

A VOTER'S GUIDE to Federal Elections





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The U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC) has developed this guide to help voters successfully navigate the Federal elections process, from registering to vote to casting a ballot on Election Day. In addition to the basics of ballot-casting, this guide includes information on eligibility and early voting, as well as the registration and voting process for military and civilians living abroad, and polling place services that make voting more accessible.

AM I ELIGIBLE TO VOTE?

At a minimum, you must be 18 years of age and a U.S. citizen to be eligible to vote. States may also have their own requirements, which are outlined in the "State Instructions" section of the National Mail Voter Registration Form (available online at www.eac.gov). State and local election offices can also provide information on voter eligibility.



HOW DO I REGISTER TO VOTE?

You may register to vote by completing and submitting the National Mail Voter Registration Form.* This form may also be used to report a name or address change to the voter registration office or to register with a political party. The National Mail Voter Registration Form can be downloaded on the EAC's Web site at www.eac.gov or the Web sites of state and local

*North Dakota, Wyoming and U.S. territories (Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands, American Samoa and Guam) do not accept this form. New Hampshire accepts it only as a request for a state absentee voter mail-in registration form.

election offices. You can also obtain the form in person from the following public facilities:

- state or local election offices
- the department of motor vehicles
- public assistance agencies
- state funded programs that serve people with disabilities
- any public facility a state has designated as a voter registration agency (such as a public library, public school, and city or county clerk's office).

You may also register to vote by using your state's voter registration form.

What about military service members and overseas citizens?

To register to vote, members of the military and overseas citizens may use the Federal Post Card Application (FPCA), available from the Federal Voting Assistance Program's (FVAP) Web site at www.fvap.gov. All states and territories accept the FPCA as an application for both registration and an absentee ballot. Printed copies of the form are also available at U.S. embassies, military bases and consular offices. Voting Assistance Officers at those sites can provide any information or assistance needed to complete the form. You may also contact FVAP by telephone at (800) 438-8683 or e-mail at vote@fvap.ncr.gov if you have any questions or would like additional information on how to register to vote.

What if I am registering to vote for the first time and I register by mail?

If you are voting for the first time in your state and are submitting a voter registration form through the mail, Federal law may require you to show proof of identification the first time you vote. This proof of

identification includes the following (or if voting by mail, a COPY of the following):

- A current and valid photo identification; OR
- A current utility bill, bank statement, government check, paycheck or government document that shows your name and address.

Federal law does not require you to show proof of identification at the polling place or when voting by mail if 1) you provided COPIES of the above with your voter registration form, 2) your voter registration form has been verified by an election official, or 3) you are entitled by Federal law to vote by absentee ballot. Please note that individual states may have additional voter identification requirements.

Did You Know...?

Your state may require voters to present identification at the polling place even if they meet the Federal proof of identification requirement. Contact your local election office for additional information.

WHEN CAN I REGISTER TO VOTE?

You must register by your state's registration deadline to ensure voting eligibility. Each state has its own registration deadline. You can find this information in the "State Instructions" section of the National Mail Voter Registration Form at www.eac.gov, or by contacting your state or local election office.

IMPORTANT: Call your state or local election office at least five (5) weeks before an election to learn if you are registered to vote and what to do if you are not. Do not leave it for the last minute; otherwise you may not be able to vote in that election.

ABSENTEE VOTING

Voters who cannot go to their polling place on Election Day can vote an absentee ballot. Each state establishes its own rules and procedures for absentee

voting. For example, some states require voters to provide a reason for why they cannot vote on Election Day, while others offer “no-excuse” voting that allows any eligible citizen to vote absentee. States also have different deadlines for requesting and submitting absentee ballots. If you need to vote absentee, contact your state or local election office as soon as possible to make sure you do not miss the deadline for requesting and returning an absentee ballot.

IMPORTANT: After you have requested and received your absentee ballot, read its instructions carefully to avoid any errors that may result in your ballot not being counted. If you return your absentee ballot by mail, make sure to place the correct postage amount on the return envelope to prevent any delays in the delivery of your ballot.

MILITARY AND OVERSEAS VOTERS— HOW DO I VOTE?

Military service members and citizens living abroad can vote in Federal elections by filling out the Federal Post Card Application (FPCA). This single form allows overseas and military voters to register and request a ballot at the same time.

An online version of the FPCA is available from the Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) Web site (www.fvap.gov). The online form must be mailed in an envelope with proper postage, or using the FVAP’s prepaid return envelope. All states and territories accept the FPCA. Alternatively, overseas voters may also send a signed written request for an absentee ballot to their local election office.

States and territories allow voters to register and request an absentee ballot by submitting a single FPCA during the election year. If you are already registered you should still submit an FPCA to request a ballot, ideally early in the election year.

You may also contact FVAP by telephone at (800) 438-8683 or e-mail at vote@fvap.ncr.gov if you have any questions or would like additional information about how to register and vote absentee.

WHAT IS EARLY VOTING?

Some states allow voters to cast a ballot before Election Day. Early voters can cast their vote by mail or in person at the local election official's office or at another location designated by the local election official.

Early voting dates and times vary among states. For information about whether your state offers early voting, and when it is offered, contact your state or local election office.

WHERE DO I VOTE—WHERE IS MY POLLING PLACE?

Voters are assigned to a polling place based on the address they provided when they registered to vote. To find out the location of your polling place, contact your state or local election office.

IMPORTANT: Update your voter registration information each time you move.



WHAT IS A PROVISIONAL BALLOT?

Voters whose eligibility to vote is in question—either because their name does not appear on the official list of voters for their polling place, or a question is raised about the voter's eligibility—are offered a provisional ballot. In both cases, voters have a right to cast a provisional ballot, provided they declare they are eligible and registered to vote in that jurisdiction. The provisional ballot is then counted if the appropriate state or local election official determines that the voter is indeed eligible to vote under state law.

Did You Know...?

Federal law requires states to provide a “free access system” that allows voters to check the status of their provisional ballots. Contact your state or local election office for more information about your state’s system.

HOW CAN I BECOME A POLL WORKER?

Poll workers are central to ensuring smooth, fair and accurate elections. They prepare the precinct by setting up voting equipment, greeting voters, verifying registrations and providing voters with appropriate ballots. At the end of the day, poll workers close the precinct and prepare election materials for delivery or personally deliver the materials to the elections office.

Poll workers typically must be registered to vote in the precinct or county they wish to serve. However, some states have recently changed their rules to allow college students to work at the polls near their school even if they are not registered to vote in that jurisdiction.

To find out more about how to become a poll worker, contact your state or local election office.

ACCESSIBILITY FOR VOTERS WITH DISABILITIES

Polling places are equipped to accommodate the needs of voters with disabilities by providing clearly marked parking spaces, accessible entrances and ramps, and well-marked routes pointing the way to voting locations.

Polling places also have voting equipment that ensures every voter is given the same opportunity for access, participation, privacy and independence.

If you have questions about the accessibility of your polling place, or need information about voting equipment for individuals with disabilities, contact your state or local election office.

LANGUAGE ASSISTANCE

Your state or local election officials may provide assistance to those with limited ability to read, speak, write, or understand English. These efforts may be voluntary or required by Federal law. Language assistance may include equipping polling places with voting materials (such as ballots and voting instructions) in other languages, staffing polling places with bilingual poll workers, and providing voting information online in languages other than English. Contact your state or local election office to learn more about language assistance in your area.

Did You Know...?

The U.S. Election Assistance Commission provides information for voters on its Web site in Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Spanish, Tagalog and Vietnamese. The Commission has also issued comprehensive glossaries of voting terms in these six languages to assist voters and election officials.



MAY I REQUEST ASSISTANCE TO VOTE?

Under Federal law, voters that require assistance to vote by reason of blindness, disability or inability to read or write may bring an individual, such as a friend or relative, to assist them in voting.* A poll worker may also provide voting assistance. State election laws may include additional provisions governing such assistance, so be sure to contact your state or local election office for additional information.

Did You Know...?

Some states offer “curbside voting” for voters who are not able to easily leave their cars. During curbside voting, a poll worker brings all necessary materials, including a ballot, to the voter’s car. Check with your state or local election office to see if curbside voting is available in your jurisdiction.

VOTING EQUIPMENT ASSISTANCE

First-time voters, voters with disabilities, and voters at polling places where new equipment has been introduced may require assistance with voting equipment.

*Federal law prohibits voters from receiving voting assistance from the voter’s employer or agent of the employer or officer or agent of the voter’s union.

If you need help using voting machines, ask a poll worker for assistance. Poll workers are there to provide voters with instructions and demonstrations in using voting equipment.

HOW DO I REPORT A PROBLEM OR FILE A COMPLAINT?

If you experience a problem at a polling place or with voting procedures in your jurisdiction, you may report the problem or file a complaint. For information on complaint procedures in your state, contact your state or local election office.

About the U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC)

This publication was prepared by the EAC, an independent Federal agency established by the Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA). The EAC is charged with developing guidance to meet HAVA requirements, adopting voluntary voting system guidelines, and serving as a national clearinghouse of information about election administration. The EAC also accredits testing laboratories and certifies voting systems, audits the use of HAVA funds, and maintains the National Mail Voter Registration Form developed in accordance with the National Voter Registration Act of 1993.



VOTERS' CHECKLIST – THINGS TO DO BEFORE ELECTION DAY

- ❑ Confirm you are registered to vote. Update your registration if information such as address, name or political affiliation has changed.
- ❑ Know how and when to apply for an absentee ballot if you are unable to get to your polling place on Election Day.
- ❑ Know your options for early voting.
- ❑ Know the voter identification requirements in your state before you attempt to vote.
- ❑ Familiarize yourself with the voting device used in your jurisdiction. Learn how the device is accessible to voters with disabilities.
- ❑ Know which polling place you are assigned to and how to get there.
- ❑ Learn what assistance is available in languages other than English.
- ❑ Know what time the polls open and close.
- ❑ Become acquainted with the candidates and issues on the ballot.
- ❑ Consider becoming a poll worker in your community. Call your local election office to learn about poll worker requirements.

VOTER RESOURCES

U.S. Election Assistance Commission: A comprehensive resource of information on the Federal elections process. Citizens can register to vote by downloading the National Mail Voter Registration Form from the EAC's Web site. Tel.: (866) 747-1471 / Web site: www.eac.gov

Federal Voting Assistance Program: Voting resources for uniformed service members and overseas citizens, including the Federal Post Card Application, a voter registration form for citizens living abroad. Tel.: (800) 438-8683 / Web site: www.fvap.gov

U.S. Department of Justice: Information about Federal voting rights laws. To report problems related to ballot access, including voter discrimination, call the Voting Section at (800) 253-3931. To report problems related to voting fraud or voter intimidation, you may contact the Department's main switchboard at (202) 514-2000 to be directed to the appropriate Federal law enforcement agency. Tel.: (202) 514-2000 / Web site: www.usdoj.gov

Federal Election Commission: A clearinghouse of information on Federal campaign finance. Tel.: (800) 424-9530 / Web site: www.fec.gov

STATE ELECTION OFFICE Contact Information

**as of August 15, 2008*

ALABAMA

Tel.: (800) 274-8683

Web site: www.sos.state.al.us/elections/

ALASKA

Tel.: (907) 465-4611

Web site: www.elections.alaska.gov/

ARIZONA

Tel.: (602) 542-8683

Web site: www.azsos.gov/election/

ARKANSAS

Tel.: (800) 482-1127

Web site: www.sosweb.state.ar.us/elections.html

CALIFORNIA

Tel.: (800) 345-VOTE

Web site: www.sos.ca.gov/elections/

COLORADO

Tel.: (303) 894-2200

Web site: www.elections.colorado.gov

CONNECTICUT

Tel.: (860) 509-6100

Web site: www.ct.gov/sots/site/default.asp

DELAWARE

Tel.: (302) 739-4277

Web site: www.elections.delaware.gov/default.shtml

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Tel.: (202) 727-2525

Web site: www.dcboee.org/

FLORIDA

Tel.: (866) 308-6739

Web site: <http://election.dos.state.fl.us/>

GEORGIA

Tel.: (404) 656-2871

Web site: www.sos.ga.gov/Elections/

GUAM

Tel.: (671) 477-9791

Web site: www.guamelection.org

HAWAII

Tel.: (808) 453-8683

Web site: <http://hawaii.gov/elections/>

IDAHO

Tel.: (208) 334-2852

Web site: <http://www.idahovotes.gov/>

ILLINOIS

Tel.: (217) 782-4141 (Springfield)

Tel.: (312) 269-7960 (Chicago)

Web site: www.elections.state.il.us/

INDIANA

Tel.: (317) 232-3939

Web site: www.in.gov/sos/elections/

IOWA

Tel.: (515) 281-0145

Web site: www.sos.state.ia.us/elections/index.html

KANSAS

Tel.: (800) 262-8683

Web site: www.kssos.org/elections/elections.html

KENTUCKY

Tel.: (502) 564-3490

Web site: www.elect.ky.gov/

LOUISIANA

Tel.: (800) 883-2805

Web site: www.geauxvote.com

MAINE

Tel.: (207) 624-7736

Web site: www.maine.gov/sos/cec/elec/

MARYLAND

Tel.: (800) 222-8683

Web site: www.elections.state.md.us/index.html

MASSACHUSETTS

Tel.: (800) 462-8683

Web site: www.sec.state.ma.us/ele/eleidx.htm

MICHIGAN

Tel.: (517) 373-2540

Web site: www.michigan.gov/vote

MINNESOTA

Tel.: (877) 600-8683

Web site: www.sos.state.mn.us/home/index.asp?page=4

MISSISSIPPI

Tel.: (800) 829-6786

Web site: www.sos.state.ms.us/elections/elections.asp

MISSOURI

Tel.: (800) 669-8683

Web site: www.sos.mo.gov/elections/

MONTANA

Tel.: (888) 884-8683

Web site: http://sos.mt.gov/elb/Voter_Information.asp

NEBRASKA

Tel.: (402) 471-2555

Web site: www.sos.ne.gov/elec/2008/index.html

NEVADA

Tel.: (775) 684-5705

Web site: <http://sos.state.nv.us/elections/>

NEW HAMPSHIRE

Tel.: (603) 271-3242

Web site: www.sos.nh.gov/electionsnew.html

NEW JERSEY

Tel.: (609) 292-3760

Web site: www.njelections.org/

NEW MEXICO

Tel.: (800) 477-3632

Web site: www.sos.state.nm.us/sos-elections.html

NEW YORK

Tel.: (800) 367-8683

Web site: www.elections.state.ny.us/

NORTH CAROLINA

Tel.: (866) 522-4723

Web site: www.sboe.state.nc.us/Default.aspx?s=0

NORTH DAKOTA

Tel.: (800) 352-0867

Web site: www.nd.gov/sos/electvote/**OHIO**

Tel.: (877) 767-6446

Web site: www.sos.state.oh.us/SOS/elections.aspx**OKLAHOMA**

Tel.: (405) 521-2391

Web site: www.ok.gov/~elections/**OREGON**

Tel.: (503) 986-1518

Web site: www.sos.state.or.us/elections/**PENNSYLVANIA**

Tel.: (717) 787-5280

Web site: www.votespa.com/**PUERTO RICO**

Tel.: (787) 758-3333

Web site: www.ceepur.org/**RHODE ISLAND**

Tel.: (401) 222-2345

Web site: www.elections.state.ri.us/**SOUTH CAROLINA**

Tel.: (803) 734-9060

Web site: www.scvotes.org/**SOUTH DAKOTA**

Tel.: (605) 773-3537

Web site: www.sdsos.gov/electionsvoteregistration/electionsvoteregistration_overview.shtm**TENNESSEE**

Tel.: (615) 741-7956

Web site: www.tennessee.gov/sos/election/index.htm**TEXAS**

Tel.: (800) 252-8683

Web site: www.sos.state.tx.us/elections/index.shtml**UTAH**

Tel.: (800) 995-8683

Web site: www.elections.utah.gov/voterinformation.html

VERMONT

Tel.: (802) 828-2464

Web site: <http://vermont-elections.org/>

VIRGINIA

Tel.: (800) 552-9745

Web site: www.sbe.virginia.gov/cms/

WASHINGTON

Tel.: (800) 448-4881

Web site: www.secstate.wa.gov/elections/

WEST VIRGINIA

Tel.: (304) 558-6000

Web site: www.wvsos.org/elections/main.htm

WISCONSIN

Tel.: (608) 266-8005

Web site: <http://elections.state.wi.us/>

WYOMING

Tel.: (307) 777-7186

Web site: <http://soswy.state.wy.us/Elections/Elections.aspx>





U.S. Election Assistance Commission

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