

Overseas Citizens Frequently Asked Questions



Can I vote absentee?

You can vote absentee in any election for Federal office if you are a U.S. citizen 18 years or older and are a U.S. citizen residing outside the United States.

Do I have to be registered to vote absentee?

Registration requirements vary from state to state. Most states and territories require registration to vote absentee. Voter registration and absentee ballot request can be done at the same time by submitting the Federal Post Card Application (FPCA). If you are already registered to vote and only wish to request a ballot, you should submit your FPCA as soon as possible.

Can I register or vote in-person at the embassy or consulate?

There are no provisions for in-person voting or on-site registration at U.S. embassies or consulates. U.S. embassy and consular officials can assist U.S. citizens in completing the Voter Registration/Absentee Ballot Request form or other election materials for their state, witness or notarize election materials (if required), and provide other absentee voting information.

You may mail election materials from U.S. embassies and consulates. Remember to make sure that all election material is postmarked.

How do I register to vote, or apply for an absentee ballot?

You may register and request an absentee ballot with a single form: The Federal Post Card Application. This application form is accepted by all states and territories and is postage-paid in the U.S. mail, including the Military Postal System and State Department Pouch mail. However, if you place the form in the postal system of the country where you now reside, you need to place that country's proper postage on the form before mailing.

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

Hard copies of the form can be obtained from a U.S. embassy or consulate or requested directly from the Federal Voting Assistance Program by contacting us.

An online version of the Voter Registration/Absentee Ballot Request form is also available. The online version of the form must be mailed in an envelope with proper postage, or mailed using our prepaid return envelope. Your Voter Registration/Absentee Ballot Request form must be completed, printed, signed, dated and mailed directly to your local election official.

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

Your "legal state of residence" for voting purposes is the state or territory where you last resided immediately prior to your departure from the United States. This applies to overseas citizens even though you may not have property or other ties in your last state of residence and your intent to return to that state may be uncertain.

When completing block 3 of the Voter Registration/Absentee Ballot Request form, be sure to enter the entire mailing address of your last residence, including rural route and number. That address determines your proper voting jurisdiction.

Some states allow children of U.S. citizens residing overseas who are U.S. citizens but who have never resided in the U.S., to claim one of their parent's legal state of residence as their own. Check out our list of states allowing this.

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

Notarization can be performed by an U.S. embassy or consular officer, or other official authorized to administer oaths. Most states and territories do not require notarization of voting materials; therefore consult your state's requirements.

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

Your Voter Registration/Absentee Ballot request form must be completed, printed, signed, dated and mailed directly to your local election official. These officials will handle the processing and distribution of your absentee ballots and may need to contact you for further information or clarification. To facilitate this process, please provide a current email address, phone and fax number on your application.

When mailing election materials to my state or territory, do I have to pay postage?

When mailed from any U.S. post office, U.S. embassy or consulate, or APO/FPO mail facility, the hardcopy voter registration/absentee ballot form is postage-paid. In order to receive free postage, the online version of the form must be mailed in an envelope printed with our postage-free envelope template. You may mail the completed form in an envelope with proper postage affixed. Ensure that your form is postmarked (see postmarking instructions below) and sent to arrive before your state's specific deadline. You must pay postage if the materials are mailed from a non- U.S. postal facility.

What is a postmark and how do I make sure I get one?

A postmark is a postal marking made on a piece of mail indicating the date and time that the item was accepted by the postal service. Postmarks are used to determine if voting materials have been mailed by state deadlines. Due to varying mail pick up times, the day you 'mail' your election mail may not be the day the postal facility postmarks it.

You may ask the mail clerk to hand stamp the election material so that a date is clearly visible. In certain situations a handwritten postmark and signature from you or a notarizing official may be sufficient.

When is the best time to apply for an absentee ballot?

We recommend that you register to vote/request an absentee ballot in January of each year, or at least 45 days before Election Day.

Must I submit a separate application for each election?

A citizen does not need to submit a separate application for each election since the states and territories accept the Voter Registration/Absentee Ballot Request form as a request for all Federal office elections for a period of two general elections.

To ensure that you receive absentee ballots for all elections in which you are eligible to vote, we recommend that you submit a new Voter Registration/Absentee Ballot Request in January of each year and whenever you have a new mailing address. If you are requesting an absentee ballot for a specific election, note in Block 6 the election for which you are requesting the ballot, i.e., "Primary (or Special, or General) election only".

When should I receive my ballot?

Most states and territories begin mailing ballots 30-45 days before an election. If you have not received your ballot two weeks before the election, contact your local election official (contact information available on most state election sites). If you encounter problems contacting your local election official, contact us. Always complete and return your absentee ballot regardless of when you receive it, even if you have already submitted a back-up Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot (explanation below). Your local election official will ensure that only one of the ballots is counted.

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

If you requested an absentee ballot but have not received one close to election day, you can still vote by using the back-up Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot (FWAB). In order to be eligible to use this back-up ballot, you must:

Be absent from your voting residence;

Have applied for a regular ballot early enough so the request is received by the appropriate local election official not later than the State deadline; or the date that is 30 days before the general election; AND

Have not received the requested regular absentee ballot from the state.

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

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

An online version is also available, which must be completed, printed, signed, dated, and mailed to your local election official. Check out your state specific instructions, witness/notary requirements, deadlines, and mailing addresses.

Your Voting Assistance Officer:

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