

2026-2027

OFFICIAL ELECTION MAIL GUIDE

Kit 600



February 2026

The Postal Service is pleased to present the 2026-2027 Official Election Mail Guide (Kit 600). The kit is a comprehensive resource designed specifically for Election Officials that choose to utilize the U.S. Mail™ as a secure, efficient, and effective part of their election systems.

The Postal Service has a long and proud history of supporting our country's electoral system and we take seriously our clear and defined role to process, transport, and deliver the nation's Election Mail, including ballots. We continually reassess our capabilities to improve the operational effectiveness of our service.

In preparation for the upcoming election season, the Postal Service made several enhancements to increase the visibility of ballots traveling through the mail stream. These efforts included issuing a newly developed bilingual green Tag 191, *Domestic and International Ballots*, implementing an official ballot checkbox, expanding the Service Type Identifier (STID) Tool for both Ballot Mail and Election Mail, and clarifying the use of the Official Election Mail logo. You will learn more about these enhancements by reviewing the materials included in this kit. For additional support, contact the Postal Service's Mailpiece Design Analysts and local Managers, Customer Relations using the forms found at <https://about.usps.com/what/government-services/election-mail/#contact>. Please take advantage of these dedicated experts.

While not specific to Election Mail, the Postal Service has some further updates that may be relevant to our customers who send or receive Election Mail. The Postal Service refined our service standards to align with operational initiatives needed to improve operational efficiency and precision. We also formally defined the postmark in our regulations, described how and where in the course of postal operations postmarks are applied, clarified the scope of the information that postmarks convey, and advised customers to request a manual (local) postmark at a retail location if they want to ensure that their mailpiece receives a postmark containing a date that aligns with the date of mailing. This kit provides additional details on postmarking, but we emphasize that we have not changed our procedures regarding how or to the extent in which we postmark mailpieces.

Our simple message to voters is to plan and mail early. Also, if a customer wants to ensure that their return Ballot Mail envelope or any other mailpiece receives a postmark, and that the date on the postmark matches the day it is mailed, the customer should bring their mailpiece to a retail location and request a manual postmark in person; it will be applied free of charge upon acceptance of the mailpiece.

The Postal Service provides many common-sense mailing recommendations to help voters and election officials use the mail successfully when policymakers choose to use the mail as part of their election systems. We recommend that both voters and election officials follow any guidance provided by their state, consider the time required for each leg of mail delivery, and keep in mind any applicable Postal Service mailing recommendations. Sharing the Postal Service's mailing recommendations with your voters can better help them decide which method of participation in the electoral process is right for them.

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ELECTION MAIL KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Fact Sheet for Election Mail

This fact sheet includes many of the Postal Service's recommendations for Election Mail. The following recommendations will help increase the visibility of Election Mail as it moves through the postal network and generally improves processing and enhances customers' experience.

MAILING RECOMMENDATIONS

When making decisions about mailing ballots (and other time-sensitive Election Mail), election officials should first consider their state and local rules, requirements and recommendations. Secondly, you should choose whether or not you want to outsource printing and/or utilize mail service providers. It is also important to consider print and production times. Additionally, make sure to consider mailing logistics such as mail induction point locations and be sure to avoid commingling outbound Ballot Mail with other mailpieces.

Along with any guidance from the state or locality conducting elections, the Postal Service recommends that election officials consider providing any applicable Postal Service mailing recommendations in their voter communications. Sharing the Postal Service's mailing recommendations will help ensure that individuals who wish to use the mail to vote know how to do so successfully.

The Postal Service's mailing recommendations for voters include:

- **In jurisdictions that require eligible voters to request a ballot to receive one through the mail:**

We recommend that domestic, non-military voters request their ballot as early as their jurisdiction allows. Note: Not all voters need to request a ballot to receive one; check your local and state voting requirements.

- **For domestic, non-military voters who choose to use the mail to return their completed ballot:**

The Postal Service recommends that they mail their completed ballot before election day, and at least one week before the deadline by which their completed ballot must be received by their election office. Some states may recommend allowing even more time for mailing completed ballots.

- **All voters** should keep in mind the time required for each leg of mail delivery—to the voter and back to the election office—when deciding how to participate in an election.

MAIL CLASS

The Postal Service continues to recommend that election officials use First-Class Mail® for outbound Ballot Mail to voters. Using First-Class Mail allows for faster service while providing high visibility as Ballot Mail moves through the mailstream (when used with USPS® visibility tools, like serialized Intelligent Mail® barcodes). Nevertheless, the Postal Service has long engaged in several practices to prioritize Ballot Mail that is entered as Marketing Mail, regardless of the paid class, when capacity permits and mailpieces are identifiable as Ballot Mail by the Official Election Mail logo or other Postal Service visibility indicia.

The Postal Service will continue to process and deliver expeditiously, as we have done in past elections, with the result that Ballot Mail commonly receives delivery timeframes equivalent to First-Class Mail even when mailed as Marketing Mail.

MAILPIECE DESIGN REVIEW

The Postal Service strongly recommends that all Election Mail envelopes, including previously approved designs, be reviewed by a Mailpiece Design Analyst (MDA) each year prior to mail printing. MDAs can provide guidance on envelopes that meet the Postal Service's processing requirements, answer questions about mailpiece design, give advice on evaluating mailpieces for automation discounts, provide technical assistance on the Postal Service's envelope standards, and help construct mailing plans.

For assistance from a MDA, submit a design review request at <https://electionmail.usps.com/s/election-mail-review> or by calling 877-672-0007 (select option 3 for mailpiece design). Hours of operation are Monday through Friday, 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. Central Time (closed federal holidays).

MAIL VISIBILITY

Election Mail visibility refers to the range of tools available to provide increased insight and trackability for your mailpiece within the postal network. In some cases, these tools can allow election officials to track their mail through the entire network.

Election officials should use all available tools to improve the visibility of their Election Mail within the postal network.

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The Postal Service strongly recommends the use of green Tag 191, dedicated Service Type Identifiers (STIDs), and serialized Intelligent Mail barcodes for Ballot Mail. In addition, the Official Election Mail logo and the Election Mail Checkboxes should be used for all Election Mail, including Ballot Mail.

■ Tag 191

- The Postal Service recommends the use of green Tag 191, *Domestic and International Ballots*, to identify trays and sacks that contain Ballot Mail.
- A modified version of the tag was created in 2025 that includes instructions on how to use the tag in both English and Spanish.
- Although use of the tag is optional, it provides greater visibility to Ballot Mail at mail entry.
- Election officials can order the tag by completing PS Form 1910, Tag 191, *Domestic and International Ballots*, Order Form (<http://about.usps.com/forms/ps1910.pdf>).

■ Service Type Identifier

- The Postal Service strongly recommends the use of customized Service Type Identifiers (STIDs), specifically for Ballot Mail to improve visibility within the automation environment.
- These STIDs have proven instrumental in identifying and tracking Ballot Mail.
- Be sure to use the latest STIDs for each election cycle mailing.
- For assistance selecting an appropriate Election Mail or Ballot Mail STID for outbound mailings, consider trying the STID Finder tool available on Postal Pro.

■ Uniquely Serialized Intelligent Mail Barcode

- A uniquely serialized Intelligent Mail barcode, or IMb, is a Postal Service barcode that provides the ability to track the delivery and return of individual Ballot Mail envelopes—increasing your visibility of this important mail within the postal network.
- Because of the central role a uniquely serialized IMb plays in identification, tracking, sorting, and payment, we strongly recommend the use of a uniquely serialized IMb on Ballot Mail.

■ Official Election Mail Logo

- When the Official Election Mail logo appears on a

qualifying mailpiece, voters recognize the mail as important and distinct from partisan political mailings.

- Additionally, the logo serves to identify official Election Mail for Postal Service workers and distinguishes it from the millions of other mailpieces that are processed daily.

■ Election Mail Checkboxes

- The Postal Service uses the Election Mail Checkboxes in *PostalOne!*® processing and our Postage Statement forms to get increased visibility of Ballot Mail and Election Mail in the mailstream.
- On July 14, 2024, the Election Mail Checkbox was separated into two distinct checkboxes: Election Mail – Official Ballots and Election Mail – Non-Ballot Materials.

For more information on any of these visibility tools, please review their fact sheets included in this kit.

QUICK LINKS

- Business Customer Gateway: <https://gateway.usps.com>
- Election Mail Permit-Based Solutions: <https://postalpro.usps.com/mailing/election-political-mail/permit-solutions>
- Election Mail Toolkit: <https://about.usps.com/election-mail/election-mail-resources.htm>
- Full-Service Certified Mail Service Providers: <https://postalpro.usps.com/certifiedmsps>
- Intelligent Mail Barcode Technical Resource Guide: <https://postalpro.usps.com/node/221>
- Postal Service Contact Forms: <https://about.usps.com/what/government-services/election-mail/#contact>
- Publication 631, *Official Election Mail – Graphic Guidelines and Logos*: <https://about.usps.com/publications/pub631.pdf>
- Publication 632, *State and Local Election Mail - User Guide*: <https://about.usps.com/publications/pub632.pdf>
- Service Standards Information: <https://postalpro.usps.com/operations/service-standards>
- Service Type Identifiers (STIDs): <https://postalpro.usps.com/mailing/service-type-identifiers>
- Tag 191 Order Form: <http://about.usps.com/forms/ps1910.pdf>
- USPS Transit Time Map: <https://www.usps.com/service-standards/>

ELECTION MAIL RESOURCES FOR ELECTION OFFICIALS

Fact Sheet for Election Mail

The U.S. Postal Service® is proud to provide a secure, efficient, and effective way for citizens to participate in elections when policymakers decide to use mail as part of their election administration. Every federal election cycle, we make efforts across the nation to inform local and state election officials about mailing procedures, our operational standards, and our recommended best practices for using the mail. We provide training, tools, and resources, to help you and your staff get started. We will even help you plan your mailings, improve the quality and accuracy of your address files, and design smart, cost-effective mailpieces. The information below introduces you to the services and assistance we provide.

For more guidance on Election Mail visit our election officials' mailing resources site at <https://about.usps.com/what/government-services/election-mail/#election-officials>

LEARNING

The Postal Service™ has developed resources to help election officials learn how to prepare, induct, and track mail sent to voters and returned to election officials. Postal Service local Managers, Customer Relations (MCRs) are also available to help you throughout the mailing process and answer any questions. Connect with your local MCR by submitting an inquiry at <https://electionmail.usps.com/s/contact-local-mcr>.

PLANNING

Planning your mailing in advance will help ensure that it goes out in a timely, efficient manner, which is vital during election season. Our team of MCRs can help you:

- Determine the appropriate mail class.
- Choose the best postage payment options for outgoing and return mailpieces.
- Identify any extra services that may be needed.
- Provide information on lead time for mailings to armed forces personnel and overseas voters.

ADDRESSING

Address quality is critical to the timely and efficient delivery of your mail. Your address lists should be up-to-date, accurate, and complete. To assist you with this, the Postal Service offers several products and services, including software, to help you improve the accuracy of your mailings. For information about address quality, go to: <https://postalpro.usps.com/address-quality>.

DESIGNING

Mailpiece Design Analysts (MDAs) can help you greatly improve the effectiveness of your mailings and reduce

postage costs. Consulting with Postal Service MDAs will help ensure you have a well-designed mailpiece that is compatible with Postal Service guidelines and regulations. Customers can receive assistance from a MDA by submitting a design review request at <https://electionmail.usps.com/s/election-mail-review> or by calling 877-672-0007 (select option 3 for mailpiece design). Hours of operation are Monday through Friday, 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. Central Time (closed federal holidays).

IDENTIFYING

Display the Official Election Mail logo on your mailpiece to indicate your mail is from a federal, state, or local election official. When the Official Election Mail logo appears on a mailpiece, voters recognize the mail as important and distinct from partisan political mailings. Additionally, the logo serves to identify Election Mail for Postal Service workers and distinguishes it from the millions of other mailpieces that are processed daily.

For more details on how to comply with the requirements for its use, review Publication 631, *Official Election Mail — Graphic Guidelines and Logos*, <https://about.usps.com/publications/pub631.pdf>.



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REPLYING

The Postal Service offers election officials the ability to create a seamless mailing experience for voters by paying for the postage on return Ballot Mail envelopes that are sent back to the officials by the voters. Discuss your reply mail needs with a Mailing Requirements Clerk. Contact the Mailing and Shipping Solutions Center (MSSC) by emailing MSSC@usps.gov or calling 877-672-0007 (select option 2 for mailing requirements). Hours of operation are Monday through Friday, 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. Central Time (closed federal holidays).

REPORTING

If an issue with your Election Mail arises, we want to know about it. The Postal Service offers a direct line for Election Officials to communicate with qualified postal professionals who are best equipped to research and resolve any concern. To report a problem, complete the form at <https://electionmail.usps.com/s/report-a-problem>.

STEPS TO CREATING YOUR INTELLIGENT MAIL BARCODE

Fact Sheet for Election Mail

The serialized **Intelligent Mail® barcode (IMb®)** is a 65-bar Postal Service™ barcode used to sort and track individual letters and flats. The barcode simplifies data by consolidating information for multiple Postal Service identifiers into one comprehensive location. Using a serialized IMb also expands mailers' ability to track individual mailpieces and gain greater mailstream visibility.



Uniquely serialized IMBs facilitate the tracking of individual Ballot Mail to and from individual voters. For example, a single household may have multiple individual voters residing at the same address. If the IMb on the Ballot Mail envelopes to and from those individual voters have not been uniquely serialized, they cannot be tracked as they move through the mailstream. Election officials will need to maintain the relationship of the serial number to the specific voter.

A uniquely serialized IMb can be applied to all automation compatible letters and flats and is critical for using Informed Visibility® Mail Tracking and Reporting (IV®-MTR) service. The IV-MTR application provides information about when and where the Postal Service sorts a mailpiece on mail-processing equipment. A uniquely serialized IMb can also be used for address correction services: Address Change Service (ACS™), OneCode ACS®, and Intelligent Mail Full-Service ACS™.

PostalPro Resources

The *IV-MTR User Guide* can be found under the IV-MTR User Guides and Training section at <https://postalpro.usps.com/InformedVisibility>.

For guidance on address quality, please visit <https://postalpro.usps.com/address-quality>.

Additional insights into the Intelligent Mail program can be found at <https://postalpro.usps.com/mailling/intelligent-mail-barcode>.

For more information about STIDs, go to <https://postalpro.usps.com/mailling/service-type-identifiers>.

STEP 1: DOWNLOAD AND INSTALL THE ENCODER AND FONT

An IMb consists of a 20-digit tracking code field [Barcode Identifier, Service Type Identifier (STID), Mailer ID (MID), and Serial Number] and a Routing Code (ZIP Code™) field

of up to 11 digits. An encoder is required to convert the numeric digits into a 65-character string representing the bars of the IMb and a special font is required to convert the 65 alpha-character string into the IMb bars. Users can download the fonts and computer source code at <https://postalpro.usps.com/mailling/encoder-software-and-fonts>.

Once the encoder and font are installed, verify the print quality by producing samples, as instructed in the encoder package. *The Intelligent Mail Barcode 4-State Specification USPS-B-3200* and the *Intelligent Mail Barcode Technical Resource Guide* on PostalPro provide extensive technical information about IMBs and can be found at <https://postalpro.usps.com/mailling/intelligent-mail-barcode>.

STEP 2: APPLY FOR A MAILER ID

A MID is required for the IMb tracking code. New MIDs are assigned through centralized USPS® processes, generally through the MID system on the Business Customer Gateway at <https://gateway.usps.com/eAdmin/view/signin>.

STEP 3: POPULATE THE BARCODE FIELDS

The five IMb fields are the Barcode Identifier, the STID, the MID, the Serial Number, and the Routing Code (ZIP Code). Each field has its own unique set of standards, explained below:

The **Barcode Identifier** field should be “00” (zero-zero), with one exception: automation-price eligible flat mail bearing a printed optional endorsement line (OEL). When mailers prepare flat-size pieces using IMb tracking codes to meet automation-price eligibility requirements, the IMb tracking codes on any pieces bearing printed OELs must contain the Barcode Identifier corresponding to the printed OEL used. See the Barcode ID fact sheet on PostalPro at <https://postalpro.usps.com/node/3528> to determine the correct Barcode Identifier.

The attributes that determine which **STID** should appear in an IMb tracking code are the mail class, the ACS service selected, and whether IV-MTR service is desired. See the Service Type Identifier for Ballot Mail fact sheet on page 10 of this kit or visit PostalPro at <https://postalpro.usps.com/mailling/service-type-identifiers> for more information about STIDs.

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SERVICE TYPE IDENTIFIERS FOR BALLOT MAIL

Fact Sheet for Ballot Mail

A **Service Type Identifier (STID)** is a unique three-digit code that indicates the service type for an individual mailpiece. The service code denotes the mail class, address correction option, and whether Informed Visibility® Mail Tracking and Reporting (IV®-MTR) is being used.

As part of the Intelligent Mail® barcode (IMb®), STIDs offer mailers near-real-time tracking visibility on both outbound and return mailpieces. STIDs also provide the Postal Service™ with enhanced tracking capabilities that allow us to quickly identify and process on-hand Ballot Mail throughout the mail network. This helps the Postal Service ensure expeditious processing and delivery of Ballot Mail.

Use of the appropriate STIDs allows for IV-MTR to identify mailpieces, with all expected service combinations, during mail processing. The STIDs shared in this fact sheet are for use only on Ballot Mail. Ballot Mail consists of any mailpiece sent to or from an authorized election official containing a live ballot that may be used to cast a vote in an election.

For other Election Mail (e.g., sample ballots, voter registration applications, absentee applications, and polling place locations), use the appropriate STID for the mail class, ACS™ and IV®-MTR services desired that are identified for First-Class Mail® or USPS Marketing Mail® on the STID Table on PostalPro.

STID FINDER TOOL

The Election Mail and Ballot Mail STID Finder was introduced in early 2024 as a tool to assist election officials and their mail service providers with selecting an appropriate Election Mail and Ballot Mail STID for their outbound mailings. It is critical when utilizing the tool to understand the difference between Ballot Mail and Election Mail in order to select the optimal STID.

The tool asks users to answer a series of yes/no and multiple-choice questions related to the main attributes that determine which STID may match the mailer's needs. It is important to bear in mind that the tool's results are suggestions only. This tool ONLY supports Election Mail and Ballot Mail. All other types of mailings should refer to the full list of STIDs available on Postal Pro at <https://postalpro.usps.com/mailing/service-type-identifiers>.

As always, election officials should consult with their mail service provider or the ACS Help Desk for additional guidance about Ballot Mail STIDs.

RESOURCES:

1. Obtain suggestions on which STID to use on your mailing by using the Election Mail and Ballot Mail STID Finder at <https://postalpro.usps.com/stid-tool>.
2. Consult the Service Type Identifier Table for Ballot Mail on page 12 of this kit to determine the correct STID or visit <https://postalpro.usps.com/mailing/service-type-identifiers>.
3. A detailed description of each STID can be found in Appendix A at <https://postalpro.usps.com/node/461>.
4. For additional support, contact the ACS Help Desk via email at ACS@usps.gov or by phone at 877-640-0724, (select option 2 for IMb).

HOW TO DETERMINE THE RIGHT STID

1. Which direction is the Ballot Mail envelope being mailed?

There are two directions the Ballot Mail envelope may be mailed:

- a. **Outbound:** From the election office to the voter.
- b. **Inbound (or return):** From the voter to the election office.

2. Which mail class is being used?

Ballot Mail STIDs differ depending on whether the ballots are mailed as [First-Class Mail®](#) or [USPS Marketing Mail®](#). We strongly recommend the use of First-Class Mail for all Ballot Mail.

3. Determine whether you want to receive Address Change Service (ACS™) information on the voter.

ACS is a post-mailing service that provides the Postal Service with instructions on how to handle mail that is Undeliverable as Addressed (UAA) and provides you with electronic Change of Address (COA) information or the reason for non-delivery.

- a. **If you do not want to receive ACS data,** use No Address Corrections- No Printed Endorsement.

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b. **If you do want to receive ACS data**, decide how you want to receive the data:

- **Manual Notice:** Physical address correction notice PS Form 3547, *Notice to Mailer of Correction in Address*, will be provided to you with the voter's correct address information.

- **Electronic Notice:**

i. **OneCode ACS®** allows you to receive electronic or automated address corrections through the use of the IMb when mailing a ballot using First-Class Mail or USPS Marketing Mail. More information can be found on <https://postalpro.usps.com/mailing-and-shipping-services/onecode-acs>.

ii. **Full-Service ACS** provides an additional benefit for mail using the Intelligent Mail barcode that qualifies for Full-Service discount postage prices. Full-Service discounts and the resulting Full-Service ACS benefits are available at <https://postalpro.usps.com/node/2788>.

iii. **Traditional ACS** allows you to receive address corrections in an electronic format when mailing a ballot in a letter or flat sized envelope. In addition to the IMb, your mailpieces will be identified with a postal-supplied seven-character alpha identifier known as the ACS participant code and an optional keyline. A keyline is a unique code that allows you to either incorporate existing voter identifiers or create a new system that assists in locating the voter in your database. Additional information is available at <https://postalpro.usps.com/address-quality-solutions/traditional-acs>.

4. Do you want UAA Ballot Mail to be forwarded (if possible), or returned to you?

a. **Forward**

- **Address Service Requested Option 1:** Mail is forwarded, if possible, or returned if forwarding is not possible. A manual or electronic notice with the voter's new address information is provided for forwarded pieces and the address

correction fee is charged. First-Class Mail is forwarded or returned at no charge. USPS Marketing Mail is charged an additional weighted fee for mail that must be returned.

- **Address Service Requested Option 2:**

Mail is forwarded, if possible, or returned if forwarding is not possible. An electronic notice is issued for either result. For First-Class Mail, the piece will be returned to sender at no charge with the reason for non-delivery attached; however, a separate notice with the reason for non-delivery will be provided for a fee. USPS Marketing Mail is charged an additional weighted fee for mail that must be returned.

b. **Return**

- **Return Service Requested Option 2:**

The mailpiece is returned to sender with the new address or reason for non-delivery. First-Class Mail is returned at no charge. USPS Marketing Mail is returned at either the single-piece First-Class Mail or Priority Mail price, depending on the weight of the piece.

5. Do you meet the requirements to be a Full-Service Mailer?

The qualifications to be a Full-Service Mailer can be found on PostalPro at <https://postalpro.usps.com/certifications/standard-full-service-certification-mailers>.

- a. **If yes**, Full-Service with IV-MTR STIDs will match your mailing goals.
- b. **If no**, Basic / Non-Automation with IV-MTR STIDs will match your mailing goals.


IMPORTANT NOTE:


Understand the postage and/or fees, if any, that will be associated with the use of each STID.

If using USPS Marketing Mail, please be aware that, to have the mailpiece forwarded or returned to sender, it must contain the associated printed text ancillary service endorsement. This incurs an additional cost.

SERVICE TYPE IDENTIFIER TABLE

Ballot Mail (Effective January 21, 2024)

Class of Mail	Address Correction Option	Basic or Nonautomation with IV®-MTR*	Full-Service with IV®-MTR*	
Elections Officials to Voters (Outbound)				
First-Class Mail®	No Address Corrections – No Printed Endorsement		715	720
	Manual Address Corrections **		716	
	OneCode ACS®	Forward Ballot- Address Service Requested Opt 1	717	
		Forward Ballot- Address Service Requested Opt 2	718	
		Return Ballot- Return Service Requested Opt 2	713	
	Full Service ACS™	Forward Ballot- Address Service Requested Opt 1		722
		Forward Ballot- Address Service Requested Opt 2		723
		Return Ballot- Return Service Requested Opt 2		725
	USPS Marketing Mail®	No Address Corrections – No Printed Endorsement		735
Manual Address Corrections **		736		
OneCode ACS®		Forward Ballot- Address Service Requested Opt 1 ** \$	737	
		Forward Ballot- Address Service Requested Opt 2 ** \$	738	
		Return Ballot- Return Service Requested Opt 2 ** \$	714	
Full Service ACS™		Forward Ballot- Address Service Requested Opt 1 ** \$		743
		Forward Ballot- Address Service Requested Opt 2 ** \$		744
		Return Ballot- Return Service Requested Opt 2 ** \$		746
Traditional ACS™		Return Ballot- Return Service Requested Opt 2 ** \$	726	
Voter to Election Officials (Return or Inbound)				
First-Class Mail® ***	First-Class Mail Reply		777	
	Business Reply Mail		778	
	Permit Reply Mail		779	
	UOCAVA		780	

 Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA) voters use only. Absent overseas uniformed services voters, as defined in 52 U.S.C. § 20304(d), may return absentee ballots from the following locations by using Priority Mail Express Label 11-DOD without prepaying postage: Overseas APO/FPO military locations; DPO locations; or Department of State (DOS) locations.

\$ Postage and fees are charged for undeliverable mail that is returned to sender.

* Informed Visibility® Mail Tracking & Reporting <https://postalpro.usps.com/InformedVisibility>.

** Requires the printed text ancillary service endorsement. The option selected must not be printed with the endorsement.

*** Return Ballot Mail (i.e., ballots that voters return to election officials) is sent as First-Class Mail at First-Class Mail prices, unless a voter opts to pay for a premium service.

IMPORTANT NOTE: The Address Correction Option identified by the STID requesting ACS in the IMb on Ballot Mail will take precedence over a printed endorsement if there is a conflict. When a printed endorsement is required to receive ACS, as is for USPS Marketing Mail, “ELECTRONIC SERVICE REQUESTED” must be printed.

KEY RESOURCES: Detailed descriptions of the various Ballot Mail STIDs can be found in Appendix A at <https://postalpro.usps.com/node/461>. For other types of Election Mail refer to pages 2 and 4 of the STID Table on PostalPro at <https://postalpro.usps.com/mailling/service-type-identifiers>.

INFORMED VISIBILITY MAIL TRACKING AND REPORTING

Fact Sheet for Election Mail

The Informed Visibility® Mail Tracking and Reporting (IV®-MTR) application provides election officials with near-real-time tracking and enhanced visibility of uniquely barcoded mailpieces as they move through the mailstream. IV-MTR is flexible, so you receive data when and how you want. It is also powerful, enabling you to better plan Election Mail mailings and resources, measure success of each mailing, staff efficiently, and instill confidence in voters that use vote-by-mail.

IV-MTR expands visibility beyond physical scans of mailpieces by leveraging the intelligence of Full-Service Intelligent Mail® and nesting associations. The application creates assumed handling events for nested mail whenever the mail aggregate containing the nested mail is scanned. For example, the scan of a pallet creates assumed events for the trays and pieces that are associated with that pallet.

Barcoding mailpieces with unique serial numbers enables visibility of individual pieces. To make the most of IV-MTR, abide by proper mail preparation and barcoding requirements. Full-service requirements and Intelligent Mail barcode (IMb) guidance are available on PostalPro at <https://postalpro.usps.com/node/2788> and <https://postalpro.usps.com/mailing#cat-subsection-2>.

HOW DOES IV-MTR HELP ELECTION OFFICIALS?

For outgoing mail, IV-MTR data allows you to:

- Obtain near-real-time notification when your mail receives its last processing scan.
- Identify mail delivery trends and anticipated delivery dates.
- Know when mailpieces reach their destination so you can better manage election activities.

For incoming reply mail, IV-MTR data helps you to:

- Obtain near-real-time notification when your return mail enters the mailstream by utilizing a serialized IMb.
- Know when voters' return items are on the way and where they are in the Postal Service™ network.

HOW DO I GET STARTED WITH IV-MTR?

To get started with IV-MTR, you need to register for a Business Customer Gateway account, enable the IV-MTR service, and set up your Election Mail data feeds. Step-by-step instructions are available on the PostalPro page at <https://postalpro.usps.com/node/3656>.

LEARN MORE: <https://postalpro.usps.com/InformedVisibility>

GET ASSISTANCE: IV® Solutions Center
InformedVisibility@usps.gov
1-800-238-3150, Option #2
Monday through Friday (closed federal holidays)

To learn about certified mail service providers (MSPs), please visit <https://postalpro.usps.com/node/3816> and <https://postalpro.usps.com/mailing/election-political-mail>. The latest lists of certified MSPs can be found on these pages under Featured Resources.

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TAG 191, DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL BALLOTS

Fact Sheet for Ballot Mail

The Postal Service™ recommends the use of green **Tag 191, Domestic and International Ballots**, to identify trays and sacks that contain Ballot Mail. Although use of the tag is optional, it provides greater visibility to containers of Ballot Mail as they enter Postal Service processing and distribution operations.

Tag 191 may only be used to identify Ballot Mail addressed for domestic or international delivery. The tag cannot be used to identify containers of other types of Election Mail such as sample ballots, voter registration cards, absentee voting applications and polling place notifications.

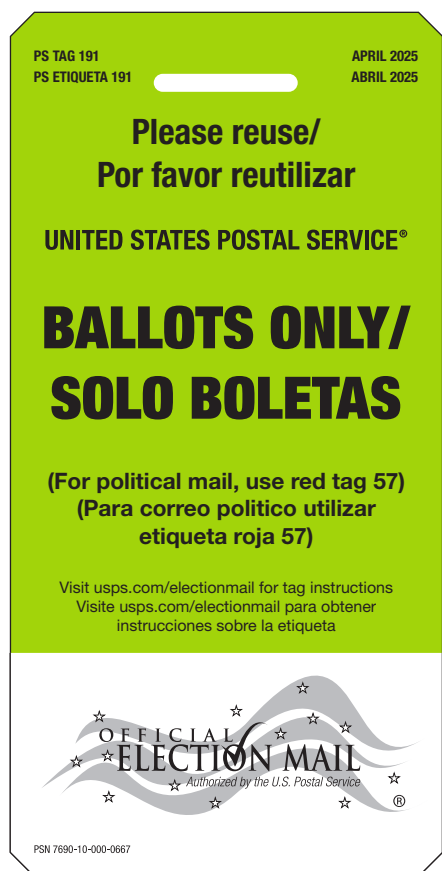
NEW THIS YEAR

An updated version of Tag 191 will be entered into circulation this election year. The April 2025 dated tag features the same text on both sides and has English and Spanish translations, whereas the existing July 2007 dated tag had different faces and was written only in English. Both versions of the tag remain valid.

Please exhaust the existing tags on hand. Business Mail Entry Units (BMEUs) will continue to accept and affix both versions of the tag since they are reusable. Affix Tag 191 to the mail container as follows:

- **Strapped Letter Trays:** Using a plastic twist tie, attach Tag 191 to the strap at the end of the tray that bears the tray label.
- **Non-strapped Letter Trays:** For trays permitted to be tendered without strapping, attach Tag 191 to the tray with a rubber band that is double-looped through the tray handhold at the end that bears the tray label.
- **Sacks and Flat Trays with Flat-Size Mail:** Depending on the type of sack, attach Tag 191 to either the strap or label holder on the sack.

Tags are available at your local BMEU, which can be found at <https://postalpro.usps.com/node/1623> or ordered online at <https://about.usps.com/forms/ps1910.pdf>.



Tag 191 is used to identify your outgoing Ballot Mail only. Tags are available at your local BMEU or can be ordered online at <https://about.usps.com/gov-services/election-mail/>.

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QUALIFIED BUSINESS REPLY MAIL WITH INTELLIGENT MAIL BARCODE ACCOUNTING

Fact Sheet for Election Mail

Qualified Business Reply Mail™ (QBRM™) is a First-Class Mail® service that enables you to pay the return postage (including a per-piece fee) for Election Mail that is mailed to your election office from voters. You can distribute QBRM envelopes and have the mailpieces returned to you at any Post Office™. QBRM utilizes the enhanced processing capability of Intelligent Mail barcode Accounting (IMbA) to reduce processing times.

The reply mail envelopes distributed must conform to a specific format, including use of a unique ZIP+4® assigned by the Postal Service™. Proofs for QBRM must be approved by a Postal Service Mailpiece Design Analyst (MDA) and bear an Intelligent Mail® barcode (IMb®). QBRM can be used only on automation-compatible cards and letter-size mail weighing up to and including 3.5 ounces.

Once you are an approved QBRM mailer, you can enhance your Election Mail processing capability with Intelligent Mail barcode Accounting (IMbA™). IMbA is an automated solution for the counting, rating, invoicing, and billing processes. Using the IMbA on the mailpiece, the mail processing equipment counts destinations approved and assigned to you. Then invoicing is sent daily, directly to *PostalOne!*®.

For more information on QBRM, see *Quick Service Guide 505* and *Mailing Standards of the United States Postal Service, Domestic Mail Manual (DMM)® 505.1.1* and 1.6 available on Postal Explorer at <https://pe.usps.com>.

HOW DOES IMbA ENHANCE THE MAILING PROCESS?

- Processes like scanning, sorting, and rating are automated to get your reply mail to you quicker, which is great for large volumes of reply mail.
- After processing, invoices are automatically created and uploaded to *PostalOne!*.
- The increase in speed creates a more consistent flow of mail and makes more timely mail pickups possible.
- USPS makes constant updates to the IMbA system to improve services and enhance reporting.
- IMbA is provided to QBRM customers at no extra cost.

- Mailers are eligible for annual account maintenance and quarterly fee waivers, and a reduced per-piece fee. Reference Notice 123 on Postal Explorer at <https://pe.usps.gov/text/DMM300/Notice123.htm> for more information.
- Using a unique IMb with ZIP+4 increases mailpiece visibility and tracking.
- Prepaid postage facilitates easy voting for citizens.

HOW DO I GET STARTED WITH QBRM WITH IMbA?

1. Discuss your QBRM needs with a Mailing Requirements Clerk. Contact the Mailing and Shipping Solutions Center (MSSC) by emailing MSSC@usps.gov or calling 877-672-0007 (select option 2 for mailing requirements). Hours of operation are Monday through Friday, 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. Central Time (closed federal holidays).
2. Complete Part A of PS Form 3615, *Mailing Permit Application and Customer Profile* (<https://about.usps.com/forms/ps3615.pdf>), to establish a QBRM permit. Then fill out section 1 of PS Form 6805, *BRM/QBRM Application for ZIP+4 Code Assignment/ Validation and QBRM Approval* (<https://about.usps.com/forms/ps6805.pdf>), to request a unique ZIP+4 for the QBRM address for each price category (letters/postcard). Both forms must be submitted via email to the MSSC – Mailing Requirements Department at MSSC@usps.gov for processing.
3. Set up a Mailer ID (MID) by visiting <https://gateway.usps.com/eAdmin/view/signin> and creating a Business Customer Gateway (BCG) account.
4. Request a unique IMb from your MDA. This request should be made only after your QBRM account is created on the BCG, a unique ZIP+4 has been assigned, and your MID is provided. Customers can receive assistance from a MDA by submitting a design review request at <https://electionmail.usps.com/s/election-mail-review> or by calling 877-672-0007 (select option 3 for mailpiece design). For more information on creating an IMb for Election Mail, see the Steps to Creating Your IMb Fact Sheet on page 8 of this kit.

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5. Design a new QBRM return mail envelope with advice from an MDA. Submit an electronic copy of the QBRM proof in a PDF file with crop marks/borders at 100% (no scaling) to an MDA for review and feedback prior to printing. Physical samples should also be submitted because they are required for reflectance, barcode quality, print/contrast ratio, and QBRM approval. For assistance from a MDA, submit a design review request at <https://electionmail.usps.com/s/election-mail-review> or call 877-672-0007 (select option 3 for mailpiece design).

Mailpiece designs must comply with the following directives:

- Publication 631 — *Official Election Mail — Graphic Guidelines and Logos.*
- Publication 632 — *State and Local Election Mail — User's Guide.*

- Kit 600 — *2026-2027 Official Election Mail Guide.*
 - DMM 201, 202, 204, 505, and 703.8.0.
6. Return PS Form 6805, *BRM/QBRM Application for ZIP+4 Code Assignment/Validation and QBRM Approval* (<https://about.usps.com/forms/ps6805.pdf>), after completing parts 1-5 and with 10 physical samples or paper mockups to ensure compliance with Postal Service regulations and processing systems. The application and 10 samples must be submitted to an MDA for QBRM testing and approval. Customers can receive assistance from a MDA by submitting a design review request at <https://electionmail.usps.com/s/election-mail-review> or by calling 877-672-0007 (select option 3 for mailpiece design).

SPECIAL PROCEDURES: APO/FPO/DPO AND OVERSEAS CITIZENS ABSENTEE BALLOTS

Fact Sheet for Election Mail

SEPTEMBER 1– NOVEMBER 30

The United States Postal Service® and the Military Postal Service Agency have again joined forces to expedite delivery of federal Ballot Mail to overseas military personnel. We recognize the important role that mail plays in the election process and are committed to ensuring that everyone who chooses to vote by mail experiences a smooth, well-organized process — one that provides them with the highest level of trust and confidence.

Program Summary:

- All military ballots mailed by election officials will be subject to special handling procedures. Election officials should send Ballot Mail at least 45 days prior to the November 3, 2026, general elections.
- Local election officials are requested to segregate military absentee Ballot Mail into bundles for the Chicago and Miami International Service Centers (ISCs), which serve as gateways for the military. At the ISCs, Ballot Mail receives special handling.
- Trays or containers of Ballot Mail destined for APO/FPO/DPO (Army and Air Force Post Office/Fleet Post Office/Diplomatic Post Office) addresses and overseas citizens may be identified using Tag 191, *Domestic and International Ballots*, and presented to the Post Office™.
- APO/FPO/DPO Ballot Mail will be sent from local Post Office locations to the nearest Processing and Distribution Center for further processing.
- Facing slips are used to presort loose Ballot Mail, based on bundle size, that are destined to pass through the two ISC military gateways. The facing slips are pictured on the right side of this fact sheet.

ELECTION OFFICIALS: Separate military Ballot Mail by preparing bundles for the two ISC military gateways: Chicago and Miami.

Directions for Marking the Bundles:

ISC Name	ISC State Abbreviation	ISC ZIP Code™ Range
Chicago	AE	090–099
Chicago	AP	962–966
Miami	AA	340

If fewer than five (5) pieces are in a separate bundle, a mixed bundle may be prepared. This bundle must have the facing slip marked, “APO/FPO/DPO MIXED – Absentee Ballots.”

Figures 1, 2, 3, and 4
APO/FPO/DPO and MIXED Facing Slips



APO/FPO/DPO
090 AE IL 62109
Absentee Ballots 090–099



APO/FPO/DPO
ADC MIAMI FL 331
Absentee Ballots 340



APO/FPO/DPO
962 AP IL 62196
Absentee Ballots 962–966



APO/FPO/DPO
MIXED
Absentee Ballots

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UNIFORMED AND OVERSEAS CITIZENS ABSENTEE VOTING ACT (UOCAVA)

As mandated by law, election officials are expected to send ballots to military personnel, their eligible family members, and overseas citizens at least 45 days prior to a federal election. The Postal Service™ is committed to helping election officials meet their obligations with proactive planning and mailpiece preparation.

Get started by doing the following:

- Connect with your Postal Service local Manager, Customer Relations by submitting an inquiry at <https://electionmail.usps.com/s/contact-local-mcr>.
- Discuss the timeline and known deadlines.
- Review address files for military and overseas voters and perform any necessary address maintenance.

- Consult Publication 632, *State and Local Election Mail - User's Guide*, or Postal Explorer for tips on how to properly address internationally bound mailpieces at https://pe.usps.com/text/imm/immc1_008.htm.
- Determine if the mailpiece meets the postage exemption criteria with postage paid as authorized by UOCAVA.
- Obtain and then affix Tag 191, *Domestic and International Ballots*, to your outbound sacks and trays of Ballot Mail. Tags can be ordered online at <https://about.usps.com/forms/ps1910.pdf>.

For more information, please review *Mailing Standards of the United States Postal Service*, Domestic Mail Manual (DMM®) 703.8.2, Pub 632, *State and Local Election Mail - User's Guide* or visit the Federal Voting Assistance Program at <https://www.fvap.gov/vao/overview>.

INFORMED DELIVERY

Fact Sheet for Election Mail

Informed Delivery® is a secure, free, and optional feature that can help election officials connect with voters by providing eligible residential, business, and P.O. Box consumers with a digital preview of their household's incoming mail and the ability to manage their packages all from one location.

Users can view grayscale images of the exterior (address side) of automation-processed, letter-sized mailpieces via a morning Daily Digest email, or at any time via the online dashboard from their phone, computer, or the Informed Delivery Mobile app. Nearly 75 million users are already signed up with an average email open rate exceeding 60 percent. The Postal Service's Informed Delivery feature continues to deliver on its value proposition to election officials by providing the opportunity to reach more voters, target and increase interaction with users, encourage responses to voter engagement campaigns, reach customers digitally from their physical address, and gain more returns on Election Mail campaigns.

Election Official Benefits

- ✓ **Increased Interaction.** Generate multiple impressions to increase awareness of Election Mail, through synchronized physical and digital touchpoints.
- ✓ **Faster Responses.** Use interactive content and clear call-to-actions to help encourage voter response.
- ✓ **Gain Insights.** Informed Delivery Interactive Campaigns provide election officials with the ability to gain insights from reporting.

Voter Benefits

- ✓ **Convenience.** Preview incoming Election Mail via email notifications, an online dashboard, or USPS Mobile App.
- ✓ **Visibility and Security.** Check what's arriving and have peace of mind that Election Mail will be delivered.
- ✓ **Call-to-Action.** Easily respond to the election official's call-to-action by virtually interacting with them before the mailpiece physically arrives.

GET STARTED WITH INFORMED DELIVERY

- 1. Choose Your Submission Method.** An Informed Delivery mailing campaign can be created in either *PostalOne!*®, Mailer Campaigns Portal, or via Application Programming Interface (API). Consider using *PostalOne!* or the API for your complex mailings, especially mailings that have several different treatments.
- 2. Define Your Voter List.** Decide if one treatment will work for all recipients or if you need to have segments within the mailing for specific ZIP Codes™ or counties. The full 11-digit ZIP Code, consisting of a ZIP+4 and delivery-point code, is required for recipients. If you need to segment your mailing, segregate the groups within your mailing list prior to printing or assigning the Intelligent Mail® barcode (IMb®).
- 3. Determine Mailer ID (MID) and/or IMb Serial Number Range.** Identify the MID used for the mailing. Ensure your MID is valid and included in the IMb on the physical mailpieces. Lastly, determine your serial number ranges in the IMb. Your mail service provider (e.g., printer, ad agency) will generally have this information.
- 4. Produce Your Creative Content.** Design the “ride-along” image that will appear in your campaign. Determine your target URL, as well as the call-to-action (i.e., “Register to Vote”). The more compelling your call-to-action is, the more likely a recipient is to respond. Lastly, decide whether you will use the grayscale image provided by the Postal Service™ or use a color representative image.
- 5. Select a Timeline.** You need to consider where the mail is being entered for your Informed Delivery mailing schedule.
- 6. Submit Campaign.** Submit your mailing using your selected submission method from Step 1.
- 7. Analyze Results.** See how your mailing campaign worked! Download your Post-Campaign Reports (Summary and Detailed level) directly from the Mailer Campaign Portal or get a copy of your Post-Campaign Summary report via email by contacting us at USPSInformedDeliveryCampaigns@usps.gov.

Want more information? Visit <https://www.usps.com/business/informed-delivery.htm> or contact your Postal Service sales representative.

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BALLOT MAIL MAILING STANDARDS

Fact Sheet for Ballot Mail

Each election cycle presents new parameters for ballot creation, causing return mailpieces to be different sizes and weights. As a result, many voters do not know the correct amount of postage required to return their ballots by mail.

Balloting materials provided to voters for any election, whether disseminated in hardcopy or electronically, must indicate in a prominent location the proper amount of First-Class Mail® postage that must be applied on return mailings, except in certain circumstances for balloting materials for military and overseas voters or where postage is prepaid. This information must be included in the balloting materials (i.e., on the ballot, ballot instructions, mailing instructions, or on the envelope) with the marking “First-Class Mail postage must be applied.” Alternatively, the marking “Apply First-Class Mail postage here” may be printed in the upper-right corner of the address side of the envelope used by the voter to return the marked ballot to election officials. The Postal Service™ will also accept approved variations of these indicia.

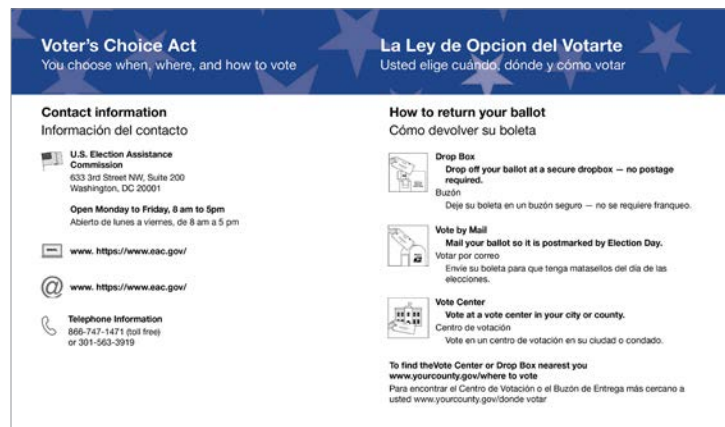
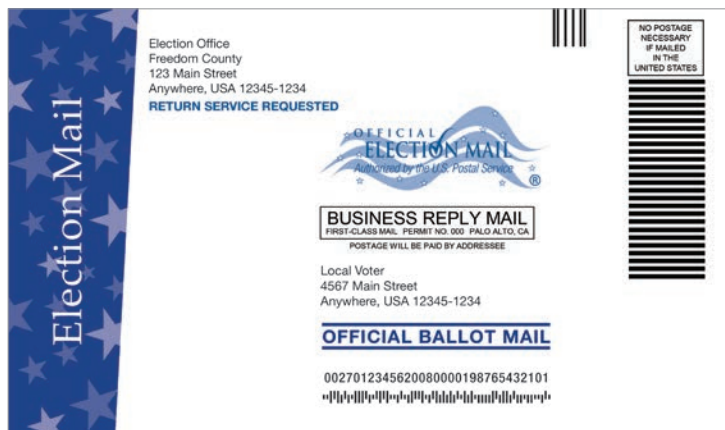
The marking requirements will not apply to balloting materials that meet one of the following exceptions:

- The balloting materials fall under the special exemptions for military and overseas voting.
- The ballot is returned under Business Reply Mail® (BRM) service.
- Return postage is guaranteed through a postage due account.
- Postage on the Ballot Mail envelope is prepaid by stamps, meter, or Permit Reply Mail.

For some of these exceptions, such as BRM, return postage and Permit Reply Mail, the mailpiece will bear the indicia “NO POSTAGE NECESSARY IF MAILED IN THE UNITED STATES” in the upper right-hand corner where postage is typically applied.

Election officials should consult with Postal Service officials to assist with mailpiece design and barcode placement as well as to determine the proper amount of postage required for mailing ballots to voters and the return of marked ballots to election officials. Connect with a Mailpiece Design Analyst by sending a request via the customer portal at <https://electionmail.usps.com/s/election-mail-review> or calling 877-672-0007 (select option 3 for mailpiece design). For more information, please see the *Mailing Standards of the United States Postal Service, Domestic Mail Manual (DMM®) 703.8.0* available on Postal Explorer at <https://pe.usps.gov/text/dmm300/703.htm#ep1174014>.

Ballot Mail Examples



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ELECTION MAIL CHECKBOXES

Fact Sheet for Election Mail

The Postal Service™ encourages election officials to use all available tools to improve the visibility of their Election Mail within the postal network. In particular, we strongly recommend that election officials use the Election Mail Checkboxes in eDoc, Mail.Dat, Mail.XML, Postal Wizard, and Intelligent Mail for Small Business (IMsb) Tool when preparing mail for processing.

To further increase visibility, in July 2024, the existing Election Mail Checkbox was separated into two distinct checkboxes: Election Mail – Official Ballots and Election Mail – Non-Ballot Materials.

As a reminder, *Election Mail* is any item mailed to or from authorized election officials that enables citizens to participate in the voting process, such as sample ballots, voter registration cards, absentee ballot applications, and polling place notifications. *Ballot Mail* is a subset of Election Mail. It consists of any mailpiece sent to or from an authorized election official containing a live ballot that may be used to cast a vote in an election. It is critical that mailers understand the difference between Election Mail and Ballot Mail when selecting the correct checkbox while presenting the mail.

Except for Electronic Verification System (eVS®) mailings, all domestic commercial mailings must use an approved electronic method to transmit a postage statement to the PostalOne!® system.

The Postal Service provides free means of electronic postage statement submission through the IMsb Tool and Postal Wizard. There are also approved third-party software options available on PostalPro at <https://postalpro.usps.com/>

Please check the – “Election Mail - Official Ballots” or “Election Mail – Non-Ballot Materials” box for each mailing presented for acceptance. This provides the Postal Service with important insight into Election Mail and Ballot Mail volume by entry point that may help with future Postal Service capacity planning.

An example of the Election Mail Checkboxes are illustrated below.

HOW DO I GET STARTED WITH ELECTRONIC DOCUMENTATION?

1. For assistance with selecting an appropriate electronic documentation submission method, please discuss your mailing needs with a mailing requirements clerk. Contact the Mailing and Shipping Solutions Center (MSSC) by emailing MSSC@usps.gov or calling 877-672-0007 (select option 2 for mailing requirements).. Hours of operation are Monday through Friday, 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. Central Time (closed federal holidays).
2. Set up a Mailer ID (MID) by visiting <https://gateway.usps.com/eAdmin/view/signin> and creating a Business Customer Gateway (BCG) account.

PS Form 3600-FCM, Postage Statement—First-Class Mail and USPS Ground Advantage

Political Campaign Mailing	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Election Mail - Official Ballots	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Election Mail - Non-Ballot Materials	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No

The Election Mail checkboxes facilitate inclusion in internal operational reporting, which is leveraged by the Postal Service to identify any bottlenecks or service impacts—and drives actions to address them and improve service.

RECOMMENDATIONS ON MAILING COMPLETED BALLOTS

Fact Sheet for Ballot Mail

Each state establishes by law the rules and requirements for ballot submission, including ballot-submission deadlines and the role, if any, that postmarks play in determining whether a ballot was timely. Our general recommendation to election officials is that, as a common-sense measure, they **encourage domestic, nonmilitary voters to mail their completed ballot before Election Day, and at least one week prior to the deadline by which their completed ballot must be received by the election office.** In the normal course of operations, the Postal Service does not postmark, or “cancel” every piece of mail in the system. However, the Postal Service tries to ensure that every return Ballot Mail envelope sent by voters receives a postmark, whether the return envelope is mailed with postage pre-paid by election officials or with a stamp affixed by the voter.

Also, while our postmarking practices have not changed, we have made adjustments to our transportation operations that will result in some mailpieces not arriving

at our originating processing facilities on the same day that they are mailed. Because postmarks are generally applied at those processing facilities, this means that the date on the postmarks applied at those facilities may not necessarily match the date of mailing.

A voter can ensure that a postmark is applied to his or her return Ballot Mail envelope, and that the date on the postmark matches the date of mailing, by visiting a Postal Service retail location and requesting a manual (local) postmark at the retail counter when dropping off the mailpiece for mailing. Manual postmarks will be applied free of charge.

For more information on our postmarking practices, review the fact sheet included on page 27 of this kit or DMM 608.11.0: Postmarks and Postal Possession, on Postal Explorer at <https://pe.usps.gov/text/dmm300/608.htm#11.0>.

Figures 1, 2, and 3

Sample Postmarks (Images not to scale)



POSTMARKS AND POSTAL POSSESSION

Fact Sheet for Election Mail

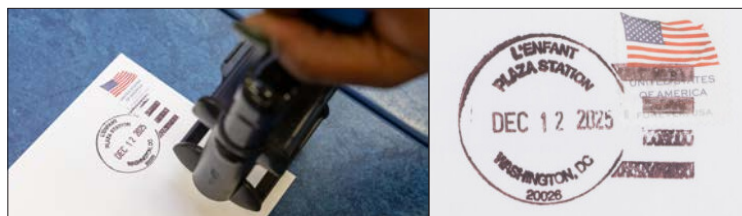
The Postal Service has not changed and is not changing our postmarking practices. Postmarks are generally applied at our originating processing facilities and will continue to be applied at those facilities in the same manner and to the same extent as before. Postmarks applied at those facilities will continue to contain the name or location of the facility that applied the postmark and the date on which the first automated processing operation was performed on that mailpiece.

However, as the Postal Service continues to modernize our transportation network and optimize our transportation operations, it will become more common that some mailpieces will not arrive at our originating processing facilities on the same day that they were initially accepted by the Postal Service. This means that the date on the postmarks applied at our processing facilities will not necessarily match the date on which the customer's mailpiece was collected by a letter carrier or dropped off at a retail location.

To improve public awareness of what the postmark is and the information it conveys, and in recognition of the fact that our regulations did not formally define the postmark or explain when and how it is applied, the Postal Service updated the Domestic Mail Manual to

- Define what the postmark is,
- Identify the types of Postal Service markings that qualify as postmarks,
- Describe the circumstances under which those markings are applied,
- Clarify the scope of the information that those markings do and do not convey, and
- Advise customers of how to obtain evidence of the date on which the Postal Service accepted possession of their mailings.

Figure 4
Sample Postmarks (*Images not to scale*)



While none of this information is unique to Election Mail, we understand that some jurisdictions refer to postmarks in their election laws and rules, and that customers may want guidance on how to ensure that their mailpiece receives a postmark with a date that matches the date of mailing.

THE KEY POINTS ARE AS FOLLOWS:

1. A postmark is a marking applied by the Postal Service to a mailpiece. If applied at a retail unit, the postmark displays the name or location of the retail unit and the date on which the mailpiece was accepted at the retail unit. If applied at a processing facility, the postmark displays the name or location of the processing facility and the date of the first automated processing operation performed on that mailpiece.
2. The presence of a postmark confirms that the Postal Service accepted custody of a mailpiece, and that the mailpiece was in the possession of the Postal Service on the identified date. However, the postmark date does not necessarily indicate the first day that the Postal Service had possession of the mailpiece, and the absence of a postmark does not imply that the Postal Service did not accept custody of a mailpiece.
3. **If a customer wants to ensure that their Ballot Mail (or other mailpiece) receives a postmark, and that the date on the postmark aligns with the date of mailing, the customer may take the mailpiece to a Postal Service retail location and request a manual (local) postmark at the retail counter when tendering their mailpiece. The manual postmark will be applied free of charge.**

Our general recommendation remains unchanged: For domestic, non-military voters who choose to use the mail to return their completed ballot, the Postal Service recommends, as a common-sense measure, that they mail their completed ballot before Election Day, and at least one week before it must be received by their election office.

For more information, please review *Mailing Standards of the United States Postal Service*, Domestic Mail Manual (DMM®) 608.11.0: Postmarks and Postal Possession, on Postal Explorer at <https://pe.usps.gov/text/dmm300/608.htm#11.0>.

ELECTION MAIL SECURITY

Fact Sheet for Election Mail

ELECTIONS AND U.S. POSTAL INSPECTION SERVICE

The United States Postal Inspection Service® is the federal law enforcement organization assigned to protect the mail, including ballots mailed to and from voters domestically and abroad. This important work is overseen by postal inspectors, who are sworn federal agents, specially chosen and trained to ensure that laws are enforced, crimes are prevented, and the nation's Election Mail is securely delivered.

SECURITY OF VOTERS AND ELECTION MAIL

Postal inspectors respond to criminal and security incidents involving Election Mail, including:

- Mail theft
- Identity theft
- Fraud
- Natural and man-made disasters

Additionally, postal inspectors respond to mail-related incidents involving suspicious and threatening communications along with dangerous items or substances associated with mail.

SECURITY OF ELECTION OFFICIALS

Postal inspectors work with state and federal authorities to:

- Investigate threats to election officials sent by mail.
- Secure the postal network as a component of national critical infrastructure.
- Provide information to election officials to help them identify and mitigate suspicious mail and other security risks involving the mail.

CONTACT THE U.S. POSTAL INSPECTION SERVICE

To report suspicious mail and Election Mail-related security or criminal incidents, call the 24-hour National Law Enforcement Communications Center at 877-876-2455 (select option 4 for Election Mail issues) or visit <https://www.uspis.gov/report>.

The U.S. Postal Inspection Service also coordinates with the USPS Office of Inspector General when allegations of Postal Service employee misconduct arise. Learn more about their work at <https://www.uspsoig.gov>.



NEXT STEPS

Fact Sheet for Election Mail

1. Familiarize yourself with the content of Kit 600, 2026-2027 Official Election Mail Guide.

For your convenience, we have also made Kit 600 available at <https://about.usps.com/election-mail/election-mail-resources.htm>.

2. Consult with your local Manager, Customer Relations.

The local Managers, Customer Relations (MCRs) are designated Postal Service™ employees who will help you coordinate with the Postal Service for best results. MCRs are your primary points of contact and can provide guidance on the mailing process and help match postal services to your needs.

Connect with your local MCR by submitting an inquiry at <https://electionmail.usps.com/s/contact-local-mcr>.

3. Work with a Mailpiece Design Analyst.

The Postal Service recommends that election officials have all Ballot Mail envelope designs reviewed each year by an Mailpiece Design Analyst (MDA) prior to printing, even if the designs have been previously approved. MDAs are experts on Postal Service mailpiece design standards and can ensure that all mailings are compliant with current Postal Service regulations as well as postage and automation requirements.

To take advantage of this free service, submit a design review request at <https://electionmail.usps.com/s/election-mail-review> or call 877-672-0007 (select option 3 for mailpiece design). Hours of operation are Monday through Friday, 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. Central Time (closed federal holidays). Also, mailpiece design information is available online at <https://postalpro.usps.com/mailing/mailpiece-design-analyst-mda-customer-service-help-desk>.

4. Consider consulting with a certified Mail Service Provider.

A Mail Service Provider (MSP) offers a variety of solutions to mail owners seeking assistance with the preparation and presentation of Full-Service presort mailings. To learn about certified mail service providers (MSPs), please visit <https://postalpro.usps.com/>

[node/3816](https://postalpro.usps.com/mailing/election-political-mail) and <https://postalpro.usps.com/mailing/election-political-mail>. The latest lists of certified MSPs can be found on these pages under Featured Resources.

There are many advantages of using an MSP to prepare Election Mail. An MSP can:

- Provide/manage your address list.
- Print and/or presort your mailing.
- Ensure your mailing receives the greatest discounts available.
- Manage mailing feedback, such as address correction service data.
- Monitor mail quality reports.

5. Contact a mailing requirements clerk.

Discuss your reply mail needs with a Mailing Requirements Clerk. Contact the Mailing and Shipping Solutions Center (MSSC) by emailing MSSC@usps.gov or calling 877-672-0007 (select option 2 for mailing requirements). Hours of operation are Monday through Friday, 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. Central Time (closed federal holidays).



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