

Chapter 3

Guide for Voting Assistance Officers

Your Responsibilities

As a Voting Assistance Officer (VAO), you are part of a worldwide network of military members, U.S. government employees, and volunteers who aid in ensuring that citizens covered under the *Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA)* understand their voting rights and know how to vote absentee. These citizens include: active duty members of the Uniformed Services or Merchant Marine, their family members, and citizens residing outside the U.S. VAOs provide these citizens with accurate and nonpartisan voting information and assistance. You should:

- Become familiar with www.fvap.gov, your organization or service voting website, the forms and absentee voting process.
- Follow FVAP on Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. Links are available on www.fvap.gov.
- Take advantage of FVAP training opportunities. Workshops are offered at military installations and Department of State locations worldwide. Contact FVAP or your Service Voting Action Officer for a workshop schedule. Training may also be completed online at www.fvap.gov.
- Keep current by signing up to receive news releases, also available online. To subscribe, email vote@fvap.gov and provide your email address.
- Ensure delivery of FPCAs to unit members by January 15 of each year if you are a military VAO. If you are a civilian VAO, ensure delivery of FPCAs to overseas citizens by July 15 of each year.
- Assist citizens in filling out the FPCA according to their State's specific requirements. Remind them to include an email address, phone and/or fax number so that the local election offices may contact them, if needed.
- Ensure that there is an adequate supply of FPCAs on hand for year-round registration, absentee ballot requests, and change of address requests for citizens moving or changing assignment location.
- Serve as coordinator for FVAP on-site workshops if one is scheduled for your installation.
- Conduct non-partisan voter registration drives. Armed Forces Voters Week, Overseas Citizens Voters Week, and Absentee Voting Week are excellent times to get the word out. During Absentee Voting Week, announce through various media that voters should return their voted ballots immediately. If citizens have not received their requested State ballot by this week

(or earlier based on location), encourage them to use the Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot (FWAB).

- Ensure that there is an adequate supply of FWABs on hand year-round for citizens to use in case they do not receive their official State absentee ballot.
- Refer local residents to the Installation Voting Assistance Office for local registration.
- Post notices on bulletin boards and in high-traffic areas encouraging citizens to register and vote.
- Create or continue a Continuity Folder.
- Provide your installation directory with contact information for referrals if you are a military VAO.
- Assign an Assistant Voting Assistance Officer to help you fulfill your duties as VAO and provide support to voters in your absence.
- Extend assistance to family members, to include the sharing of information at family events.

Your responsibilities may also include serving in an Installation Voting Assistance Office. A handbook for Office personnel is available on the FVAP website at <http://www.fvap.gov/resources/media/installation-vaohandbook.pdf>

How You Can Assist Voters

Determining Voting Residency

To vote in U.S. elections, citizens must have a legal voting residence address in a State or territory. The issue of voting residence can be complex, depending on individual circumstances. Even in States where laws clearly define criteria for determining voting residence, the final determination is generally up to each local election office.

For voting purposes, "legal voting residence" can be the state or territory where the citizen last resided prior to entering military service OR the state or territory that the citizen has since claimed as their legal residence.

Even though the citizen may no longer maintain formal ties to that residence, the address determines their proper voting jurisdiction. To claim a new legal residence, the citizen must have simultaneous physical presence and the intent to return to that location as their primary residence.

Military and their family members may change their legal residence every time they change permanent duty stations, or they may retain their legal residence without change.

This may mean that the family's Uniformed Service member has a different legal voting residence than his/her family members.

A Judge Advocate General officer or legal counsel should be consulted before the citizen changes legal residence, because there are usually other factors that should be considered besides voting.

Asking citizens the following questions may help advise them on voting residence:

- Where have you registered to vote or voted?
- What State or territory has issued you a driver's license, any other license or identification card?
- Where is your motor vehicle registered?
- Where is your home or home of record?
- What State or territory are you from?
- Where did you live before coming here?
- Where did you live immediately before leaving the United States?
- Where does your family live?
- Where do your parents live?
- Where do you own property?
- What State do you claim for tax residency?

Assisting Citizens to Complete the Federal Post Card Application (FPCA)

The FPCA can be used by military and overseas citizens to simultaneously register to vote and request an absentee ballot. As a VAO, you should help citizens correctly complete their FPCAs if requested. Local election officials determine the citizen's eligibility to vote based on information provided on this application. Citizens should include all contact information (email, telephone, fax, and/or mailing address) on their FPCA and submit it early enough for election officials to contact them should problems processing the application arise.

If you are sending FPCAs for several citizens by email or fax, use a separate Electronic Transmission Sheet for each form and send separately to ensure that each form is received by the proper election official. Email addresses and fax numbers can be found on the State's election website or at www.fvap.gov.

Check that FPCAs Include:

- Signature and date
- Complete voting residence address (no P.O. Box addresses)
- Legible handwriting
- All information required by the State

- Party preference if the citizen wants to vote in primary elections (if required by State)
- Witness signature (if required by State)

Also, be sure that the citizen mails the FPCA to their local election official in time to be received by the State registration and/or absentee ballot request deadline.

Assisting Citizens to Complete the Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot (FWAB)

The FWAB is available to military and overseas citizens who have requested but have not received their State absentee ballot in time to vote and return it before the deadline. To use the FWAB, citizens must have applied for a State ballot early enough so that their local election office received the request at least 30 days before the election or before the State's ballot request deadline, whichever is later.

The FWAB may be used to vote for Federal offices (President/Vice President, U.S. Senator, U.S. Representative, Delegate or Resident Commissioner) in primary, general, special, or runoff elections. Some States have expanded the use of the FWAB and accept the FWAB for voting for State and local offices, or allow the FWAB to be used for voter registration and ballot request.

If you are sending FWABs for several citizens by email or fax, use a separate Electronic Transmission Sheet for each ballot and send separately to ensure that each ballot is received by the proper election official. Email addresses and fax numbers can be found on the State's election website, available in the State's pages in Chapter 2 or at www.fvap.gov.

Tips for Using the FWAB:

- Citizens who have not received a requested State ballot in time to return it before the election should immediately complete and submit the FWAB to their local election office.
- The FWAB must be received by the local election office no later than the ballot return deadline.
- The transmittal envelope must be signed and dated, (and the witness or signature must be included if required by State).
- If citizens receive their State absentee ballot after submitting the FWAB, they should vote and return the ballot immediately. If the State absentee ballot arrives by the ballot return deadline, the State will count the State absentee ballot instead of the FWAB.

Legal Guidelines

VAOs may not provide partisan voting information from candidates, political parties, or partisan organizations. Military VAOs may receive questions from voters regarding whether they can distribute and/or display partisan materials at the military installations. VAOs

should consult their Commanding Officer for their interpretation of DoD Directive 1344.10 *Political Activities by Members of the Armed Forces on Active Duty*, available at www.fvap.gov.

VAOs should report any irregularities in the voting process to their department or agency headquarter's VAO. Federally employed VAOs should refer to the Hatch Act, Title 5 U.S.C. Sec. 7321, link available at: www.fvap.gov.

VAOs can advise citizens on locating information on candidates and issues using national, local, and Service newspapers, magazines, radio, television, political party and campaign committee offices, overseas newspapers and periodicals, and State election websites.

Continuity Folder

VAOs should create and maintain a Continuity Folder for personal reference and for passing on to future VAOs.

It should provide basic details on absentee voting procedures and contain anything that may help your backup or successor. Your folder should also provide a quick orientation of VAO voting responsibilities. It can be in the form of a notebook, file folder, or an online community folder. Make sure it is readily available to other VAOs and assistants.

Your Continuity Folder Should Contain:

- Your VAO Designation Letter (only Military VAOs)
- FPCAs and FWABs
- Reporting requirement materials
- Your complete contact information. (Stateside VAOs should also include local county election office contact information.)
- Current *Voting Assistance Guide* (updates available at www.fvap.gov)
- Recent news releases
- Election Dates Calendar
- Current State Department or Service guidance (directive, instruction, order, etc.)
- DoD Instruction 1000.04. (Federal Voting Assistance Program) and 1344.10 (Political Activities by Members of the Armed Forces in Active Duty). Copy of the Hatch Act, Title 5 U.S.C. Sec. 7321 (for Federal employees overseas) and the Voting Action Plan, available at: www.fvap.gov
- Training materials and certificate from workshops

Many of these materials are available through your normal service supply chain, the Installation Voting Assistance Officer, Service Voting Action Officer or at www.fvap.gov.

Voting Emphasis Weeks

Each Federal election year (every even numbered year), FVAP works with the Uniformed Services and overseas citizens groups to promote voter registration and absentee voting by conducting Voting Emphasis Weeks.

Armed Forces and Overseas Citizens Voters Week: June 29- July 7, 2012

Your Goal: Deliver Federal Post Card Applications (FPCA) to all unit members and their voting age family members. Encourage everyone to fill out and submit the form immediately.

What You Can Do:

- Put up posters to tell unit members how to get the right form.
- Use current *Voting Assistance Guide* to help everyone fill out the form.
- Conduct a non-partisan voting workshop and registration drive.
- Enlist the help of other VAOs and base organizations.
- Use media outlets to encourage voter registration.
- Enlist the help of overseas citizen organizations.
- Plan your events around Independence Day.

Absentee Voting Week: September 30 - October 7, 2012

Your Goal: Encourage everyone to return their voted ballots immediately or use the Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot (FWAB).

What You Can Do:

- Ask voters if they've received their ballots. If not, give them a FWAB and tell them how to fill it out and submit it.
- Use media outlets to encourage people to vote using their State ballot or the FWAB.
- Enlist the help of other VAOs, base organizations, or overseas citizen organizations to conduct events to encourage people to vote and return their absentee ballots.

- Put up posters that tell people how to reach you for help.
- Hold unit or installation "Voting Days" where computer terminals are set up for the express purpose of receiving, printing, and where allowed, returning ballots electronically.

Recommended Mailing Dates for the November 2012 General Election

Send your FPCA by August 15, 2012 to ensure that you receive your ballot in time to vote and return it to be counted.

- Voters in Iraq, Afghanistan, ships at sea, and other overseas locations without access to the military postal system should send voted ballots by October 6, 2012
- Voters in other overseas military installations should send voted ballots by October 13, 2012
- Stateside Uniformed Service members and their families should send voted ballots by October 29, 2012.

If you do not receive your State absentee ballot by October 2, 2012, use the Federal Write-in Absentee Ballot. If you receive your State absentee ballot, vote and return it. If both ballots are received by the deadline, only the State ballot will be counted.

Ordering Voting Materials

Maintaining an adequate supply of voting materials is an essential function of every VAO. To order more materials, follow the instructions below.

Army:

You may order voting materials from the Army Publishing Directorates (APD) website at www.apd.army.mil or the US Army Europe (USAREUR) publications warehouse at <https://aepubs.army.mil/>. You must have a publications account to place an order. You may order the following voting supplies: SF Form 76, FPCA; SF Form 186, FWAB; Voting Assistance Guide (360-02); Motivational Poster (DOD114); Election Dates Poster (360-05).

For assistance, contact the APD at: 314-592-0910 or DSN 892-0910 or the USAREUR publications warehouse at DSN 314-384-6881/6882/6883/6884.

Navy:

Navy Voting Assistance Officers (VAOs) are responsible for distributing absentee voting materials as outlined in

OPNAVINST 1742.1 (series). Digital documents (i.e., forms, templates, Voting Assistance Guides, and posters) may be downloaded from this website and/or command Voting Information Management System (VIMS) accounts. Print editions for Navy commands are available as follows:

FPCA (SF 76): Purchase from GSA Advantage (<https://www.gsadvantage.gov/>), stock # 7540-00-634-5053

FWAB (SF 186): Purchase from GSA Advantage (<https://www.gsadvantage.gov/>), stock # 7540-01-218-4384

VAG (VAG 2012-2013): Limited quantities available on request from vote@navy.mil.

Posters: Limited quantities available on request from vote@navy.mil.

Training CD: One per command, available on request from vote@navy.mil. (Local reproduction authorized.)

Air Force:

You may order supplies online at <https://www.my.af.mil> by going to the "Library" drop-down menu, clicking on "Publications," and then clicking on "Air Force e-Publishing."

Login or create a new account. Apply for the General Account. No AF Form 1846 is required.

If you don't have accounts set up yet, click on "Ordering Accounts" under "On-Line Ordering." Set up a request for user account and wait to be approved before moving on. Then, click on "Order Products" under "On-Line Ordering."

To order the Voting Assistance Guide, type VAG in all capital letters in the "Search for a Product" text entry box. For other voting materials, click on "Order Products" and use the "Search for a product" text entry box.

Place a check in the "Order" box, click "Add to cart," and type the quantity in the "Quantity" box. Follow on-screen instructions to complete order.

To check on your order, use the "Track Orders/Order History" link. For assistance, contact Air Force ePublishing at DSN 754-2438 or COMM 1-800-848-9577 or by email at e-publishing@pentagon.af.mil.

Marine Corps:

You may order the following voting materials through Direct Support Stock Control Outlets, General Services Administration, or through your units supply officers via SABRS: SF76, FPCA (NSN: 7540-00-634-5053); SF186, FWAB (NSN: 7540-01-218-4384).

You may order the following voting materials through your unit's S-1 office via Marine Corps Publication Distribution System: Voting Assistance Guide (PCN: 100006628000); Motivational Poster (PCN: 50100651000); Election Dates Poster (PCN: 50100650000).

Please provide the PCN or NSN numbers when requesting materials. For assistance, contact your Installation Voting Assistance Officer or the Service Voting Action Officer.

Coast Guard:

You may order FPCAs and FWABs from General Services Administration (GSA) using the following data: SF 76, FPCA (NSN: 7540-00-634-5053) SF 186, FWAB (NSN 7540-01-218-4384).

You should receive a *Voting Assistance Guide* through the DOT warehouse whenever a new edition is issued. If you do not receive a new *Guide*, contact your Service Voting Action Officer.

State Department:

You may order FPCAs and FWABs through the normal General Services Administration (GSA) supply channel. For expedited service, send a request to GSA, Attn.: Pat Bright, via email at burlington.cscorder@gsa.gov, by fax: 215-446-5123, or by telephone at 215-446-5088. GSA requires the funding information, the stock number, and the quantity. Use the following stock numbers: SF 76, FPCA (7540-00-634-5053); SF 186, FWAB (7540-01-218-4384).

You may order Motivational Posters, Election Dates Posters, and *Voting Assistance Guides* by sending an email request to votinginfo@state.gov. Posters and *Voting Assistance Guides* are provided free of charge while supplies last and are shipped by diplomatic pouch.

For assistance, contact the Department of State Voting Action Officer.

Overseas Citizens Organizations:

You may order forms, Motivational Posters, Election Dates Calendars, and *Voting Assistance Guides* by sending an email request to vote@fvap.gov or calling (703) 588-1584 or 1 (800) 438-VOTE (8683). International toll-free numbers can be found on the inside back cover or at www.fvap.gov.

Additional Assistance

The Uniformed Services have extensive chains of command to provide voting support for military members and their families.

- Installation Commanding Officer (CO) — The Installation CO conducts orientation briefings with VAOs prior to the start of primary elections, as well as informative briefings for citizens who would like to vote absentee. COs also make opening statements at FVAP workshops and make transportation available for VAOs to attend workshops at surrounding installations.
- Installation Voting Assistance Officer (IVAO) — The IVAO acts as a focal point on military installations in coordinating voting assistance support. IVAOs maintain a roster of all unit VAOs on the installation, establish communications with VAOs, and provide

necessary materials and support. IVAOs coordinate FVAP workshops with organizations from their installation and surrounding installations.

- Legal Assistance Officer — This officer can be contacted with legal questions, such as determining voter residency.
- Public Affairs/Information Officer — This officer can be contacted to ensure that voting information is included in installation or unit publications.
- Inspector General (IG) — The IG is required by Federal law to periodically review voting assistance programs to ensure compliance with DoD and Service directives and regulations.
- Personnel/Human Resources Officer — This officer ensures that all newly reporting personnel and naturalized U.S. citizens are provided FPCAs and voting assistance.
- Chaplain — The Chaplain can assist in disseminating reminders and information to members of the community.
- Publications, Supply, or Distribution Officer — This officer ensures that VAOs receive FPCAs, FWABs, and other voting materials.
- Officers-in-Charge — Officers in Charge of exchanges, commissaries, special services activities, medical and dental facilities, education centers, family centers, etc. can coordinate the display of voting materials for Armed Forces Voters Week and Absentee Voting Week.

Other non-military support organizations can assist in voter outreach.

- Veterans and Service Organizations, such as: Veterans of Foreign Wars, the American Legion, the Non-commissioned Officers Association and the League of Women Voters
- Civic Groups, American Chambers of Commerce, colleges and universities, and support organizations for overseas US citizens
- Spouses' Club, Boy/Girl Scouts, and Other Youth Groups

Share Your Good Ideas

After each Federal election, the Services and Department of State issue After-Action Reports that include good ideas submitted by VAOs to improve the absentee voting process.

Good ideas are processes and procedures that help the citizens you assist and help you to perform your duties. Good ideas enhance lines of communication among VAOs at all levels and enable you to improve your voting assistance efforts.

Your good ideas may come from a variety of sources:

- Personal experiences
 - Assessments, audits, and appraisals
 - Training evaluations
 - Operational Readiness Reviews
 - Critiques, analyses, and investigations
 - Process improvement initiatives
- VAO training
 - Voting activities, such as registration drives

Have a good idea? Submit it to your Service Voting Action Officer. (Contact information is on the inside front cover.) Overseas citizen organization VAOs may submit their ideas directly to FVAP via email at vote@fvap.gov. Be sure to include a clear statement of your idea and your complete contact information.

On the following pages, you will find these four handouts which you can copy and distribute to assist voters: Frequently Asked Questions for Uniformed Service Members, Frequently Asked Questions for Overseas Citizens, 2012 Primary Election Dates, and U.S. Embassy and Consulate Email Addresses.

You can also find these handouts at www.fvap.gov.