



DEPARTMENT OF STATE
FEDERAL VOTING ASSISTANCE PROGRAM
GUIDANCE



TOWN HALL TALKING POINTS

January 18 2012

In 2009, the Congress passed the Military and Overseas Voter Empowerment or MOVE Act to simplify the absentee registration and voting process and increase access to voting materials electronically via the internet and email. We encourage you to use the Federal Voting Assistance Program website, WWW.FVAP.GOV, which has the forms and information most overseas voters need.

Our most important message: If you want to vote, you have to send in a **Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) to your local election officials every year – even if you’ve previously voted overseas – and every time you change your name, physical address, or email address.** Use the FPCA to request an absentee ballot, and to register to vote if you’re not currently registered. The easiest way to fill out this form is to use the online tool available at WWW.FVAP.GOV that walks you through the process based on your state’s specific voting rules. Fill it out every January first and make this your new New Year’s Resolution!

The fastest way to get your absentee ballot is to request electronic ballot. Depending on the specific rules of your home state, delivery may be made by fax, email, or online download. On the 2005 FPCA, you may request electronic ballot delivery in section 4 of the FPCA, but don’t forget to include your email address or fax number. On the 2011 version of the FPCA, you rank your ballot delivery preference in section 6. Otherwise, your ballot will be mailed to you.

Most states now allow you to send the FPCA electronically to your local election officials, but others still require you to print and mail in a hard copy. The online tool at WWW.FVAP.GOV will tell you which method(s) your state permits.

All states now offer a way to verify registration. This is often done by an online verification website or by calling your local election official. This helps confirm you are properly registered and on the list to get absentee ballots. WWW.FVAP.GOV provides a link to each state’s online verification website.

Overseas voters are eligible to vote in presidential primary elections and in state primary elections for federal offices (Senator, Representative), as well as the general elections in November 2012. Some states allow overseas voters to vote in state and local elections. The online tool available through WWW.FVAP.GOV will let you know in which state and local elections you may vote.

States send out absentee ballots at least 30 days before the primary elections, and 45 days before the November general election. Returning your completed ballot as quickly as possible will ensure it reaches your local election officials before your state’s ballot receipt deadline.

International mail to Hometown, USA takes (6-8) weeks. You can also drop off your FPCA or your completed ballot in person at the Embassy, and we’ll mail it to the United States for you. Contact the Consular Section for instructions and hours of operation. Mail sent through the diplomatic pouch takes 3 weeks to get to Washington, and another week to reach most U.S. counties. For the pouch, use a postage-paid envelope (or the template available at WWW.FVAP.GOV), or affix U.S. postage.

After you send in your completed ballot, you can confirm receipt by your local elections officials online by visiting the website of your state’s Secretary of State.

If it’s 30 days before Election Day, and you haven’t received your ballot, fill out and mail in an emergency write-in ballot -- the Federal Write-in Absentee Ballot (FWAB) which is available at WWW.FVAP.GOV. You can also drop off your FWAB in person at the Embassy, and we’ll mail it to the U.S. for you.

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.

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: ACS Consular Officer

Location: U.S. Embassy Yaounde

Phone: 2220-1500 ext. 4341 / 4023

Email: yaoundeacs@state.gov