



FVAP.GOV

FEDERAL VOTING ASSISTANCE PROGRAM



Strategic Plan

2021-2025

Message from the Director

Each day of the year, the staff of the Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) come to work to support the voting rights of active duty military personnel, their families, and overseas Americans living and working around the world. In pursuit of this mission, the FVAP team applies a spirit of customer service not only to voters themselves, but to all of our partners and stakeholders. FVAP does this through its uncommon dedication and a special passion for their work.



The goals set forth below inform FVAP's work into a cohesive strategic plan reflecting lessons learned from prior election cycles and setting objectives for the program's performance over the next 5 years. This strategic plan also sets forth a framework for approaching specific absentee voting challenges for the customers we serve. In consideration of its continuous program improvement, FVAP embarked on a multi-faceted approach in consideration of its Strategic Plan involving every phase of an election cycle it supports and reliance upon customer and stakeholder involvement.

FVAP's program activities, after each federal election cycle, are focused on improving the resources, online tools and tactics necessary to measure key performance indicators in order to raise voter awareness and overall program effectiveness. In that spirit, FVAP recognizes the importance of applying critical thinking in its approach to measuring program performance.

The next 5 years represent a new opportunity for FVAP to use structured administrative data to better identify factors that ultimately drive absentee voter success or failure when attempting to navigate the absentee voting process. Serving away from home in our military or living overseas each represent unique challenges for improving readiness and ensuring voting eligibility. FVAP's Strategic Plan embraces the past successes providing quality customer service to a population of over 5 million eligible voters, but renews the need to lean forward and address ongoing challenges.

The opportunity for improvement is constant and the FVAP staff epitomizes the sense of purpose identified in the three goals of this Strategic Plan. As public servants, the team at FVAP will dedicate ourselves to these goals and to all the work we do on behalf of the American people.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "David Beirne". The signature is fluid and stylized, with a large initial "D" and "B".

David Beirne, Director

FVAP's Mission

The Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) supports Uniformed Service members, their families, and overseas citizens with absentee voting.

Goal 1: Be a highly valued customer service program to military members, their eligible family members, voting assistance officers, overseas voters, and election officials.

Goal 2: Reduce obstacles to military and overseas absentee voting success.

Goal 3: Increase Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA) voter awareness of available tools and resources.

Our Vision

The Federal Voting Assistance Program is a premier organization providing first-class assistance so that all Service members, their families, and overseas citizens can successfully vote absentee from anywhere in the world. In pursuing this guiding vision, we place value in:

- Maintaining a customer service outlook
- Collaborating with stakeholders on new and ongoing activities and initiatives
- Striving for innovation in the accomplishment of our goals
- Demonstrating dedication to work and mission
- Ensuring the assistance provided is timely, nonpartisan and accurate.

The goals outlined in the Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2021-2025 are consistent with our vision and mission and provide a clear trajectory for FVAP in the years ahead.

In turn, this plan is aligned with the Defense Human Resources Activity (DHRA) Business Operations Plan and the Department's National Defense Strategy of 2018. Specifically, FVAP's operations align to DHRA's Business Operations Plan goal for providing effective Force support products and services to stakeholders and customers.

Commitment to our vision informed FVAP's decision to commission a research effort with the RAND Corporation in 2013 to align FVAP's strategy and operations to better reflect its core mission. Throughout the effort, FVAP worked closely with RAND and stakeholders to begin implementing initiatives that align with its recommendations. The plan is in keeping with the findings from the RAND report, released in 2015.

Additionally, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) reviewed FVAP leading up to the 2016 Presidential election. The GAO report, "DoD Needs More Comprehensive Planning to Address Military and Overseas Absentee Voting Challenges," GAO-16-378, of April 2016, recommended a revised strategic plan that exhibits the six selected leading practices of federal strategic planning, including, but not limited to:

- A statement of mission and goals
- An identification of strategies that address management challenges and resources needed to achieve goals
- A description of leadership involvement and accountability
- A description of stakeholder involvement in the development of FVAP priorities
- A coordinated strategy to communicate the program's mission and goals to other Federal agencies
- A description of *performance measures*, aligned with program goals that FVAP will use to track progress toward achieving goals

Strategic Context:

The Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (*UOCAVA*) extends federal absentee voting rights to uniformed Service members who are U.S. citizens including: active duty members of the Uniformed Services; the Merchant Marine; the commissioned corps of the Public Health Service; the commissioned corps of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration; their eligible family members, and U.S. citizens residing outside the United States. This act provides the legal basis for these citizens' absentee voting requirements for Federal offices.

UOCAVA was amended in 2009 to require states to send absentee ballots to *UOCAVA* voters at least 45 days before a federal election and electronically upon request.

FVAP is charged with administering *UOCAVA* on behalf of the Secretary of Defense. In serving this role, FVAP works to ensure citizens covered under the law are aware of their right to vote and have the tools and resources to successfully do so from anywhere in the world. Furthermore, FVAP directly assists voters through its implementation of a centralized information resource, FVAP.gov, and by prescribing a standardized voter registration and absentee ballot request form, the Federal Post Card Application (FPCA), as well as a backup ballot known as the Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot (FWAB).

As such, FVAP's customer base is varied. FVAP serves the following customers: absent uniformed service voters, eligible family members, overseas citizens, Voting Assistance Officers (VAOs), Service Voting Action Officers (SVAOs), and state and local election officials.

In completing FVAP's mission, we routinely engage and collaborate with a wide array of stakeholders. FVAP's stakeholders include the following: election officials, representative non-governmental organizations (NGOs), DoD entities (e.g. Military Postal Service Agency, Inspector General, representatives of the Uniformed Services), Federal agencies (e.g. U.S. Election Assistance Commission, Department of Justice, United States Postal Service, Department of State, Department of Homeland Security), overseas citizens NGOs, various election advocates, Congressional Oversight Committees, and Congressional staff.

Our interaction with these customers and stakeholders is additionally informed by DoD guidance and directives. DoD Instruction 1000.04: Federal Voting Assistance Program establishes Department policy, assigns responsibilities, and provides procedures for the implementation of FVAP in accordance with *UOCAVA*. The Instruction also establishes policy and assigns responsibilities to: implement installation voter assistance (IVA) offices under Section 1566a of Title 10, U.S.C.; and implement jointly with each state, procedures for persons to apply to register to vote at Military Service recruitment offices under Section 20506 of Title 52, U.S.C.

DoD has a well-established chain of command in carrying out its responsibilities under *UOCAVA*. The lines of accountability are articulated in the DoD Directive 5124.02, Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, June 23, 2008, and the DoD Instruction 1000.04, Federal Voting Assistance Program, November 12, 2019.

FVAP and each of its employees are evaluated under yearly *performance measures* tied to work done on a daily basis. These measures are tied to FVAP's overall mission and this strategic plan. The annually updated *performance measures* track upward from the individual to FVAP leadership, the Defense Personnel and Family Support Center, the Defense Human Resources Activity, the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, and overall Departmental strategies and goals. The strategic goals below are informed by these rules and directives, which inform and guide collaboration with stakeholders (as outlined above) and FVAP staff. All of these goals and key performance indicators are included within post-election and annual Congressional reports.

Goal 1

Be a highly valued customer service program to military members, their eligible family members, voting assistance officers, overseas voters, and elections officials

It is FVAP's mission to ensure military members, their families, and overseas citizens are aware of their right to vote and have the tools and resources to successfully do so – from anywhere in the world. For UOCAVA citizens, FVAP provides information for potential voters to learn about the absentee voting process and find the necessary forms, materials, and assistance to vote from wherever they are.

Objective 1.1: Provide professional, timely, and helpful assistance to UOCAVA voters to ensure the ability to successfully register, request, and return an absentee ballot

Strategies for Achieving the Objective

- Provide accurate and timely state-specific absentee voting information and other voting materials, in print and online, to UOCAVA voters in order to facilitate an individual's awareness of the voting process, important dates, and local election official contact information.
- Partner with state and local election officials to discuss updates to FVAP.gov in order to maintain up-to-date information and easy access to crucial voting information for voters, to include the listing of federal candidates in federal elections.
- Provide direct customer service by providing accurate nonpartisan absentee voting information within an established service level.

Performance Measures

- Customer satisfaction with our Voting Assistance Center as evidenced by post-inquiry survey data. Goal is to maintain a customer satisfaction rate at or above 4.0 out of 5.
- Customer satisfaction with trainings as evidence by feedback on pre- and post-workshop evaluation forms. Goal is to maintain an attendee satisfaction score at or above 4.5 out of 5.
- Usefulness and satisfaction feedback on tools and resources as shown by post-election survey data. Goal is a 75 percent or higher usefulness rate for FVAP resources.
- Qualitative feedback from stakeholders (i.e. communicating with voters at public forms and/or digital platforms) as well as more informal "face-to-face" feedback after and during presentations or workshops.
- Quantitative feedback data from the Election Administration and Voting Survey (EAVS), the EAVS Section B (ESB) Data Standard Information Collection, and the Overseas Citizen Population Analysis.
- Maintaining critical relationships with state and local election officials to facilitate the most up to date information for voters, as well as provide UOCAVA policy support when required.

Goal 1

Objective 1.2: Provide professional, timely, and helpful assistance to election officials, who administer elections, to ensure the ability of UOCAVA citizens to successfully vote absentee

Strategies for Achieving the Objectives

- Re-evaluate and update, as needed, the UOCAVA training program for election officials.
- Partner with state and local election officials and stakeholder organizations to discuss updates to FVAP.gov and state provided UOCAVA information to maintain up-to-date information and easy access to crucial voting information on the respective websites.
- Provide valuable training and presentations for state and local election officials to help them understand their requirements under Federal law and how to help UOCAVA citizens to vote successfully.

Performance Measures

- Continued operation of the Voting Assistance Center in a manner that ensures election officials receive accurate, timely, and professional help.
- Customer satisfaction with our Voting Assistance Center as evidenced by post-inquiry survey data. Goal is to maintain a customer satisfaction rate at or above 4.0 out of 5.
- Usefulness and satisfaction of tools and resources as evidenced by customer satisfaction surveys of state election officials.
- Qualitative feedback from election community meetings, conferences, and the Post-election survey.
- Leverage partnerships to ensure awareness of best practices and challenges election officials experience.
- Quantitative feedback data from the Election Administration and Voting Survey and administrative data to better identify success and challenges in the absentee voting process through ballot acceptance and rejection rates.

Objective 1.3: Provide professional, timely, and helpful support to VAOs at all levels, ensuring their ability to assist voters in successfully casting an absentee ballot

Strategies for Achieving the Objective

- Deliver valuable training in a variety of mediums to ensure VAOs understand their responsibilities in carrying out the law and the state-specific rules and deadlines.
- Re-evaluate and update, as needed, our training program for VAOs to address operating conditions and adult learning tactics.
- Provide updated Voting Assistance Guides and other voting materials to VAOs and overseas citizens in order to facilitate an individual's awareness of the voting process, important dates, and local election office contact information.
- Partner with relevant stakeholders to discuss updates to the voting assistance portal and FVAP.gov in order to maintain an up-to-date resource and easy access to crucial voting information.
- Produce useful tools and resources for VAOs that help them fulfill their requirements as described in DoD policy and Federal law, respectively.

- Provide direct customer service to VAOs to answer questions about the *UOCAVA* voting process as well as maintaining Portal accounts.
- *Performance Measures*
- Continued operation of the Voting Assistance Center in a manner that ensures customers receive accurate and professional help.
- Customer satisfaction with our Voting Assistance Center as evidenced by post-inquiry survey data. The goal is to maintain a customer satisfaction rate at or above 4.0 out of 5.
- Customer satisfaction with trainings as evidence by feedback on pre- and post-evaluation forms.
- Usefulness of and satisfaction with tools and resources as evidenced by post-election survey data.
- Qualitative feedback from the VAO workshops.
- Quantitative feedback data from the Election Administration and Voting Survey, the EAVS Section B (ESB) Data Standard Information Collection, Post-Election Voting Surveys: Voting Assistance Officers, and Post-Election Voting Surveys: Active Duty Military.

External Factors and Emerging Issues

Most factors that influence the success of a voter are outside the control, or even influence, of DoD. States run elections and individual voters must take the actions necessary to register to vote, request a ballot, and vote in a timely manner. FVAP works to facilitate the process between these groups and to monitor and assess postal impacts for *UOCAVA* voters both domestically and internationally. This includes working with key agency partners such as the Military Postal Service, the United States Postal Service and State Department.

In anticipation of these factors, FVAP can and does develop materials, online resources and communications to assist voters. For example, FVAP maintains online assistants on FVAP.gov to cut down on the time it takes to fill out the form (and process it). FVAP provides messaging throughout the year concerning dates and deadlines, as well as reminders to sign and date forms and other important aspects necessary to fill out the form. FVAP further provides direct customer service in the form of a call center, so that voters can quickly have their questions answered. This includes providing contact information for their local election official in order to make the process that much more clear and efficient.

Goal 2

Reduce obstacles to military and overseas voting success

DoD's voting assistance resources work together to support military and overseas voter's ability to participate in the electoral process. Since an election cycle includes primary, general, and run-off elections for Federal office, FVAP provides continual support over the course of an election cycle. FVAP also emphasizes metrics as a method of tying the execution and performance of supporting voting assistance activities to that of program effectiveness during an election cycle. Effectiveness for FVAP, therefore, includes reducing obstacles that allow for voter participation should a voter decide to vote in a given election.

Objective 2.1: Provide voting assistance tools and resources for military and overseas voters to support their ability to participate in the electoral process

Strategies for Achieving the Objective

- Evaluate and update the Voting Assistance Guide in order to reflect accurate, up-to-date, state-specific guidelines with standardized content written in plain language. This includes coordinating with local election officials to verify these guidelines and voting deadlines.
- Produce, re-evaluate, and solicit stakeholder input every 2 years (including state election officials, active duty military, and U.S. citizens living overseas) to better understand changes in state laws and the obstacles the UOCAVA population experience during the voting process.
- Produce, re-evaluate, and solicit UOCAVA stakeholder input every 2 years to update, as needed, the key forms used by UOCAVA citizens to request voter registration, request an absentee ballot, and successfully vote by absentee ballot.
- Provide website and online tools to guide voters through the process of filling out key absentee voting forms according to their state's laws, rules, deadlines, and regulations.
- Continue to provide accurate information to stakeholders via email and telephone regarding key voting forms and election dates as well as information on the general UOCAVA absentee process via the FVAP Call Center.
- Continue to create innovative solutions to known barriers, which may include pilot programs and cooperative agreements to spread awareness of the UOCAVA voting process and seek usage of inexpensive but timesaving measures.
- Use data to understand trends impacting U.S. citizens worldwide to anticipate the effective support necessary for UOCAVA voters.

Performance Measures

- General resource usage data, especially information on FVAP's Online Assistant and website usage results (Google Analytics).
- Continued operation and functional enhancement of FVAP.gov throughout election cycles.
- Voting Assistance Metrics from VAOs and the FVAP Call Center.
- Continued updates to the Portal on a quarterly basis, targeting new arising issues.

- Feedback on the effectiveness of current forms, website, and Portal from SVAOs, FVAP staff, election officials, and other stakeholders. This information is used to inform possible future form changes.
- Metrics on overall awareness, use, and effectiveness of FVAP products and services for SEOs, VAO, ADM, and local election officials regarding awareness, use, and effectiveness of FVAP products and services.
- Creating After Action Reviews to streamline FVAPs projects and procedures including AARs for workshops as well as for new projects.
- Overall utilization of the FPCA as the preeminent tool for voters.

Objective 2.2: Work with stakeholders to identify and address obstacles to *UOCAVA* absentee voting process

Strategies for Achieving the Objective

- Assist election officials with identifying policies, strategies, and best practices in customer service and increase their awareness of their requirements under Federal law.
- Continue working with the Council of State Governments focusing on the importance of issues surrounding the *UOCAVA* absentee voting process to the election community and seeking potential innovations.
- Examine the effect of technological improvements made by United States Postal Service (USPS) and the Military Postal Service (MPS) on the delivery of absentee ballots.
- Explore innovative techniques to support *UOCAVA* voters in the absentee voting process.
- Coordinate with MPS to develop and promote recommended mailing deadlines.
- *Performance Measures*
- Assess whether USPS and MPS mail modernization efforts reflect a positive impact on delivery of absentee ballots.
- Identify best practices for supporting *UOCAVA* voters regardless of operational conditions and international postal disruptions.
- By October of each odd numbered year, develop recommended mailing deadlines and include these deadlines in FVAP messaging efforts.

Objective 2.3: Influence improvements to the absentee process and support the absentee voting process

Strategies for Achieving the Objective

- Serve as a legislative resource at both the state and Federal level by responding to requests for feedback or input on a given, *UOCAVA*-related topic.
- Monitor the passage of voting-related state and Federal legislation and continue working with the states to reduce additional requirements to the *UOCAVA* process.
- Work directly with state and local election officials to identify best practices to better serve military and overseas voters.
- Work with state and local election officials to examine the use of administrative data and technology to assess the impact of technology in election administration.
- Continue to examine the impact of electronic blank ballot delivery and Federal mandates for

Goal 2

the transmission of ballots 45 days prior to each Federal election.

- Work with stakeholders to explore content and process improvements for military and overseas voter data.
- Utilize FVAP's innovative performance management dashboard to apply a critical thinking model to identify locations where additional voting assistance is needed.
- Develop targeted research to guide current policy and guide/adjust future policy implementation and program operations.

Strategic Measures

- Further collaborative efforts with the Council of State Governments (CSG) and state and local election officials to develop targeted and actionable proposals that states can easily implement either through administrative or legislative action.
- Advance collaborative efforts with CSG and state and local election officials to standardize data and explore technology best practices in order to provide an improved sense of the root causes for ballot rejections.
- Consolidate information collection efforts and leverage administrative data to provide a greater amount of actionable information on the impact of technological and administrative requirements in the *UOCAVA* process.
- Leverage the performance management dashboard as a resource to ensure installations or Service members are receiving sufficient assistance and support.

External factors and Emerging Issues

FVAP recognizes that the act of voting is between a voter and their state, as the states run elections. Therefore, FVAP can work with stakeholders, such as CSG and election officials, to identify and recommend policy and technology best practices. States can then implement these best practices to improve existing processes for serving *UOCAVA* voters. FVAP also works to conduct research, offer guidance, and communicate trends reported from the election community.

Additionally, FVAP understands there are other barriers (whether real or perceived) for overseas citizens who are attempting to vote successfully, including those identified in the Overseas Citizen Population Analysis. For example, depending on where the voter lives, the time needed to send ballots for federal elections may be longer than anticipated or there may be a significant distance between a voter and their nearest U.S. Embassy or consulate for voter assistance services including voted ballot dropoff. Further, there may be a lack of available resources such as a stable internet connection or access to scanners or fax machines. A voter may also live in a country with a slow or unreliable postal system.

FVAP focuses on factors that have the potential to be resolved in future elections through voter education, state legislation changes, and communication with local election offices. This includes communicating voting and mailing deadlines for all voters who fall under *UOCAVA*, making forms and other information readily available in a central location (FVAP.gov), and evaluating new ways to expand education and outreach initiatives.

Goal 3

Increase UOCAVA voter awareness of available tools and resources

Survey data over several election cycles consistently indicate that UOCAVA voters are more successful in casting a ballot when they have consulted a DoD resource (e.g. FVAP.gov or VAOs). FVAP will initiate activities to increase awareness and encourage use of tools and resources based on the strategic application of enhanced performance metrics including increased stakeholder engagement and a strong communications plan.

Objective 3.0: Create and administer more efficient outreach and education initiatives for all UOCAVA populations and encourage the use of tools and resources

Strategies for Achieving the Objective

- Identify lessons learned from previous election cycles and plan and implement new approaches for upcoming election cycles. This includes FVAP staff off-sites and FVAP's various program analysis reports.
- Send emails to .mil addresses highlighting absentee voting information, deadlines, key resources, forms, election dates, and general reminders using simple, concise messages (90, 60, 30 days during a Federal election year).
- Develop targeted marketing and communication plans to reach appropriate audiences: active duty military with particular emphasis on younger, potential first-time voters; known active duty military voters; military spouses; overseas citizens; and election officials.
- Develop earned media and shared media campaigns to advance FVAP's brand strategy by raising awareness of resources.
- Continue working with and furthering FVAP's relationship with the Department of State in order to reach overseas citizen populations.
- Use data from EAVS data and the ESB Data Standard Information Collection to better understand how to encourage UOCAVA voters to take action earlier and to help local officials understand the UOCAVA voting population.
- Structure supporting activities for UOCAVA voters across all Executive Branch agencies.
- Evaluate new ways to expand educational and outreach initiatives, including the possibility of pilot programs.

Strategic Measures

- Executed communication plans resulting in meeting or exceeding the intended goals as shown by various analytics (i.e. impressions or interactions and engagements on digital and social platforms, downloads of information in foreign languages, etc.).
- Results of expanded outreach efforts reflected in post-election survey results and digital/online analytics when comparing data across similar election cycles (i.e. midterm election cycle versus presidential election cycle). This data can be seen in the following metrics included in FVAP Congressional reports:
- Voter registration rate

Goal 3

- Voter participation rate
- Awareness of voting assistance resources
- Satisfaction/usefulness of voting assistance resources
- Usage of voting assistance resources
- Percentage receiving voting information from family and friends, especially among married active duty members
- Web traffic to FVAP.gov

External Factors and Emerging Issues

UOCAVA voters span the world and are highly-mobile. Reaching U.S. citizens requires the development of targeted and engaging communications strategies given that U.S. citizens consist of diverse groups such as; study abroad students, long-term residents, Service members, eligible families, and others. FVAP is committed to better understanding where U.S. citizens are around the globe and to creating informative and engaging materials for these communities.

When creating any program, the issue of continuity and partnerships is at the forefront. Within the voting realm, VAOs are a significant resource for active duty members, their families, as well as overseas citizens. Often times, the functions of VAO are collateral duties that fail to take priority and are transferred from person to person based on the length of an individual's tour of duty.

Anticipating this situation, FVAP.gov has a dedicated section as a resource for VAOs. It includes VAO training, information on directives and guidance that are crucial to their roles, as well as materials that explain their duties. Further, FVAP requires that military VAOs maintain a continuity binder designed to be passed onto the next Service member who is given the duty of Unit or Installation Voting Assistance Officer. Each Service, including the Department of State, has a Service Voting Action Officer as a resource for Service- or department- specific information. FVAP's Call Center is also a great resource for questions about the *UOCAVA* voting process should VAOs need assistance answering a question.

Summary

FVAP is committed to supporting Uniformed Service members, their families, and overseas citizens with absentee voting by:

1. Being a highly valued customer service program to military members, their eligible family members, voting assistance officers, overseas voters, and election officials
2. Reducing obstacles to military and overseas voting success
3. Increasing *UOCAVA* voter awareness of available tools and resources. FVAP intends to accomplish these goals by continuing to refine its program operations and resources while working with its key stakeholders to respond effectively to any change to the overall election administration environment. This overall strategic plan reflects past efforts to align FVAP mission elements directly to its statutory authorizations, but also to look forward and recognize how voters interact with the absentee voting process. This strategic plan captures the series of improvements made in the past, addresses key measures in meeting future goals, while providing key opportunities for updates on FVAP progress through its Congressional reporting requirements. This plan will continue to guide these efforts and ensure that *UOCAVA* voters are aware of their right to vote and have the tools and resources to successfully do so - from anywhere in the world.