



UNIFORMED AND OVERSEAS VOTERS

March 2008

Quick Start
MANAGEMENT GUIDE





UNIFORMED AND OVERSEAS VOTERS

The Quick Start Management Guide on Uniformed and Overseas Voters is part of a series of brochures designed to highlight and summarize the information contained in the chapters of the U.S. Election Assistance Commission's (EAC) Election Management Guidelines (EMG). The goal of the EMG is to provide a collection of election management guidelines, consolidated into one document, to assist State and local election officials effectively manage and administer elections. These guidelines are solely designed to serve as a source of information for election officials and not as requirements by which they must abide. The EAC expects the EMG to be completed in 2008. However, due to the urgent need for election management resources, EMG chapters and Quick Starts are released as they are completed.

The content of the EMG and the Quick Start Management Guides has been developed in collaboration with State and local election officials and other election professionals who have first-hand experience managing elections. The EAC is grateful for their participation and ensuring the guidelines are practical and applicable for jurisdictions regardless of their size and resources. The EMG and the Quick Starts are available online at www.eac.gov.

INTRODUCTION

- The Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA) protects the voting rights for Uniformed Services members and members of the U.S. merchant marine, their families and all U.S. citizens residing outside of the United States. The Act is administered by the Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP), operating within the Department of Defense. There are currently more than 6,000,000 UOCAVA voters - including over 3,000,000 overseas civilians; 1,400,000 military voters; 1,300,000 military dependents of voting age; and 100,000 federal civilian overseas employees.
- UOCAVA voters face unique challenges in registering to vote, requesting and receiving their ballot, and returning their voted ballot. The most important component in ensuring their right to vote can be summed up in one word: COMMUNICATION. Communication between the local election officials and their state election office; between each state election office and the FVAP; and the ongoing communication between the UOCAVA voter and you – the state/local election official.
- In addition, the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) of 2002, amended Section 102 of UOCAVA to mandate that no later than 90 days after the date of each regularly scheduled general election for Federal office, each State and unit of local government which administered the election must submit to the EAC the combined number of absentee ballots transmitted to uniformed and overseas voters, and the combined number of such ballots returned by such voters and cast in the election.



COMMUNICATING WITH UOCAVA VOTERS

- Wherever possible, utilize technology to communicate directly with UOCAVA voters. Collect email addresses for UOCAVA voters to provide quick contact with the voter to confirm registration status, receipt of absentee ballot, and to provide the UOCAVA voter with a contact person in your office who can quickly answer and respond to their questions. **TIP:** *Develop your own “news updates” for all of your UOCAVA voters and routinely send the “updates” using your email list.*
- Provide an on-line voter status search tool to enable UOCAVA voters to verify their voter eligibility status. **TIP:** *If allowed by State law, consider providing an on-line sample ballot by address for UOCAVA voters to print, vote, and return by mail or fax.*
- Develop a special link for UOCAVA voters on your election office website. Include the following information:
 - A link to the Federal Voting Assistance Program website (www.fvap.gov).
 - Information on how to register to vote, including any State-specific laws and regulations. **TIP:** *Post a link to the electronic version of the Federal postcard application (www.fvap.gov/pubs/onlinefpca.html)*
 - Publish future year election calendars, including registration deadlines.

- Provide details on how to vote and return the ballot to your office. **TIP:** *Be sure to inform UOCAVA voters about State laws governing when a ballot must be received in order to be eligible to be counted. For example, some states require that a ballot be returned no later than 7:00 p.m. on Election Day, while others allow the UOCAVA ballot to be counted if postmarked on Election Day.*
- Post a direct email link and toll-free phone number to provide UOCAVA voters with a staff representative knowledgeable in this area to answer all questions.
- Take steps to confirm a UOCAVA voter's current address is accurate to ensure the ballot is delivered. A variety of communication methods are recommended by FVAP, including:
 - Utilize telephone, fax, or email contact information provided on the Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) to reach the voter. (**NOTE:** *Faxes to voters are toll-free to any location in the world by using the FVAP's Electronic Transmission Service, 1-800-368-8683.*)
 - If the ballot is returned as undeliverable, be sure to compare the address on the mailing envelope with the address provided by the voter on the absentee ballot request. (**NOTE:** *Be aware of how your voter registration software manages secondary address information, especially as it relates to printing ballot envelopes and/or labels.*)



- Contact the FVAP for assistance in verifying address data through the Department of Defense’s personnel database. Submit requests via email to vote@fvap.ncr.gov with the subject “Address Update”. Requests must include the name of the voter, date of birth, and if possible, the social security number. FVAP has no access to information on military family members or other overseas citizens.
(NOTE: This information can only be provided to election officials if ballots have been returned as non-deliverable).
- Determine ways to ensure the timely receipt and return of voting information for UOCAVA voters. Many states allow faxing and emailing of materials to avoid delay. Check to find out if any of the following are permitted by your state:
 - Sending the FPCA or registration and ballot request by fax or email,
 - Receiving the blank ballot by fax or email,
 - Returning the voted ballot by fax or email



DEVELOPING OFFICE GUIDELINES FOR SERVING UOCAVA VOTERS

- Prior to every election cycle, review and update procedures pertaining to UOCAVA voters. Be sure that a minimum of two staff members are cross-trained on this topic. **TIP:** *This is also an excellent opportunity to reinforce new State and Federal requirements and deadlines regarding UOCAVA voters.*
- Review the EAC's Best Practices on Military and Overseas Voters available on the EAC's website, www.eac.gov.
- Provide staff with copies of the Voting Assistance Guide (available from the FVAP). This reference book provides information about residency requirements in other states.
- Add questions to your state voter registration form (i.e. "Are you a military, overseas civilian, or dependent?"). This provides an additional opportunity for you to identify voters that fall into the UOCAVA category.
- Understand the definition of "legal voting residence." This is the address within the State or territory where the UOCAVA voter last resided before entering the military or the last State or territory that was claimed as their legal residence. Military and family members may change their legal residence every time they change permanent duty stations or they may retain their legal residence without change. (**NOTE:** *Family members may have a different legal voting residence from the military member*).



- For overseas citizens, the “legal voting residence” is the address within the State or territory where they lived before leaving the United States. This is the same legal residence for family members of U.S. citizens residing overseas. (**NOTE:** *For family members who have never lived in the United States, they may claim one of their parents’ legal State or territory of residence as their own, if allowed by the State*).
- Build a partnership with your local Post Office branch to ensure special handling for UOCAVA outgoing and incoming ballots. Review the domestic mail manual for information on how to use the postage-free indicia. For information on preparing and sending election mail, visit the United States Postal Service Election Officials’ Mailing Resources site at: www.usps.com/electionmail.
- Evaluate your voter registration software to ensure that the system will track the number of voters in this category, as well as the number of ballots issued and number of ballots returned.



UNDERSTANDING FORMS AND PROCEDURES FOR UOCAVA VOTERS

- The Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) is a postage-free card, printed and distributed by the FVAP for use by all voters covered by UOCAVA. All States and territories accept the FPCA as the voter registration and absentee ballot application for UOCAVA citizens only. The extent of its use is governed by State and territorial law.

REMINDER: *You are required to mail ballots to the UOCAVA voter for each election for Federal office through the next two general Federal elections, unless the voter specifically requests otherwise.*

- The Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot (FWAB) is often referred to as a “back-up” ballot. It is available to UOCAVA voters who do not receive their regular absentee ballot. The FWAB is used to vote for Federal offices in general elections. Some States allow the use of the FWAB in elections other than general elections. (NOTE: The FWAB is only valid when a regular ballot from a State or territory has already been requested, in a timely manner, and has not been received).

MOST IMPORTANT THINGS TO REMEMBER

- UOCAVA voters move frequently, and often with little or no advance warning. Develop procedures and methods to keep accurate and current records for these voters.
- Be on the alert for any changes in Federal and State law. Review the FVAP’s Web site as well as your own State’s link. Review your internal procedures and make changes as needed.



- Prepare voting materials for UOCAVA voters in advance. Consider mailing a “notice of election” letter to all UOCAVA voters prior to every election in order to confirm their current mailing address.
- Process all applications received after the initial 45 day mail period as quickly as possible.
- Devote a section of your Web site to UOCAVA voters and provide a link to the FVAP’s automated Federal Post Card Form.
- Consult your State Election Director for questions. Consider partnering with large military establishment jurisdictions in your State to develop a State procedure checklist.
- Develop a network within your State of staff members that manage UOCAVA voters. Encourage communication and collaboration to develop new and uniform techniques and methods for improving the registration and voting processes for UOCAVA voters in your State.
- Communicate your practices and procedures to the State Election Director and the FVAP to ensure accuracy and correctness.
- Collect statistics regarding UOCAVA voters and the issuance and return of ballots that fall into this category for State and Federal reporting purposes.



FEDERAL VOTING ASSISTANCE PROGRAM CONTACT INFORMATION

Mail

Federal Voting Assistance Program
Department of Defense
1155 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1155

Telephone

Toll-free: 1-800-438-VOTE (8683)
Commercial: (703) 588-1584, DSN 425-1584
International Toll-free numbers are available at
www.fvap.gov/services/tollfree.html

Staff can be reached from 7:30a.m. to 6:00p.m.
Eastern United States Time, Monday through Friday.
Messages can be left 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

E-mail

vote@fvap.ncr.gov
World Wide Web
www.fvap.gov

Electronic Transmission Service (ETS)

Toll free within the U.S. 1-800-368-8683
Commercial (703) 693-5527
International Toll-free numbers are available at
www.fvap.gov/services/faxing.html



For information regarding this publication or to request additional copies, please, contact:

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The EAC is an independent bipartisan commission created by the Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA). It is charged with administering payments to states and developing guidance to meet HAVA requirements, implementing election administration improvements, adopting voluntary voting system guidelines, accrediting voting system test laboratories and certifying voting equipment and serving as a national clearinghouse and resource of information regarding election administration.