

Permanent Mail Ballot Delivery List Best Practices

1. **Fundamental element:** Voters will be able to designate their registration as “permanent mail ballot delivery” and from that point forward receive their ballots for all future elections by mail no later than three weeks prior to election day.
2. **Building the permanent absentee list:** Immediately after passage of the statute, registered voters will be informed by US mail of the options they can take at that point.
 - a. Voters who requested and received absentee ballots in the most recent statewide election will be notified that they will now be placed on permanent mail ballot delivery status, but will be given the choice to “opt-out” and then to either request an absentee ballot for specific elections, or to vote in-person.
 - b. Voters who did not request and receive an absentee ballot in the most recent statewide election will be informed of the new statute and their new option and will be directed on how to sign up for permanent mail ballot list status (in-person, by mail, on-line) if they choose to do so.
3. **Maintaining the permanent absentee list:** The state will partner with the US Postal Service and its National Change of Address (NCOA) system, and receive an update of address changes at least once a month (ideally more frequently when closer to an election). Changes will be compared with the voter registration file, and where a voter has been found to have moved the following will occur:
 - a. The voter will be notified by mail at their new permanent residential address that their voter registration has been automatically moved to that new address, unless they opt out and reply that they want it maintained at the old address.
 - b. If the voter moves to another state as indicated on the NCOA list, the state will mark the voting record as inactive (which removes them from the permanent mail ballot list) and sends a letter with notification to the voter under NVRA requirements to encourage them to register to voter in their new state.
4. **Making sure returning ballots is easy and fair:** Multiple paths should be available for voters to return their completed ballots (see 4.a. below). Ballots returned by US mail need to be postmarked by a specified time on election day, and received no later than the end of the third business day after election day. Some states have also implemented longer timeframes after the election to receive the physical mail ballots.

Note: There are differences of opinion on whether to focus on “received by” or “postmarked by” mail cutoff dates. We prefer the postmark model for a simple reason: It is simple. Voters learn there is one, and only one deadline, regardless of the method they use to vote. No voter is disadvantaged, whether they use a traditional polling place, a vote center, a secure drop box or the US mail. Elections officials also have a simpler task of communicating with their voters. And there is no debate after the fact about different rules being applied to which ballots.

 - a. Voters may return their absentee ballots either by US Mail, at a secure 24 hour drop-off box, or dropped off at any officially designated voting location on or

before election day. Ballots dropped off in jurisdictions outside the voter's home precinct will be routed by elections officials to the proper locale for counting.

- b. In the event a voter for any reason receives and sends in more than one ballot, only the first one received at the elections department will be processed, all others will be discarded.
- c. At such time that the permanent mail ballot list rises to be more than 50% of the active registered voters in the state, the state will put in place well distributed secure ballot drop boxes, available 24x7 wherever practical, with one drop box for every 10,000 registered voters. There will be no fewer than one drop box per county, and no fewer than one drop box per Native American reservation. Additionally, a state may chose a better minimum standard for standalone drop-boxes for the more populous counties.

Note: while each state can decide whether to offer business reply return mail postage on their mail ballots – which we encourage - the availability of drop boxes will cause fewer people to use the postage option, helping to cover the cost of the drop boxes.

5. **Ballot authentication:** The signatures on incoming ballots shall be compared to the signature on file with the voter's registration. That comparison may be done by electronic signature matching software, supplemented with election judges that are bi-partisan. States should not have the voter's party, race, age or gender show up on the signature matching screen, to avoid any likelihood of bias in the evaluation.
 - a. If the signature matches, the ballot is sent on for processing and counting.
 - b. If the signature does not match, additional steps may be taken to try to authenticate it, such as researching other signatures and documents, and accessing other statewide signature databases (such as DMV).
 - c. If there still is no match, or the signature is missing, the voter will be notified within two business days of the need to "cure" their signature. That notification can be by US mail, email, or text message or some other approved method. The voter will then have up to eight business days to cure with an affidavit, either in-person or by US mail or text message. This process can extend after election day, if necessary.

Other best practices to consider for the most secure, voter-centric system:

1. Automatic Voter Registration
2. Same Day Voter Registration
3. Risk Limiting Audits
4. Staffed Vote Centers for in-person voting support once mail ballot usage reaches a certain level
5. Allowing counties to conduct elections via entirely mailed-out ballots
6. Clear Civic Design for instructions and mail ballot packets
7. Effective cure process with options for voters
8. Ballot Tracking Tool – provides communication and accountability to voters about the status of their mail ballot.