

The Basics of Voting

An Introduction to Voting

KNOW YOUR VOTING RIGHTS!

- Because of the The Voting Rights Act of 1965, all American citizens have the right to vote. The Voting Rights Act includes a ban against election practices that discriminate on the basis of color, race, gender, minority group, nationality, and disability.
- The Voting Rights Act requires federal spectators at polling places to prevent voting discrimination. It allows citizens to register to vote by mail, and stops the removal of voters from the polling place without a legal reason.
- Voters who are non-English speakers are allowed under the Act to have language assistance at the polling place.
- Many states currently guarantee employees paid time off to vote. Regulations about time off for voting are different from state to state.

For more information on voting rights, contact:

**U.S. Department of Justice
Civil Rights Division**

Online:

www.usdoj.gov/crt/voting/overview.htm#vra

Phone: 1-800-253-3931

American Civil Liberties Union

Online: <http://www.aclu.org/votingrights/>

Phone: 202-457-0800 Mail: ACLU

125 Broad Street, 18th Floor New York, NY 10004

Why Vote?

In an election, your vote says who you want to represent you in public office. It is your way of showing your concerns, wants, and needs to elected officials. That is why voting is so important – it is how you make yourself heard.

Who Can Vote?

In every state, voters must be over the age of 18 by Election Day, a citizen of the United States, and registered to vote. However, states differ on other laws, such as if and when a person who has been convicted of a felony can vote. If your state has additional eligibility requirements, they will be clearly stated when you register.

Don't Know Who to Vote For?

A ballot will include local, state and national elections as well as other issues, often called initiatives, for you to vote on. You do not have to vote in each race for your vote to count. You can vote for the elections and issues that you are familiar with and *leave those you don't know blank*. The sections you do vote in will still be counted.



Registering to Vote

Before voting in a state or local election, you must register to vote. The process of registering varies from state to state but, generally is a simple procedure of proving that you live in the area where you are voting. For most states there is a deadline to register to vote; it is usually a month to a week before the election.

There are usually several places voters can pick up a voter registration form, such as the post offices, public libraries, and government offices. You can also visit your city hall to fill out a registration form in person. When going to the office, bring:

- a state driver's license or other government issued photo identification
- a bill or some other document with proof of your address on it.

The Women Work! web site has links to each state's specific registration form and on-line registration if one is offered. Visit www.womenwork.org/policy/voterinfo.htm or call 202-467-6346.

Voting Absentee

The Absentee Ballot process allows citizens to vote even if they are away from home or cannot get to the polls on Election Day. This process provides voters the opportunity to complete their voter registration and vote by mail, fax, or bringing the ballot to a different location than their polling place.

Who is able to vote by absentee ballot varies by state. To learn if you are able to vote absentee in your state, visit the Women Work! website at www.womenwork.org/gotv/smvep.htm.

Each state also has different deadlines for when absentee ballots must be turned in, but it is a good idea to **request your ballots as early as possible**. The deadline is usually at least a week from the election.



To Vote Using an Absentee Ballot:

Step 1: Get a Federal Post Card Application.

- Go to the *Federal Post Card Application* at <http://www.fvap.gov/pubs/fpca.html>
- Call Federal Voting Assistance Program free of charge at 1-800-438-8683.

Step 2: Turn in your Federal Post Card Application as directed in the application. Be sure to provide correct and updated address and contact information. Wait for approval or a request for more information from your local election official.

Step 3: Double check the absentee voting deadlines for your state so you know how long you have to mail your ballot in.

Step 4: Complete your absentee ballot and mail it in by the deadline.

Absentee Voting Cont'd

If you have questions about the absentee voting process, you can contact:


General/ Federal Voting Assistance Program:


1-800-438-VOTE (8683); Federal Voting Assistance Program, Department of Defense, 1155 Defense Pentagon, Washington, DC 20301-1155; vote@fvap.ncr.gov; <http://www.fvap.gov/>


You can also contact your local election official. They are most likely listed in your local phone book. Often an election official is a Deputy Secretary of State, State Election Commissioner, or Director of Elections Legal Counsel.


On Election Day

Types of Ballots

 **Paper Ballot:** Voters mark their decisions by hand on a ballot printed with the candidates' names. All ballots are physically counted by election officers.

 **Punch Card:** The punch card system requires voters to punch out a pre-cut mark from the paper ballot.

 **Voter Verified Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT):** This application is used with computer-based voting, and prints a copy of the voter's choices in order to verify the voter's intent.

 **Direct Record Voting System (DRE):** Voters touch the name of their choice on a computer screen or push a button next to a candidate list.

To learn more about the type of ballot your state uses, visit
http://uspolitics.about.com/od/elections/bl_evoting_states.htm.

Going to Vote

Once you have registered, you will be assigned a specific polling place where you will go to vote. Your polling place is determined by your address. Most states will inform you of this location when you register.

To Find Your Polling Place

The League of Women Voters Education Fund has a web site to help you find your polling place based on your address. Visit www.vote411.org or call 202-429-1965.

What to Take With You to Vote

When going to vote it is important to take government issued photo identification, such as a driver's license. If you do not have a driver's license, contact your city hall to see what other forms of identification you can use.

Some states also require you to bring a voter identification card. If this is the case in your state, the voter identification card will be sent to you after you register.

You can take your children with you when you go to vote; it's a great opportunity to teach them about democracy!