



Fact Sheet: Serving UOCAVA Voters

What is UOCAVA?

The **Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA)** requires states and territories to allow overseas and absent members of the military, military family members, and overseas citizens, to register and vote in all federal elections. UOCAVA requires election officials to follow special procedures when serving military and overseas voters.

This fact sheet provides quick-reference information for election officials as well as links to additional resources. However, there are many federal resources available to help election officials serve voters covered under UOCAVA. More information about serving UOCAVA voters can be found at www.eac.gov/uocava and www.fvap.gov/eo.

Who qualifies as a UOCAVA voter?

Specific groups of American citizens are covered by UOCAVA. These groups are¹:

- Members of the Uniformed Services (Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, Coast Guard, Space Force, United States Public Health Service Commissioned Corps, and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Commissioned Corps)
- Members of the Merchant Marine
- Eligible family members of the above
- U.S. citizens residing outside the U.S.

What are my responsibilities as an Election Official?

UOCAVA requires election officials to send ballots to UOCAVA voters **at least 45 days** prior to each federal election. Election officials are also required to process FPCA and FWAB forms according to state and federal law. This includes:

- Accepting the FPCA form as a simultaneous voter registration application and absentee ballot request. The FPCA serves as a ballot request during the calendar year in which it was received at a minimum but may be valid longer depending on state law.
- Accepting the FWAB as a backup ballot for UOCAVA voters. If both a state ballot and FWAB are received, follow state procedures.
- Provide an electronic option for blank ballot delivery and provide the ballot electronically to UOCAVA voters, upon request.
- Accepting voting materials from UOCAVA voters, transmission methods vary depending on state law.



Requested ballots must be sent to UOCAVA voters at least

45 days

prior to each federal election.

¹ <https://www.fvap.gov/eo/overview>

What is FVAP?

The Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP), in the US Department of Defense, ensures UOCAVA voters are aware of their absentee voting rights and have the tools and resources to successfully cast a ballot from anywhere in the world. Some of the resources provided by FVAP include:



- **Resources for Voters:**
 - [Federal Post Card Application \(FPCA\) Form](#) – This form is used by UOCAVA voters to both register to vote and request an absentee ballot.²
 - [Federal Write-in Absentee Ballot \(FWAB\) Form](#) – The FWAB serves as a backup ballot to vote for federal offices.³
 - [Voting Assistance Guide \(The Guide\)](#) – The Guide includes information on registering and voting in all 55 States, territories, and the District of Columbia, how voters can return their ballots, and what information is required on the FPCA and FWAB forms. Importantly, the Guide also includes contact information for state and local elections offices.⁴
- **Resources for Election Officials**
 - [Voter Outreach Materials](#) – FVAP has created a wide variety of handouts, factsheets, toolkits, and other resources.⁵
 - [Election Official Toolkit](#) – FVAP specifically created an outreach toolkit for Election Officials that is designed to support election offices in their efforts to reach UOCAVA voters.⁶
 - [Training](#) – This online, self-paced training covers several topics: UOCAVA, FVAP, using the FPCA and FWAB forms, how election officials support UOCAVA voters, and communicating with and assisting UOCAVA voters.⁷
 - [Election Forms and Tools for Sending](#) – Downloadable versions of the FPCA and FWAB forms (including several bilingual versions), templates for postage-free return envelopes, and a coversheet for forms received electronically.⁸

What are the FPCA and FWAB forms?

UOCAVA voters rely on two essential federally prescribed forms:

- **The Federal Post Card Application (FPCA)**
- **The Federal Write-in Absentee Ballot (FWAB)**

The FPCA serves as both a voter registration application and an absentee ballot request form. While state laws vary on how long this request is valid, UOCAVA voters can use the FPCA as a single ballot request for all federal elections during the calendar year in which it is submitted.



² <https://www.fvap.gov/fpca-privacy-notice>

³ <https://www.fvap.gov/uploads/FVAP/Forms/fwab.pdf?searchHint=true>

⁴ <http://www.fvap.gov/guide>

⁵ <https://www.fvap.gov/info/outreach>

⁶ https://www.fvap.gov/uploads/FVAP/Outreach-Materials/OutreachToolkit_EO_2024.pdf

⁷ <https://www.fvap.gov/training/get-started.html>

⁸ <https://www.fvap.gov/eo/overview/materials/forms>

The FWAB is an emergency or “back-up” ballot available for citizens covered under UOCAVA. It is used to vote in any election for federal offices and as otherwise permitted by state law. UOCAVA requires voters to meet the following criteria to use a FWAB:

- The citizen must be a member of the Uniformed Services or Merchant Marine (or eligible family member), or a United States citizen overseas who is absent from their place of residence where they are otherwise qualified to vote, and
- Not have received the requested regular absentee ballot from the state
- Depending on your state’s law, the FWAB may also be used to request voter registration and/or an absentee ballot.

UOCAVA stipulates that voters may also return the state-issued absentee ballot after returning the FWAB, as the state ballot may offer other offices or referenda. Only one ballot is counted for each voter.

What is a voting residence?

A voting residence is the state or address where a UOCAVA voter is registered to vote and serves as the physical address to determine the absentee ballot precinct. The rules and considerations vary for different categories of UOCAVA voters:



- **Service Members**

- For service members, a voting residence is the voter’s state of legal residence or domicile. This is the address the voter considers to be their permanent home and where they had a physical presence.
- A service member’s state of legal residence is used for state income tax purposes, determining eligibility to vote in federal and state elections and qualification for in-state tuition rates. This residence is not necessarily the service member’s “home of record.” The “home of record” is where the service member lived when they entered the military.
- Service members may choose to establish residency each time they are transferred to a new location; however, once the service member changes their residency, they may not revert to a previous residence without re-establishing physical presence according to residency laws of that state.
- Service members may need to consult their legal counsel, Judge Advocate General, or military legal assistance office to determine possible tax implications (or other considerations) of changing their permanent residence.
- Additional information and considerations for service members can be found here:

<https://www.fvap.gov/military-voter/voting-residence>

- **Military Spouses and Eligible Family Members**

- Under the Military Spouse Residency Relief Act (MSRRA), military spouses may choose the same residency as their spouse even if they have not physically been present at that address. They may also choose to retain their separate residency as well.
- Military spouses may need to consult legal counsel to discuss tax implications and other impacts of changing their residency address.



Did You Know?

If a UOCAVA voter cannot remember their last physical address, they should consult old records or IDs that may establish their residency. Election officials may also be able to look up the individual’s previous voter registration record to establish their voting residence.

- Some children turn 18 while their family is stationed overseas. To vote, they should use the last U.S. address they had before departing to the parent's current duty station.
- **Overseas Citizens**
 - Overseas citizens may use the address where they lived immediately prior to leaving the United States. This residence may remain valid even if:
 - The voter no longer owns property or has other ties to that state.
 - The voter's intent to return to that state is uncertain.
 - The voter's previous address is no longer a recognized residential address.
 - Voting in an election for federal offices may not be used as the sole basis of determining residency for the purpose of imposing state and local taxes.
 - Overseas voters should consult legal counsel before claiming a new legal residence or domicile, as there may be other factors to consider, such as tax implications.
- **Never Resided Voters**
 - Voting rights vary by state for U.S. citizens born overseas who have never established residence in the United States. In many states, U.S. citizens 18 years or older who were born abroad but have never resided in the U.S. are eligible to vote absentee using a parent's legal residence address. Check with your state office for your state's rules.
- **Students Studying Abroad**
 - Students who are living overseas for an extended period during an election season and want to vote absentee should use the [FPCA](#) to request an absentee ballot. The student's voting residence will be their last legal residence prior to leaving the United States to study abroad.
- **Voting residence and the Federal Post Card Application (FPCA)**
 - Election officials should review the FPCA and other forms for completion and accuracy and contact the voter if clarifications are required to determine their voter eligibility or the current location to send the blank absentee ballot.



Did You Know?

UOCAVA voters must be registered to vote at an address in the US. The voter may not have lived in that residence for a number of years, and they may be properly registered to vote at that address, even if the residence is home to other registered voters.

Occasionally, current residents may receive election mail for a UOCAVA voter who no longer lives at that address. Election officials should explain to the current resident that a military or overseas voter is eligible to use their former physical residence for voter registration purposes, even if they typically receive mail overseas.



Additional Resources

Acronym Glossary			
Acronym	Definition	Acronym	Definition
APO	Army Post Office	MOVE Act	Military and Overseas Voter Empowerment Act
DPO	Diplomatic Post Office	NVRA	National Voter Registration Act
FPCA	Federal Post Card Application	SVAO	Service Voting Action Officer
FPO	Fleet Post Office	UVAO	Unit Voting Assistance Officer
FVAP	Federal Voting Assistance Program	UOCAVA	Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act
FWAB	Federal Write-in Absentee Ballot	VAO	Voting Assistance Officer

Comparing the FPCA and FWAB Forms		
Form Features	FPCA	FWAB
Can be emailed or faxed to voters	✓	✓
Can be completed by the voter online	✓	✓
Serves as a voter registration application	✓	?
Serves as an absentee ballot application	✓	?
Serves as a single ballot request for at least one calendar year	✓	?
Contains a voter's contact information	✓	✓
Serves as a back-up ballot unless the voter returns their official ballot before the state's ballot return deadline	✗	✓
Should be submitted with a secrecy envelope	✗	✓
Can be returned to election officials by email or fax	?	?

✓ = Yes for all states.

✗ = No for all states.

? = Varies by state. Check your state's UOCAVA voter policies.

Contact Information

Additional information about serving UOCAVA voters can be found here:

U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Website: www.eac.gov/uocava Email: clearinghouse@eac.gov 	Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Website: www.fvap.gov/eo Phone: 1-800-438-VOTE (8683) Email: vote@fvap.gov
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