

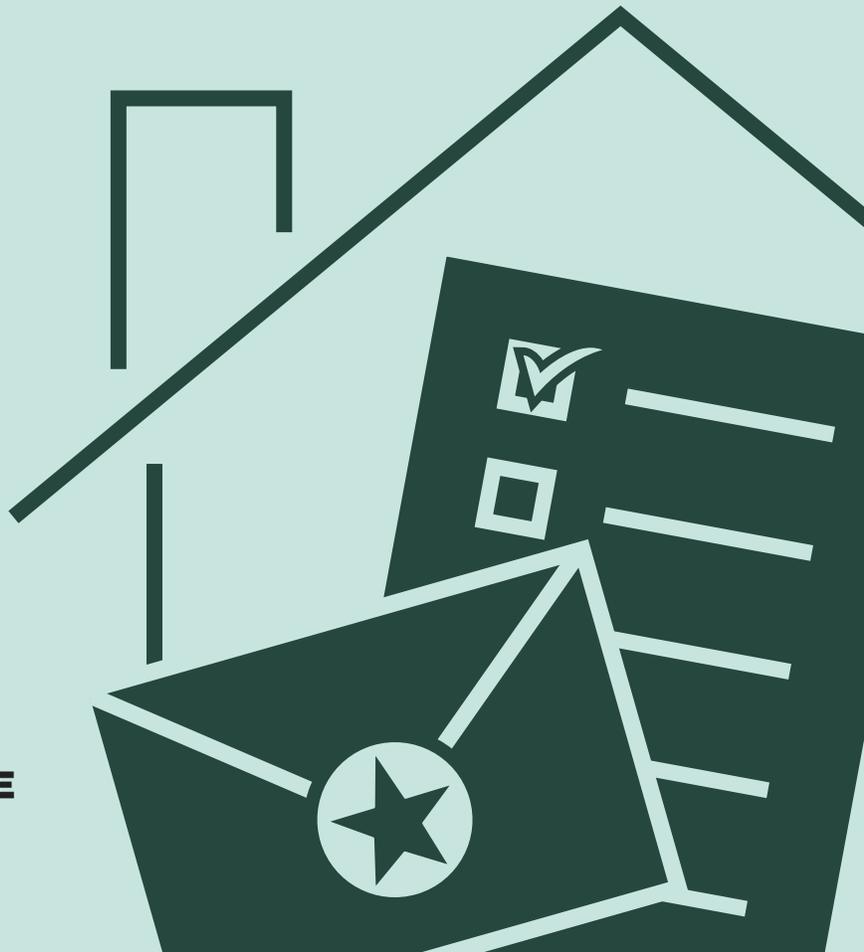


July, 2020

Vote By Mail for Secure Elections in 2020 — and Beyond

A Step-by-Step Guide for California

In-depth materials and guidelines for local election administrators, secretaries of states, legislators, and advocates to help California handle more mailed-out ballots.



Sightline
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VOTE at HOME

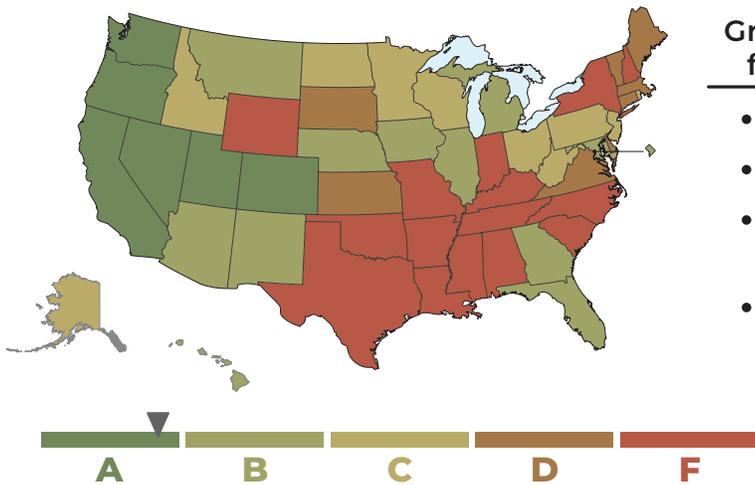
www.Sightline.org/SecureElections2020

Voting in California



California has more than 25 million registered voters in its 58 counties, ranging from 870 in Alpine County to 6.8 million in Los Angeles County. In 2018, 69 percent of Californians voted absentee, ranging from 54 percent in Mono County to 100 percent in Alpine County. Of that election's 73,264 poll workers, 40 percent were age 60 or older—an age group at a higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19.

Nearly half of California's registered voters cast votes in the state's March 3 primary. A record 72 percent of ballots were cast by mail—higher than in any previous state election and a 13 percentage point increase from the 2016 primary. In May, Governor Gavin Newsom issued an executive order that moved the November election to all-mail. All registered voters will receive ballots in the mail prior to the election.



California's grade for Vote By Mail preparedness



Ways in which California is already prepared



- Provides a postage-prepaid return envelope for mailed ballots.
- Ballot tracking required by state law.
- Gives voters sufficient opportunity to cure signature problems.
- Allows any voter to request an absentee ballot.
- Offers voters a "single sign-up" option to permanently vote by mail.
- Uses voters' signatures to verify ballots.
- Allows county clerks to start processing ballots sufficiently early.
- Accepts mailed ballots postmarked on Election Day.
- Early in-person voting starting three weeks before Election Day.
- Allows anyone to return sealed ballots in person.
- Automatically registers voters and updates their address.

Who We Are

Sightline is a nonpartisan nonprofit think tank with a 25-year history. We are based in the Pacific Northwest, where many states already conduct all-mail elections. We are grateful for feedback and research from many policy experts, elections officials, and leaders committed to safe, secure democracy, particularly the National Conference of State Legislators and the [National Vote at Home Institute](#).

The Moment

American election officials face an urgent challenge to secure the 2020 elections. As poll workers and voters grapple with the coronavirus pandemic, many jurisdictions are already unable to find enough workers to run their usual polling places, and many Americans are seeking to cast their ballot from home, rather than risk contagion in a crowded polling place in November.

About This Resource

We hope that California election officials, advocates, and legislators will find this resource useful as they work to handle more Vote By Mail ballots in 2020 and beyond.

Local election officials and **secretaries of state** will find in-depth information including practical nuts-and-bolts advice, materials and guidelines from election administrators with experience in conducting all-mail elections, and information about vendors and costs.

Legislators will find tried-and-tested policies, along with sample language from states that have successfully implemented those policies. Even if California lawmakers don't act in time for November 2020, the experience of hastily trying to secure elections this year may create a greater political appetite for reforms to strengthen democracy in California beyond 2020.

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For Local Election Officials

1. Coordinate with USPS®.

To ensure that the United States Postal Service (USPS) is able to process ballots in a timely manner, election administrators can [contact their local USPS](#) election mail coordinator to discuss the design, timing and volume of election materials.¹ USPS can review all materials to ensure that the design, wording, and colors meet their guidelines, and sign off on the printer's proofs. Election administrators can also discuss the date, time, and location for delivery of ballots to the post office to ensure that the post office is prepared. For example, before each election, King County, Washington, election administrators send a letter to USPS alerting them to the number, type, and timing of ballots they expect to deliver.²

USPS may also be able to help election administrators access the National Change of Address Linkage (NCOA) to update voters' addresses. Using NCOA to update voter addresses is particularly important for California because it is not a member of the Electronic Registration Information Center (ERIC), which helps 30 states keep their voter lists up to date (see Recommendation 6). Having the most up-to-date addresses will ensure that each ballot reaches the right voter, reducing the costs of re-mailing ballots.

Resources

- To find a local point of contact at USPS: [Election/Political Mail Coordinators](#).³
- [USPS Election Mail Kit](#).⁴
- [USPS Election Mail guidelines](#).⁵
- To report problems to USPS: [electionmail.org](#).⁶
- Center for Tech and Civic Life's 2020 [webinar](#) on [best practices for tracking and reporting](#), and the [slides](#).⁷
- Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency's (CISA) guidance on [Managing an Increase in Outbound Ballots](#)⁸, pp. 67-70.
- [Vote at Home Policy and Research Guide](#), p. 19.⁹

¹ <https://about.usps.com/gov-services/election-mail/political-mail-map.htm>

² <https://aqua.kingcounty.gov/elections/docs/vbm/VBM-information.zip> (see "Ballot mailing" folder, "Example of USPS Notification Letter.pdf")

³ <https://about.usps.com/gov-services/election-mail/political-mail-map.htm>

⁴ <https://about.usps.com/kits/kit600.pdf>

⁵ <https://about.usps.com/gov-services/election-mail>

⁶ <https://electionmail.org>

⁷ <https://www.techandciviclelife.org/vote-at-home>

⁸ <https://www.in.gov/sos/elections/files/COVID-19%20Election%20GUIDANCE%20ONLY.pdf#page=56>

⁹ <https://www.voteathome.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/VAH-Policy-and-Research-Guide.pdf#page=19>

Example Guidance Language

- Oregon [Vote by Mail Procedures Manual](#), pp. 26-30.¹⁰
- Municipality of Anchorage [Vote by Mail Project](#).¹¹
- Ohio Secretary of State [Election Official Manual](#), pp. 5-22.¹²

2. Design ballots and envelopes that are easy to use.

Well-designed envelopes, ballots, forms, and instructions help voters fill out their ballots and return them without mistakes, decreasing processing time and minimizing the chance that ballots will be flagged, thrown out, or not counted. In contrast, poorly designed instructions or ballots may cause voters to fill out their ballot incorrectly or incompletely so that their vote is not counted.¹³

Ensure that election materials are easy so that voters who may be voting by mail for the first time don't make mistakes. For example, those who are new to mailing their ballots may not know that they need to sign the outside of their envelope, so putting their name under the signature line and providing simple and clear instructions to sign there can help prompt them and reduce the number of ballots that need extra processing time. (Also, pre-filling the absentee ballot request form can help voters complete it correctly.)

Color-coded envelopes can help USPS sort the mail quickly and accurately, and including space for voters' contact information can help election officials reach voters promptly in the event of a missing signature or discrepancy.

Another important way to assist voters is to design and distribute voter education booklets to help guide them through the process. (For example, when Anchorage, Alaska, moved to all-mail elections in 2018, in addition to a robust [community education campaign](#) and a [voter information flyer](#), the city extended an elections call center's hours in the month leading up to the election.) To reach all voters, make all voter materials and the elections website available in multiple languages. The Brennan Center for Justice estimates that the cost for voter education materials is between [\\$0.50 and \\$0.88 per person](#).

¹⁰ https://sos.oregon.gov/elections/documents/vbm_manual.pdf#page=26

¹¹ https://www.muni.org/departments/assembly/clerk/elections/documents/vote%20by%20mail%20project%20final%20report%20mas%201026%20annual%20report_030819.pdf#page=5

¹² https://www.ohiosos.gov/globalassets/elections/directives/2019/dir2019-11_eom.pdf#page=197

¹³ https://www.washingtonpost.com/video/opinions/dont-let-mail-in-voting-be-thwarted-by-badly-designed-ballots/2020/05/18/1cce7c56-5312-44a8-afa9-fb813970f854_video.html

Resources

- The Center for Civic Design's¹⁴ [design guidelines for election officials](#), based on solid research and best practices (includes resources on designing envelopes and forms, such as vote at home [envelopes and information](#), a field guide to [designing vote at home envelopes and ballots](#), Vote By Mail [envelope design](#), [writing ballot instructions voters can understand](#), and [creating forms that help voters take action](#).¹⁵ Also see its guidelines for [designing voter education booklets and flyers](#), [creating accessible online information](#), and [providing materials in multiple languages](#).¹⁶
- Center for Tech and Civic Life's 2020 [webinar](#) on [best practices for envelope design](#), and the [slides](#).¹⁷
- USPS guidance on [designing election mail](#).¹⁸
- Center for Tech and Civic Life's 2020 [webinar](#) on [best practices for preparing supplementary materials](#), and the [slides](#).¹⁹
- CISA's [Voter Education Guidance](#).²⁰

Example Legislative Language

Revised Code of Washington [29A.40.091](#). Envelopes, declaration, and instructions—Voter's oath—Overseas and service voters—Return of ballots—County auditor's name.²¹

Ballots and envelopes must have the election date printed on them. Return envelopes must have space for the voter's telephone number so that the elections office can contact the voter if their signature does not match the one on file.

Revised Code of Washington [29A.36](#). Ballots and other voting forms.²²

See code for detailed guidance on formatting, contracts with vendors, sample ballots, and instructions.

¹⁴ Jurisdictions in Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, and Wisconsin have worked with the Center for Civic Design, and one in four voters have used their designs.

¹⁵ <https://civicdesign.org/fieldguides>

¹⁶ [Ibid.](#)

¹⁷ <https://www.techandcivicle.org/vote-at-home>

¹⁸ <https://about.usps.com/election-mail/design-election-mail.htm>

¹⁹ <https://vimeo.com/393307242> and <https://www.techandcivicle.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/PDF-VAH-Webinar-2-Preparing-helpful-supplementary-materials.pdf>

²⁰ https://www.cisa.gov/sites/default/files/publications/election_education_outreach_absentee_508.pdf

²¹ <http://lawfilesexst.leg.wa.gov/biennium/2019-20/Pdf/Bills/Session%20Laws/House/1520-S.SL.pdf>

²² <https://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=29A.36>

Example Guidance Language

- Washington State [Ballot Format Checklist](#) 2019.²³
- Washington Administrative Code [434-230](#). Ballots.²⁴
- Washington Administrative Code [434-230-010](#). Sample Ballots.²⁵
- Colorado [Elections Division Policy and Procedure Manual](#), p. 26.²⁶
- Oregon [Vote by Mail Procedures Manual](#), p. 23.²⁷

3. Implement robust signature verification.

California election officials already have experience in verifying signatures to protect against fraud while avoiding mistaken voter disenfranchisement.²⁸ As election administrators handle more mail-in ballots due to COVID-19, officials may take several steps to implement efficient and effective signature verification.

First, digitize the voter signatures already on file. The more digitized signatures, the more accurate the verification can be.²⁹ Signatures can come from each voter's registration, their absentee ballot request form, prior mailed ballots, or their signatures on file with the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) or other state agencies.

Second, train enough workers to inspect signatures. Washington, Oregon, and Colorado have developed training program procedures (see Resources). Forensic scientists (possibly from California's patrol or that of a neighboring state) may be able to help train your workers.

Third, implement a two-stage signature review. In the first stage, trained workers or specialized equipment compares the signature on the envelope to the digitized signature on file. If the signatures match, the ballot is moved to an "accepted" pile, but if there is a discrepancy, it is moved to a "flagged for further review" pile. In King County, Washington, trained inspectors flag around 2.5 percent of ballots during an initial review. Flagged ballots then go to another team of trained workers that closely examines the ballots and decides whether to accept or challenge them. (King County inspectors challenge about 1 percent of signatures.)

²³ <https://www.sos.wa.gov/assets/elections/administrators/2019-ballot-format-checklist.pdf>

²⁴ <https://apps.leg.wa.gov/wac/default.aspx?cite=434-230>

²⁵ <https://apps.leg.wa.gov/wac/default.aspx?cite=434-230-010&pdf=true>

²⁶ <https://www.sos.state.co.us/pubs/elections/policyManual/ElectionsPolicyManual.pdf#page=26>

²⁷ https://sos.oregon.gov/elections/documents/vbm_manual.pdf#page=23

²⁸ To verify the identity of voters who are unable to sign due to disability, offer the option of filling out a form that allows them to use a signature stamp.

²⁹ <https://www.voteathome.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/VAH-Policy-and-Research-Guide.pdf#page=18>

For all challenged signatures, notify voters and give them an opportunity to respond so that their ballot might still be counted.

Voters' signatures change over time, so if the state does not have a recent signature on file for a voter, ask them to update it. The King County, Washington, elections administrator sends voters a Signature Update Form. And in preparation for moving to an all-mail election, Hawaii sent a postcard to all registered voters asking for an updated signature for reference.

Resources

- Colorado Secretary of State [Signature Verification Guide](#).³⁰
- King County, Washington, [Signature Verification Training presentation](#) (includes examples of signatures and common problems with signatures).³¹
- King County, Washington, [Signature Update Form](#).³²
- Hawaii's Office of Elections [Signature Card](#).³³
- Oregon Secretary of State Elections Division [webinar](#) on signature verification.³⁴
- Election Assistance Commission [Signature Verification Cure Process](#).³⁵
- [Tour](#) of King County (Washington) Elections ballot processing area.³⁶
- Oregon [Signature Stamp Attestation](#) form.³⁷
- CISA's [Ballot Verification](#) and [Signature Verification and Cure Process](#).³⁸

Example Legislative Language

Revised Code of Washington [29A.40.110](#). Processing incoming ballots.³⁹

Verification may be conducted by approved automatic verification systems. Variation in signature between the return envelope and the registration record due to initials or common nicknames is permitted as long as the surname is the same and the handwriting matches.

³⁰ <https://www.sos.state.co.us/pubs/elections/docs/SignatureVerificationGuide.pdf>

³¹ <https://aqua.kingcounty.gov/elections/docs/vbm/VBM-information.zip> (see "Ballot processing" folder, "Signature Verification Training Updated.pptx")

³² <https://aqua.kingcounty.gov/elections/docs/vbm/VBM-information.zip> (see "Ballot processing" folder, "Signature-update-letter-April-May 2016-English.pdf")

³³ <https://elections.hawaii.gov/main/sign-sealed-and-counted-securing-your-vote>

³⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UKiYGONnNT0&feature=youtu.be>

³⁵ https://www.eac.gov/sites/default/files/electionofficials/vbm/Signature_Verification_Cure_Process.pdf

³⁶ <https://kingcounty.gov/depts/elections/education-and-outreach/take-a-tour.aspx>

³⁷ <https://sos.oregon.gov/elections/Documents/SEL540.pdf>

³⁸ <https://www.in.gov/sos/elections/files/COVID-19%20Election%20GUIDANCE%20ONLY.pdf#page=48> and <https://www.in.gov/sos/elections/files/COVID-19%20Election%20GUIDANCE%20ONLY.pdf#page=63>

³⁹ <https://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=29A.40.110>

Example Guidance Language

- Washington Administrative Code [434-250-120](#). Verification of the signature and return date.⁴⁰
- Oregon [Vote by Mail Procedures Manual](#), p. 35; [Appendix 13](#), p. 83.⁴¹

4. Consider using a professional printer and ballot sorter.

Many election administrators use professional printers and ballot sorters, rather than printing ballots, stuffing envelopes, and sorting them in-house. This can save money and increase staff efficiency. It might also mitigate problems voters have experienced during their primaries, such as in Georgia,⁴² where voters requested ballots but did not receive them, or in New York,⁴³ where ballots did not include a return envelope. Both states were relying on overworked workers who did not have much experience in printing, stuffing, and mailing ballot envelopes, rather than hiring a professional service that has printed, stuffed, and mailed ballot envelopes many times and has quality control practices in place.

According to the Brennan Center, printing costs per ballot ranges from [\\$0.21 to \\$0.35 cents per ballot](#). Volume efficiencies in moving to a Vote By Mail system result in lower per-voter printing costs. In Colorado, total printing costs declined from [\\$6.86 to \\$3.04 per voter](#) after implementing Vote By Mail.

Resources

- [K&H Integrated Print Solutions](#) for secure ballot and envelope printing.⁴⁴
- [Runbeck Election Services](#) for election products and services.⁴⁵
- Relia-Vote™ automated mail ballot solutions from [BlueCrest](#).⁴⁶
- [Ryder Graphics](#) for ballot printing and mailing.⁴⁷
- [Reprographics](#) for ballot printing and mailing.⁴⁸
- [Phoenix Graphics](#) for ballot printing and mailing.⁴⁹

⁴⁰ <https://apps.leg.wa.gov/wac/default.aspx?cite=434-250-120>

⁴¹ https://sos.oregon.gov/elections/documents/vbm_manual.pdf#page=35 and https://sos.oregon.gov/elections/documents/vbm_manual.pdf#page=83

⁴² <https://www.11alive.com/article/news/politics/elections/absentee-ballot/85-4bde08c8-97db-4736-b1de-45a03c29c330>

⁴³ <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/19/us/politics/nyc-vote-by-mail.html>

⁴⁴ Many counties in the Pacific Northwest use this vendor. <http://www.khprint.com>

⁴⁵ Runbeck has the capacity to serve 10 percent of American voters. <https://runbeck.net>

⁴⁶ BlueCrest serves 30 counties. <https://www.bluecrestinc.com/solutions/vote-by-mail-relia-vote>

⁴⁷ Many Oregon counties use this vendor. <http://rydergraphics.net>

⁴⁸ Many Oregon counties use this vendor. <http://reproprinting.com>

⁴⁹ Some jurisdictions on the East Coast use this vendor.

<https://www.phoenix-graphics.com/absentee-mail>

- [Tritek](#) for ballot sorting and signature verification services.⁵⁰

Example Guidance Language

- Colorado Secretary of State [Elections Division Policy and Procedure Manual](#), p. 26.⁵¹
- Oregon [Vote by Mail Procedures Manual](#), p. 23.⁵²

5. Count ballots at a secure centralized facility.

Counting ballots in a secure centralized facility enhances election security, transparency, and efficiency. Election administrators in King County, Washington, count ballots in guarded facilities with continuous security camera monitoring in addition to using their ballot tracking system. Having security surveillance equipment in ballot processing areas and streaming the footage online allows voters to see for themselves how secure and transparent a jurisdiction's vote-counting procedures are. As with all election procedures, prepare for Election Day by rehearsing processes and timing various stages.

To the extent possible according to California law, counties that don't have an appropriate facility for secure and centralized ballot processing could coordinate with counties that do.

Resources

- King County Elections [FAQ](#) and [security and accountability information](#).⁵³
- CISA's [Inbound Ballot Process Recommendations](#).⁵⁴

Example Guidance Language

- Washington Administrative Code [434-261-045](#). Secure Storage.⁵⁵
- Oregon [Vote by Mail Procedures Manual](#), p. 8.⁵⁶

⁵⁰ <https://tritektech.com>

⁵¹ <https://www.sos.state.co.us/pubs/elections/policyManual/ElectionsPolicyManual.pdf#page=26>

⁵² https://sos.oregon.gov/elections/documents/vbm_manual.pdf#page=23

⁵³ <https://kingcounty.gov/depts/elections/about-us/security-and-accountability/frequently-asked-questions.aspx> and <https://www.kingcounty.gov/depts/elections/about-us/security-and-accountability.aspx>

⁵⁴ <https://www.in.gov/sos/elections/files/COVID-19%20Election%20GUIDANCE%20ONLY.pdf#page=43>

⁵⁵ <https://apps.leg.wa.gov/wac/default.aspx?cite=434-261-045>

⁵⁶ https://sos.oregon.gov/elections/documents/vbm_manual.pdf#page=8

For Lawmakers

6. Join the Electronic Registration Information Center (ERIC).

Thirty states and DC are members of the Electronic Registration Information Center (ERIC), which helps them identify outdated or invalid voter registrations. ERIC reports to each member state which voters have moved within the state, moved out of the state, passed away, may have duplicate registrations, or may be eligible to vote but have not yet registered. States can then update addresses, remove deceased voters from the rolls, and reach out to eligible voters to encourage them to register. States that do this have more accurate voter rolls, reducing the opportunity for fraud and ensuring that ballots are mailed to eligible voters' current address.

ERIC is very effective. According to a [US GAO report](#), "King County, Washington, which conducts elections entirely by mail, saw a drop in undeliverable ballots from 17,911 in the 2013 primary to 11,174 in the 2014 primary, which county election officials attributed to Washington's participation in ERIC." In addition, member states showed a net increase of 2.36 percent in voter turnout compared to non-member states.⁵⁷

Resources

- ERIC's [website](#),⁵⁸ [bylaws](#),⁵⁹ and [procedures to join](#).⁶⁰ States pay a one-time membership fee of \$25,000 and contribute to ERIC's annual operating expenses with annual dues; states with larger populations contribute more than states with smaller ones.⁶¹
- [Not all states](#) require changes to statutes in order to join ERIC.⁶²

Example Legislative Language

Connecticut General Statutes § 9-19k. Online voter registration system.⁶³

The secretary of state can use voter registration databases from other states to verify applicants' information.

⁵⁷ https://www.rti.org/sites/default/files/resources/eric_stage1report_pewfinal_12-3-13.pdf

⁵⁸ <https://ericstates.org/who-we-are>

⁵⁹ https://ericstates.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/ERIC_Bylaws_01-2020.pdf

⁶⁰ <https://ericstates.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/ERIC-Membership-Summary-v20190603.pdf>

⁶¹ [Ibid.](#)

⁶² <https://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/voter-list-accuracy.aspx>

⁶³ https://www.cga.ct.gov/current/pub/chap_143.htm#sec_9-19k

Nevada Revised Statutes §293.675. Establishment and maintenance of statewide voter registration list; duties of Secretary of State; requirements for list; duties of county and city clerks and Department of Motor Vehicles; verification of information with Social Security Administration; agreements with state agencies to provide information necessary for list; exchange of information with chief election officers of other states.⁶⁴

The statewide voter registration list must be shared with other states if the information will be used to maintain voter registration lists. The secretary of state can also request information from other states.

Ohio Revised Code Annotated 3503.15. Statewide voter registration database.⁶⁵

The secretary of state will enter into agreements to share voter registration data with other states as necessary to maintain registration lists. The secretary of state will ensure that this information remains confidential.

Code of Virginia §24.2-404(A)(9-10). Duties of Department of Elections.⁶⁶

To maintain records, the Department of Elections may use any source of information and may share any information it receives from other agencies with any chief election officer of another state for the maintenance of voter registration systems. The statute also allows Virginia to cooperate with other states to develop systems to ensure the accuracy of voter registration rolls.

7. Account for voters with nontraditional addresses.

Native American voters living on tribal lands often have mailing addresses that don't adhere to USPS standards, making it difficult for them to register to vote and receive ballots in the mail. They may have many family members living at the same address, and some states may not allow them all to receive a ballot, in an attempt to protect against fraudulent ballot requests. Or these voters may use a USPS box to receive mail but live far from the nearest post office or election center, making it more difficult to receive and return their ballot in a timely fashion.⁶⁷ Eligible voters experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity also may not have a home address. California should make sure these voters can receive a ballot and vote securely.

California should allow multiple eligible voters to use the same mailing address. Living with others to save housing costs should not diminish any American's right to vote. California can allow Native Americans to [designate a building on the Nation's land to receive their ballot](#). Especially in areas where people live far from a post office, election administrators

⁶⁴ <https://www.leg.state.nv.us/nrs/nrs-293.html#NRS293Sec675>

⁶⁵ <http://codes.ohio.gov/orc/3503.15>

⁶⁶ <https://law.lis.virginia.gov/vacode/title24.2/chapter4/section24.2-404>

⁶⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/may/22/mail-in-voting-native-americans-election>

can temporarily install drop boxes or vote centers on tribal lands to ensure that voters have viable options for returning their ballots.

California can allow homeless community members to receive their ballots at a [shelter, park, motor home](#), or other identifiable location. As an alternative, homeless voters can list the county elections office as their mailing address and get their ballot in person there. They can then return their ballot to the elections office or a secure drop box.

Example Legislative Language

Colorado Revised Statutes [1-2-102](#). Rules for determining residence.⁶⁸

For voter registration residence, voters can identify a physical location in the county that they return to regularly, such as a shelter, services provider, park, campground, vacant lot, or business. If that location does not have an address, voters must also provide a mailing address.

Oregon Revised Statutes [247.038](#). Registration of person who is homeless or resides in identifiable location.⁶⁹

Individuals who are homeless or reside in shelters, vehicles, marinas, or other identifiable locations cannot be denied the opportunity to register to vote. Residence addresses can be descriptions of the person's physical location or the office of the county clerk.

Revised Code of Washington [29A.08.112](#). Voters without traditional residential addresses.⁷⁰

Voter registration accepts nontraditional addresses, defined as narrative descriptions of the voter's physical location. No person can be disqualified for lacking a traditional address. Voters must provide a mailing address. Tribes may designate a government building to serve as a mailing address for residents.

Example Guidance Language

- Oregon [Vote by Mail Procedures Manual](#) and Oregon secretary of state [website](#).⁷¹
- Colorado secretary of state [Foreclosure and Homeless Voters FAQs](#) and [Election Rules](#).⁷²

⁶⁸ https://www.sos.state.co.us/pubs/info_center/laws/Title1/Title1Article2.html

⁶⁹ https://www.oregonlegislature.gov/bills_laws/ors/ors247.html

⁷⁰ <https://apps.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=29A.08.112>

⁷¹ https://sos.oregon.gov/elections/Documents/vbm_manual.pdf#page=19 and <https://sos.oregon.gov/voting/Pages/homeless-confidential.aspx>

⁷² <https://www.sos.state.co.us/pubs/elections/FAQs/foreclosureHomelessFAQ.html> and https://www.sos.state.co.us/pubs/rule_making/CurrentRules/8CCR1505-1/Rule2.pdf#page=3

- Washington Secretary of State Clearinghouse Elections Notice on [Voters without Traditional Addresses](#).⁷³

8. Allow voters to request an absentee ballot online.

Thirty-nine states and DC give citizens the option to securely register to vote online.⁷⁴ Twenty-three states allow voters to request absentee ballots online. An additional eleven states allow voters to send their absentee ballot request via email. (Voters in these states may still face a barrier because the states require voters to print the form, physically sign it, scan it, and attach it to an email.) Allowing voters to request absentee ballots digitally makes the entire process easier for everyone, especially during times of restricted mobility like the coronavirus shutdowns. For voters, it increases their access to absentee ballot options. And for the county clerks and state officials, it reduces the amount of paperwork and the amount of time spent inputting data into elections systems.

California's secretary of state could provide a user-friendly statewide web portal where voters can request to receive a ballot in the mail, register to vote, update their address, track their ballot, cure signatures, and request a replacement ballot. For example, Texas offers a simple online request form⁷⁵ and Idaho offers a complete online portal.⁷⁶

California law ties election administrators' hands by requiring absentee ballot requests to be on a physical piece of paper. Your state legislators could change state laws to allow for modern, efficient, and secure digital requests.

Creating a secure online request system requires some upfront investment in digital infrastructure. Election administrators will need to integrate the new interface into their existing elections software.

Example Legislative Language

Florida 2019 Statutes [101.62](#). Request for vote-by-mail ballots.⁷⁷

Election supervisors must inform voters requesting Vote By Mail ballots of a free access system to determine the ballot status.

⁷³ <https://www.sos.wa.gov/assets/elections/auditorsctp/19-04%20voters%20without%20traditional%20addresses.pdf>

⁷⁴ <https://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/electronic-or-online-voter-registration.aspx#a>

⁷⁵ <https://webservices.sos.state.tx.us/vrrequest/bbm.asp>

⁷⁶ <https://idahovotes.gov/vote-early-idaho>

⁷⁷ http://www.leg.state.fl.us/statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&URL=0100-0199/0101/Sections/0101.62.html

Code of Virginia § [24.2-711.1](#). Absentee ballots; confirmation of receipt; notice of reason for rejection.⁷⁸

The secretary of state must implement a free access system for voters to track absentee applications and ballots.

9. Allow voters to request replacement ballots online.

Occasionally, voters might lose, destroy, spoil, or never receive their ballot in the mail. These voters need to be able to quickly, conveniently, and securely request a replacement. To best accommodate voters, especially during the pandemic, county clerks can give voters the option to request a replacement ballot not only in person but also in writing, over the phone, or online.

To ensure security, election officials should only send replacement ballots once they confirm that the voter has not already voted. Unique barcodes on each ballot will ensure that only one ballot per voter is counted. Each voter will only be able to vote once; if an election official receives two ballots with the same unique barcode, only the first one received will be counted.

Printing and mailing ballots costs between \$1.26 and \$2.35. California can reduce the need for replacement ballots by keeping voter records up to date and making it easy for voters to update their address online (see Recommendations 1 and 6).

Example Legislative Language**Oregon Revised Statutes § [254.470 \(7\)](#). Procedures for conducting election by mail; rules.⁷⁹**

Voters may obtain replacement ballots if the ballot is destroyed, lost, spoiled, or not received. Replacement ballots need not be mailed if within five days of Election Day. Instead, they will be available at the office of the county clerk.

Revised Codes of Washington [29A.40.070](#). Date ballots mailed—Replacement ballots.⁸⁰

Registered voters may obtain replacement ballots if the ballot is destroyed, lost, spoiled or not received. The voter may request a replacement by telephone, mail, or email, online, or in person.

⁷⁸ <https://law.lis.virginia.gov/vacode/title24.2/chapter7/section24.2-711.1>

⁷⁹ https://www.oregonlegislature.gov/bills_laws/ors/ors254.html

⁸⁰ <https://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=29A.40.070>

Example Guidance Language

- Oregon [Vote by Mail Procedures Manual](#), p. 51.⁸¹
- Alaska Division of Elections instructions for [online ballot delivery](#).⁸²
- Office of the Minnesota Secretary of State [2016 Absentee Voting Administration Guide](#), p. 30.⁸³

⁸¹ https://sos.oregon.gov/elections/documents/vbm_manual.pdf#page=51

⁸² <http://www.elections.alaska.gov/Core/votingbyonline.php>

⁸³ <http://www.co.wadena.mn.us/DocumentCenter/View/904/absentee-voting-administration-guide#page=30>