

MS 253 Voter Assistance Program Procedures

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MS 253 Voter Assistance Program

1.0 Overseas Voting Forms and Procedures

Voting forms and materials will be provided to overseas Posts by the voting officer. They should be used as indicated below. Supplemental instructions and guidance may be provided by the voting officer by separate memoranda concerning special and other elections and any current problem involved in absentee voting. Specific questions concerning the Voter Assistance Program may be addressed to:

Peace Corps Voting Officer
Office of Administrative Services
1111 20th Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20526

2.0 Voting Forms

- (a) Form SF-76-A, Registration and Absentee Ballot Request - Federal Post Card Application, is a simultaneous registration and/or absentee ballot request used by U.S. citizens voting pursuant to the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (Absentee Voting Act).
- (b) Virtually every State and territory allows use of forms downloaded from the Internet so these may be used by Post in an emergency. See the Federal Voting Assistance Program guidance about the *online* Federal Post Card Application (<http://www.fvap.gov/resources/media/fpca.pdf>).

- (c) Form SF-186-A, Federal Write-in Absentee Ballot, is a back-up ballot that can be used by Absentee Voting Act citizens in general elections for Federal offices under three very specific conditions in which a citizen must:
- (1) Be located outside the United States;
 - (2) Apply for a regular ballot early enough so that the appropriate local election official receives the request at least 30 days before the election or by the State's deadline, whichever is later; and
 - (3) Not have received the requested regular absentee ballot from the State.
- (d) The Form SF-186-A, Federal Write-in Absentee Ballot (FWAB), is available online.
- (e) Posts should maintain a sufficient stock of Forms SF-76-A, Registration and Absentee Ballot
- (f) Request - Federal Post Card Application and Forms SF-186-A, Federal Write-in Absentee Ballot on hand to provide voters who do not receive their absentee ballots in time to complete and return them by the ballot receipt deadline.

3.0 Procedures and Material Descriptions

The Federal Voting Assistance Program Webpage has an excellent Web site that provides extensive information and training materials. It also contains information for U.S. citizens covered by the Absentee Voting Act, such as voter registration deadlines; a downloadable form for registration and absentee ballot request; links to current office holders; list of Federal, state and local candidates; and media Web site links in every State for current information about candidates and issues.

3.1 Voting Assistance Guide

The Voting Assistance Guide is a compilation of absentee voting regulations, laws, deadlines, and procedures. It is the primary source of information for citizens covered by the Absentee Voting Act regarding the procedures for registering to vote, requesting a ballot, and voting in their State or territory of legal residence. The guide is issued by the Department of Defense and is regularly updated to accommodate state changes. The guide contains general information for each State but may not answer all questions which arise. A copy of the guide or access to the electronic version must be kept at each Peace Corps office for use by Country Directors and other staff members to answer questions concerning these procedures. If the booklet does not contain the required information, the individual should write directly to the person's local election authority or contact the Peace Corps voting officer.

3.2 Federal Post Card Application

Overseas voters must register and request an absentee ballot in their State of legal residence by completing a Federal Post Card Application according to that State or territory's specific instructions and submitting the application to their local election office. In most States and

territories, one Federal Post Card Application can be used to request ballots for primary and general elections for Federal offices (President/Vice President, U.S. Senator, U.S. Representative, Delegate or Resident Commissioner). Voters should submit a new Federal Post Card Application each year and whenever they change mailing addresses.

The Federal Post Card Application is available online and can be completed using an automated assistant at www.fvap.gov; or using a paper form (Attachment 1). The completed Federal Post Card Application may be sent by mail, email or fax. Voters should consult the Voting Assistance Guide for their particular State's submission requirements.

Although completing the Federal Post Card Application's online is encouraged, the voting officer will forward a supply of printed Federal Post Card Applications to each Country Director, who in turn will forward the forms to each Volunteer or staff. Many States (listed in the Voting Assistance Guide) permit the use of a Federal Post Card Application as an application for both registration and for an absentee ballot. However, the practices in this regard are not uniform and are subject to change. Volunteers or staff, therefore, should send the Federal Post Card Application to their Election Board, requesting that the card be considered as an application for registration and for an absentee ballot, or if this is not possible, that the Board provide immediate information as to the necessary procedures. (If Volunteers or staff are in doubt as to the correct address, they should address the request to the Secretary of State in their own State, who will either respond directly or will forward the inquiry to the appropriate election official.) The Federal Post Card Application must be completed by the person intending to vote.

When paper Federal Post Card Applications are submitted, the completed form may be sent by diplomatic pouch to the voting officer who will forward it to the appropriate local jurisdiction. No postage is necessary. In cases where time is critical, international airmail (with postage) may provide quicker service.

3.3 Receiving a Blank Ballot from Local Election Officials

Local election officials verify the voters meeting the jurisdiction's residency requirements and decide which ballot to send to the voter. The local election officials normally contact an individual if there are any questions or if the application has been denied. Therefore, it is important to provide complete contact information, including an email address.

An individual may contact the local election office with questions regarding the status of the Federal Post Card Application. Some States have voter registration verification websites where voters can verify their registration status. Links to these websites and contact information for local election officials can be found at www.fvap.gov.

3.4 Receiving and Completing an Absentee Ballot

In some cases, the ballot will be received directly by the Volunteer or staff. When received by the Peace Corps at a training site or in the host country, the ballot will be immediately forwarded to the Volunteer or staff member by the Country Director. The Volunteer or staff member must then complete the ballot and return the completed ballot using the diplomatic pouch and/or express mail.

3.5 Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot

If a voter has registered and requested a ballot by their State's request deadline, or at least 30 days before the election, whichever is later, the voter may use the Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot any time before the election. A completed Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot must be received by the local election office by the deadline for receipt of State absentee ballots for that election. In most cases, voters can only use the Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot to vote for Federal offices.

The Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot can be completed using an automated assistant at www.fvap.gov, or using a paper form (attachment 2) and may be returned by mail, email or fax.

Voters should consult the Voting Assistance Guide for their particular State's submission requirements for returning a Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot.

3.6 Witnessing

The following States have witnessing requirements for the Federal Post Card Application: Alabama and Puerto Rico. Under certain circumstances, Hawaii, Tennessee, and Virginia require witnesses.

The following States and Commonwealths have witnessing requirements for the the Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot: Alabama, Alaska, Puerto Rico, Virginia, and Wisconsin. Under certain circumstances, Tennessee requires witnesses.

Any required witness must sign in the witness section of the Voter's Declaration/Affirmation.

To learn more, please refer to the State's section in the Voting Assistance Guide by visiting <http://www.fvap.gov/vao/vag>.

4.0 Effective Date

These Procedures shall become effective on the date of issuance of MS 253.