

Overseas Citizens 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://fvap.gov/reference/nvr-res.html>.

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.

Can I register and 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 Federal Post Card Application or other election materials for their State 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.

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

You may register and request an absentee ballot with a single form: The Federal Post Card Application (FPCA). 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. However, if you place the form in the postal system of the country where you now reside, you need to place that country's proper postage on the form before mailing.

If mailing through a foreign postal system, be sure to write "USA" after the city, State, and Zip Code of the election office.

Hard copies of the form can be obtained from a U.S. embassy or consulate or requested directly from FVAP. An online version of the FPCA is available at www.fvap.gov, along with a prepaid return envelope template.

Your Federal Post Card Application must be completed, printed, signed, dated, and submitted directly to your local election official.

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

Your "legal State of residence" for voting purposes is the State or territory where you 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 3 of the Federal Post Card Application, 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 www.fvap.gov for a list of States allowing this.

Where do I send my Federal Post Card Application?

Your Federal Post Card Application must be completed, printed, signed, dated, and submitted 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.

If I am required to have election materials notarized, how do I do it?

Notarization can be performed by an U.S. embassy or consular officer, or other official authorized to administer oaths. Most States and territories do not require notarization of voting materials; therefore consult your State's requirements. Note: There will be no notary requirements for the 2010 general election or any election for Federal office thereafter.

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 the prepaid return envelope template available at www.fvap.gov. 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.

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 materials 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 60 days before Election Day.

Must I submit a separate application for each election?

A citizen does not need to submit a separate application for each election since the States and territories accept the Federal Post Card Application as a request for all Federal office elections for a period of one year.

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 6 the election for which you are requesting the ballot, i.e., "Primary (or Special, or General) election only".

When should I receive my ballot?

Most States and territories begin mailing ballots 30-45 days before an election.

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 in time to return it by the voted ballot receipt deadline, 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 no 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.

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. Your local election official will ensure that only one of the ballots is counted.

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

Hardcopies of the back-up Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot (FWAB) are available through Voting Assistance Officers at military installations or at U.S. embassies/consulates.

The FWAB is also available at www.fvap.gov. It must be completed, printed, signed, dated, and submitted to your local election official. Check out your State specific instructions, notary requirements, deadlines, and mailing addresses at: www.fvap.gov.

Your Voting Assistance Officer:

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

Federal Voting Assistance Program, 1155 Defense Pentagon, Washington, DC 20301-1155
 1-800-438-8683, (703)588-1584, DSN: 425-1584, vote@fvap.ncr.gov. International toll-free numbers available at www.fvap.gov

Current as of November 2009.