent a confirmation artifact that CARD does not produce.

Correct errors in the reporting period where they occurred

The current municipal-court instructions are direct on this point. If the court needs to change information for a previous month, it must edit that online report or, for paper reporting, file an amended report. CARD's current correction guidance allows a court to correct a previously submitted month by uploading a corrected XML file or by editing the existing report manually, and it tells courts to make corrections sequentially, beginning with the oldest affected month.

That is not a technical inconvenience. It is how the reporting history stays true. Criminal and civil pending balances carry from one month into the next. Changing the current month to offset an old mistake can distort both periods: the earlier month still contains the error, and the later month no longer describes the activity that actually occurred then.

Correct the month that was wrong

Correct the report that was wrong. Do not make a later month absorb the difference.

After a correction, review the corrected month the same way the court reviewed it the first time. Then review later months that were already submitted, especially sections that carry pending balances. A correction that repairs January can create a docket adjustment in February if February is not revisited. Current CARD guidance treats that follow-through as part of the correction, not as optional cleanup.

Make OCA reporting a monthly close process

A sustainable reporting process should not depend on one clerk remembering every step under deadline pressure. The court should use the same close process every month, even when the month was quiet and even when the person who usually files the report is out.

The memorable framework is:

Prepare -> Review -> Reconcile -> Submit -> Confirm -> Retain

The checklist below is that framework turned into a monthly working list. Use it to run the close. Do not treat it as a second copy of the official OCA instructions.

Texas Municipal Court Monthly OCA Reporting Checklist

A practical monthly-close checklist for Texas municipal court clerks. Work the same six stages every month. Correct an earlier report only when an error is later identified.

Prepare

- ☐ Confirm the reporting month and year.
- ☐ Confirm the current Official Municipal Court Monthly Report instructions and CARD guidance.
- ☐ Prepare or generate the reporting data from the court's source records.
- ☐ Verify that expected court activity is represented in the applicable report sections.
- ☐ Identify obvious missing or incomplete records before review begins.

Review

- ☐ Review each applicable report section: Criminal, Civil / Administrative, Juvenile / Minor, and Additional Court Activity.
- ☐ Review classifications and OCA categories against the underlying activity.
- ☐ Investigate unexpected zeros.
- ☐ Investigate unusual changes from a normal month for this court.
- ☐ Review applicable CARD or source-system validation messages.

Reconcile

- ☐ Resolve applicable out-of-balance conditions before treating the month as finished.
- ☐ Trace discrepancies to the underlying cases or activity.
- ☐ Correct source information where appropriate so the report and the docket continue to agree.
- ☐ Regenerate and review the report after each material correction.
- ☐ Document any legitimate exception that remains.

Submit

- ☐ Submit through the applicable CARD workflow no later than 20 days after the end of the reported month.
- ☐ Use manual CARD entry or XML upload as applicable.
- ☐ Include required sections, including a No Activity indication where a required section had no reportable work.
- ☐ Resolve submission or validation issues before leaving CARD.

Confirm

- ☐ Confirm the report was successfully received or accepted as the current CARD workflow indicates.
- ☐ Check the court home page for sections displayed as out of balance.

- ☐ Retain appropriate submission evidence using what CARD and the court actually produce.
- ☐ Record the completion date and responsible person if that helps the court's internal process.

Retain

- ☐ Retain the submitted report and appropriate source records according to applicable requirements and court policy.
- ☐ Retain the court's own monthly report or tracking form, not only a later printout from the OCA website, as current CARD manual-entry guidance describes.
- ☐ Retain reconciliation notes and supporting documentation as appropriate.
- ☐ Preserve enough information to investigate a later question about the month.

Correct if necessary

- ☐ Identify the affected reporting month.
- ☐ Follow current CARD and OCA correction procedures for that month.
- ☐ Correct or resubmit the appropriate report, beginning with the oldest affected month when more than one month is involved.
- ☐ Review later submitted months that carry pending balances.
- ☐ Do not manipulate a later month simply to offset the earlier error.

Checklist disclaimer

This checklist is a practical workflow aid and does not replace the Official Municipal Court Monthly Report, OCA reporting instructions, CARD validation, or guidance from the Texas Office of Court Administration.

Good monthly reporting starts before month-end

OCA reporting is most reliable when the court's normal case records and workflows produce the information the monthly report needs. Classification happens when the case is set up. The reporting month is decided when the activity occurs. Review then has something trustworthy to look at.

The monthly process then becomes review, reconcile, and submit-rather than reconstruct, guess, and correct totals under deadline pressure.

The goal should be to make OCA reporting a predictable monthly close process-not an emergency that begins on the twentieth day.

Official OCA resources

This guide does not replace current OCA reporting instructions, CARD validation, or other official guidance. Official OCA material controls.

[Justice & Municipal Court Reports \(Texas Office of Court Administration\)](#)

[Official Municipal Court Monthly Report Instructions \(effective January 1, 2026\)](#)

[Court Activity Reporting and Directory System \(CARD\)](#)

[CARD login - enter reports](#)

[Submitting a Court Activity Report Manually \(CARD\)](#)

[Submitting a Court Activity Report via XML Upload \(CARD\)](#)

[Making Changes to the Monthly Court Activity Report \(CARD\)](#)

[Cheat Sheet for Criminal Section \(OCA\)](#)

[DPS Violation Codes Categorized by OCA Case Category](#)

[Municipal Court XML specification \(OCA\)](#)

[Frequently Asked Questions - XML Report Submissions \(revised May 27, 2026\)](#)

[CARD XML tester](#)

Important notice

This guide is provided for general informational and operational-planning purposes. It is not legal advice and does not replace current Texas Office of Court Administration reporting instructions, CARD validation, or other official guidance. Courts should verify reporting questions against current OCA materials and contact OCA when clarification is needed.

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