

Frequently Asked Questions



Can I vote absentee?

You may vote absentee in any election for Federal office if you are a U.S. citizen 18 years or older and are a U.S. citizen residing outside the United States. Only certain States allows U.S. citizens who have never resided in the United States to vote. For more information, go to: <http://www.fvap.gov>.

Do I have to be registered to vote absentee?

Registration requirements vary from state to state. Most states and territories require registration to vote absentee. Voter registration and absentee ballot request can be done at the same time by submitting the Federal Post Card Application (FPCA). If you are already registered to vote and only wish to request a ballot, you should submit your FPCA as soon as possible.

Where do I send my Voter Registration/Absentee Ballot Request?

Your Voter Registration/Absentee Ballot request form must be completed, printed, signed, dated and mailed directly to your local election official. These officials will handle the processing and distribution of your absentee ballots and may need to contact you for further information or clarification. To facilitate this process, please provide a current email address, phone and fax number on your application.

When mailing election materials to my state or territory, do I have to pay postage?

When mailed from any U.S. post office, U.S. embassy or consulate, or APO/FPO mail facility, the hardcopy voter registration/absentee ballot form is postage-paid. In order to receive free postage, the online version of the form must be mailed in an envelope printed with our postage-paid envelope template. You may mail the completed form in an envelope with proper postage affixed. Ensure that your form is postmarked (see postmarking instructions below) and sent to arrive before your state's specific deadline. You must pay postage if the materials are mailed from a non-U.S. postal facility.

It is recommended that voted ballots be mailed from your location outside the U.S. rather than be given to another individual to be placed in the U.S. postal system. If the ballot is postmarked from any location inside the U.S. your local election official may not count your ballot.

What is a postmark and how do I make sure I get one?

A postmark is a postal marking made on a piece of mail indicating the date and time that the item was accepted by the postal service. Postmarks are used to determine if voting materials have been mailed by state deadlines. Due to varying mail pick up times, the day you 'mail' your election mail may not be the day the postal facility postmarks it.

You may ask the mail clerk to hand stamp the election material so that a date is clearly visible. In certain situations a handwritten postmark and signature from you or a notarizing official may be sufficient.

When is the best time to apply for an absentee ballot?

We recommend that you register to vote/request an absentee ballot in January of each year, or at least 45 days before Election Day.

Must I submit a separate application for each election?

A citizen usually does not need to submit a separate application for each election. To ensure that you receive absentee ballots for all elections in which you are eligible to vote, we recommend that you submit a new Federal Post Card Application in January of each year and whenever you have a new mailing address. If you are requesting an absentee ballot for a specific election, note in Block 9 the election for which you are requesting the ballot, i.e., "Primary (or Special, or General) election only".

Refer to the individual State Pages in Chapter 2 for additional information about State and Territory requirements.

When should I receive my ballot? What happens if I do not receive a ballot from my local election office?

States and territories begin mailing ballots at least 45 days before an election.

If you have requested an absentee ballot from your State but have not received it, you can also vote by using the back-up Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot (FWAB). You may submit the FWAB at any time after you submit your FPCA.

In order to be eligible to use this back-up ballot, you must:

- Be absent from your voting residence;
- Have applied for a regular ballot early enough so the request is received by the appropriate local election official not later than the State deadline;

or the date that is 30 days before the general election; AND

- Have not received the requested regular absentee ballot from the State.

If you have not received your ballot one month before the election:

- Go to FVAP.gov and see what online ballot delivery tools are available for your state.
- Use the FWAB wizard available at FVAP.gov to complete a back-up ballot and submit it to your local election official. If you cannot access FVAP.gov, you can obtain a hardcopy of the form from your Voting Assistance Officer at military installations or at U.S. embassies/consulates.
- Contact your local election official to determine the status of your ballot. Contact information is available at FVAP.gov.
- When you receive your regular absentee ballot, complete it and return it regardless of when you receive it. Your local election official will ensure that only one of the ballots is counted.

All FWABs must be completed, printed, signed, dated, and submitted to your local election official. Check out your state's instructions to determine your state specific instructions, witness requirements for voted ballots, deadlines, and mailing addresses.

Questions for Uniformed Services/ Family Members

Can I vote absentee?

You can vote absentee in local, state and Federal elections if you are a U.S. citizen 18 years or older and are an active duty member of the Armed Forces, Merchant Marine, Public Health Service, NOAA, a family member of the above, or a U.S. citizen residing outside the United States.

Where is my "legal voting residence"?

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

Even though you may no longer maintain formal ties to that residence, the address determines your proper voting jurisdiction. To claim a new legal residence, you must have simultaneous physical presence and the intent to return to that location as your 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 legal residence is changed because there are usually other factors that should be considered besides voting.

My family members are not in the military; can they also vote absentee?

Yes. Eligible spouses and dependents (U.S. citizens, 18 years or older) of military personnel may vote absentee. Some states allow children of military personnel residing overseas who are U.S. citizens but who have never resided in the U.S. to claim one of their U.S. citizen parent's legal state of residence as their own. Check out our list of states allowing this.

How do I register to vote or request an absentee ballot?

You may register and request an absentee ballot with a single form: The Federal Post Card Application. This application form is accepted by all states and territories and is postage- paid in the U.S. mail, including the Military Postal System and State Department Pouch mail. Hard copies of the form can be obtained from your installation's Voting Assistance Officer or requested directly from the Federal Voting Assistance Program by contacting us.

An online version of the FPCA is also available. The online version of the form must be mailed in an envelope with proper postage, or mailed using our prepaid return envelope.

Your Voter Registration/Absentee Ballot Request form must be completed, printed, signed, dated and mailed directly to your local election official.

Can I vote in-person where I am stationed?

Military members may vote in the U.S. state or territory where stationed if they change their legal residence to that state or territory, even if they live on a military installation. Be advised that there may be legal obligations, such as taxation, if you change your state of residence. Therefore, consult a Judge Advocate General officer or legal counsel before making such a decision.

Currently there are no provisions for personnel stationed outside the U.S. to vote in-person where stationed.

Questions for Overseas Citizens

Can I vote absentee?

You can vote absentee in any election for Federal office if you are a U.S. citizen 18 years or older and are a U.S. citizen residing outside the United States.

If I do not maintain a legal residence in the U.S., what is my "legal state of residence"?

Your "legal state of residence" for voting purposes is the state or territory where you last resided immediately prior to your departure from the United States. This applies to overseas citizens even though you may not have property or other ties in your last state of residence and your intent to return to that state may be uncertain.

When completing block 7 of the Voter Registration/Absentee Ballot Request form, be sure to enter the entire mailing address of your last residence, including rural route and number. That address determines your proper voting jurisdiction.

Some states allow children of U.S. citizens residing overseas who are U.S. citizens but who have never resided in the U.S., to claim one of their parent's legal state of residence as their own. Check out our list of states allowing this.

How do I register to vote, or apply for an absentee ballot?

You may register and request an absentee ballot with a single form: The Federal Post Card Application. This application form is accepted by all states and territories and is postage- paid in the U.S. mail, including the Military Postal System and State Department Pouch mail. Hard copies of the form can be obtained from a U.S. embassy or consulate or requested directly from the Federal Voting Assistance Program by contacting us.

An online version of the Voter Registration/Absentee Ballot Request form is also available. The online version of the form must be mailed in an envelope with proper postage, or mailed using our prepaid return envelope.

Your Voter Registration/Absentee Ballot Request form must be completed, printed, signed, dated and mailed directly to your local election official.

Can I register or vote in-person at the embassy or consulate?

There are no provisions for in-person voting or on-site registration at U.S. embassies or consulates. U.S. embassy and consular officials can assist U.S. citizens in completing the Voter Registration/Absentee Ballot Request form or other election materials for their state, witness election materials (if required), and provide other absentee voting information.

You may mail election materials from U.S. embassies and consulates. Remember to make sure that all election material is postmarked.

Your Voting Assistance Officer:

Name: _____ Location: _____
Phone: _____ Email: _____

Federal Voting Assistance Program
1-800-438-8683, (703)588-1584, DSN: 425-1584, vote@fvap.gov. International toll-free numbers available at www.fvap.gov

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