
ELECTION SEASON TOOLKIT

Your Vote-by-Mail Checklist

Six steps to make sure your ballot is requested, filled out, and counted. Precautions worth taking no matter what you're hearing this year.

Depending on where you live, this may be called an absentee ballot, mail ballot, or vote-by-mail ballot. Same process, different name.

01 Before You Request Your Ballot

- ✓ Check your **state's system**: some mail a ballot to every registered voter automatically, others require you to request one.
- ✓ If you need to request one, check **how**: some states let you submit an application online, by email, through the mail, or in person, and others use a combination. Methods vary by state.
- ✓ Confirm your **registration** and mailing address are current on your Secretary of State's website.
- ✓ Note both deadlines: the date to **request** a ballot and the date to **return** it. They're different.
- ✓ If your state requires an excuse to vote by mail, check that you qualify before you request one.
- ✓ Request early, then use your state's ballot tracker to confirm it was **mailed to you**. Follow up with your election office if it wasn't within a reasonable window.

02 Filling Out Your Ballot

- ✓ Read every instruction before you mark anything. Mail ballots often work a little differently than in-person ones.
- ✓ Use black or blue ink unless the instructions say otherwise, and fill in ovals or lines completely.
- ✓ Mark your own ballot. Someone can help you if you need it, but no one should fill it out for you.
- ✓ If a disability, or trouble reading or writing, makes voting independently difficult, **federal law guarantees your right to assistance** from a person of your choice, just not your employer or union. Some states limit who can help return a completed ballot, so check your state's requirements.
- ✓ Made a mistake? Don't cross it out and guess. Contact your election office about a **replacement ballot**.

03 Signing and Sealing Your Ballot

- ✓ Sign **exactly** as you're registered. Mismatched signatures are a top reason ballots get rejected.
- ✓ Complete any witness signature, ID copy, or notary step your state requires. Skipping it is the other top rejection reason.
- ✓ Seal the return envelope fully. A loose or unsealed ballot can be set aside.

04 Returning Your Ballot Safely

- ✓ Return it as early as you can. Don't wait for the deadline week.

- ✓ Check **how** your state accepts returned ballots: an official drop box, your local election office, an early voting site, or in some states your polling place on Election Day. Confirm before you return.
- ✓ Dropping your ballot at an official **drop box** or your **local election office** is generally the safest way to return it, even if you have plenty of time to spare. If you do mail it, mail it with plenty of time before the deadline.
- ✓ Avoid handing your ballot to anyone else to deliver on your behalf unless you've confirmed your state allows it.
- ✓ If someone is returning a ballot for you, check your state's rules. Many limit who can do this and how many ballots one person can carry.
- ✓ Know whether your state counts your ballot returned by **postmark** date or by the date it's **received**. They're not the same.
- ✓ Once it's back in the system, check your state's tracker again to confirm it was **received**.

05 Confirm Your Ballot Is Counted

- ✓ After Election Day, use your tracker to confirm your ballot was both received and ultimately **counted**.
- ✓ If it's flagged for a signature or ID issue, respond within your state's **cure window** right away. Missing it means the ballot won't count.

What's a "cure"? If your signature doesn't match, is missing, or another fixable problem is found, many states are required to notify you and give you a set window to confirm your identity or correct the issue. This is called curing your ballot. Not all states offer it, and the process and deadline vary, so check yours as soon as you're notified.

- ✓ If your tracker shows no update as the deadline approaches, contact your election office directly rather than hoping for the best.
- ✓ Keep your confirmation number or tracking receipt in case you need to follow up.

06 Precautions Worth Taking

- ✓ Get rules and deadlines from your Secretary of State or local election office. Do not rely on a forwarded text or a social media post.
- ✓ If you hear mail voting rules "just changed" or your ballot is being "thrown out," verify it with an official source before you act on it. Sudden, unverified claims are usually wrong.
- ✓ If anything about returning your ballot feels confusing, contact your election office or call **866-OUR-VOTE** to check.

Questions about anything on this checklist?

866-OUR-VOTE

Trained, nonpartisan volunteers can help with ballot requests, signature and ID rules, tracking, and cure processes. You don't have to wait until something's gone wrong to call.

Additional resources: [US Vote Foundation](#) (state-by-state absentee and mail rules) · [CanIVote.org](#) (run by the National Association of Secretaries of State — request forms, deadlines, and ballot tracking by state)

Rules on requesting, signing, returning, and curing mail ballots vary by state. Always confirm specifics with your state or county election office.

Request early. Return early. Track thoroughly.