

# Frequently Asked Questions

---

Clicking a link below will scroll to the relevant answer on this page.

## General Questions

[Do I have to be registered to vote absentee?](#)

[Where do I send my Voter Registration/Absentee Ballot Request?](#)

[When mailing election materials to my State or territory, do I have to pay postage?](#)

[What is a postmark and how do I make sure I get one?](#)

[When is the best time to apply for an absentee ballot?](#)

[Must I submit a separate application for each election?](#)

[When should I receive my ballot?](#)

[What happens if I do not receive a ballot from my local election office?](#)

[Where can I get a back-up Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot?](#)

## Questions for Uniformed Services/Family Members

[Can I vote absentee?](#)

[Where is my "legal voting residence"?](#)

[My family members are not in the military; can they also vote absentee?](#)

[How do I register to vote or request an absentee ballot?](#)

[Can I vote in-person where I am stationed?](#)

## Questions for Overseas Citizens

[Can I vote absentee?](#)

[If I do not maintain a legal residence in the U.S., what is my "legal State of residence"?](#)

[How do I register to vote, or apply for an absentee ballot?](#)

[Can I register or vote in-person at the embassy or consulate?](#)

## General Questions

### 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 \(FPCA\)](#) and can be easily and automatically completed by using the FPCA wizard at [FVAP.gov](#). If you are already registered to vote and only wish to request a ballot, you should submit your FPCA as soon as possible.

[Back to Questions](#)

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

Your request form must be completed, printed, signed, dated and [mailed directly to your local election official](#). Some States allow your request to be faxed or email to our local election office.

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.

[Back to Questions](#)

### **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.

[Back to Questions](#)

### **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.

[Back to Questions](#)

### **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 90 days before Election Day.

[Back to Questions](#)

### **Must I submit a separate application for each election?**

A citizen does not need to submit a separate application for each election. The length of time an application is good for varies by State. Most accept the Federal Post Card Application as a request for all Federal office elections for the calendar year in which it was submitted. 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".

[Back to Questions](#)

## **When should I receive my ballot?**

States and territories are required to mail ballots at least 45 days before an election. If you have not received your ballot 30 days before the election, contact your local election official (contact information available on most [State election sites](#)). If you encounter problems contacting your local election official, contact us. Always complete and return your absentee ballot regardless of when you receive it, even if you have already submitted a [back-up Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot](#) (explanation below). Your local election official will ensure that only one of the ballots is counted.

[Back to Questions](#)

## **What happens if I do not receive a ballot from my local election office?**

If you requested an absentee ballot but have not received one close to Election Day, you can still vote by using the back-up Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot (FWAB).

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.

[Back to Questions](#)

## **Where can I get a back-up Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot?**

The back-up Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot (FWAB) can be easily and automatically completed by using the FPCA wizard at [FVAP.gov](#).

Hardcopies are available through Voting Assistance Officers at military installations or at U.S. embassies/consulates. An [online version](#) is also available, which must be completed, printed, signed, dated, and mailed 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.

[Back to Questions](#)

## **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.

[Back to Questions](#)

### **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.

[Back to Questions](#)

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

Yes. Eligible spouses and children (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.](#)

[Back to Questions](#)

### **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 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](#).

[Back to Questions](#)

### **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.

[Back to Questions](#)

## **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.

[Back to Questions](#)

## **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 5 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.](#)

[Back to Questions](#)

## **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](#).

[Back to Questions](#)

## **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.

[Back to Questions](#)