



Marin County Elections Department

Voter Education and Outreach Advisory Committee Frequently Asked Questions November 8, 2022 Election

This FAQ sheet was created for the Voter Education and Outreach Advisory Committee (VEOAC) agencies and their staff to assist with answering questions from the public.

The Voter's Choice Act

1) What is the new voting model?

The Voter's Choice Act (VCA) is a law that allows counties to offer voters more choices for when, where, and how they vote. Under the VCA, all active registered voters are automatically mailed a ballot, early voting is expanded for more days, and voters may vote in-person at any regional vote center. Marin County first implemented the Voter's Choice Act during the June 7, 2022, primary election.

2) How does it work?

ALL active registered voters are automatically mailed a ballot and have several ways to return it:

(No stamp needed)

- By Mail
- At an Official Ballot Drop Box
- At a Vote Center

3) What is a vote center?

Voters may vote in-person at ANY vote center in Marin County. Assigned, neighborhood polling places are replaced by regional vote centers that open at least 3 days before Election Day with MORE services:

- Register to Vote & Vote the Same Day
- Replace a Lost or Damaged Ballot
- Early Voting (vote before Election Day!)
- Vote with an Accessible Voting Machine
- Request Help

4) Why am I mailed a vote-by-mail ballot when I didn't ask for one?

One aspect of the VCA includes automatically sending a ballot to all active registered voters. Additionally, Assembly Bill 37 makes California a permanent vote-by-mail state beginning January 1, 2022. Voters no longer need to request a vote-by-mail ballot.

If you don't want to vote by mail, you may visit a vote center and ask to vote in person.

5) Who made the decision to switch to this new process?

The California Voter's Choice Act (VCA) is based on nationally recognized best practices for increasing voter participation and voter registration. In 2016, the state legislature passed and the Governor signed Senate Bill 450 which made the VCA state law. The Secretary of State sponsored the VCA with extensive input from civil rights organizations, local elections officials, and community groups that represent a wide range of California voters.

On May 25, 2021, the Marin County Board of Supervisors approved resolution 2021-33 confirming the implementation of the Voter's Choice Act in Marin County. The Marin County Registrar of Voters has involved the public to help decide the details of how to implement the new law.

Vote By Mail

6) What if I lose my ballot or make a mistake?

If you make a mistake: Draw a straight line beginning at the oval through the entire incorrect choice. Fill in the oval you want. Make sure your intent is clear. **Do not** write your initials next to the error.

To get a replacement ballot, follow one of the options listed below:

Option 1: Go to any [Vote Center](#) in Marin County to request a replacement ballot

Option 2: Use the "[Replacement Vote-By-Mail Ballot Application](#)" (found at [MarinVotes.org](#)) to apply by mail (the form must be **received** by the Elections Department on or before November 1)

Option 3: Request a [Remote Accessible Vote-By-Mail Ballot \(RAVBM\)](#) by calling (415) 473-6456, emailing VoteByMail@MarinCounty.org, or using the application on the back of the County Voter Information Guide.

7) If I forget to sign my vote by mail ballot envelope or it isn't an exact match with my voter registration, will my ballot be rejected?

If you forget to sign, or your signature does not compare, you will get a letter asking you to correct your signature to similarly compare with the signatures on file before final processing of your ballot. Read the letter carefully and return the form before the deadline.

8) If I don't sign my ballot exactly as my name is printed on mailings, will my ballot be rejected?

No. Elections officials are looking for your signature to be "substantially" comparable, meaning they must be able to recognize it as being comparable to the signature on your voter registration even if it is not exact. For example, if your first name is "Elizabeth" but you sign your ballot "Beth", as long as the signature is comparable, it will be accepted.

9) Can I have my vote by mail ballot sent to a PO Box?

Yes. However, when you register to vote, you must provide your residence address, but you can include a mailing address such as a PO Box. Elections materials will be sent to your mailing address if you provide both. Do not register to vote with only a PO Box or business address; it could delay your registration.

For individuals without a residence address (“unhoused”), the voter registration form will ask you to provide nearest cross streets or an intersection for residence, and then add a mailing address where you receive your information/ballot. A residence address is required because that is used to assign you to the correct districts such as supervisorial, congressional, school districts for voting – this in turn is used to mail you the proper version of the ballot with all the contests for where you live.

10) Is it true that Vote by Mail ballots are thrown out if they arrive after Election Day?

County elections officials will process and count all valid vote by mail ballots that are postmarked on or before Election Day and arrive no later than 7 days after Election Day (November 15). Sign up to track the status of your ballot at WheresMyBallot.sos.ca.gov. If it seems too late to mail your ballot back, there is a list of locations in the Voter Information Guide, online at MarinVotes.org, or call the Elections Department at (415) 473-6456 and they will tell you where you may hand-deliver your ballot.

11) I’m traveling for a couple months and can’t get mail. Are there any options for me to vote?

Remote Accessible Vote by Mail (RAVBM) is available to **all** Marin Voters. It allows any voter to download, mark, and print their ballot. RAVBM **is not** “internet voting,” all ballots must be printed and returned in an envelope that includes the voter’s printed name and signature on the outside of the envelope. Ballot must be printed and returned—not be emailed or faxed.

Any voter may use this service by requesting a link via email — **enter RAVBM in the subject line**, send to VoteByMail@marincounty.org, or call (415) 473-6456. The service is available starting 29 days before the election.

12) Is a polls ballot the same as a vote by mail ballot?

Yes. Vote by mail ballots and “live” ballots issued at vote centers are the same and counted the same way.

- Vote by mail (VBM) ballots: all valid VBM ballots are counted if they are postmarked on/before Election Day and are received by 7 days after Election Day (November 15). Voters who vote a VBM ballot are given credit for voting once the ballot inside the return envelope is checked into the system at the Elections Office.
- “Live” ballots: are ballots issued at vote centers, voted on site, and put in a ballot box at the vote center. Voters are given credit for voting a “live” ballot at a vote center as soon as the ballot has been issued. All “live” ballots are accounted for and brought back to the Elections office each night and counted on Election Day.

Official Ballot Drop Boxes

13) What is a drop box?

An official ballot drop box is a secure, locked container operated by Marin County elections officials where voters may deliver their ballots from when they receive them by mail up to 8 p.m. on Election Day. Election officials place drop boxes in convenient, accessible locations, including places close to public transportation routes and public buildings such as libraries and community centers. Marin County has 13 official ballot drop boxes for the November 8, 2022, General Election.

To learn more about Marin's official ballot drop boxes, please visit the [Ballot Drop Box webpage](#).

14)How often are drop boxes emptied?

Ballots are collected on a regular schedule multiple times a week by deputized employees of the County Elections Department working in teams of two. Pick-up frequency is adjusted to accommodate higher volume. Ballots are sealed in secure containers during transport.

To learn more about ballot collection regulations please visit the [Ballot Drop Box webpage](#).

15)Are drop boxes secure?

Yes. Official ballot drop boxes are constructed similarly to those used by USPS, FedEx, and UPS. They are bolted on the inside into concrete or secured to an immovable object using industrial strength hardware. The opening is narrow and designed in a way that prevents tampering or retrieval of envelopes. Each official ballot drop box is inspected by the pick-up team for damage or evidence of tampering. Local law enforcement agencies have been notified of the locations so they can monitor them daily while on patrol.

To learn more about Marin's official ballot drop boxes, please visit the [Ballot Drop Box webpage](#).

Ballot Tracking

16)How do I know my vote by mail ballot was counted?

Track your ballot every step of the way. **Where's My Ballot?** lets you know when your ballot is mailed to you and received by the Elections Office.

Sign up at WheresMyBallot.sos.ca.gov.

17)Is BallotTrax the same as Where's My Ballot?

Yes. **Where's My Ballot?** is powered by BallotTrax and is offered to every California voter by the California Secretary of State.

18)How does ballot tracking work?

Sign up at WheresMyBallot.sos.ca.gov to receive automatic email, SMS (text), or voice call notifications about the status of your ballot.

If you have more questions, visit the [Where's My Ballot? Troubleshooting - Frequently Asked Questions](#) page.

Vote Centers

19) Can I vote at any vote center?

Eligible Marin voters can vote at **any** vote center in Marin County.

20) How do vote centers look and feel?

Vote centers look and feel like a traditional polling place and are located in accessible, convenient locations, such as libraries, community centers, and local government buildings. Vote centers are well-organized, professional, and accommodate voters with disabilities. County elections officials are required to hold public meetings to receive input regarding the best locations for vote centers and ballot drop boxes. All voting machines at vote centers are tested and certified for use in California by the Secretary of State.

21) Are vote centers open on the weekends?

Yes. All vote centers are open the weekend before Election Day, and some are open for 11 days including Election Day.

22) Do vote centers offer language assistance?

Yes. Vote centers accommodate voters with limited English proficiency. Vote centers have well-trained staff at every location prepared to support voters with translated voting materials in languages required by law (current Marin required languages: Chinese, Spanish, and Vietnamese). To the greatest extent possible, counties aim to have multilingual staff and volunteers available to help voters at vote centers.

Voters may request a translated facsimile ballot be mailed to them up to 7 days before Election Day to help them mark their Official Ballot.

Marin County also has a Language Accessibility Advisory Committee (LAAC).

The LAAC is comprised of community members representing language minority groups within the county. It is integral during the planning process to make voting accessible in the transition to a vote center model.

Learn more about the LAAC on the [LAAC webpage](#).

23) Who decides where the vote centers and drop boxes are placed? Which criteria are used?

The Marin Elections Department decides where to place vote centers and drop boxes based on 14 criteria outlined in state law. These include considering where the population lives, access to public transit and parking, how frequently a community votes by mail, and accessibility for people with disabilities.

Additionally, the Elections Dept. must consider which sites are available for up to 11 continuous days of voting. Community input is also important. Marin held consultations with language minority communities and with voters with disabilities, as well as a public hearing to discuss the Elections Administration Plan.

To read Marin County's Election Administration plan, visit the [Elections Department website](#).

24) Why can't I use my polling place?

In some cases, former polling places are used as vote centers. However, many former polling places are no longer in use, so check the [list of locations](#) before voting in person. Polling places under the VCA are called vote centers. Vote centers are open up to 11 days, including Election Day. A voter may use **ANY** vote center in Marin.

25) I get off work at 7 p.m. on Election Day and I heard the polls close at 8 p.m. Will I be turned away at 8 o'clock?

If you are in line before 8 p.m. you are still eligible to cast a ballot. You may vote in person at any vote center in Marin up to 10 days before Election Day. If you need to vote in-person, we recommend you go early.

26) I always vote in person because I want my "I Voted" sticker. Now what?

An "I voted" sticker is included with your vote by mail ballot. Peel and wear it proudly!

Voter Registration

27) What if I'm not registered to vote?

- **Before the voter registration deadline (deadline is Oct. 24):** register online at RegisterToVote.ca.gov or call the Elections Dept. to have a form mailed to you.
- **After the voter registration deadline (deadline is Oct. 24):** you may still register and vote. Visit any vote center in Marin to register to vote and vote on the same day. This is called Conditional Voter Registration (CVR) or, sometimes called [Same Day Registration](#).

28) I thought I was registered to vote but when I checked my status, it shows I am an "Inactive" voter. What does that mean?

Voters become "Inactive" if the elections office receives 3rd party information that a person moved (such as from the DMV or USPS), or if election mail that is mailed to the voter is returned as undeliverable (election mail is not forwarded). Inactive voters do not automatically receive election materials (including ballots) and are still registered but they need to verify their address to become "Active" again. We urge Inactive voters to re-register to ensure their information is current, and so they become "Active." To check your status, you can go to RegisterToVote.ca.gov

29) I think my signature is different from when I registered 10 years ago, and I'm concerned my ballot will be rejected. Can I check my signature online?

For your protection, certain information on the voter registration card, including signatures, is confidential and may not be published or shared. If you want to update your signature, you have options: (1) complete a new registration paper form; (2) go online to register at RegisterToVote.ca.gov and select "use DMV signature" to attach that to your registration, or print and sign the form and mail it

in. If you changed your name (e.g. were married), and you are still registered under your former name, your ballot may be accepted if you sign with your former name, but you must re-register for it to change official voter records. You can also call the Elections Department at (415) 473-6456 and they can look at your signature history.

Disability

30) Are vote centers accessible to people with disabilities?

Most vote centers are accessible. Elections staff work to find accessible vote centers that meet all of the required criteria or mitigate barriers whenever possible. However, voters can vote at any vote center in Marin. Go to MarinVotes.org to find a list of accessible vote center locations.

Each vote center is required to have 3 accessible voting machines and provide appropriate accommodations and services to assist a voter with a disability. Marin County also has a Voting Accessibility Advisory Committee (VAAC). The VAAC is comprised of voters with disabilities and representatives of the community. It is integral during the planning process to make voting accessible in the transition to a vote center model.

Learn more about the VAAC on the [VAAC webpage](#).

31) How can voters with disabilities receive an accessible vote-by-mail ballot?

Remote Accessible Vote by Mail (RAVBM) is available to **all** Marin Voters. It allows any voter to download, mark, and print their ballot at home. Voters may use their own assistive technology to read and mark the ballot. RAVBM is **not** “internet voting,” you must print and return your marked ballot.

Any voter may use this service by requesting a link via email — **enter RAVBM in the subject line** and send to VoteByMail@marincounty.org, or call (415) 473-6456.

Rights/Security

32) Do I need to show photo identification at a vote center?

California voters are not required to show identification at a vote center, unless you are a first-time voter and did not provide a driver’s license or state ID number, or the last 4 digits of your social security number when you registered to vote. In these specific cases, you may be asked to show identification the first time you vote, per federal law. Acceptable forms of identification include a copy of a recent utility bill, the sample ballot booklet you received from your county elections office or another document sent to you by a government agency. Other examples include your passport, driver’s license, official California identification card, or student identification card.

Please note that every individual has the right to cast a [provisional ballot](#) even if they do not provide documentation.

33) Could this make it easier for people to commit voter fraud?

No. The Voter's Choice Act builds upon existing protections against potential voter fraud: when a voter uses a vote center, county officials will verify that no other votes have been cast by that voter in the statewide database. When a voter casts a ballot at a vote center, their voter record is immediately updated to reflect that action. If the same voter attempts to vote again at another vote center within the county, or in a different county, the county election officials will see that they have already cast their ballot for the election. Based upon that knowledge, the election official can take action and only count the first vote.

The VCA reduces the need for provisional ballots, which also enhances security. Just like at polling places, voters' signatures at vote centers are recorded and can be compared to voter registration records in the event of a challenge to their eligibility. Vote-by-mail ballots also require voter signatures which must compare with official records.

34) Are the voting machines ever connected to the internet?

No. Voting machines and ballot tabulators are prohibited from being connected to the internet at any time.

35) What measures are being implemented to protect the data of registered voters?

Voter registration records are stored in California's voter registration database known as VoteCal, which was launched in September of 2016. Security for the statewide database meets or exceeds industry standards. The Secretary of State continuously updates security measures.

Glossary Of Common Terms

Absentee Ballot:

An outdated phrase in California that was used to describe voters who requested a mail-in ballot, but is still used across the country. The phrase was legally changed several years ago in California to "vote by mail ballot."

Active Voter:

A voter who is registered to vote at his/her current residence address. Active voters are automatically mailed elections materials.

Official Ballot Drop Box:

A secure container ("box") that is used to deposit voted ballots. Official Ballot Drop Boxes may be "staffed" or "unstaffed" which means they are in view of a live person while open for use. Unstaffed secure boxes are usually open 24/7.

Ballot Tracking:

See: "Where's My Ballot?"

Conditional Ballot:

Eligible citizens who need to register or re-register to vote within 14 days of an election are called “conditional voters.” They can register and vote at their county elections office or at a vote center. They cast a “conditional ballot” that will be processed and counted once the county elections office has completed the voter registration verification process.

Inactive Voter:

A voter whose registration has been “flagged” because the Elections Department received a third-party notice (e.g. from the post office) that the voter may have moved. Technically, the voter is registered, but the voter needs to confirm the residence address. Inactive voters are not mailed elections materials.

Overvote:

An overvote occurs when a voter marks more than the maximum number of voting position targets allowed in the contest. The votes for that contest (only) will not count. For example, if a contest says “vote for two” but the voter marks three spaces, that is one overvote.

Spoiled Ballot:

Basically, it is a voided ballot. Voters usually spoil a ballot after making a voting mistake or damaging the ballot such as tearing it. The ballot is marked “spoiled” and a replacement is provided upon request.

Undervote:

An undervote occurs when a voter marks less than the maximum number of voting position targets allowed in a contest. For example, if a contest says “vote for two” but the voter marks one space, that is one undervote. Voters are not required to vote for maximum number (or for all contests) for the other votes to count.

Vote by Mail (VBM):

The Elections Department mails an official ballot and postage-paid return envelope to the voter, who may return (cast) it by mail. Active California voters now automatically receive a vote by mail ballot for all elections due to Assembly Bill 37.

Vote Center

Replaces assigned, neighborhood polling places. Voters may vote in-person at any vote center in Marin County. Several vote centers are open for 11 days in a row, including Election Day. All locations are open 3 days before Election Day and on Election Day. Vote centers offer these services:

- Register to Vote & Vote the Same Day
- Replace a Lost or Damaged Ballot
- Early Voting (vote before Election Day!)
- Vote with an Accessible Voting Machine
- Request Help

Voter Information Guide (VIG):

The County Voter Information Guide (previously known as a “sample ballot”) contains a sample of your ballot and information about local candidates and ballot measures, and other important or new information about the election. The California Secretary of State also sends a Voter Guide that includes information for statewide contests.

Voter Information Portal (VIP):

An online voter look-up tool created by the Marin County Elections Department. You must be a registered voter to use the look-up to find voter registration and voter guide information.

Voter Status (or Voter Registration Status):

A phrase that refers to whether or not a person is registered to vote. Voters can check their status at RegisterToVote.ca.gov.

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Where’s My Ballot?:

Also known as “ballot tracking,” this is a service powered by BallotTrax and is offered to every California voter by the California Secretary of State. **Where’s My Ballot?** sends an automatic email, text, or call to the voter to notify the voter about the status of their ballot every step of the way. Voters must sign up for the service at WheresMyBallot.sos.ca.gov.