

Frequently Asked Questions about Absentee Voting

Can I vote absentee?

Generally, all U.S. citizens 18 years or older who are or will be residing outside the United States during an election period are eligible to vote absentee in any election for Federal office. In addition, all members of the Armed Forces, their family members and members of the Merchant Marine and their family members, who are U.S. citizens, may vote absentee in state and local elections.

How do I apply for an absentee ballot?

The SF 76 Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) is accepted by all states and territories as either an application for registration form or for registration, or as an application for absentee ballot. You may also send a written request for a ballot to your county, city, town or parish clerk. The mailing addresses (and some on-line registration) may be found on the web at www.fvap.ncr.gov or the SF 76 can be obtained at the local Legal Services Branch.

I would like to vote but don't know how. Where can I find assistance?

Specific information on applying for absentee registration and a ballot is contained in the 2002-03 Voting Assistance Guide. Hard copies of the Guide are available for your review at the Legal Services Branch in Building 677 on Wilson Avenue. Members of the Armed Forces can obtain hard copies and CD-ROM versions of the Guide through the services distribution channels. You can also print the Guide off the Internet at the website or request hard copy by contacting the Federal Voting Assistance Program directly (by email) at www.vote@fvap.ncr.gov.

Do I have to be registered to vote absentee?

Registration requirements vary from state to state. Many states and territories allow the citizen to register and request an absentee ballot by submitting a single FPCA. However, other states may require the use of two separate FPCA forms: one to register, and a second FPCA to request an absentee ballot. Consult Chapter 3 of the 2002-03 Guide or your Legal Services Branch for specifics.

Where do I send my FPCA?

Chapter 3 of the Guide outlines absentee voting procedures for each state and territory. In your state or territory of legal voting residence under the heading of "Where to Send It" you will find a list of addresses for county and local election officials.

Must I submit a separate application for each election?

In some states and territories you must submit a separate FPCA for each election. Many states and territories accept a single FPCA for all ballots issued during an election year. When in doubt, send a separate application for each election.

If I am required to have my FPCA or ballot notarized, how do I do it?

Generally, election materials may be witnessed or sworn to before a notary, U.S. Commissioned Officer, Embassy or Consular officer or other official authorized to administer oaths. Notary services are available at the Legal Services Branch every day from 1200–1300 and 0900-1630 on Wednesday and Thursday. Most states and territories do not require notarization of the FPCA or ballot, therefore consult Chapter 3 of the Guide to determine your state's or territory's requirements. In all instances you must sign the FPCA.

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

Yes. All election-related materials are mailed postage paid from any APO or FPO mail facility, all U.S. Embassies and Consulates and any post office in the U.S. You must pay postage if the materials are mailed from a non-U.S. postal facility.

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

Generally, the FPCA is used to request a ballot and should be received by election officials at least forty-five days before election day to allow ample time to process the request and mail the ballot. If the FPCA is being used to apply for registration and an absentee ballot, the FPCA may have to be mailed earlier. Consult Chapter 3 of the Guide for further information on state or territorial deadlines. Be sure to advise your election official of any change to your address.

When should I receive my ballot?

Under normal circumstances, most states and territories begin mailing ballots to citizens 30-45 days before an election. Always sign and return your absentee ballot regardless of when you receive it. Court decisions sometimes require the counting of ballots voted by election day, but received late.

What is an election for Federal office?

An election for Federal office is any general, special, or primary election held solely or in part for the purpose of selecting, nominating, or electing any candidate for the office of President, Vice President, Presidential elector, Member of the United States Senate, Member of the United States House of Representatives, Delegates from the District of Columbia, Guam, Virgin Islands, and American Samoa, and Resident Commissioner of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico.

What is my "legal state of residence?"

For voting purposes, your "legal state of residence" can be the state or territory where you last resided prior to entering military service or the state or territory which you have since claimed as your legal residence. To claim a new legal residence you must have simultaneous physical presence and the intent to reside at that location as your primary residence. Military and family members may change their legal residence every time they change permanent duty stations or they may retain their legal residence without change. A legal officer should be consulted before legal residence is changed because there are usually other factors that should be considered besides voting. Be sure to enter the complete address of your legal residence, including street or rural route and number, when completing the residence section of the FPCA. Even though you may no longer maintain formal ties such as property ownership to that residence, the address is needed to place you in a proper voting district, ward, precinct or parish.

Can I vote where I am stationed?

Military members may vote in the state or territory where stationed if they change their legal residence to that state or territory, even if they live on a military installation. Be advised that there are legal obligations that may be incurred, such as taxation, when changing your state or territory of residence. Therefore, consult a legal officer before making such a decision. At the present time, there are no provisions for personnel stationed outside the United States to vote, in person, where stationed.

My family members are not in the military; can they also vote absentee?

The law entitles eligible family members of military personnel to vote absentee. Family members are considered to be in the same category of absentee voter as military members and generally should follow the same procedures. Family members of military personnel residing overseas, who are U.S. citizens and who have never resided in the U.S., usually claim one of their parent's legal state of residence as their own.