



# Tips for Supporting Voting By Mail

Americans have cast ballots through the mail since the Civil War, but the practice, sometimes referred to as “absentee voting,” was primarily reserved for members of the military and people who would be out of town on Election Day. States are increasing access to mail in voting, and now more people are choosing to vote at home and send their ballot through the postal service or put it in a secure drop box before election day.

Voting by mail is a new way of voting for many people. Your organization can educate voters on how the process works to give them confidence and clarity on how their vote will be counted.

## Applying for a Mail Ballot

**Updating voter registration:** Voters can’t receive a ballot if their registration isn’t updated with their current address. Use an online portal, like [canivote.org](http://canivote.org), to check registration status.

**Check your state’s process:** Each state runs voting by mail a little differently. Check to see if your state:

- Automatically mails a ballot to all registered voters
- Automatically mails a ballot request to registered voters
- Has an online portal for mail ballot requests or accepts emails for requests
- Requires requests for mail in ballots to be mailed to the election office (and whether postage is included or not)

**Find out who is eligible to vote by mail:** Some states require a pre-approved excuse in order to vote by mail. Voters over 65, people with disabilities, and people who are out of town on Election Day are generally excused. Use [canivote.org](http://canivote.org) to check if your state requires an excuse.

**Request early:** Don’t wait until the days before an election to request a ballot. Encourage voters to apply 6 weeks or more ahead of the election so they receive their ballot with plenty of time.

## Filling Out the Ballot

Voting at home gives people more time to research what is on their ballot but it means they don’t have trained poll workers answering questions or helping them if they have not filled out their ballot correctly. Make sure voters are ready to:

- **Follow all instructions:** Voters should read the instructions included with their ballot before voting, use blue or black ink, and write legibly.
- **Do their research:** Provide a nonpartisan candidate guide or direct voters to visit [vote411.org](http://vote411.org) to learn more about the candidates on their ballot.
- **Mind the envelopes:** There may be two envelopes included with the ballot and both may need to be signed by the voter. Some states also require a witness signature.
- **Get help if needed:** Let voters know if you can help them with questions and provide the numbers for the state elections office and the voter protection hotline:

**English:** 866-OUR-VOTE **Spanish:** 888-VE-Y-VOTA  
**Asian Languages:** 888-API-VOTE  
**Arabic:** 844-YALLA-US

## Turning in the Ballot (and Having a Back Up Plan!)

**Do it early:** Voters should mail ballots two or more weeks before election day to make sure it arrives on time.

- Last minute voting? Use a secure drop box or voting site (if available) or, if your state requires ballots to be postmarked (not received) by election day, voters can go to the post office and request a postmarked stamp to make sure it is counted.

**Track the ballot:** Voters can check the status of their mail ballot (including whether the voted ballot has been received by the election office) if your state has an online portal for tracking mail ballots.

**Have a back up plan:** What should a voter do if they make a mistake, lose, or don’t receive their ballot? Vote in person early or on Election Day. In some states they may need to request a provisional ballot that will be counted once the election office verifies that they do not have a mail ballot from the voter.