FVAP

2018

Report to Congress

FVAP.GOV
FEDERAL VOTING ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

This report fulfills the Federal Voting Assistance Program's (FVAP) requirement under section 20308(b) of title 52, United States Code. The estimated cost of this report or study for the Department of Defense is approximately $1,447,000 for the 2018 Fiscal Year. This includes $1,413,000 in expenses and $34,000 in DoD labor. Generated on May 21, 2019, RefID: 3-A67BD81.

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Executive Summary

This report fulfills the Federal Voting Assistance Program's (FVAP) requirement for its annual report codified at section 20308(b) of title 52, United States Code. It includes findings from FVAP's post-election surveys and provides an assessment of activities supporting the 2018 elections for federal offices. FVAP is an assistance program; its mission is to inform voters covered by the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA) of their right to vote and provide the tools and resources to help those who want to vote do so successfully from anywhere in the world.

FVAP continues to press forward with the following program objectives: reducing obstacles to UOCAVA citizen voting success, continuing the expansion of UOCAVA voter awareness and outreach initiatives, and enhancing measures of effectiveness and participation. Since 2016, FVAP has demonstrated significant progress in advancing these recommendations, as it recommitted itself to core focus areas of customer service and raising awareness of available resources across the Department of Defense (DoD), such as FVAP.gov or Voting Assistance Officers (VAOs) in the field.

This progress was possible thanks to the collaborative efforts provided by FVAP's stakeholders: Congress, the Military Services, Department of State, state and local election officials, the Election Assistance Commission and advocacy organizations. This year's report provides a detailed analysis on the progress that FVAP has made in regards to these recommendations. It also includes updated recommendations on how FVAP can continue to support UOCAVA voters and stakeholders during the 2020 election cycle.

Observations from the 2018 General Election

After the 2018 Federal Election, FVAP conducted Post-Election Voting Surveys of the active duty military (ADM), Voting Assistance Officers, and state election officials. The survey data yielded the following findings:

- The 2018 voter registration rate for all ADM was 61 percent.
- The 2018 voter participation rate for all ADM was 26 percent.
- ADM who received assistance from a DoD resource (FVAP, Unit Voting Assistance Officers, Installation Voter Assistance Offices) were significantly more likely to submit a ballot than if they did not receive DoD assistance. This finding has been consistent across the last four General Elections (2012, 2014, 2016 and 2018) and speaks to the importance and effectiveness of efforts by FVAP and the Services to raise awareness of available resources and provide direct assistance.
- In 2018, three-quarters of ADM voted by absentee ballot, which is a seven percent increase in ADM using absentee methods compared to 2014.
- More than one in five visits to FVAP.gov resulted in a conversion, which falls in the top 10 percent of conversion rate benchmarks for high-traffic sites. "Conversion" occurs when a website visitor performs a desired action; on FVAP.gov, conversions are actions taken by

a visitor that represent a first step toward registering and requesting a ballot or using the backup ballot if necessary.

FVAP's activities fulfill the Secretary of Defense's responsibilities under UOCAVA. These activities are geared toward raising awareness of the right to vote among UOCAVA citizens and eliminating barriers for those who choose to exercise that right. FVAP's 2018 activities made progress toward the recommendations in FVAP's 2016 Report to Congress.

Recommendations from the 2016 Report to Congress and Results of Activities in 2018

Recommendation #1: Reduce Obstacles to UOCAVA Citizen Voting Success

- There was a 180 percent increase in Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) and Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot (FWAB) transactions on FVAP.gov in 2018 as compared to 2014.
- In 2018, FVAP distributed 28,292 physical forms (FPCA and FWAB) and 97,930 pieces of educational or outreach materials to 44 countries and 103 military installations. (Note: These numbers only include the forms and materials that were distributed directly by FVAP staff. They do not incorporate the number of FVAP branded materials that were distributed directly by the Military Services or the Department of State.)
- More than one in five visits to FVAP.gov resulted in the visitor taking a voting-related action. This data point indicates the effectiveness of the FVAP website in supporting the voting process.
- FVAP staff provided state and local election officials with information on the implementation requirements specified in UOCAVA and fostered greater understanding of the military and overseas citizen experience with the absentee voting process at multiple state and national election official conferences.

Recommendation #2: Continue Expansion of UOCAVA Voter Awareness and Outreach Initiatives

- FVAP.gov achieved a 116 percent increase in total visitors and a 136 percent increase in visits in 2018 when compared to 2014.
- FVAP implemented an effective communication campaign in support of the 2018 election season, resulting in awareness of FVAP by over four out of five (82%) ADM voters who reported casting an absentee ballot. Between 2014 and 2018, awareness of FVAP amongst all ADM rose from 38 percent to 47 percent.
- In 2018, 24 percent of all FVAP.gov sessions originated from paid media advertising, as compared to just six percent in 2016. This data point reveals the substantial impact of paid media in a midterm election and suggests that FVAP has been allocating its media funding effectively.
- VAO training workshops were conducted at 48 U.S. military installations and 43 U.S. embassies and consulates over a span of 27 countries. FVAP received a workshop customer satisfaction score of 4.60 out of 5.00, with 5.00 being the highest score achievable. This score is similar to FVAP's score in 2016 which was 4.66.
- Overall customer inquiries in 2018 increased by 183 percent compared to 2014. Among

inquiries, the portion coming from ADM increased by 51 percent.

Recommendation #3: Enhance Measures of Effectiveness and Participation

- In September 2018, FVAP released the Overseas Citizen Population Analysis using data from the 2016 post-election Overseas Citizen Population Survey. This analysis helps FVAP to better understand overseas citizen voters and uncover any barriers they might face when trying to vote from abroad.
- FVAP analyzed and made changes to its Post-Election Voting Survey instruments in order to reduce unnecessary survey burden and enhance the quality of information collected.
- FVAP continued to collaborate with the Council of State Governments regarding how local and state election officials can better serve UOCAVA voters and how these election officials can standardize data reporting to the Election Assistance Commission.

Recommendations for the 2020 Election Cycle

Based on the 2018 election data and activities, FVAP plans to continue to focus on the following strategies in support of the 2020 election cycle:

Recommendation #1: Reduce Barriers for UOCAVA Voters to Successfully Vote Absentee

- Educate states on the need to support ADM by authorizing acceptance of electronic signatures from the DoD Common Access Card (CAC) in the election process, based on the Council of State Governments' Overseas Voting Initiative recommendations.
- Further simplify the FPCA and the FWAB to focus on core federal election eligibility requirements to avoid confusion and maximize benefits codified under UOCAVA.
- Inform states on how best to maintain voter access while conducting their due diligence in response to increased concerns over cybersecurity and the Department of Homeland Security's Critical Infrastructure designation.
- Offer FVAP election materials in foreign languages to better support U.S. citizens residing overseas.

Recommendation #2: Increase Awareness About Absentee Voting

- Continue to use paid media and social media outlets to focus on population segments who lack awareness of available resources through FVAP, especially first-time absentee voters.
- Incorporate a pilot volunteer program in an effort to spread awareness about UOCAVA voting overseas.
- Create and effectively distribute innovative content that resonates with the military, their families, and overseas citizens.

Recommendation #3: Enhance Measures of Effectiveness and Participation

- Refine and improve upon FVAP's Effective Voting Assistance Model to track changes to Voting Assistance Officer responsibilities across the Services for effectiveness and

identification of best practices.

- Leverage the Council of State Governments' ongoing work with implementation of a reporting data standard for states to assess and report the impacts of Congressional reforms passed in 2009 (the Military and Overseas Voter Empowerment Act.)

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Message from the FVAP Director

It is my distinct pleasure to present FVAP's 2018 Post-Election Report to Congress. This report includes findings from our post-election surveys and provides an assessment of our activities supporting the 2018 elections for federal office. It is important to remember that FVAP is an assistance program – our mission is to inform citizens covered by UOCAVA of their right to vote and provide the tools and resources to help those who want to vote do so successfully from anywhere in the world.

In our 2016 report, we recommended areas for action to further improve voting assistance efforts. Thanks to collaboration with our many stakeholders, FVAP made important strides in fulfilling those initiatives along with new efforts for 2018:

- Implemented an effective communication campaign in support of the 2018 election season, resulting in awareness of FVAP by over four out of five (82%) active duty military voters who reported casting an absentee ballot.
- Launched an innovative direct-to-voter video training to increase awareness and knowledge of the absentee voting process across the military community.
- Released registration and participation rates for the overseas citizen population during the 2016 General Election.

The 2018 calendar year was one of transition for the structure and staffing of the Military Services' voting assistance programs. Recognizing concerns over the growing list of additional responsibilities placed upon active duty service personnel, including serving as Voting Assistance Officers (VAOs), FVAP worked with the Services to chart a path forward for their voting assistance programs - one that embraces standardized outcomes, not a standardized design. As a first step in this process, FVAP developed an effectiveness model to assess the performance of VAOs across the Services and share best practices. We anticipate guidance in place for 2020 that will provide greater operational flexibility to the Military Services while continuing to hold ourselves accountable for the ability to support active duty personnel with the information and resources needed to navigate the absentee voting process.

I would like to thank Neal Kelley and his team at the California Orange County Registrar of Voters for their inspiration toward the design of this report. I also look forward to the opportunities and accomplishments ahead, and I know that together, in partnership with the dedicated UOCAVA community, we can reach our shared vision: Military members, their families, and U.S. citizens living abroad can successfully exercise democracy's most important civic responsibility - voting.

Background

This report fulfills the Federal Voting Assistance Program's (FVAP) requirement for an annual report codified at section 20308(b) of title 52, United States Code (U.S.C.).

The Law and its Requirements

The Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA) (codified at Chapter 203 of title 52, U.S.C.) and sections 1566 and 1566a of title 10, U.S.C., provide authority for establishment of voting assistance programs for members of the Uniformed Services, their eligible family members, and U.S. citizens residing abroad.

Presidential Executive Order 12642, signed in 1988, names the Secretary of Defense as the Designee for administering UOCAVA. Further, the Department of Defense Instruction (DoDI) 1000.04, "Federal Voting Assistance Program," directs the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness to perform the responsibilities of the Presidential designee; the responsibilities are carried out by the Director of FVAP. Under these authorities, FVAP provides voting information and assistance to those eligible to vote in U.S. elections for federal office.

In October 2009, UOCAVA was amended by the Military and Overseas Voter Empowerment (MOVE) Act Title V, Subtitle H of P.L. 111-84, National Defense Authorization Act Fiscal Year 2010. Among its provisions, the amended UOCAVA:

- requires states to transmit ballots at least 45 days before federal elections;
- requires states to offer electronic transmission of voting information and blank ballots;
- expands the use of the Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot (FWAB) for all federal elections;
- prohibits notarization requirements;
- requires the Services to establish voting assistance through Service Installation Voter Assistance (IVA) Offices, and authorizes the Secretary of Defense to authorize the Secretaries of the Military Departments to designate IVA offices as voter registration facilities under section 7(a)(3)(B)(ii) of the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA) of 1993, P.L. 103-31; and

- requires the Department of Defense (DoD) to field a number of online tools for FVAP-prescribed forms.

Section 20308(b) of title 52, U.S.C., requires an annual report issued by the DoD to the President and Congress concerning:

- the effectiveness of FVAP activities carried out under section 20305 of the above title;
- an assessment of voter registration and participation by absent Uniformed Services voters;
- an assessment of voter registration and participation by overseas citizens not members of the Uniformed Services;
- a description of cooperation between states and the Federal Government in carrying out the requirements of UOCAVA; and
- a description of the utilization of voter assistance under section 1566a of title 10, U.S.C.

Observations from the 2018 General Election

The Active Duty Military Population

FVAP collects the active duty military (ADM) data referenced in this section through the Post-Election Voting Survey of the Active Duty Military (PEVS-ADM). One of the main objectives of the PEVS-ADM is to gather the data needed to estimate the UOCAVA Gap: The percentage of UOCAVA ADM who would have voted, but did not due to UOCAVA-specific obstacles to voting. FVAP seeks to ensure that all UOCAVA voters who want to vote are able to do so. To achieve this goal, FVAP must measure and evaluate obstacles to participation faced by the UOCAVA ADM population. In this context, participation refers to the act of submitting a voted ballot.

The results of the 2018 PEVS-ADM reflect efforts to improve survey data quality by encouraging ADM to take the survey regardless of their interest in voting. In particular, since 2014 FVAP has been transitioning the sampling and contact methodology of the PEVS-ADM to largely eliminate language about voting. By increasingly framing the survey as being about broader military issues and de-emphasizing language regarding the voting process in the title and letters, emails and other

communications regarding the survey, FVAP is working to expand the survey respondents so they are more representative of ADM overall.

From 2010 to 2014, all of the ADM surveyed received invitations and a questionnaire that emphasized that the PEVS-ADM was a survey dealing specifically with absentee voting issues and ways to assist absentee voters (Sample A). The title of the survey for Sample A is the "Post-Election Voting Survey of the Active Duty Military". In 2016, 85 percent of the sample was included in Sample A and the remaining 15 percent received materials that de-emphasized voting language (Sample B). The survey title used to collect the data in Sample B is the "Quick Compass of the Active Duty Military." In 2018, this experiment was reversed. Fifteen percent of ADM were included in Sample A and 85 percent were included in Sample B. In 2020, FVAP plans to have all ADM as part of Sample B.

VAO attending a VAO workshop in order to better assist others

This transition in survey methodology is important for a number of key reporting metrics. Since the data collected in Sample B is designed to be more inclusive of non-voters, the majority of voting-related statistics are expected to trend downward because more ADM who do not vote or lack the interest and motivation to do so will respond to the survey. Therefore, most comparisons of 2014 to 2018 data in this report use Sample A. Discussions focused on 2018 data exclusively will use Sample B, as will future iterations of FVAP's Report to Congress.[1]

Comparing Military and Citizen Voter Registration and Participation Rates

Election observers make direct comparisons between ADM voter registration and participation rates and those of the non-UOACAVA citizen voting age population (CVAP). However, the ADM population differs from CVAP in a wide variety of ways including age, gender, education, and mobility.

To make useful comparisons of these two populations, FVAP leverages a sophisticated modeling approach to control for these demographics, as well as to provide greater insight into how ADM registration and participation rates compare with the rates of the CVAP that most closely resembles the military population.

[1] *Most comparisons in this report are between 2018 and the last midterm election year, 2014, to account for well-documented differences between presidential and midterm election years in voting interest and behaviors, as well as the amount of voting-related information available.*

Figures 1 and 2 illustrate voter registration and participation rates for the following groups.[2]

ADM: FVAP's ADM survey population includes active duty members of the Army, Marine Corps, Navy, Air Force, and Coast Guard. Reported proportions use a sample matched to demographic and geographic characteristics of the CVAP.

Using Sample A:[3]

- 67 percent of ADM were registered to vote in 2018, compared to 74 percent in 2014[4]
- 31 percent of ADM participated in 2018, compared to 24 percent in 2014.

Using Sample B:

- 61 percent of ADM were registered to vote in 2018
- 26 percent participated in 2018.[5]

CVAP: The CVAP consists of employed native and naturalized U.S. citizens who are 18 years of age or older, which is the U.S. Census Bureau's standard baseline measurement used when comparing voting statistics.[6] Reported proportions are of a sample of CVAP with necessary demographic and geographic data to match them to a comparable sample of ADM.

Modeled CVAP: The modeled CVAP is the CVAP population adjusted to reflect greater demographic alignment with ADM to provide a more accurate portrayal of military voting participation rates in comparison to CVAP.

Figure 1 compares the population groups based on overall registration rates between 2014 and 2018.[7] While the ADM registration rates decline from 74 percent to 67 percent in Sample A, the CVAP registration rates rose from 79 percent to 83 percent. In addition, the modeled CVAP registration rate, which reflects participation among CVAP who are demographically and geographically similar to ADM, was higher than that of ADM.

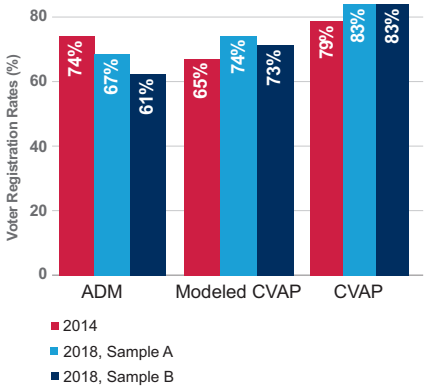


Figure 1. Comparison of 2014 and 2018 voter registration rates of ADM with those of CVAP and Modeled CVAP

[2] *This report uses the 2018 ADM and CVAP rates in FVAP's 2018 PEVS-ADM Technical Report (public release forthcoming).*
[3] *FVAP, 2018 PEVS-ADM Sample A, Q8, Q32.*
[4] *Note that this decline may reflect a change in the survey question used to solicit information about registration status. In 2014 the registration question did not specify registration with respect to the 2014 election while in 2018 it did.*
[5] *FVAP, 2018 PEVS-ADM Sample B, Q8, Q32.*
[6] *U.S. Census Bureau, https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/voting-and-registration/p20-580.html?intcmp=s2_voting*
[7] *FVAP, 2018 PEVS-ADM, Q6; 2014 PEVS of ADM, Q11*

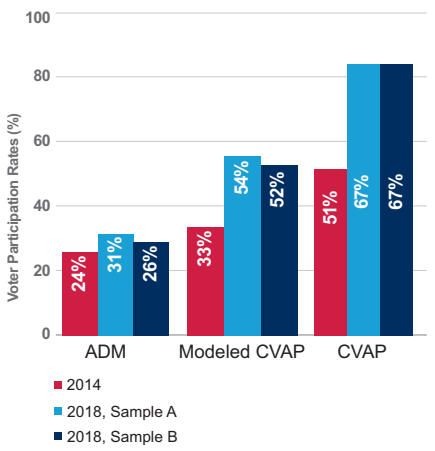


Figure 2. Comparison of 2014 and 2018 voter participation rates of ADM with those of CVAP and Modeled CVAP

These data points suggest a drop in the ADM voter registration rate from 2014 to 2018 in comparison to the CVAP. However, more research is required to determine if this drop is an effect of a change in the PEVS-ADM survey question wording from 2014 to 2018 or if it indicates an actual drop in voter registration rates among the ADM population.

Note: The difference in registration rates between ADM and CVAP as well as between ADM and modeled CVAP were statistically significantly different from zero at the one percent level for both the 2014 and 2018 general elections. These results hold when using the estimated 2018 ADM registration rate derived from either Sample A or Sample B.

Figure 2 compares total ADM and CVAP voting participation rates in 2014 and 2018.[8] As is customary, the rates shown encompass all methods of voting (e.g., in-person on Election Day, early voting, and absentee). Since available data sources do not adequately isolate voting methods, total participation is the best measure of comparison to the CVAP.

The ADM participation rate increased from 24 percent in 2014 to 31 percent in 2018 in Sample A. During that same period, CVAP participation rates increased from 51 percent to 67 percent. The modeled CVAP participation rate remained higher than ADM at 54 percent. Of particular interest is the dramatic increase in the CVAP participation rate from 2014 to 2018. The relative comparison gaps in participation rates fail to isolate the core customer group for FVAP, the absentee voter, and illustrates the need for a deeper understanding of the absentee voter and those eligible to vote under UOCAVA.

Note: The difference in participation rates between ADM and CVAP as well as between ADM and Modeled CVAP were statistically significantly different from zero at the one percent level for both the 2014 and 2018 general elections. These results hold when using the estimated 2018 ADM participation rate derived from either Sample A or Sample B.

ADM Interest Compared to Participation

Figures 1 and 2 are focused on comparing two populations and adjusting (using a model) for changing demographics that could

[8] *FVAP, 2018 PEVS of ADM, Q32; 2014 PEVS of ADM, Q34*

cause rates to go up or down. These both differ from Figure 3, which shows ADM interest compared to participation from 2010-2018. The data points are not adjusted for demographics and demonstrate that participation fluctuates with motivation over time.

From 2014 to 2018 using Sample A of the PEVS-ADM survey, there was a 12-percentage-point increase in ADM-reported interest in the election (48 percent to 60 percent), and the trend for interest continues to align with participation.[9] In Sample B (not shown), both of these trends are consistent, with interest declining from 66 percent in 2016 to 51 percent in 2018.[10] This chart illustrates the relative gap for ADM in each election and the relative difference between interest and participation for each election cycle.[11] Since FVAP remains focused on awareness pursuant to its Congressional mandate, FVAP will continue to examine those who are interested, but lack information or access to absentee voting resources while serving on active duty.

In further analyzing the issue of interest, it was found that in 2018, fewer ADM gave motivation-related reasons for not having voted when compared to 2014. In 2018, 50 percent of ADM who did not vote said it was because of lack of motivation (e.g., choosing "I did not want to vote").[12]

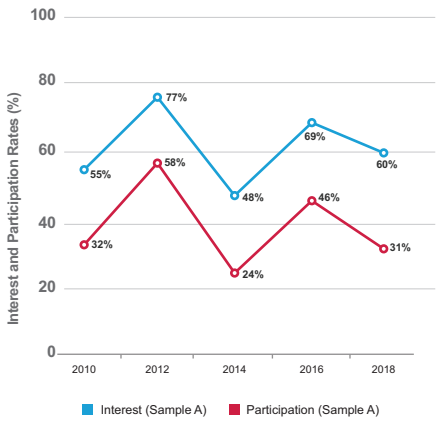


Figure 3. Active Duty Military interest compared to participation, 2010-2018

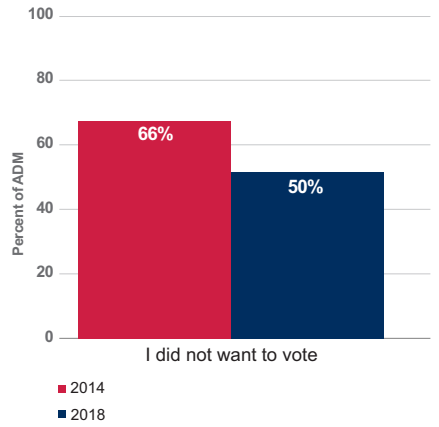


Figure 4. ADM motivation-related reasons for not voting among non-voters, 2014-2018

Military Voting Assistance Programs

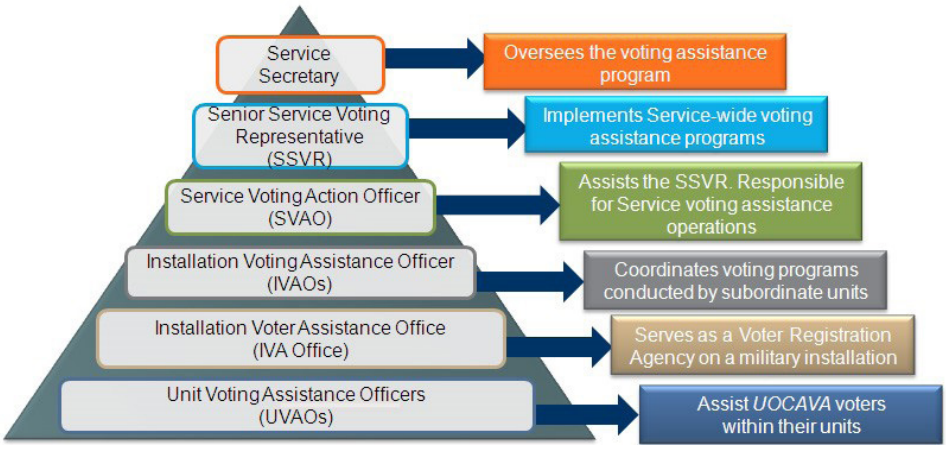
Figure 5 outlines the structure of each Service's voting assistance program. Each Service Voting Action Officer (SVAO) serves as the voting program manager, working directly with FVAP to provide Installation Voting Assistance Officers (IVAO), Installation Voter Assistance (IVA) Offices, and Unit Voting Assistance Officers (UVAO) with Service-specific support to develop programs and policies for their respective programs. The Services are responsible for execution and compliance and are required to submit annual reports outlining the effectiveness of their programs.

The 2018 election cycle was a year of change for DoD's voting assistance programs. In 2017, both the Air Force and the Navy

[9] *FVAP. 2018 PEVS-ADM Sample A, Q29, Q32.*
[10] *FVAP. 2018 PEVS-ADM Sample B, Q29, Q32.*
[11] *Participation rates in Figure 3 may differ slightly from those provided in Figure 2 (Req 3); Figure 3 uses weighted descriptive statistics, and Figure 2 (Req 3) uses modeled data that censors some cases.*
[12] *FVAP, 2018 PEVS-ADM, Sample A, Q34. 2014 PEVS-ADM, Q35.*

attempted to address concerns with the growth of additional responsibilities and collateral duties for individual Service members by limiting or eliminating UVAO responsibilities. In light of subsequent DoD Inspector General findings, both branches re-instituted UVAO responsibilities to ensure compliance with provisions of 10 U.S.C. 1566a, which requires the Services to adhere to DoD regulations on the implementation of their voting assistance program.

In 2018, FVAP convened a working group to address the collateral duty issue with its next iteration of DoDI 1000.04, which serves as the official DoD regulation for implementation of the voting assistance program. FVAP anticipates adoption of this new regulation in time for the 2020 primary election season. The new regulation will offer greater operational flexibility to the Services in the actual assignment of voting assistance officer responsibilities for each unit while also focusing on the specific outcomes and program execution requirements of DoDI 1000.04.



Service voting assistance program key members

Unit Voting Assistance Officers

VAOs are designated individuals who provide nonpartisan voting information and assistance to military voters, their spouses, and eligible dependents on installations or in units. DoDI 1000.04 requires that a UVAO at the O-2/E-7 level or above be designated within each unit of 25 or more permanently assigned members. However, those of a lower grade who are enthusiastic volunteers and desire the job may be designated as the UVAO if they have enough authority to carry out the responsibilities. FVAP's Post-Election Voting Survey of Voting Assistance Officers (PEVS-VAO)

data shows that in 2018, 78 percent of VAOs were assigned to their position while 21 percent volunteered; 40 percent of VAOs were enlisted members;[13] and 60 percent were officers. Figure 5 illustrates VAOs by paygrade.[14]

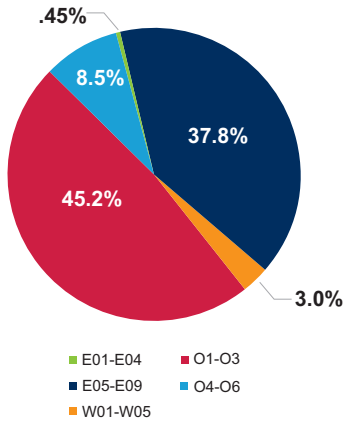


Figure 5. 2018 paygrades of VAOs

To support UVAOs and IVAOs in providing the best possible assistance, FVAP offers in-person workshops and online training, a VAO-dedicated section at FVAP.gov, and voting assistance materials such as posters, banners, forms, outreach materials, and the Voting Assistance Guide (the Guide). PEVS-VAO data shows that VAOs found FVAP's materials useful and shared them with military members.

Installation Voter Assistance Offices

Under regulations prescribed by the Secretary of Defense, Section 1566a of title 10, U.S.C. directs the Secretaries of the Military Departments to designate offices on military installations as IVA Offices. The Military and Overseas Voter Empowerment (MOVE) Act amendments to UOCAVA require these offices to provide information and direct assistance on voter registration and absentee ballot procedures to Uniformed Services members and their family members when a Service member:

- undergoes a permanent change of duty station;
- deploys or returns from deployment; or
- requests such assistance.

Under that same statute, the Secretary of Defense authorized the Secretaries of the Military Departments to designate IVA Offices as voter registration agencies under the National Voter Registration Act. DoDI 1000.04 enhances DoD policy by outlining specific IVA Office requirements in greater detail.

IVA Offices may leverage UVAOs to meet staffing requirements or directly assist with meeting processing milestones. However, it is the responsibility of the individual in charge of the IVA Office to require that UVAOs be in full compliance with the voter assistance responsibilities, if delegated.

Across all the Services, 65 percent of VAOs reported that they provided a briefing at either in-processing or out-processing. Air

[13] *FVAP, 2018 PEVS-VAO, Q5.*
[14] *FVAP, 2018 PEVS-VAO, Q47.*

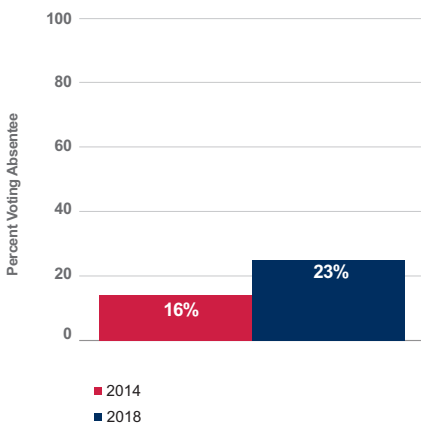


Figure 6: ADM Absentee voting rates for 2014 and 2018

Force was the most likely to provide a briefing at in-processing or out-processing at 93 percent, compared to 82 percent for Marine Corps, 70 percent for Navy, and 52 percent for Army. Overall, 35 percent of VAOs provided a briefing for ADM when they changed their address. Air Force was most likely to brief voting-related issues during change-of-address events at 57 percent, compared to 34 percent for Navy and 33 percent for both Marine Corps and Army.[15]

The Active Duty Military Absentee Voter

FVAP examined the use of DoD voting resources among ADM who reported voting absentee. As shown in Figure 6, 23 percent of ADM voted absentee in 2018 compared to 16 percent in 2014.[16]

Ballot Request, Receipt, and Return Rates, 2014-2018

Table 1 shows that there was an increase in the percent of ADM requesting and receiving absentee ballots in 2018 when compared to the last midterm election in 2014, but a decrease in ballot return rates.

	2014	2016	2018
Requested an Absentee Ballot	46.64%	54.48%	53.14%
Received an Absentee Ballot	35.82%	59.49%	41.96%
Returned an Absentee Ballot	82.28%	90.79%	77.67%

Table 1. Rates for ADM absentee ballots requested, received and returned for the years 2014, 2016 and 2018

Because of the decrease in the rate of ballot return, FVAP examined the relationship between those ADM who needed assistance and reported seeking information or assistance from a DoD resource (FVAP, UVAOs, or IVA Offices) and those ADM who needed assistance but did not report seeking information or assistance from a DoD resource. This comparison was undertaken both for the overall population, as well as for individual age groups and Services.

- Thirty-nine percent of ADM (regardless of their age or

[15] *FVAP, PEVS-VAO Technical Report pg. 21, 22. (Public release forthcoming.)*
[16] *FVAP, 2018 PEVS-ADM, Q32; 2014 PEVS-ADM, Q43; voted rate include all methods of voting absentee. Percentages are weighted by 2014 and 2018 survey weights.*

Service) who needed assistance returned their ballot if they reported seeking information or assistance from a DoD resource.

- Only eight percent of ADM who needed assistance but did not seek it from a DoD resource ballot returned their ballot.

ADM who needed assistance were nearly five times more likely to report returning their absentee ballot if they sought assistance from a DoD resource.

For ADM age 18- to 29-years old who sought assistance from a DoD resource, 37 percent reported returning their absentee ballot.

This statistically significant difference[17] reinforces previous findings on the effectiveness of DoD resources administered under the auspices of FVAP and also stresses the need for a continued information awareness campaign on the availability and location of these resources.

Since the ADM population is much younger than the civilian voting-age population, FVAP examined whether different ADM age segments may be more in need of voting assistance. Table 2 presents the relative gap in the rate of seeking assistance and returning an absentee ballot based on age, illustrating that younger Service members lag behind their elders in ballot return rates even after seeking assistance.[18] These findings emphasize the importance of FVAP tailoring its information campaigns to reach the younger segments (18-29 years old) of the ADM population in 2020 and beyond. These findings also emphasize the importance of a voter's interest in an election and willingness to seek assistance, with FVAP's challenge remaining one of increasing awareness of absentee voting resources across the ADM population.

	Sought Assistance from DoD Resource and Returned Ballot	Did Not Seek Assistance from DoD Resource and Returned Ballot
Total ADM	39.43%	8.31%
18 to 29 years old	37.40%	6.98%
30 years old or more	41.53%	11.32%

Table 2. Percent of ADM who returned an absentee ballot, comparing those who sought assistance from a DoD resource, and those did not seek assistance from a DoD resource by age group

[17] *This difference is statistically significant ($p < .01$) when conducting a chi-square test using weighted cross-sectional data. This does not control for other demographic confounding variables that more complex models may account for to test significance.*

[18] *FVAP. 2018 PEVS-ADM Sample B, Q23, Q44, Q45, Q46. Limited to ADM who needed assistance.*

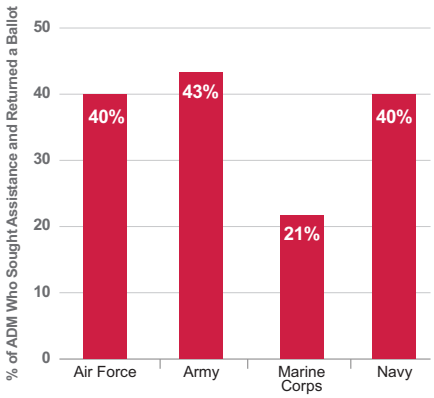


Figure 7. The percentage of ADM per Service who submitted a ballot and sought assistance from a DoD resource

Table 3 shows the differences in ballot return rates among ADM who did and did not seek voting assistance by Service branch. While the gap between those needing assistance who did and did not seek it from DoD resources is statistically significant across all Service branches,[19] the gap is largest for Army and smallest for the Marine Corps.[20]

	Sought Assistance from DoD Resource and Returned Ballot	Did not Seek Assistance from DoD Resource and Returned Ballot
Army	43.13%	7.97%
Navy	40.30%	13.67%
Marines	20.50%	1.39%
Air Force	40.39%	6.45%

Table 3. Percent of ADM who returned an absentee ballot, comparing those who sought assistance from a DoD resource, and those did not seek assistance from a DoD resource by Service

The differing availability of voting assistance resources through FVAP.gov or at the installation or unit level highlights the need to examine the effectiveness of each of these resources. In this case, resource effectiveness is measured in terms of ballot return rates. As depicted in Table 4, of those ADM who needed assistance and reported seeking assistance from FVAP in 2018, 46 percent returned their ballot. Of those ADM who needed assistance and reported seeking assistance from UVAOs or IVA Offices in 2018, 20 percent returned their ballot. Less than seven percent of ADM needing, but not seeking assistance from a DoD resource, reported returning their absentee ballot.[21]

[19] *This difference is statistically significant ($p < .01$) when conducting a chi-square test using weighted cross-sectional data. This does not control for other demographic confounding variables that more complex models may account for to test significance.*

[20] *The Coast Guard was not included in the Service breakouts in this report due to there being very few Coast Guard respondents in both the PEVS-ADM and the PEVS-VAO. In this case, isolating for Coast Guard as a Service will not yield significant findings and more importantly it might put the respondents at risk of recognition.*

[21] *FVAP. 2018 PEVS-ADM Sample A, Q23, Q44, Q45, Q46. Limited to ADM that needed assistance. The return rate for those seeking assistance from UVAO and IVAO has a relatively large margin of error because of the small numbers of respondents who needed assistance and used either of these resources.*

	2014	2016	2018
Needed, but did not seek assistance from a DoD Resource	5.77%	17.81%	6.65%
Sought Assistance from a DoD Resource (FVAP/UVAOs/IVA) Offices	35.79%	51.91%	41.30%
Sought Assistance from FVAP	38.51%	53.22%	45.79%
Sought Assistance from UVAOs or IVAOs	27.99%	46.39%	20.46%

Table 4. Percent of ADM who reported returning absentee ballot by type of assistance requested

As each Service branch will continue to exercise operational flexibility for its voting assistance program in 2020, 2018 findings were used to capture the current utilization rates for all voting assistance resources across the Services, which establishes a performance baseline going forward and isolates program impacts in anticipation of future changes.

Table 5 shows that in 2018 the differences in resource utilization were marginal across Service branches. FVAP remained the most utilized resource across the branches; 16 percent of ADM who were in the Army or Navy and who needed assistance reported they were aware of and sought assistance from FVAP, compared to 12 percent in the Marine Corps and 15 percent in the Air Force.[22] These findings align with FVAP's role of supporting and augmenting VAO responsibilities as the preeminent resource for voting assistance.

	FVAP	UVAO	IVA Office
Army	15.53%	5.72%	4.78%
Marine Corps	11.64%	3.89%	5.04%
Navy	15.59%	3.46%	2.11%
Air Force	15.05%	5.97%	4.80%

Table 5. Percent of ADM who needed assistance and who sought assistance from DoD Resources by Service

FAST FACT
Using a DoD resource increases the likelihood that military members will return their ballots.

[22] *FVAP, 2018 PEVS-ADM Sample B, Q44, Q45, Q46. Limited to ADM that needed assistance.*

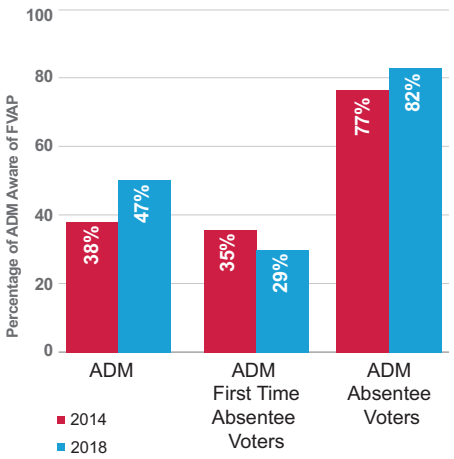


Figure 8. Percent of ADM that are aware of FVAP in 2014 and 2018, comparing all ADM, ADM first time voters and ADM absentee voters

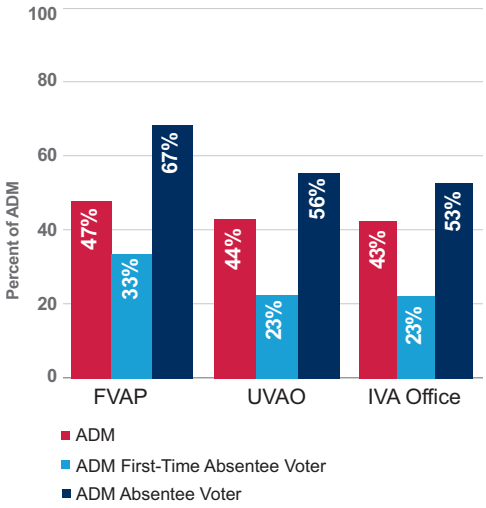


Figure 9. ADM awareness of DoD voting assistance resources

These findings will be used in 2020 and beyond to monitor differences across the Services, further refine differences in operational approaches adopted by the Services, and track relative impacts on resource utilization over time.

Awareness of DoD Resources

One of FVAP's key metrics for program effectiveness is based on overall awareness of such resources. When using data taken from Sample A, between 2014 and 2018, awareness of FVAP amongst all ADM rose from 38 percent to 47 percent as seen in figure 8. ADM who were aware of FVAP also become more heavily represented amongst ADM who voted absentee. However, amongst first time absentee voters, FVAP awareness declined from 35 percent to 29 percent.

The awareness of the different DoD resources (FVAP, UVAOs, and IVA Offices) in 2018 is shown in figure 9. Figure 9 data was derived from Sample B, therefore the results for FVAP.gov awareness are different from those in figure 8 which uses Sample A data. Figure 9 also highlights the awareness levels for ADM who reported voting absentee and includes rates for first-time voters. Forty-seven percent of all ADM were aware of FVAP, compared to 33 percent of ADM first-time absentee voters and 66 percent of ADM absentee voters.[23] When reviewing both figures 8 and 9, it can be concluded that even though awareness of FVAP has increased from 2014, more needs to be done especially when it comes to first-time absentee voters. This represents the ongoing need for FVAP to refine its communication initiatives to reach first-time absentee voters. This is most likely the 18 to 29-year-old demographic who may not be familiar with FVAP and how to navigate the absentee voting process. To address this issue, FVAP has made increasing awareness of absentee voting one of its recommendations for the 2020 election cycle.

When we examine the level of awareness of DoD resources by Service, members of the Air Force had the highest levels of awareness for FVAP and the IVA Office, with 49 percent aware of FVAP and 51 percent aware of IVA Offices. High awareness of Air Force IVA Offices is likely due to the movement of IVA Offices to Airmen and Family Readiness Centers, which are well-established and well-known locations on Air Force installations. The Marine

[23] *FVAP. 2018 PEVS-ADM Sample B, Q32, Q37, Q45.*

Corps had the highest awareness of UVAOs; the comparatively low awareness of UVAOs among the Navy of 37 percent[24] is likely related to the Navy's changed guidance in 2018 on the appointment of UVAOs.

	FVAP	UVAO	IVA Office
Army	48.76%	43.90%	43.19%
Marine Corps	46.06%	49.66%	41.70%
Navy	45.46%	37.24%	34.91%
Air Force	49.41%	48.43%	52.04%

Table 6. ADM awareness of DoD voting assistance resources by Service

In 2018, ADM who sought assistance from UVAOs or IVA Offices most frequently reported seeking assistance with obtaining voting forms, followed by finding information on voting deadlines and completing voting forms, such as the FPCA, FWAB, and National Voter Registration Form (NVRF).[25]

Establishing an Effective Voting Assistance Model by Service

In consideration of new DoD guidance on the implementation of its voting assistance program and as part of a deeper examination on how best to evaluate program effectiveness, FVAP is piloting a concept known as the Effective Voting Assistance Model (EVAM). The EVAM is an index that determines the ideal characteristics of voting assistance programs administered by VAOs at the unit or installation level and those who work in an IVA Office. These ideal characteristics were identified from the results of the 2018 PEVS-ADM and PEVS-VAO, which showed 11 variables that are positively associated with effective voting assistance outcomes. Effective voting assistance outcomes include high numbers of people assisted, FPCA awareness, ease of voting assistance and registration rates.

The 11 variables positively associated with these outcomes are divided into those that are required by DoDI 1000.04 and those that are encouraged but not required, such as best practices.

[24] *FVAP, 2018 PEVS-ADM Sample B, Q45.*
[25] *FVAP, 2018 PEVS-ADM Sample B, Q48, Q49.*

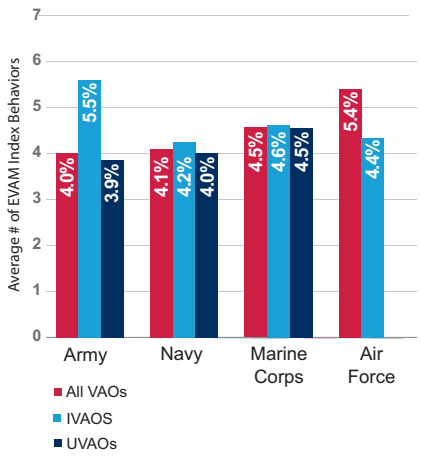


Figure 10. EVAM index (six required variables) by Service in 2018

Variables that are required by DoDI 1000.04 include:

- Delivering a voting assistance briefing during "in-processing" and "out-processing"
- Delivering a voting assistance briefing at an ADM change of address
- VAOs trained with either FVAP in-person or online training
- VAO use of FVAP's Voting Assistance Guide (the Guide)
- VAO use of the FVAP Portal
- VAO conducting some type of outreach, such as carrying out a voting emphasis week or posting FVAP posters and banners

Variables that are encouraged, but not required, by DoDI 1000.04 include:

- Having an IVA office
- Locating the IVA office within walking or bicycling distance of ADM
- Locating the IVA office near two or more key installation landmarks
- Having VAOs with 12 months or more experience as a VAO
- Communicating with other VAOs (UVAOs, IVAOs, and IVA Office staff)

The EVAM index varied across the Services in 2018. Scoring VAOs by the number of behaviors they exhibited out of the 11 identified, the average VAO scored 8.0 for Air Force, 6.4 for Marine Corps, 6.2 for Army, and 5.9 for Navy. When only UVAOs are examined, the average Marine Corps UVAO exhibited 6.4 of these behaviors; Army UVAO exhibited 5.9 behaviors; and Navy UVAO exhibited 5.6 behaviors. Although the Air Force re-instituted UVAOs in September 2018, these individuals were not included in the survey sampling due to the proximity of their appointments to the general election. When limiting analysis to IVAOs, the average Army IVAO exhibited 8.1 of these behaviors, Air Force 8.0, Marine Corps 7.4, and Navy 6.1. When limiting the index to the six required behaviors, the Services' pattern of behavior is similar as seen in Figure 10.

Figure 11 displays the likelihood of providing assistance to a high number of ADM based on the EVAM index for each of the Services. For the most part, all Services see the same increase in VAOs having a higher likelihood of assisting more ADM as they demonstrate more of the ideal behaviors on the EVAM index. The positive association with EVAM variables to the number of ADM assisted helps to validate the approach of this model overall and the structure of VAO responsibilities in DoDI 1000.04.

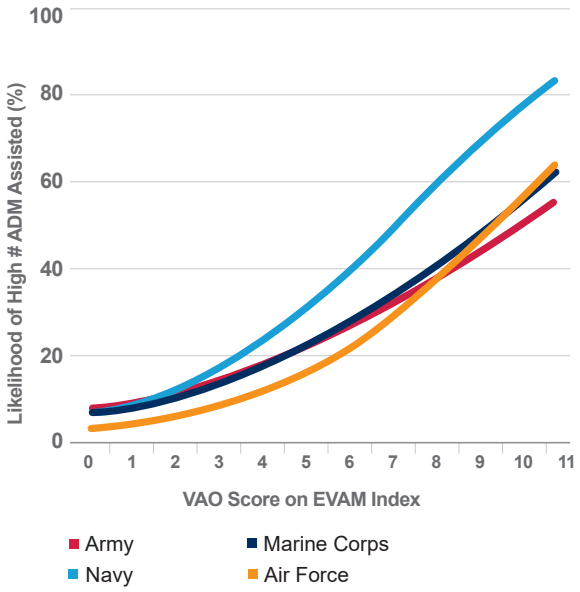


Figure 11. Likelihood of high number of ADM assisted by Service in 2018

Figure 12 displays, by Service, the impact of the EVAM index on the likelihood of high FPCA awareness on an installation,[26] which is a critical metric for FVAP. FPCA awareness is important because the FPCA simplifies and expedites the voting process for UOCAVA voters. It is accepted in all states, territories and the District of Columbia, and it both registers ADM and allows them to request an absentee ballot for all federal elections within a calendar year.

For every additional criterion VAOs met on the EVAM index, the likelihood of having high FPCA awareness on their installation increased by 4.4 percentage points. Army and Marine Corps VAOs that exhibit all factors of the index have a 92 and 84 percent respective likelihood of being at an installation with high FPCA awareness. Navy VAOs that exhibit all factors had a 42 percent likelihood of being at an installation with high FPCA awareness.

"I was most impressed with how quickly I received a response. The analyst was extremely well versed and was able to give me the information I needed."

– Active Duty Member from FVAP's customer service survey

[26] *The percentages are the predicted probabilities from a model of the likelihood of high installation FPCA awareness among ADM, with all control variables held at their means so that the demographics of the sample more closely match those of the population.*

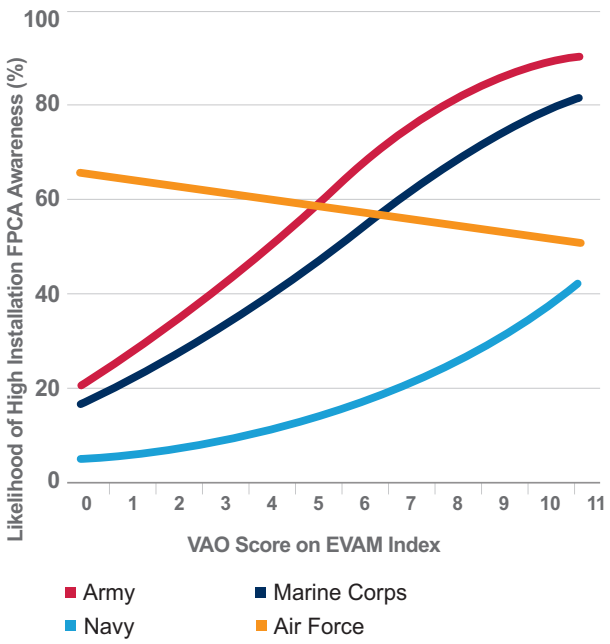


Figure 12. Likelihood of high FPCA awareness among ADM by Service in 2018

Service-Reported Metrics

The Military Services and their corresponding VAOs are required to report on the voting assistance they provide to ADM, their eligible family members and other eligible U.S. citizens residing overseas throughout the year. To do so, metrics are collected every time a military member goes to an IVA Office or UVAO for help or additional information.

In September 2014, FVAP disseminated required reporting metrics that eliminated duplicative data points and explained more concisely and concretely the data that VAOs should collect and report with the goal of improving and enhancing the measures of effectiveness for VAOs.[27] The resulting standardized metrics provide a comprehensive overview and enable DoD to better assess the voting assistance provided across the Services. These metrics include:

- total number of FPCAs distributed per Service per year in both hard copy and electronic form;
- number of people who received voting assistance per Service ; and
- number of people who received voting assistance at IVA

[27] *FVAP. https://www.fvap.gov/uploads/FVAP/VAO/2015-Metrics-Memo_20141015.pdf*

offices, including ADM, ADM spouses and eligible family members, and other eligible U.S. citizens including DoD civilian employees

The metrics reported per Service for 2018 are in Figure 13. The results show the percentage of each Service population that received an FPCA or voting assistance in 2018. Of particular interest is the level of saturation occurring for ADM receipt of FPCAs as each of the Services report VAOs distributing FPCAs directly to all ADM or an equivalent population. Although some of the Services have a mechanism to directly distribute the FPCA by email, others do not, and rely solely on VAOs in the field to distribute the FPCA and report metrics.

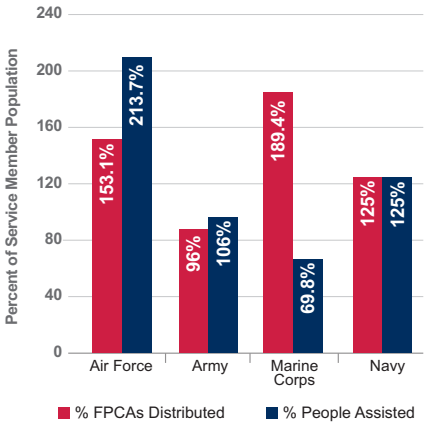


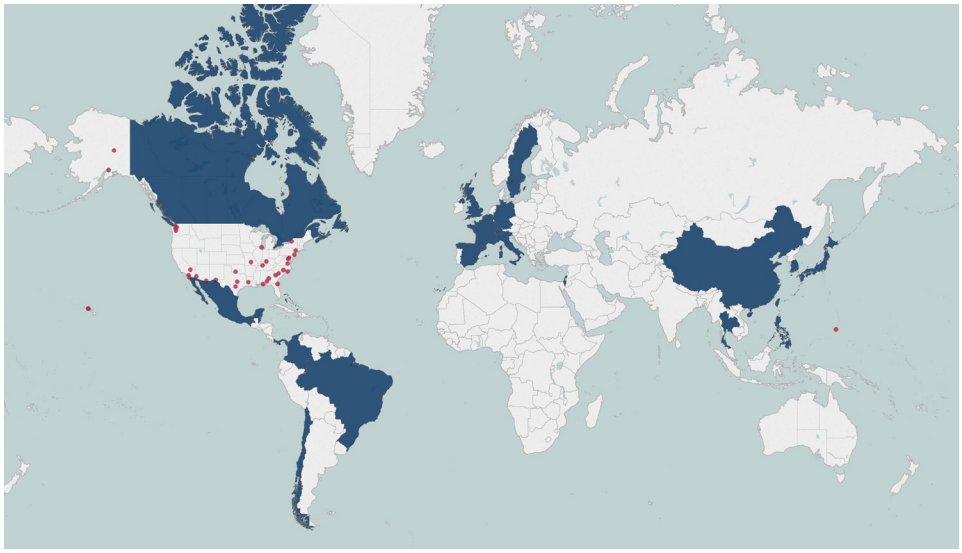
Figure 13. FPCAs distributed and people assisted as a percentage of Service branch population for 2018

Voting Assistance Officer Training

Ensuring that VAOs understand their responsibilities in carrying out the law and state-specific rules and deadlines is critical to voter success. Therefore, FVAP provided multi-modal voting assistance training for the 2018 election cycle. This flexible approach allowed VAOs to receive training when it best fit their individual schedules and preferences. Voting assistance training was offered online through FVAP's dedicated training website and in-person by FVAP employees. In-person training allowed FVAP to provide direct guidance, conduct on-site assistance visits to voting programs and IVA Offices, and answer questions in an interactive environment.

FVAP partnered with the Air Force, Army, Marine Corps, Navy and the Department of State in order to conduct in-person VAO training workshops. These training workshops were held at 119 locations within the U.S. and overseas and a total of 2,857 VAOs were trained. Estimates from FVAP's 2016 Overseas Citizen Population Survey (OCPS) show that the countries where workshops took place are home to over 2.2 million voting-age overseas U.S. citizens, which is 74 percent of the U.S. worldwide overseas voting-age population. In 2018, FVAP's workshop satisfaction score among attendees was 4.60 (on a scale from 1.00 to 5.00 with 5.00 being the highest rating), which is similar to FVAP's score in 2016 at 4.66.

VAOs attending a workshop in Fort Belvoir to learn how to assist others



Domestic workshop locations are marked with red dots while the countries where international workshops took place in 2018 are shaded in blue

In evaluating the effectiveness of voting assistance training, the 2018 PEVS data show that UVAOs who received online or in-person training served more individuals than UVAOs who received neither type of training. UVAOs who attended both in-person and online training served slightly more people than those who only received online training. The combined impact of in-person and online training for UVAOs underscores the need for greater support for the Services to have more in-person training, as attendance at both modes of training results in a 20 percent increase in the number of individuals assisted.

Training Type	Average # of Individuals Served during 2018
Neither In-person or Online	6.62
Only In-person	39.04
Only Online	44.44
Both In-person and Online	50.85

Table 7. UVAO training types and the average number of individuals served during 2018

Service Assessment of Voting Assistance Programs

In addition to reporting metrics, each Service branch is required by DoDI 1000.04 to produce an After Action Report (AAR) in January of each year. Below are summaries of these reports,

outlining the successes and challenges each Service faced while implementing the voting program requirements under DoDI 1000.04.

Army IVAO presenting at an in- processing session at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii

Army

The Army complied with DoDI 1000.04 by appointing UVAOs who provided assistance to ADM, their families and other eligible voters. The Army SVAO distributed monthly newsletters to IVAOs and UVAOs and used social media as one of the main ways to distribute voting information to all members of the Army. The Army Voting Assistance Program also developed public service announcements for the Adjutant General (TAG) of the Army, which aired on Armed Forces Networks overseas, YouTube, and MilTube. Voting emphasis emails were sent from Deputy Chief of Staff G-1 to Army Commanders to ensure their UVAOs were appointed, were trained, and provided voting assistance to eligible voters. The TAG sent "TAG sends" messages to the field and discussed voting while traveling throughout the world.

The Army also used print media in The Army Times, Stars and Stripes, and NCO Journal. IVAOs and UVAOs set up tables in high-traffic areas during Armed Forces Voters Week and Absentee Voters Week. FPCAs were distributed by hand or electronically twice during 2018. The SVAO reported that IVAOs and UVAOs have benefited greatly from FVAP workshops and webinars.

Super Bowl event at Fort Knox where voting information was distributed

The biggest challenge that the Army faced during 2018 was a high turnover in UVAOs. Going forward, more emphasis will be placed on ensuring that appointed UVAOs have at least eighteen months left on station.

The challenge the Army anticipates during the 2020 election cycle is how to accommodate the removal of civilian IVAOs. The funding for these IVAOs stopped at the end of 2018. They have been vital to the growth and success of the program and it is not yet known what the repercussions will be now that they have been removed. The Army will be filling the lost IVAO positions with personnel who are appointed in writing.[28]

[28] *U.S. Army, 2018 After Action Report.*

"Exceptional customer service. I received all of the material as promised."

– Voting Assistance Officer from FVAP's customer service survey

Commander, Fleet Activities Yokosuka voter outreach event

Navy

During the first three months of 2018, the Navy was out of compliance with DoDI 1000.04 as it started removing VAOs from afloat commands in accordance with NAVADMIN 168/17. To bring the Navy back into compliance with the DoDI 1000.04 and OPNAVINST 1742.1C, NAVADMIN 087/18 was released in April 2018 to fully reinstate the Navy Voting Assistance Program. However, many commands were still operating under 2017 guidance until late 2018. By the end of 2018, there was increased awareness of the NAVADMIN 087/18 guidance throughout the fleet and the reinstatement of VAOs is now happening at all levels to include afloat commands.

The SVAO sent out monthly email newsletters to IVAOs and UVAOs regarding voting program responsibilities. Information was also distributed online through the Navy's voting social media channels. Voting and IVA Office information was made available on the Morale, Welfare, and Recreation smartphone application. With SVAO guidance, IVAOs took the lead in hosting awareness and participation events and provided assistance from their office, online, and by telephone. UVAOs were appointed for commands that had 25 or more permanently assigned personnel. All UVAOs provided access to FPCAs to their units in a hard copy or an electronic format. The Navy SVAO updated the annual voter training in the Navy's Fleet Training Management and Planning System to ensure command leadership was aware of the annual training requirement.

The Navy SVAO provided four recommendations on how the Navy Voting Assistance Program can be improved. The first is that the Navy should revise and release a new OPNAV Instruction based on the DoDI 1000.04 Series currently in development. The second is that the Navy should consider making IVAO and VAO positions for large commands (i.e. Carriers) a billet, as many IVAOs expressed concern that it is impossible to meet all requirements and provide adequate assistance to voters while continuing to be successful in their primary billet. The third is that the Navy's attempts to designate Admin Officers as VAOs through NAVADMIN 087/18 produced mixed results and the Navy should reconsider automatically placing the VAO duties on the Admin Officer. The last recommendation is that the position of Navy SVAO be shifted from an ADM to a civilian employee who could serve through multiple election cycles.[29]

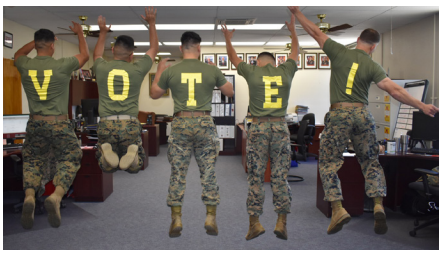
[29] *U.S. Navy, 2018 After Action Report.*

Marine Corps

The Marine Corps was in compliance with DoDI 1000.04 in regards to appointing UVAOs. The Marine Corps Voting Assistance Program utilized 594 VAOs to provide voting assistance and voting awareness to the Marines and their eligible family members. UVAOs were successful at providing voting assistance to the Marines in deployed locations, as the Marine Corps assigns a UVAO to all units in a deployed environment.

All Marines received an email from the SVAO with a link to the electronic version of the FPCA, and all eligible voters received an FPCA from their IVAOs and UVAOs. The VAOs successfully utilized social media platforms, base newspapers, and local unit websites to distribute articles regarding voter registration, absentee voting, and voting awareness. Absentee voter registration booths were set up at unit events and military exchanges throughout the Marine Corps during Armed Forces Voters Week and Absentee Voting Week.

Unit Commanders and annual unit voter training was instrumental in highlighting voting awareness. The Marine Corps Community Services Forward Magazine website and Family Readiness Officers also helped to increase the visibility of the Marine Corps Voting Assistance Program.[30]



Armed Services Voting Week in Camp Pendleton, July, 2018

Air Force

The Installation Airman & Family Readiness Centers maintained 73 established Air Force IVA Offices. The Air Force did not have assigned UVAOs at the start of the year, but on August 30, 2018 over 2,350 UVAOs were appointed by unit commanders following the Air Force Guidance Memorandum to Air Force Instruction (AFI) 36-3107. Messages were distributed through the All Partners Network Access to Major Command, Numbered Air Force, and installation commanders announcing the restoration of UVAOs throughout the Air Force.

Service-wide voting activities conducted throughout 2018 included webinars to train IVAOs and MAJCOM VAOs on policy changes and Air Force UVAO requirements. The General Election was advertised through Service websites, Facebook, and Twitter. Advertisements were designed to encourage voting participation and they also displayed the voting point of contact. The Air Force

[30] *U.S. Marine Corps, 2018 After Action Report.*

Personnel Center Total Force Service Center provided worldwide/toll-free 24/7 contact for voting information to deployed members or those who could not contact their IVA office. The Air Force MyPers messaging system was used to launch an inaugural message to all "af.mil" users (460,211 total contacts) with the 30-60-90 day reminder for Federal elections. MyPers was also used to forward a Force Support field message on voting assistance. Voting assistance requirements were part of the Commanders' Courses and Key Spouse[31] training, and they were included in the Installation Booklets on the DoD OneSource website. The Air Force's Personnel Center published articles on the Voting Assistance Program webpage, Facebook, and Twitter. Regular emails went out to IVAOs regarding policy changes, resources, tasks, and timelines.

The Air Force conducted several voting activities at its installations during 2018. These included the implementation of a quick response code that guides voters to FVAP's "Direct-to-Voter" training video, a "Get Ready, Set, Vote" event that encouraged families to vote using 10 touchscreen voting machines available for children to vote for a favorite fictional character, a forced "splash page" on all installation computers to encourage voter participation, Bacon and Ballot breakfast, voter registration drives, and television/radio interviews.

An IVAO at a voting information table at Columbus Air Force Base

In addition to the above events, voting information tables were set up across installations – one of the most successful locations being at a mandatory flu shot site. Facebook live events were held to address voting questions. IVAOs conducted Armed Forces Voters Week (27 June – 5 July) and Absentee Voting Week (1-8 October) activities per the Air Force Voting Action Plan. IVAOs reported approximately 73,161 contacts during Armed Forces Voting Week events and 49,359 contacts during the Absentee Voting Week events.

The Air Force found that IVAOs who were permanent government civilians whose primary duty was being an IVAO maintained the most enthusiasm towards the voting program, as compared to Service members who took on VAO duties as one of their collateral assignments.[32]

[31] *Air Force Key Spouses provide information and resources to military spouses and support families in successfully navigating throughout the military lifecycle.*
[32] *U.S. Air Force, After Action Report.*

Coast Guard

The Coast Guard did not submit a Voting Assistance Program AAR required by the DoDI 1000.04, announcing that it would not be completed due to the government furlough in the beginning of 2019. Regarding activities performed, the Coast Guard's Personnel Service Center published a voting assistance message in September 2018 on the All Coast Guard Personnel Service Center online message bulletin. The message included information on how to obtain an FPCA, how VAOs could complete their training, a link to the Coast Guard Voting Action Plan, and contact information for the SVAO.[33]

An overseas citizen signing in at a VAO workshop at the U.S. Embassy in Bangkok, Thailand

Overseas Citizen Voting Programs

Department of State Voting Assistance Program

Similar to military VAOs, Department of State VAOs assist overseas U.S. citizens who wish to participate in U.S. federal elections. The Department of State administers its program through a network of VAOs appointed at the 238 U.S. embassies and consulates around the world.

The Department of State conducted voter outreach efforts and provided extensive guidance on the absentee voting process through consular officers at U.S. embassies and consulates. For the 2018 election cycle, the Department of State partnered with FVAP to host 42 workshops at embassies and consulates. The Department of State also issued guidance on collaborating with private U.S. citizens groups and nonpartisan political organizations and provided recommendations for hosting successful voter outreach events.

Some posts held voter registration events and election night parties. The SVAO sent out monthly newsletters containing voting information and deadlines to all VAOs, who in turn provided that information to U.S. citizens living in their consular districts. Many posts provided voting information booths during Fourth of July events and Overseas Citizens Voters Week and sent additional messages to U.S. citizens overseas during Absentee Voting Week. The Department of State requests that FVAP continue to conduct training workshops for their VAOs.

Facebook post by the U.S. Embassy in Kuwait

[33] *U.S. Coast Guard, https://www.dcms.uscg.mil/PSD/fs/CG-Federal-Voting-Assistance/*

Twitter status by the U.S. Consulate in Halifax, Canada

Article in the Kuwait Economic Observer about voting from overseas

Overseas Citizen Population Analysis

Historically, FVAP was unable to provide voter behavior data for U.S. citizens residing abroad due to challenges associated with quantifying and identifying the overseas citizen population. Following the 2014 election, FVAP conducted the first Overseas Citizen Population Analysis (OCPA) to determine the viability of a new methodology and statistical modeling approach to capture more information on the demographics of this population, as well as to estimate voter registration and participation rates.[34] The OCPA combines data from U.S. and foreign governments, and state records of ballot requests and voting. It is the only representative survey of registered U.S. citizen voters living abroad who requested a ballot for the biennial General Election. In September 2018, FVAP released the second OCPA, reporting on the 2016 election.

FVAP is currently in the process of administering the 2018 post-election Overseas Citizen Population Survey (OCPS), which will yield the data needed for the 2018 OCPA with an expected release date in 2020. The forthcoming research will represent the most complete effort to report on the registration and participation rates for overseas citizens in 2018. In the interim, the 2016 OCPA provides important insights into overseas citizen voting behavior, as well as the Election Assistance Commission's Election Administration Voting Survey data.[35] FVAP continues to examine methods for sampling and surveying overseas citizens to ensure the robust and timely findings that inform its post-election reporting requirement.

The OCPA estimated 5.5 million U.S. citizens living overseas in 2016. This represents an increase of slightly more than one million U.S. citizens (23 percent) since 2010. These citizens are distributed across 170 countries, with the largest populations in Europe and the Western Hemisphere, including Canada. The greatest population growth since 2010 has been in East Asia and the Pacific, which had an estimated population increase of 36 percent from 2010 to 2016. The population in South-Central Asia also increased substantially, with the 2016 population estimated to be about 28 percent larger than in 2010.

[34] *FVAP, (2016). Overseas Citizen Population Analysis Volume 1: Participation and Voting Rates Estimation Prototype https://www.fvap.gov/uploads/FVAP/Reports/FVAP-OCPA_201609_final.pdf.*

[35] *Though both the EAC-EAVS and the OCPS collect data on the overseas citizen population, they are not directly comparable. The OCPS is limited to survey respondents from a highly motivated sample of known absentee ballot requesters living at an overseas address. EAVS data is a collection of counts from state and local election officials.*

Region	2010	2012	2014	2016
Africa	102,476	111,889	105,916	105,897
East Asia and Pacific	690,686	796,115	869,272	938,713
Europe	1,233,724	1,327,215	1,407,725	1,454,291
Near East	214,392	228,569	238,537	234,039
South-Central Asia	99,120	110,325	121,525	126,939
Western Hemisphere	2,120,543	2,337,283	2,537,455	2,629,142
Total	**4,460,941**	**4,911,396**	**5,280,430**	**5,489,021**

Table 8. Total Overseas Citizen Population by region

Tag on diplomatic pouch from Washington D.C. to Yerevan, Armenia. This mail delivery to the U.S. Embassy in Armenia may contain official ballots from election officials

Only 6.9 percent of eligible overseas voters returned a ballot during the 2016 General Election, which is significantly lower than the 71.9 percent of domestic voters. The OCPA indicates that this low percentage is an effect of the Voting Gap experienced by many overseas voters. This Voting Gap is broken down into an Obstacle Gap and a Residual Overseas Gap.

The Obstacle Gap includes those overseas U.S. citizens who wanted to vote or tried to vote in 2016 but were unsuccessful due to factors that have the potential to be resolved in future elections through voter education, state legislation changes, or communication with their local election office. An example of an obstacle experienced by a voter is a mailing delay due to a slow or unreliable foreign postal service.

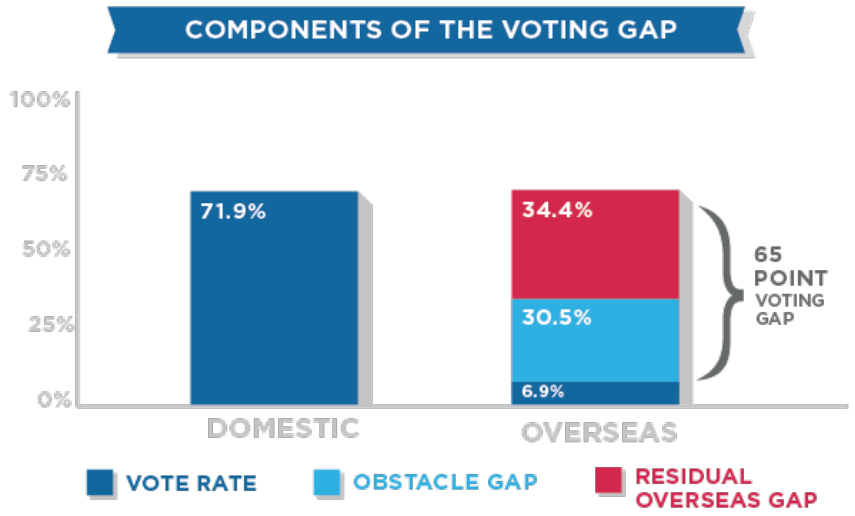
The Residual Overseas Gap consists of voters who did not vote due to factors that cannot be resolved through voter education, state legislation changes, or communication with their local election office. U.S. citizens who do not vote due to a lack of interest in voting fall within this gap.

Part of FVAP's mission is to help those overseas voters that fall within the Obstacles Gap. In order to do this, FVAP will be evaluating new ways to expand its educational and outreach initiatives.

Mail being transmitted by diplomatic pouch which may contain official ballots

"I'm an expat living in Thailand and it's wonderful to be able to easily be fully involved in my community back home!"

– Overseas Citizen from FVAP's customer survey



Collection and Delivery of Ballots for Overseas Uniformed Services Voters

The U.S. Postal Service (USPS) and the DoD Military Postal Service (MPS) facilitate the delivery of election materials between overseas military voters and election offices. Pursuant to section 20304 of title 52, U.S.C., the USPS and the MPS provide expedited mail delivery service for overseas Uniformed Services voters' absentee ballots in general elections, which are processed before other classes of mail.

For the 2018 General Election, the average transit time of voted ballots from the absentee voter to election offices was 5.9 days – more than a day faster than the MPS' target of seven days.

Procedures for Handling Overseas Military Ballots

Details regarding inbound ballots during the 2018 General Election are described below:

- Inbound blank absentee ballots from election offices are initially sorted at a USPS International Service Center prior to dispatching them to overseas military postal activities.
- Military postal clerks process and deliver ballots through individual mail boxes or unit delivery.
- For ballots that cannot be delivered as addressed:
    - A directory clerk attempts to locate addressees via

change-of-address cards on file, local personnel management systems, or global address listings.
- If a new address is found, the absentee ballot is then dispatched (forwarded) and delivered to the current address on file, either overseas or domestic.
- If no new address information is found, the absentee ballot is returned to the election official marked "undeliverable as addressed" (UAA).

ADM in Okinawa, Japan receiving official ballots sent from election officials

Ballots Collected and Delivered to Overseas Uniformed Services

Between September 1, 2018 and December 10, 2018, the MPS postmarked and dispatched 13,686 voted absentee ballots from military voters to election offices using Priority Mail Express Military Service. The average transit time of ballots to election offices was 5.9 days. MPOs received 3,648 ballots (21 percent) that were UAA from election offices with 2,312 redirected to current addresses while 1,336 were returned to sender. The 21 percent rate of UAA ballots represents a decline of 12 percentage points from the 2014 election when the rate was 33 percent.

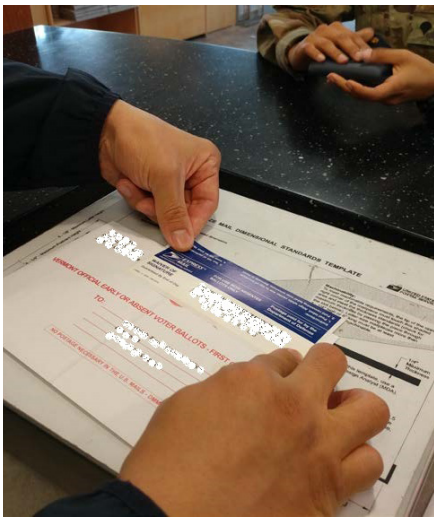
The UAA ballots may be attributed to two key factors:

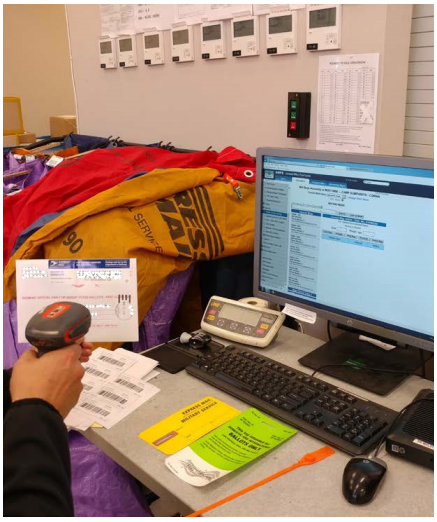
- Election offices did not validate current addresses of voters.
- Absentee voters did not update mailing addresses with election offices.

The top five states for UAA ballots in 2018 were states with large UOCAVA populations: California (970), Florida (757), New York (545), Washington (433), and Colorado (264). The UAA ballots in these states may also be attributed to extended periods of time of eligibility for the FPCA in which voters automatically receive ballots for elections, as all five states have periods of eligibility for the FPCA ranging from two to eight years.

The issue of undeliverable ballots is a point of concern as the additional time needed to redirect a ballot increases the likelihood of the voter not receiving a full ballot in a timely manner – resulting in the need for casting a FWAB, or, worse, jeopardizing a voter's ability to successfully cast a ballot at all. However, the significant decrease in UAA ballots for the 2018 election demonstrates the effectiveness of recent improvements made by DoD and USPS.

The Label 11-DoD is applied to marked absentee ballots of overseas military members, ensuring expedited delivery to local election offices in the U.S.





At Camp Humphrey's in South Korea, an MPS worker puts a 11-DoD label onto a voted ballot envelope, scans the barcode for tracking purposes, and then places it into one of the mail bags in order to be shipped back to the U.S.

Expediting and Tracking Overseas Uniformed Services Ballots

Section 20304 of title 52, U.S.C., requires expedited mail delivery service for marked absentee ballots of overseas military personnel in federal general elections. The voted ballots of overseas military members were processed using the Express Mail Service Label 11-DoD. Upon receipt from the military voter, Military Postal Clerks applied the label to each ballot, ensuring expedited delivery to the election office. The label provides voters and the MPS the ability to track ballots from acceptance through delivery. Ballots are first scanned in at the initial intake point. They are then scanned in again while being delivered and upon arrival at the U.S. International Gateways of Chicago, New York, San Francisco, or Miami. Then finally, they are scanned in again by USPS demonstrating delivery at the election office address.

USPS and the MPS continue to build from efforts in 2014 to modernize military mail systems and now provide a proactive way to encourage military members to update their mailing address with election offices. In the past, the MPS may have had a separate listing of address changes that would result in delays as ballots were sent overseas before being redirected. Now, when standard-sized ballot envelopes are processed through USPS, the integration of the MPS and USPS address-change information will process a ballot for forwarding before transmitting it overseas.

State and local election officials often use USPS Address Information System Services and information from the National Change of Address (NCOA) database to conduct maintenance on lists of registered voters. In the past, these excluded overseas/APO and FPO address changes. The new system consolidated all address change information for MPO addresses into the overall NCOA list maintenance service – meaning that local election officials can now leverage one source of data for the most current address information registered with either USPS or the MPS. These services assist with ensuring the most recent address information is reflected on absentee balloting records and lowers the number of UAA ballots.

USPS, the MPS and FVAP still continue to explore offering increased levels of service for Marine Guard detachments located at Department of State locations and to explore offering full cycle tracking of ballots sent to overseas military locations and during

their return to local election officials as fully voted ballots.

Election Official Engagement

FVAP works with states to raise awareness of their responsibilities under UOCAVA, providing election officials information about the challenges of voting while serving in the military or living overseas, and giving election officials additional information and tools to assist eligible voters. This section provides information regarding FVAP's state and local relations program, cooperative agreement with the Council of State Governments (CSG), FVAP's combined efforts with the Election Assistance Commission (EAC) in regards to the Election Administration Voting Survey (EAVS) Section B, and the Electronic Absentee Systems for Elections (EASE) Research Grant Program.

Use of FVAP Support and Products

In 2018, FVAP reinforced its commitment to support public policy that improves the voting experience for military and overseas voters, and that serves as a critical information source for policymakers through its state and local relations program. FVAP state affairs specialists fostered and strengthened relationships with state and local government officials to identify and assess areas for improvement to the UOCAVA absentee voting process.

To support its mission of supporting public policy that improves the voting experience for UOCAVA voters, FVAP tracks and researches policy and state legislative developments that may have implications for military and overseas voters. FVAP also provides policy-related products to the states. According to FVAP's customer service based survey called the Post Election Voting Survey for State Election Officials (PEVS-SEO), state election officials (SEOs) indicated that they found FVAP's policy-related products useful.[36] FVAP is continuing its work with state and local stakeholders and plans to release additional policy research.

In addition to assessing the usefulness of FVAP's policy-related products, the PEVS-SEO is also used to evaluate FVAP's effectiveness in serving election officials, shaping future products and services, addressing state ballot and registration issues,

[36] *FVAP, 2018 PEVS-SEO, Q. 9, 2016 PEVS-SEO, Q. 9.*

92% of users are satisfied with FVAP.gov and 100% of customers have identified FVAP staff support as useful.
–PEVS-SEO survey

and clarifying its understanding of state policies. Of the SEOs who reported using FVAP products or services, the vast majority indicated that they were satisfied with the resources. Satisfaction ratings of FVAP products and services ranged from 80 percent to 100 percent. Compared to 2016, an equal percent of SEOs said that FVAP.gov, FVAP State Affairs Specialists, the FVAP address look-up service, and FVAP's online training for election officials were useful.[37]

- FVAP.gov: 92 percent satisfied
- State Affairs Specialists: 95 percent satisfied
- Address Look-up Service: 80 percent useful
- Online Training: 80 percent useful
- FVAP Staff Support: 100 percent useful

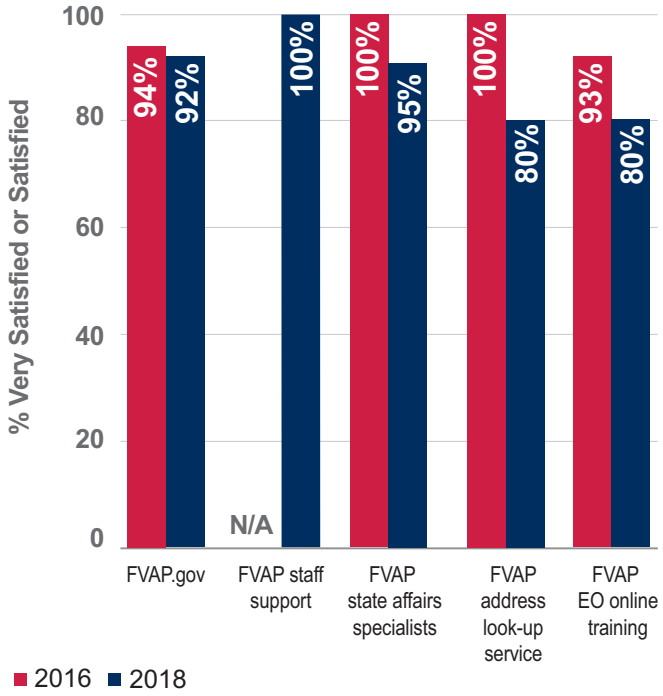


Figure 14. Percent of SEOs that were very satisfied or satisfied with FVAP products and services during 2016 and 2018

Eighty-two percent of SEOs indicated that they referred FVAP.gov to Local Election Officials (LEOs) in 2018, which was slightly less than the 90 percent who reported doing so in 2016.[38]

[37] *FVAP, 2018 PEVS-SEO, Q. 2, 2016 PEVS-SEO, Q. 2.*
[38] *FVAP, 2018 PEVS-SEO, Q. 3, 2016 PEVS-SEO, Q. 3.*

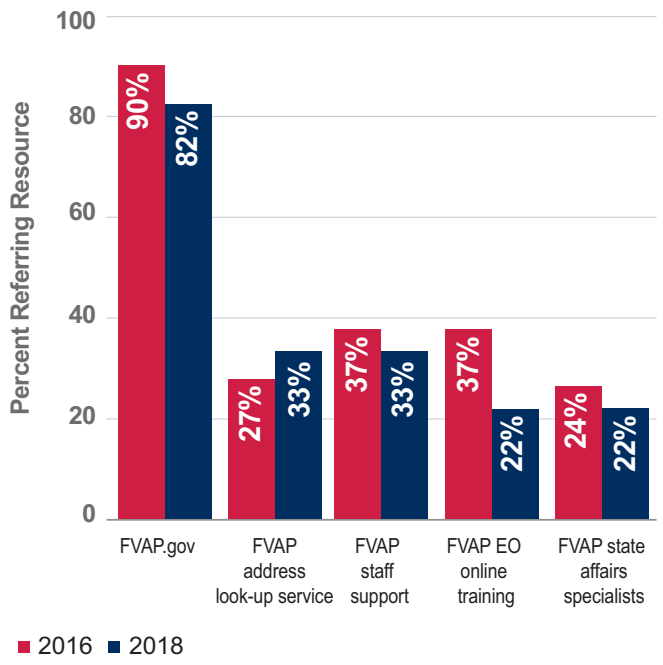


Figure 15. Percent of SEOs that referred FVAP products and services to local election officials during 2016 and 2018

Ensuring UOCAVA Protections

Voters covered by UOCAVA are entitled to certain protections that states do not have to extend to their other voters. For example, states must allow UOCAVA voters to use the FPCA to register to vote and request a ballot and use the FWAB as a backup ballot if their state ballot does not arrive in time. In addition, states must transmit ballots to UOCAVA voters at least 45 days before federal elections and must offer electronic transmission of voting information and blank ballots.
Based on the 2018 PEVS-SEO data, some states do not ensure UOCAVA protections for voters that do not use the FPCA. This finding underscores the importance of FVAP activities to distribute and promote the FPCA as the one universal national form for UOCAVA voters to use to ensure they receive the UOCAVA protections to which they are entitled.[39]

"As always, everyone does a great job to assist the election clerks."

– Election Official from FVAP's customer survey

[39] *FVAP, 2018 PEVS-SEO, Q. 20, 2016 PEVS-SEO, Q. 20.*

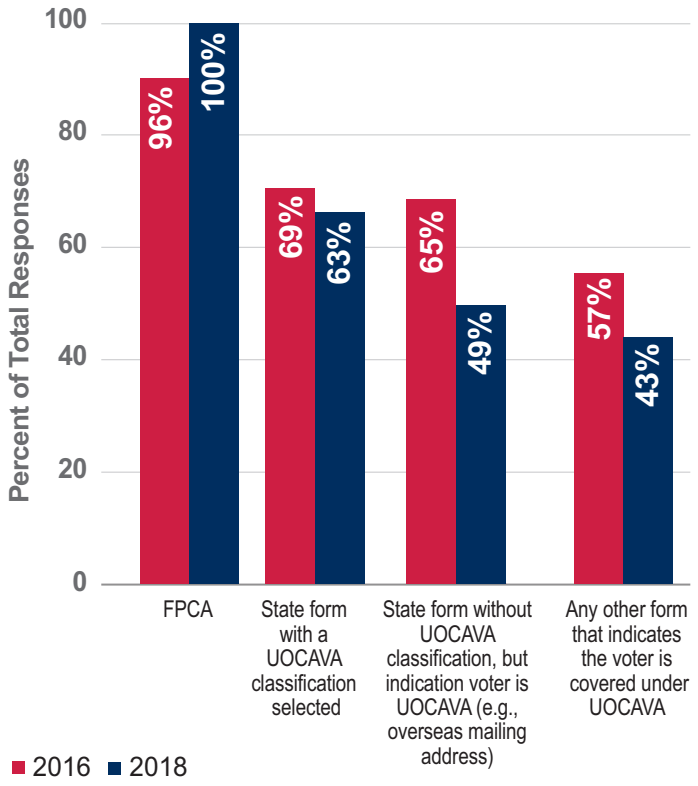


Figure 16. Absentee ballot request forms that allow for UOCAVA protections

Election Administration Voting Survey Section B Analysis

In 2016, FVAP and the U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC) combined efforts to survey election officials to obtain the total number of ballots transmitted, received and counted after each federal general election. The Election Administration and Voting Survey (EAVS) collects data from approximately 6,500 local election jurisdictions on a wide variety of election administration topics.[40]

Election offices reported receiving 312,437 FPCAs ahead of the 2018 midterm elections. About 25 percent came from Uniformed Service members,[41] and 72 percent were submitted by overseas citizens. Overall, only 2.3 percent of FPCAs received ahead of the 2018 elections were rejected – over one-third of rejections (35.1 percent) were because the election office received the form after the state's absentee ballot request deadline. The FPCA rejection rate among Uniformed Service members was slightly higher than

[40] *Election Assistance Commission, https://www.eac.gov/research-and-data/election-administration-voting-survey/.*
[41] *Per the EAVS instructions, Uniformed Service members include both ADM and their eligible family members.*

among overseas citizens, with 2.8 percent of Uniformed Service members FPCAs rejected as compared to 2.0 percent of FPCAs submitted by overseas citizens.

According to the EAVS, the total number of UOCAVA ballots transmitted, counted, and rejected for the 2018 General Election were:

	Ballot Numbers
Ballots Transmitted	655,409
Ballots Counted	338,271
Ballots Rejected	19,328

Table 9. Ballot processing totals acording to the EAVS

Data collected at the state level on UOCAVA ballots returned and rejected is shown in Figures 17 and 18. The overall median rejection rate for ballots received from ADM, their eligible family members, and overseas citizens was 2.8 percent. The most common reasons for ballot rejections for voters covered under UOCAVA were missing the deadline, signature issues, and having no postmark.

Figure 17 shows UOCAVA ballots returned as a percentage of total ballots transmitted.[42] The map classifies states into three groups based on relative percentiles: one-quarter with the highest ballot return rates (82.1 percent to 100 percent), one-quarter with the lowest ballot return rate (57.2 percent to 82.1 percent), and half between the other two groups (57.2 percent to 82.1 percent).

25% of FPCAs received in the 2018 election were from Uniformed Service members and 72% were submitted by overseas citizens.
– 2018 EAVS

[42] *EAC, 2018 EAVS, Section B.*

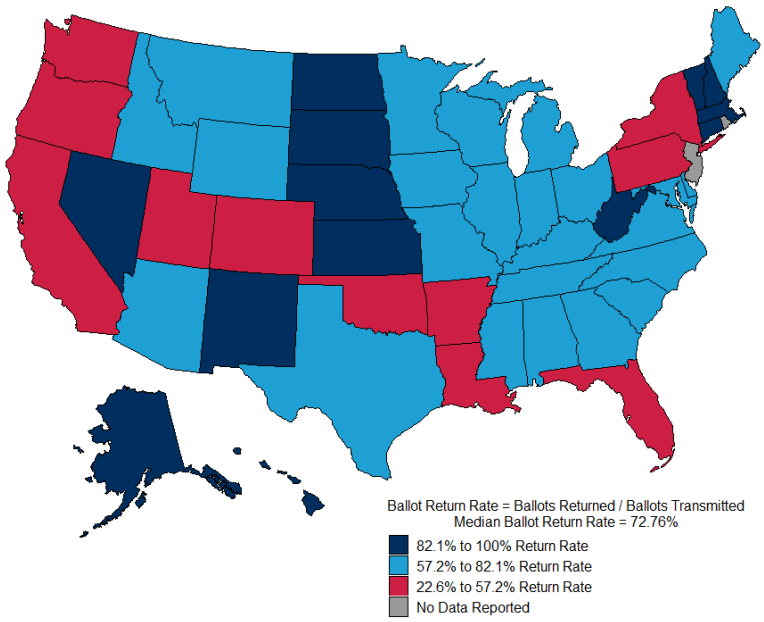


Figure 17. Total UOCAVA ballots returned as a percentage of total ballots transmitted

Figure 18 shows UOCAVA ballots rejected as a percentage of ballots returned.[43] The map classifies states into three groups based on relative percentiles: one-quarter with the highest rejection rates (6.5 percent to 15.2 percent), one-quarter with the lowest rejection rates (0.0 percent to 1.4 percent), and half in the middle between the other two groups (1.4 percent to 6.5 percent). Of particular note, the overall rejection rates reported include FWABs that were rejected due to the return of an official state ballot. Therefore, this map should only be used to educate and inform for future analysis on the specific reasons for ballot rejections. For example, FVAP stresses the importance of using the FWAB as a backup ballot in case the official state ballot does not arrive 30 days prior to the election. Inevitably, this may lead to an overstated rejection rate when voters return both ballots and the FWAB is rejected to ensure only one ballot is counted in the election.

[43] *EAC, 2018 EAVS, Section B.*

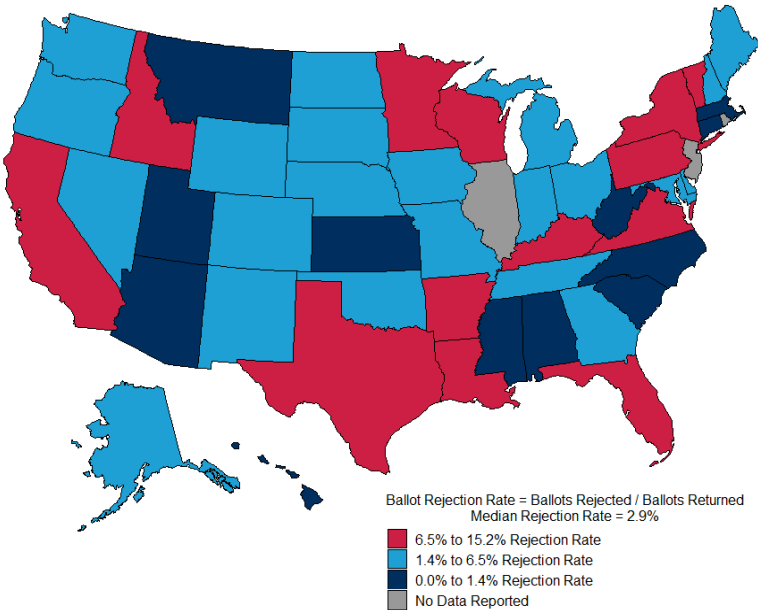


Figure 18. Total UOCAVA ballots rejected as a percentage of total ballots returned

Cooperative Agreement with the Council of State Governments

In 2014, FVAP entered into a cooperative agreement with CSG and established the Overseas Voting Initiative (OVI) in recognition of a shared goal to improve the voting process for UOCAVA citizens. FVAP also wanted this relationship to augment its ongoing efforts to engage stakeholders – especially state and local election officials – in order to institute best practices and explore innovative areas to assist election offices with the administration of elections. The working groups created under the CSG OVI provided stakeholders with the opportunity to come together and discuss concrete measures that would improve the UOCAVA voting process for states, local election offices, and individuals covered by the law.

The three OVI working groups examined critical areas for improving UOCAVA voting, including:

- improving communications and community connections between UOCAVA citizens and their election offices;
- making voter registration easier for UOCAVA citizens;
- considering how DoD digital signature capabilities can facilitate document signing by certain UOCAVA voters;
- examining how the ballot duplication process can be improved through transparent standard operating procedures and new technologies; and
- identifying a data standard, the Election Administration

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Voting Survey Section B (ESB), for reporting data to the EAC and FVAP.

The efforts of these working groups were heavily publicized by CSG at its 2015 and 2016 annual meetings, which provided an opportunity for state legislators, election officials, and others to learn more about this important work. FVAP has publicized the recommendations of the CSG OVI working groups, incorporating key items into the presentations and trainings they conduct for state and local election staff and key stakeholders.

In 2018, FVAP initiated a second cooperative agreement with the CSG to examine two key areas: the overall viability of technical solutions to support the implementation of electronic blank ballot delivery systems and the implementation of a new data reporting standard to assist FVAP with informed program improvements and meeting its Congressional reporting requirements.

Going forward, FVAP will integrate the ESB data standard into longer term reporting and analysis to better isolate the true impact of reforms put into place as a result of the 2009 MOVE Act. Specifically, this data standard and subsequent analysis will isolate the impacts of voters engaging early in the absentee voting process, the federally mandated 45-day blank ballot delivery transmission requirements, and electronic modes of delivering blank ballots to UOCAVA voters.

Electronic Absentee Systems for Elections Research Grant Program

In 2011, FVAP offered five-year grants to states and localities to research improving services to military and overseas voters. The grants funded programs including online blank ballot delivery, online voter registration, online ballot requests, automated ballot duplication, and online ballot tracking. In 2013, FVAP offered a second round of EASE research grants that focused on two specific areas: online blank ballot delivery tools and establishing a single point of contact for transmitting voters' election materials to state election offices.

The EASE research grant program was created to fulfill two primary goals: to examine tools that can effectively make the UOCAVA voting process simpler and more accessible, as well as to assist state and local election offices in improving services to military and overseas citizen voters. Many of the research

grants were funded through the 2016 General Election, with the remaining grants coming to a close in December 2018. The resulting data and analysis from the research grant program will help identify barriers and improve the voting experience for military and overseas voters. FVAP is in the process of completing its analysis on the EASE research grant program and expects to issue its final report with recommendations to Congress by the end of the 2019 calendar year.

FVAP.gov's web metrics indicate that its popularity has increased significantly compared to the 2014 midterm election, with a 136 percent increase in site sessions in 2018.

Assessment of FVAP Activities

In fulfilling DoD's responsibilities under the law, FVAP is committed to the following voting assistance tenets: promoting awareness of the right to vote and eliminating barriers for those who choose to exercise that right. In its 2016 Post-Election Report to Congress, FVAP recommended three areas for action to improve its effectiveness:

1. Reduce obstacles to UOCAVA citizens' voting success.
2. Continue expansion of UOCAVA voter awareness and outreach initiatives.
3. Enhance measures of effectiveness and participation.

Using lessons learned since the 2016 election cycle, FVAP further explored how to raise awareness of its resources and reduce obstacles by improving resources including its website and call center support.

Reduced Obstacles to UOCAVA Citizen Voting Success

FVAP.gov Website Metrics

FVAP.gov is an information-rich site with an intuitive online assistant that guides users through completing the FPCA and the FWAB. It also offers educational materials that help simplify the UOCAVA voting process; directs users to state websites offering online voter registration and ballot request; and provides election news, state-specific voting deadlines, requirements, and contact information. FVAP.gov's web metrics indicate that its popularity has increased significantly compared to the 2014 midterm election, with a 136 percent increase in site sessions in 2018.

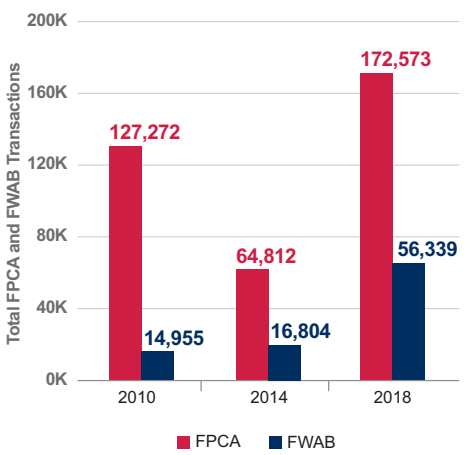


Figure 20. Total FPCA and FWAB transactions during 2010, 2014, and 2018

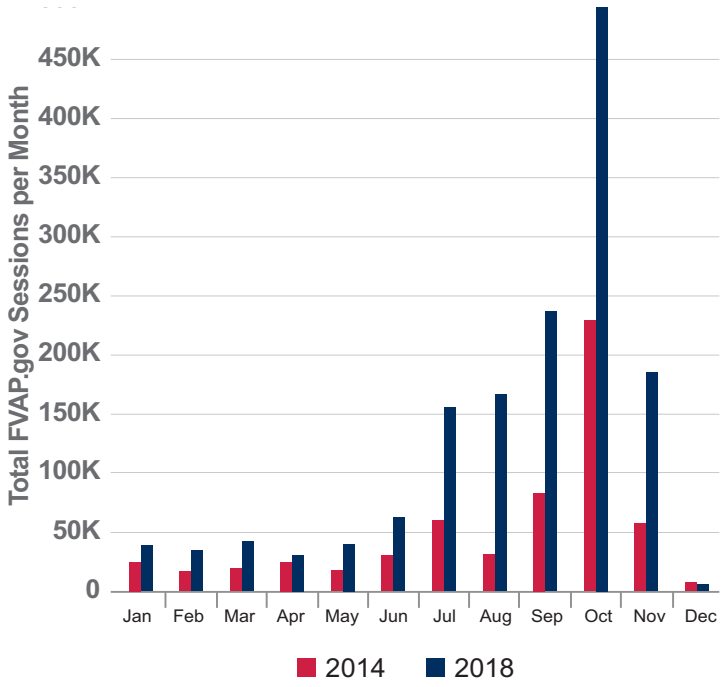


Figure 19. Total FVAP.gov sessions during 2014 and 2018

To assess the effectiveness of its website, FVAP tracked four actions that website users might take:

- using the FVAP.gov online assistant for the FPCA
- using the FVAP.gov online assistant for the FWAB
- opening a PDF of the FPCA
- opening a PDF of the FWAB

Each website session that included a desired action represented a website "conversion," which, in turn, indicated a first step toward offline target behaviors – registering and requesting a ballot, and returning the ballot.

The results of FVAP's push-to-web efforts were an overall conversion rate of 22 percent which falls within the top 10 percent of conversion rate benchmarks for websites that are deemed "high traffic."[44] In 2018, there was a 180 percent increase in the number of FPCA and FWAB transactions when compared to the past midterm elections in 2010 and 2014.[45]

[44] *FVAP, 2018 Campaign Evaluation Report, Pg. 19.*
[45] *A transaction is an FPCA or a FWAB PDF form downloaded from FVAP.gov or the online assistant.*

Voting Assistance Center

FVAP's Voting Assistance Center provides phone, email, and fax support to UOCAVA voters, VAOs, election officials, and those who assist UOCAVA voters such as academic institutions, non-governmental organizations, and concerned citizens. FVAP provided continuous business-hours customer service throughout the election cycle, with expanded coverage on Election Day. Phone calls were handled by FVAP staff members and designated customer service staff from the Defense Personnel and Family Support Center's (DPFSC) Call Center. Key observations on the performance of the call center in 2018 include:

- FVAP responded to over 13,000 inquiries, representing an increase of 183 percent in phone call and email volume as compared to the 2014 midterm election.
- The Call Center achieved a customer satisfaction survey rate of 4.3 out of 5 with a customer service survey response rate of 9 percent.

Also in 2018, email-to-fax service usage increased by over 230 percent from the 2014 election. UOCAVA customers use FVAP's email-to-fax service when they need to fax their official ballot, FWAB, or FPCA to their election office and do not have access to a fax machine. FVAP will transmit voting documents only to states that allow the use of fax machines but not email, as voters can email directly. UOCAVA voters emailing documents that do not meet this criterion are provided instructions on how to transmit their voting documents directly to their election office based on their state's guidelines. Between October 1, 2018 and November 6, 2018, FVAP successfully transmitted 2,748 voting documents to Florida, Oklahoma, Louisiana, California, Rhode Island, Louisiana, and Alaska by fax. The voting jurisdictions with the most transmitted ballots through FVAP's email-to-fax service are shown in Figure 21.

During times of high volume, FVAP encountered difficulties in transmitting ballots to several jurisdictions before their corresponding state deadlines on Election Day. This was due to technical limitations on either the transmitting end or the receiving end of the fax transmissions. Compounding the problem was the size and number of pages associated with each ballot and the total transmittal time for each fax transmission. Consequently, this delay produced a backlog of voting documents awaiting transmission, which became critical when attempting to meet state deadlines.

MORE THAN 1/5

of visits to FVAP.gov resulted in conversion

IN TOP 10% OF CONVERSION RATES FOR HIGH-TRAFFIC SITES

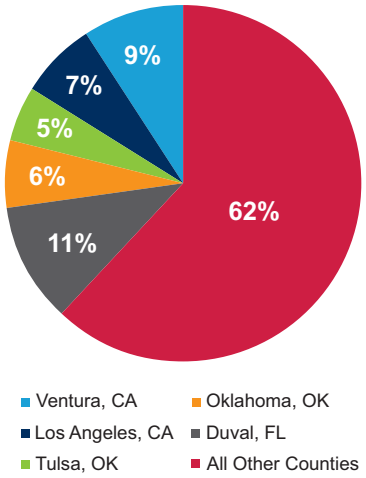
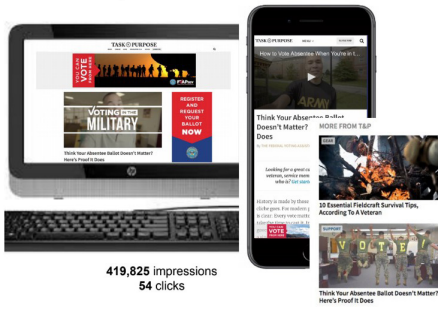


Figure 21. Voting Jurisdictions with the most transmitted ballots through FVAP's email-to-fax service



Sponsored content in Task & Purpose website

FVAP ensured that all voting documents received from UOCAVA voters were transmitted to the appropriate jurisdictions by the end of Election Day and included a cover memo stating the voter had transmitted the document before the close of polls. FVAP is exploring options to increase email-to-fax efficiencies for 2020. FVAP is also considering future options to include the email-to-fax program's termination.

Expanded UOCAVA Voter Awareness and Outreach Initiatives

Efforts to Increase Awareness

In election year 2018, FVAP continued and built on its 2016 strategies and tactics to increase brand recognition and raise awareness of FVAP resources, including FVAP.gov as the leading source of information for the military, their families and overseas citizens. These included:

- Using research insights to create and deliver targeted messages that help UOCAVA voters overcome specific obstacles throughout the election cycle.
- Increasing the number of potential UOCAVA voters that FVAP reaches.
- Expanding the range of communication tactics employed.[46]

Strategies emphasized providing people who wanted to vote with:

- deadlines to spur action and reminders about these deadlines;
- information and resources with a customer service orientation; and
- access to tools that simplify the FPCA and FWAB.[47]

While FVAP continually communicated key messages, such as the ability of ADM, their eligible family members, and overseas citizens to vote in federal elections from anywhere, the focus shifted across the election cycle to address barriers UOCAVA voters confront at each step of the voting process. In addition, the 2018 messaging put more emphasis on using the FPCA (to identify oneself as a UOCAVA voter to state and local election

[46] *FVAP, 2018 Strategic Communications Plan, Pg. 4.*
[47] *FVAP, 2018 Marketing and Outreach Campaign Evaluation, Pg. 7.*

offices) and using the FWAB as a backup ballot.

For 2018, FVAP's integrated marketing communications campaign combined advertising, news media, social media, and direct outreach to engage UOCAVA-covered citizens; drove them to FVAP.gov; and encouraged them to use the online assistant or downloadable forms to complete the FPCA and FWAB. The 2018 campaign achieved its goals of increasing traffic and driving action to FVAP.gov.

More than **DOUBLE** the sessions and users from the last midterm election

Organic (Unpaid) Social Media

FVAP's awareness-raising efforts included establishing a substantial social media presence on the brand's Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and LinkedIn accounts. The content and timing of posts were designed to ensure these platforms were fully integrated into the campaign and used to maximize engagement with prospective voters and influential organizations.
Social media efforts were successful in meeting specific communication goals by amplifying sponsored messages, further engaging with captured audiences, providing custom help to narrowly-defined subgroups, and building relationships with partners and influencers – all of which ultimately served UOCAVA voters.

To provide UOCAVA citizens with a valued voting experience, FVAP once again offered a digital "I Voted" sticker, which could be customized by country and shared on social media platforms, resulting in:

- 2,800+ shares on Facebook
- 275 shares on Twitter[48]

Digital "I Voted" stickers customized by country

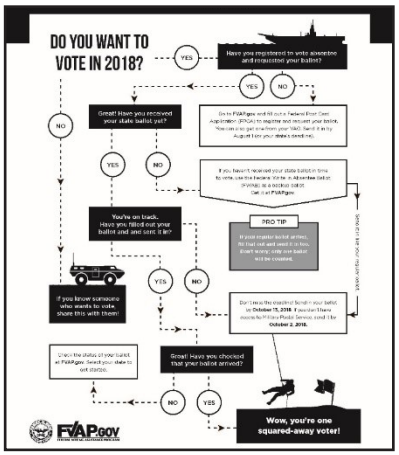
Paid Media

FVAP invested in advertising placements to raise awareness of FVAP absentee voting resources for active duty personnel, their families, and overseas citizens. FVAP crafted the 2018 paid media plan with these tenets in mind:

- Balance the need for global reach after heightened interest from overseas citizens in 2016 with a recognition of the

[48] *FVAP, 2018 Campaign Evaluation Report, Pg. 32.*

Sponsored content on Military Spouse's Facebook page



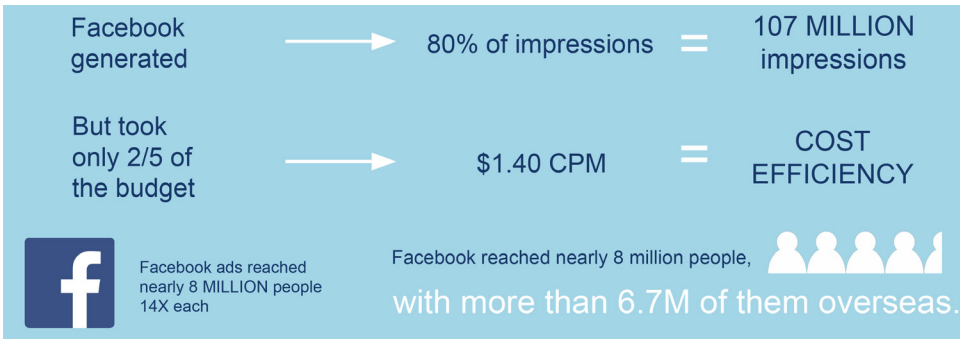
Sponsored content on printed advertisement in Stars and Stripes newspaper

inherently lower interest in midterm elections.

- Focus on digital platforms (e.g., social media, search engine marketing, sponsored content, and digital video and display ads), as they were the best performers in 2016, supplemented with targeted in-kind print placements in Stars and Stripes overseas.

By applying lessons from 2016 and streamlining to high-performing digital channels, the paid campaign's impressions increased from 85 million in 2016 to 133 million in 2018 – even though the 2018 spend was much lower than in 2016. The campaign also brought in 120,000 more sessions and 25,000 more conversions on FVAP.gov in 2018 than in 2016. Paid media clearly has a substantial impact in midterm election years: sessions generated by paid media made up 24 percent of all sessions on FVAP.gov in 2018 compared to less than six percent in 2016.

As in 2016, Facebook advertising was the most cost-effective platform in 2018: two-fifths of the paid media budget was spent on Facebook, yet it generated 80 percent of all advertising impressions, reaching many people several times with information about FVAP's voting resources.[49]



CPM refers to cost per thousand impressions. It is a standard measure of cost efficiency for advertising.

Earned Media

In 2018, FVAP sought local media coverage through general releases of news and information surrounding upcoming elections and broader coverage of its research on overseas citizens. In addition to providing UOCAVA voters with timely information through news and feature coverage, the goal was to position FVAP in the minds of reporters, editors, and producers as an assistance agency and nonpartisan source of rigorous research

[49] *FVAP, 2018 Campaign Evaluation Report, Pg. 41.*

on UOCAVA populations so that these media professionals consult FVAP resources when they are preparing stories touching on UOCAVA voters or issues.[50]

Two-fifths of the paid media budget was spent on Facebook, yet it generated 80 percent of all advertising impressions

News agencies covering UOCAVA voting in 2018

Shared Media and Organizational Outreach

To reach UOCAVA voters through other organizations and individuals that interact with them, this portion of FVAP's integrated communication approach leveraged its broad network of key stakeholders who may also support military and overseas citizens with the absentee voting process. These stakeholders include a wide range of organizations and information sources that touch various segments of UOCAVA voters, including the Services, voting advocacy groups, affinity groups, embassies and consulates, Federal and private-sector employers, state and local election offices, and online channels focused on military or overseas citizens.[51]

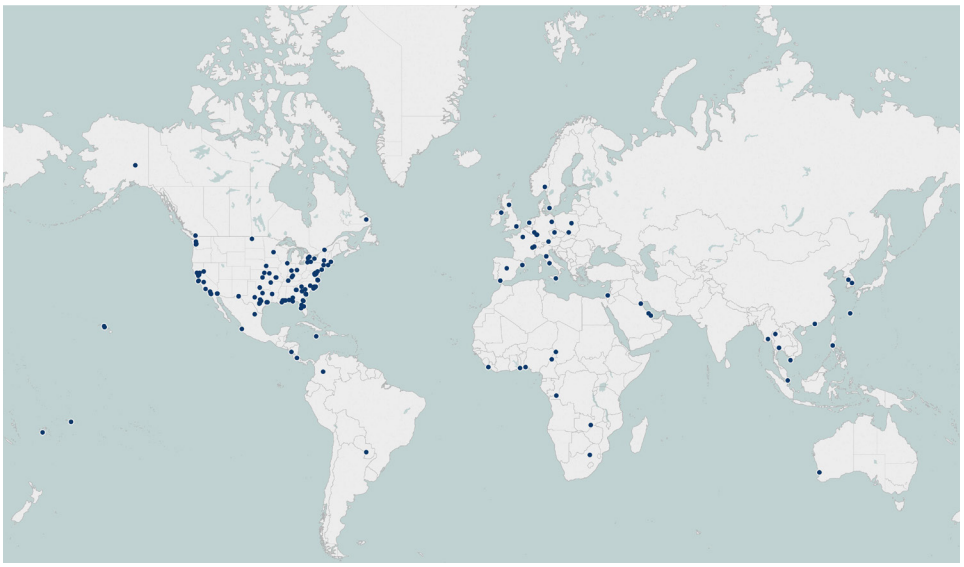
Collateral materials

The campaign included development of a new wallet card distributed to VAOs at all domestic and overseas military bases and installations, as well as to embassies and consulates. The small size makes it easy for VAOs to transport and distribute them to other UOCAVA voters. It emphasizes the UOCAVA voting process in two simple steps: 1) Register and request your ballot by going to FVAP.gov; and 2) Fill out and send in your ballot after it arrives.[52]

Graphic of new wallet card design

[50] *FVAP, 2018 Earned and Shared Media Outreach Plan, Pg. 7, 2018 Campaign Evaluation Report, Pg.46.*
[51] *FVAP, 2018 Campaign Evaluation Report, Pg.48.*
[52] *FVAP, Report to Congress, 2016, Pg. 35.*

In 2018, FVAP physically distributed 28,292 hard copy FPCAs and FWABs and 97,930 pieces of educational and outreach materials to 44 countries and 103 military installations.



Locations of where collateral materials were distributed

Training video on absentee voting designed to engage first time ADM voters and those that fall within the 18-29 years old age bracket

Videos

In 2018, FVAP introduced a six-minute training video that walks military members through the UOCAVA voting process step-by-step in a confessional tutorial style familiar to young internet users. FVAP worked with the Services to make sure that this video, designed specifically for use during in-processing and out-processing, was distributed and counted for Service members' voter training requirement expressed in DoDI 1000.04. FVAP also re-purposed the video in shorter clips. A one-minute version let military members know that they can still vote when away from home and to visit their VAO or go to FVAP.gov if they needed assistance. Several 30-second spots were made for use on the Armed Forces Network, social media, and other outlets to highlight key milestones of the absentee voting process. The videos had a combined 31,615 views on YouTube.

Information Toolkits

Separate digital toolkits containing information for organizations to use and share—including sample content for websites, email, social media, and other channels—were prepared (by updating

2016 versions) for embassies and consulates, the military services (one toolkit addressed military members and a separate one addressed spouses and family members), human resource professionals working with overseas citizens, and election offices. All toolkits remain available on FVAP.gov.

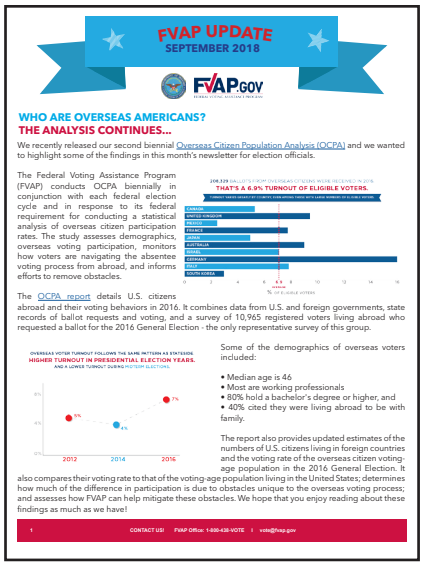
Social Media Engagement

FVAP monitored key stakeholders' Facebook and Twitter accounts, sharing and "liking" relevant posts. In addition, at key points in the election cycle FVAP sent direct messages with sample posts that stakeholders could then share on their channels.

Example of shared social media post

Direct Marketing

Section 20305 of title 52, U.S.C., requires that FVAP send email notifications to all military members in the months leading up to each General Election. Based on this requirement, FVAP sent out email notifications to all ADM from December 2017 to October 2018. Post-election data shows that, of 86 percent of military VAOs who used FVAP's alerts, 88 percent found them useful in performing their duties. SEOs also receive a monthly emailed newsletter from FVAP that details useful information such as new research data findings, UOCAVA election tips, general FVAP updates, and modifications to resources to create more understanding and cohesiveness between FVAP and election officials.



The SEO newsletter contains information regarding FVAP updates and it gets sent to SEOs on a monthly basis.

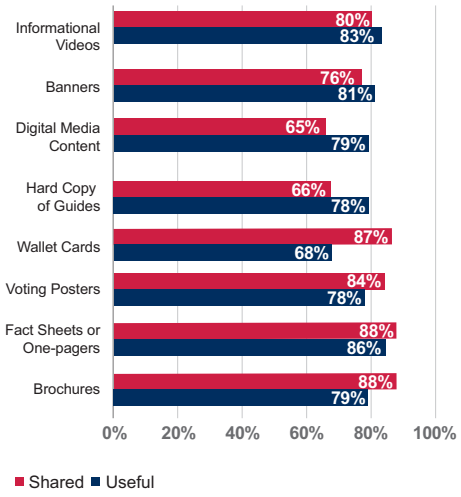


Figure 22. The percentage of VAOs who said that FVAP materials were useful and the percentage of VAOs that shared them with others

Enhance Measures of Effectiveness and Participation

Active Duty Military Awareness

In 2018, FVAP continued to increase military members' awareness of resources as discussed in the previous section. The 2018 survey data show that 47 percent of ADM, and 72 percent of those who returned an absentee ballot, reported they heard, saw, or received messages from FVAP.[53] This reflects a significant improvement from the 2016 election when 40 percent of all ADM and 57 percent of those who returned an absentee ballot reported hearing, seeing or receiving FVAP messages.[54]

VAO Usefulness of FVAP Resources

FVAP asked VAOs whether they heard or saw any FVAP advertising or outreach materials such as radio, print, or online ads in 2018. Fifty-six percent of UVAOs and 58 percent of IVAOs and IVA Office staff were aware of these materials. When compared to 2014 data, UVAO awareness of FVAP materials increased by seven percentage points.

Overall, most VAOs who obtained FVAP's marketing materials had a positive view of the items and shared them with others. Figure 22 presents the percentage of VAOs who deemed outreach materials useful and shared them with ADM.[55]

[53] *FVAP, 2018 PEVS-ADM Sample A, Q61.*
[54] *FVAP, 2014 PEVS-ADM, Q55.*
[55] *FVAP, 2018 PEVS-VAO, Q42, Q43, Q44.*

Conclusion

FVAP continues to make important strides in its ability to directly support its core customers: voters eligible to vote under the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act. FVAP recognizes that it cannot accomplish its mission without collaboration from all of its key stakeholders: Congress, the Military Services, Department of State, state and local election officials, the Election Assistance Commission, and advocacy organizations. Continuing to increase awareness of DoD voting assistance resources remains one of FVAP's top priorities. FVAP was successful in this aspect as post-election survey data indicates that FVAP's outreach efforts in 2018 were more effective than in previous years.

Overall, FVAP's activities fulfill DoD's responsibilities under UOCAVA. These activities are geared towards promoting the awareness of the right to vote among UOCAVA citizens and eliminating barriers for those who choose to exercise that right. In its 2016 Post-Election Report to Congress, FVAP identified three themes it took for action:

1. Reduce obstacles to ADM voting success.
2. Expand UOCAVA voter awareness and outreach initiatives.
3. Enhance measures of effectiveness and participation.

The activities that FVAP performed in 2018 aligned with the advancement of these recommendations. Based on 2018 election data and program activities, these three themes continue as areas of focus for FVAP in upcoming election cycles, with specific initiatives within each area for the 2020 election cycle.

Recommendations from the 2016 Report, Results and Accomplishments

Recommendation #1: Reduce Obstacles to UOCAVA Citizen Voting Success.

- There was a 180 percent increase in Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) and Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot (FWAB) transactions on FVAP.gov in 2018 as compared to 2014.
- In 2018, FVAP distributed 28,292 physical forms (FPCA and FWAB) and 97,930 pieces of educational or outreach

materials to 44 countries and 103 military installations. (Note: These numbers only include the forms and materials that were distributed directly by FVAP staff. They do not incorporate the number of FVAP branded materials that were distributed directly by the Military Services or the Department of State.)

- More than one in five visits to FVAP.gov resulted in the visitor taking a voting-related action. This data point indicates the effectiveness of the FVAP website in supporting the voting process.
- FVAP staff provided state and local election officials with information on the implementation requirements specified in UOCAVA and fostered greater understanding of the military and overseas citizen experience with the absentee voting process at multiple state and national election official conferences.

Recommendation #2: Continue Expansion of UOCAVA Voter Awareness and Outreach Initiatives.

- FVAP.gov achieved a 116 percent increase in total visitors and a 136 percent increase in visits in 2018 when compared to 2014.
- FVAP implemented an effective communication campaign in support of the 2018 election season, resulting in awareness of FVAP by over four out of five (82%) ADM voters who reported casting an absentee ballot. Between 2014 and 2018, awareness of FVAP amongst all ADM rose from 38 percent to 47 percent.
- In 2018, 24 percent of all FVAP.gov sessions originated from paid media advertising, as compared to just six percent in 2016. This data point reveals the substantial impact of paid media in a midterm election and suggests FVAP has been allocating its media funding effectively.
- VAO training workshops were conducted at 48 U.S. military installations and 43 U.S. embassies and consulates over a span of 27 countries. FVAP received a workshop customer satisfaction score of 4.60 out of 5.00, with 5.00 being the highest score achievable. This score is similar to FVAP's score in 2016 which was 4.66.
- Overall customer inquiries in 2018 increased by 183 percent compared to 2014. Among inquiries, the portion coming from ADM increased by 51 percent.

Recommendation #3: Enhance Measures of Effectiveness and Participation.

- In September 2018, FVAP released the Overseas Citizen Population Analysis using data from the 2016 post-election Overseas Citizen Population Survey. This analysis helps FVAP to better understand overseas citizen voters and uncover any barriers they might face when trying to vote from abroad.
- FVAP analyzed and made changes to its Post-Election Voting Survey instruments in order to reduce unnecessary survey burden and enhance the quality of information collected.
- FVAP continued to collaborate with the Council of State Governments regarding how local and state election officials can better serve UOCAVA voters and how these election officials can standardize data reporting to the Election Assistance Commission.

Recommendations for the 2020 Election Cycle

Based on the 2018 election data and activities, FVAP plans to continue to focus on the following themes in support of the 2020 election cycle:

Recommendation #1: Reduce barriers for UOCAVA voters to successfully vote absentee

- Educate states on the need to support ADM by authorizing acceptance of electronic signatures from the DoD Common Access Card (CAC) in the election process, based on the Council of State Governments' Overseas Voting Initiative recommendations.
- Further simplify the FPCA and the FWAB to focus on core federal election eligibility requirements to avoid confusion and maximize benefits codified under UOCAVA.
- Inform states on how best to maintain voter access while conducting their due diligence in response to increased concerns over cybersecurity and the Department of Homeland Security's Critical Infrastructure designation.
- Offer FVAP election materials in foreign languages to better support U.S. citizens residing overseas.

Recommendation #2: Increase awareness about absentee voting.

- Continue to use paid media and social media outlets to focus on population segments who lack awareness of available resources through FVAP, especially first-time absentee voters.
- Incorporate a pilot volunteer program in an effort to spread

awareness about UOCAVA voting overseas.
- Create and effectively distribute innovative content that resonates with the military, their families, and overseas citizens.

Recommendation #3: Enhance Measures of Effectiveness and Participation

- Refine and improve upon FVAP's Effective Voting Assistance Model to track changes to Voting Assistance Officer responsibilities across the Services for effectiveness and identification of best practices.
- Leverage the Council of State Governments' ongoing work with implementation of a reporting data standard for states to assess and report the impacts of Congressional reforms passed in 2009 (the Military and Overseas Voter Empowerment Act.)

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Glossary

A

ADM active duty military

C

CAC common access card
CSG Council of State Governments
CVAP citizen voting age population

D

DoD Department of Defense
DoDI Department of Defense Instruction

E

EAC Election Assistance Commission
EASE Electronic Absentee System for Elections (research grant program)
EAVS Election Administration and Voting Survey
EVAM Effective Voting Assistance Model
ESB EAVS Section B

F

FPCA Federal Post Card Application
FVAP Federal Voting Assistance Program
FWAB Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot

G

Guide *Voting Assistance Guide*

I

IVA Office Installation Voter Assistance Office
IVAO Installation Voting Assistance Officer

L

LEO local election official

M

MOU Memorandum of Understanding
MOVE Act *Military and Overseas Voter Empowerment Act*
MPO Military Post Office
MPS Military Postal Service

N

NCOA National Change of Address
NVRA National Voter Registration Act
NVRF National Voter Registration Form

O

OCPA Overseas Citizen Population Analysis

P

PEVS Post-Election Voting Survey

S

SEO state election official
SVAO service voting action officer

U

UAA undeliverable as addressed
UOCAVA *Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act*
U.S.C. United States Code
USPS U.S. Postal Service
UVAO unit voting assistance officer

V

VAO voting assistance officer

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FVAP.GOV

FEDERAL VOTING ASSISTANCE PROGRAM