
Future of
**CALIFORNIA
ELECTIONS**

Modernizing Elections.
Expanding Participation.

October 2014

Simple Messaging for Vote-by-Mail Outreach

This toolkit was developed for any institution, campaign or organization conducting outreach to vote-by-mail voters. We have compiled simple messaging to help voters cast a successful vote-by-mail ballot.

This toolkit and translated versions of the press release are available at <http://futureofcaelections.org/VBMToolkit>. The press release is translated for the following languages: Chinese, Hindi, Japanese, Spanish, Tagalog, Thai and Vietnamese.

This toolkit is made possible thanks to the collaboration of Future of California Elections (FoCE) members:

Asian Americans Advancing Justice-Los Angeles

California Association of Clerks and Election Officials

California Forward

California Voter Foundation

League of Women Voters of California Education Fund

National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials Educational Fund

FoCE members include election officials, civil rights organizations and election reform advocates who together examine and address the unique challenges facing the State of California's election system.

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Translated versions of key messaging are available at <http://futureofcaelections.org/VBMTToolkit> in the following languages: Chinese, Hindi, Japanese, Spanish, Thai and Vietnamese

I. Preliminary Findings of Vote by Mail research in California

The members of Future of California Elections are committed to helping California voters cast meaningful and valid ballots. As part of this ongoing work, Future of California Elections members and partners are developing a body of work on vote-by-mail in California. This toolkit is based on the early findings of this research.

Disparities in California's Vote-by-Mail Use: Changing Demographic Composition: 2002-2012

The California Civic Engagement Project, in collaboration with Future of California Elections, is undergoing the first comprehensive analysis of the changing composition of California's vote-by-mail voters over the past decade. Early findings show disparities of vote-by-mail across the state by geography, with 30 percent of voters using vote-by-mail in Los Angeles County, compared to 90 percent in Napa County; by age, with young voters ages 18-23, voting by mail the least, while voters over age 54 casting mail ballots at higher rates; and by ethnicity, with Asian voters more likely to vote by mail than the general population while Latinos are more likely to go to the polls. The CCEP policy brief is available here <http://regionalchange.ucdavis.edu/ourwork/projects/ccep-issue-brief-one-disparities-in-californias-vote-by-mail-use-changing-demographic-composition-2002-2012>

Improving California's Vote-by-Mail Process: A Three-County Study

The California Voter Foundation (CVF) recently completed a three-county study to better understand the primary reasons why ballots go uncounted. CVF's study reveals the top three reasons why vote-by-mail ballots go uncounted in the three counties studied are because 1) they are received too late, 2) they lack a voter's signature or 3) the signature on the ballot does not match the signature on file. The full report is available online at www.calvoter.org/votebymail

Preliminary findings from "How Voters Get Information" project by the League of Women Voters of California Education Fund and Center for Civic Design

The League of Women Voters of California Education Fund, in collaboration with Center for Civic Design and the Future of California Elections, is developing a manual to best meet the needs of California's diverse voters, including eliminating confusing, complicated technical language and improving accessibility, design, and delivery of voter information. The project is currently concluding the research phase and preliminary findings about preferences in voter information, including that information should be clear and simple and that voters value attention to visual layout, including images. Information is available at <http://centerforcivicdesign.org/projects/how-voters-get-information/>.

II. Simple Messages for Vote-by-Mail Outreach

Vote-by-mail messages should ensure the following three goals:

1. Urge voters to mail their vote-by-mail ballots the week before Election Day
 - The earlier the better. Postmarks don't count.¹
 - Remind voters that a vote-by-mail ballot must arrive in the county that sent it by 8 p.m. on Election Day.
2. Remind voters to sign their vote-by-mail ballot envelope.
 - Signatures must be comparable to signature on voter registration card, ID or drivers license.
 - Voters should not let anyone else sign their vote-by-mail ballot envelope.
3. Let voters know to return their ballots in person by 8 p.m. on Election Day if they cannot mail them in the week prior to Election Day.
 - Vote-by-mail ballots can be returned to any polling place by 8 p.m. on Election Day that is in the voter's county.

Sample messages:

- ⇒ When you vote by mail, make it count! Sign the envelope and mail your ballot the week before Election Day.
- ⇒ Sign your ballot envelope and mail the week before Election Day.
- ⇒ Sign it and send it the week before Election Day or drop it off at one of your county's polling places by 8 p.m. on Election Day.
- ⇒ Do you vote by mail? Make sure your signature is clear and make sure you mail it the week before Election Day.
- ⇒ Forgot to mail your ballot the week before Election Day? No problem! Drop it off by 8 p.m. at one of your county's polling places on Election Day.

CASE STUDY: The League of Women Voters of California Education Fund developed the info graphic below to get simple and clear messaging out to their network.

Tips For Voting By Mail
in the November 4 California General Election

When your vote-by-mail ballot arrives:

1. Fill it out
2. Sign the envelope
3. Mail it back in time for it to **ARRIVE** by election day

You can also **drop off your ballot** at any polling place in your county on election day.

Find your polling place at www.smartvoter.org

LWV LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF CALIFORNIA EDUCATION FUND

¹ For the November 4, 2014 General Election vote-by-mail ballots must be received by Election Day. Starting in January 2015, Senate Bill 29 will allow vote-by-mail ballots, postmarked or time stamped on or before Election Day, to be counted if received within three days of Election Day. www.futureofcaliforniaelections.org

III. Sample Outreach Documents - Outreach Email

Make your email message short and to the point. Keep the main points at the forefront. Use simple language and thoughtful formatting to bring out your main points. Add a picture to keep it interesting.

Subject: Make your vote-by-mail ballot count!

Dear Voter,

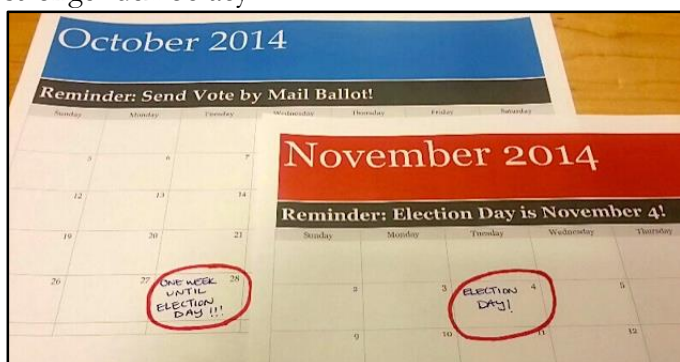
Are you voting by mail? Here are three tips to make sure your vote counts!

1. **Mail your vote-by-mail ballot the week before Election Day. The earlier the better!**
2. **Make sure you sign your ballot envelope and that your signature is clear and easily verifiable.**
3. **Don't have time to mail your ballot the week before Election Day? You can also drop it off at one of your county's polling places by 8 p.m. on Election Day.**

Don't know if you are registered to vote by mail? Look up your vote-by-mail status at <http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/ballot-status/>

Don't know your polling place location? Look up your polling place location at <http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/find-polling-place.htm> or to contact your county elections office.

Election Day is Tuesday, November 4, 2014. Thank you for helping to make California a stronger democracy.



Let's get every vote to count. Share this email with your friends on social media or by forwarding this message.

Sincerely,

INSERT YOUR NAME

III. Sample Outreach Documents - Newsletter article

Newsletter articles are a great way to provide public education on vote-by-mail, communicate key points and even go a little deeper on the subject. We recommend simple language and formatting to highlight the main points. You can also add Twitter or Facebook links to make your newsletter article shareable on social media.

Voting by Mail: Five Tips to Make it Count

Casting a vote-by-mail ballot has become a popular option for California voters. While most vote-by-mail ballots get counted, a significant number are rejected because they arrive too late, lack a signature, or the signature doesn't sufficiently compare to the one on file with the registrar of voters.

If you choose to vote-by-mail, make it count by following these three tips:



1. Mail your ballot a week prior to Election Day.

Only ballots **received** by county election offices by 8 p.m. on Tuesday, November 4th get counted. Unlike a tax return, postmarks don't count.

2. If you cannot mail your ballot a week before the election, return it in person by 8 p.m. on Election Day.

Deliver your voted ballot to your county election office or to any polling place in your county by 8 p.m. on Election Day.

3. Be sure to sign your ballot envelope.

Ballots mailed in envelopes that lack a voter's signature cannot be counted. Sign your name the same way as when you registered to vote. Voters who registered online using their DMV signature can check their ID or driver's license to make sure they sign their ballot envelope in a similar way.

4. If you make a mistake or lose your ballot you can still vote.

You can request a replacement ballot from your county elections office or get a provisional ballot at your polling place on Election Day.

5. Look up your voting status and polling place.

Many counties offer online lookup tools voters can use to check their mail ballot status. Visit <http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/ballot-status/> to check your status. Visit <http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/find-polling-place.htm> to look up your polling place or to contact your county elections office.

Share on Facebook or Twitter!

III. Sample Outreach Documents - Social Media Messaging

Social media messages on Twitter and Facebook are more likely to be shared if they are on the humorous side. Use these messages or be inspired to craft your own.

Hashtags & Slogans:

- #MakeItCount #SignSealDeliver #SignStampDeliver #WhyWait

Messages in 140 characters or less about sending your ballot early:

- #CA #VoteByMail ballots must be RECEIVED by 8PM on #ElectionDay. Postmarks don't count! Mail yours ONE week before. #SignStampDeliver
- Procrastinators beware! Arriving late is #1 reason #CA #VoteByMail ballots go uncounted. Deadline is 8PM on #ElectionDay #SignStampDeliver
- It's called "snail mail" for a reason. Mail #VoteByMail ballot 1wk b4 #ElectionDay 2 ensure it arrives in time 2be counted #SignStampDeliver
- Late is only fashionable at parties. #CA #VoteByMail ballots must arrive by 8PM on #ElectionDay to be counted! #WhyWait? #SignStampDeliver
- Don't be tardy for the #ElectionDay party. Mail ur #VoteByMail ballot early 2 ensure it arrives by 8PM Nov4 to be counted! #SignStampDeliver
- Don't have a stamp? Fugheddaboutit! Drop off your #CA #VoteByMail ballot at a polling place by 8PM on #ElectionDay. #SignStampDeliver
- Forgot to mail ur #CA #VoteByMail ballot? Drop it off at a polling place on #ElectionDay & remember to sign the envelope! #SignStampDeliver
- #VoteByMail ballots must be RECEIVED by 8PM on #ElectionDay to count. Last-minute voters use the ballot box not mailbox!#SignStampDeliver

Messages in 140 characters or less about signing the envelope:

- Plan to #VoteByMail in #CA? Remember to SIGN the return envelope before mailing it, to ensure your ballot is counted! #SignStampDeliver
- #VoteByMail in #CA? For a ballot to count, sign your return envelope the way you did as when you registered. #SignStampDeliver
- No one likes rejection. Avoid it by ensuring your signature on the #VoteByMail envelope & on file at the DMV look alike! #SignStampDeliver
- You don't let others vote for you, so don't let anyone sign your #CA #VoteByMail return envelope for you! PS it's illegal. #SignStampDeliver
- Your mom does a lot for u, but don't let her sign your #VoteByMail envelope! Sign in ur own handwriting or it won't count. #SignStampDeliver
- Forgetful ppl beware! Forgetting to sign the #VoteByMail return envelope is big reason #CA VBM ballots go uncounted. #SignStampDeliver
- Sloppy writers beware! Signature irregularities is a common reason #VoteByMail ballots go uncounted in #CA. #SignStampDeliver

Facebook: Voting by mail affords of-age citizens the luxury and convenience of voting in their PJs, but last-minute voters should beware to rely on the Post Office. There's a reason they call it snail mail: it's slow. A vote-by-mail ballot must be RECEIVED IN THE COUNTY THAT SENT IT by 8PM on Election Day to be counted, so mail your vote-by-mail ballot in the week before! Mail ballots can also be returned to any polling place in your county on Election Day.

www.futureofcaelections.org

III. Sample Outreach Documents - News release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

***[Insert your organization]* Urges Vote-By-Mail Voters to Mail Ballots the Week Before Election Day**

Californians voting by mail in the November 4, 2014 General Election are urged to mail their ballots the week before Election Day to ensure they arrive in time to be counted.

Recent research has revealed that most unsuccessful vote-by-mail ballots went uncounted due to late arrival, missing signature and having non-matching signature.

A separate Pew Charitable Trusts study found California's vote-by-mail rejection rate is among the highest in the country, with an estimated 66,000 mail ballots uncounted in November 2012. These findings underline the importance of having every single vote count, especially in close races such as the recent June primary race for Controller that came down to a mere 400 votes. "A high vote-by-mail rejection rate could have a dramatic impact on future elections if left unchecked," said NAME.

"We are reminding voters to mail their ballot the week before Election Day to help ensure these votes count. Unlike a tax return, a postmark does not matter. All ballots, regardless of how they are returned, must be received by 8 p.m. on Election Day," said [First name and Last Name], of the [Insert Organization].

Voters are urged to follow these tips to ensure their vote-by-mail ballots are counted:

1. Mail your ballot by mail the week prior to Election Day. Earlier is even better.
 - a. A ballot must be received in the county that sent it by 8 p.m. on Election Day.
2. Be sure to sign your ballot envelope.
 - a. Remember to sign your name the same way as when you registered to vote.
 - b. Voters who register online should check their ID, or driver's license signature to make sure their ballot envelope signature will match.
3. Voters who do not mail their ballots the week before the election should return them in person.
 - a. Ballots can be returned to county election offices or to any polling place within the voter's county by 8 p.m. on Election Day.
 - b. If you make a mistake or lose your ballot you can still vote.
 - c. Voters can seek replacement ballots from their county elections office or get a provisional ballot at their polling place on Election Day.

Voting by mail provides a great convenience to California voters, but in every statewide election, tens of thousands of ballots go uncounted. These easy tips can help to reduce the number of uncounted ballots and ensure every vote cast is counted.

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Insert name of your organization

Insert your organization's website

www.futureofc elections.org