Pennsylvania Department of State

Guide to Running a Voter Registration and Mail Ballot Application Drive in Pennsylvania

Date: September 22, 2025
Version: 7

Introduction

The purpose of this guide is to provide general guidelines and best practices to organizations that want to help citizens register to vote and apply for a mail ballot in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

This guide is not intended as legal advice. Any person or group undertaking a voter registration or mail ballot application drive (referred to in this guide as "voter drive" or "drive") should consult with an attorney to ensure their efforts comply with federal and state law. Organizers are strongly encouraged to notify the county elections office in any county where they will be organizing a drive to ensure they plan their efforts with local practices and circumstances in mind. Understanding counties' intake processes for applications and their procedures related to processing applications can help avoid unnecessary delays.

Voter drives offer an important service to Pennsylvanians by providing a convenient opportunity to register to vote or update voter registration information. They also present opportunities for voters to apply to vote by mail. By the same token, organizations that hold voter drives take on an important responsibility to the voters they assist.

To be of service to voters, persons and organizations that run voter drives should:

- Ensure that volunteers know and follow the law and specifically the qualifications for voter registration in Pennsylvania.
- Ensure that the individuals they are assisting understand the requirements necessary to register to vote and the serious ramifications of unlawful registration.
- Take steps to ensure voters fill out registration and mail ballot applications completely and accurately.
- Submit completed voter registration and ballot applications as soon as practicable, but in no event later than the applicable deadline. Delaying delivery of completed applications to the correct county may result in confusion on the part of applicants, prompting them to submit duplicate applications, and create burdens for county elections offices processing significant numbers of applications submitted close to the applicable deadline.
- Deliver applications to the correct county voter registration office. Delivering applications to a county other than the county of an applicant's residence may result in an application being deemed untimely.
- Follow best practices for submitting applications.
- Provide helpful information to voters when they have questions.

This guide provides information you will need when planning and executing an effective voter registration and mail ballot application drive in Pennsylvania.

Contact Information

For questions related to the contents of this guide, contact the Department of State or your local county elections office.

Pennsylvania Department of
State Bureau of Elections
401 North St. Ste. 210
Harrisburg, PA 17120

1-877-VOTES-PA (1-877-868-3772)
RA-voterreg@pa.gov

County contact information is available at vote.pa.gov/county.

Know the Rules

When planning and administering your voter drive, it is important to know the rules about staffing the drive, who is eligible to vote, the requirements for applying for a mail ballot, and the deadlines for submitting applications, among other things. In addition, the workers who staff the drive should be prepared to respond to questions from voters about their voting rights. **A list of Frequently Asked Questions from voters is included in this guide.**

The Department of State's website, vote.pa.gov, is the best source for up-to-date and accurate information about elections and voting in Pennsylvania. Make sure you are familiar with available resources, including the Department's Election Directives and Guidance and Voter Education Toolkit.

Voting and Mail Ballot Eligibility

To be eligible to register to vote in Pennsylvania, an applicant must meet three criteria. They must:

1. Be a citizen of the United States for at least one month before the next election.
2. Be a resident of Pennsylvania and the election district in which they want to register and vote for at least 30 days before the next election.
3. Be at least 18 years of age on or before the day of the next election.

Individuals currently incarcerated on a felony conviction and those who have been convicted of violations of the Election Code are <u>not</u> eligible to register to vote. More information can be found here.

Any eligible, registered voter can apply to vote by mail without a justification or excuse.

When to Fill Out a Voter Registration Form

Voters can use the voter registration application to:

- Register to vote.
- Update the registration address on their voter record.
- Update the mailing address on their voter record.
- Change the name on their voter record.
- Change their political party affiliation.

Individuals assisting applicants should make sure that the applicant is not submitting duplicate information. To assist in finding out their current registration status and details, applicants can look up their record at vote.pa.gov/status.

Deadlines

- Voter registration deadlines are **15 days** before the next election. Voter registration applications sent by mail must be received in the county elections office by end of business hours on the day of the deadline. Late applications are not accepted, even if they were postmarked by the deadline.

Mail ballot application deadlines are **seven days** before the next election. Online mail ballot applications are also due by end of business hours on the day of the deadline. Online voter registration applications must be submitted by midnight on the day of the deadline.

Hand-delivered applications must be received by the county elections office by close of business on the day of the deadline.

Applicants who entrust their applications to a voter drive have a reasonable expectation that their applications will be submitted to the appropriate county elections office without delay. **Drive organizers should not wait until the deadline to submit completed applications**. Doing so could delay processing of the applications, and it could prompt applicants to submit a subsequent duplicate application. Waiting until the deadline to submit an application for a mail ballot could leave the voter with insufficient time to receive, complete, and return their ballot.

Address Requirements

Voters must register using their home residence address. It must be a Pennsylvania address.

- For college students, this may be their residence at school, or where they reside the rest of the year. They must choose one and can only vote in that district.
- For persons without a permanent residence, they may register at the place where they temporarily reside.
- Voters may not register using a Post Office (P.O.) Box as their residence. However, they may use a P.O. Box as their mailing address.
- Voters applying for a mail ballot can choose to have their ballot sent to any address, even if it is outside of Pennsylvania and not the address on their voter registration record.

Many voter drives target specific voters, like students, incarcerated individuals, and voters with disabilities. Additional information on residence requirements is included in the section "Voters With Special Considerations."

Nuances related to registration and mailing addresses can be one of the most challenging parts of the registration and mail voting process. For important considerations about registration and mailing addresses, refer to the "How to Complete an Application" section.

Organization requirements

In Pennsylvania, there is no requirement for organizations to register with the state in order to conduct a voter registration or mail ballot application drive. However, such organizations are strongly encouraged to communicate with county elections offices about your plans for the drive, as well as consult with an attorney. (See page 14 for a list of information to review with county elections officials.)

Who can help others register or apply for a mail ballot?

You or your organization's staff can help a citizen complete a voter registration form, as long as the person providing assistance remains nonpartisan and does not attempt to influence or critique the applicant's chosen political affiliation. If you fill in any portion of the registration application on behalf of a voter, you must sign the application and provide your address. While the organization's name can go on the address line, it is important that the name of the individual providing assistance is on the form.

With respect to mail ballot applications, you or your organization's staff can assist voters in completing such applications. You will only need to provide your information if signing on behalf of the voter because the voter's illness or physical disability prevents them from being able to do so themselves.

Know the Law

You should consult with an attorney to make sure you understand what activities are not permitted by law. For example, there may be certain political activities that are not allowed if your organization is a nonprofit organization. If you run a nonprofit organization, it may be useful to consult IRS guidelines. In addition, federal law prohibits providing incentives to voters for registering for federal elections. For example, it would be against the law to give someone a gift for registering to vote in a presidential election. In addition, Pennsylvania law prohibits anyone from giving a person a payment or financial incentive for obtaining a voter registration if the payment or incentive is based on the number of registrations or applications obtained. Consult with an attorney for specific, detailed advice about what activities are prohibited.

How to Submit Voter Registration and Mail Ballot Applications

One of the first steps in planning your voter registration or mail ballot application drive is to decide how voters will complete the application form. There are two options for submitting online applications, in addition to the paper application method. The Department of State highly recommends using one of the online registration and mail ballot application tools.

Online Voter Registration and Ballot Applications

Voters may register, update their registration, and apply for a mail ballot all through the Department of State website at vote.pa.gov. Voters whose information is up to date can apply for a mail ballot at vote.pa.gov/ApplyMailBallot.

- Completing applications online reduces errors in data entry.
- Online applications are submitted immediately, reducing processing time. Completing applications online saves the cost of postage, or a trip to the county elections office.

To register voters online or submit online applications for mail ballots, you'll need to have internet access where you are conducting the drive, and access to a device such as a phone, tablet, or computer.

You will also need a way to upload photos of applicants' signatures in the event they do not have a PennDOT ID number.

Department of State Web API

Developing a web application program interface (web API) requires greater resources from your organization, but it offers the best options for information tracking. If you do not have the resources to develop your own web API, you may become an authorized affiliate of an organization that has developed one.

You may register through the Department of State to use a web API at https://paovrwebapi.vote.pa.gov/SUREWebAPIAdmin/. You will need to create a username and password to submit the request. You will also need to agree to the Department's Terms of Use for using web API.

After you submit your registration, a Department of State representative will communicate with you within a week.

You should consider the factors below when deciding whether to participate in the API offering:

- Web API is a good option if your organization has the capacity and funding to develop a web application.
- The web application you create can be custom-branded and integrated into your organization's website.
- You can use web API to gather applicant contact information to stay in touch with voters for other purposes. You can also obtain demographic information or collect other information from applicants related to your organization's mission. (You may collect and retain information only subject to the Department's Terms of Use for web API.).

- By using web API, you can track the status of submitted applications and track more information about how the applications are processed and accepted.
- More information is available at dos.pa.gov/paovrwebapi.

Paper Voter Registration and Mail Ballot Applications

Paper applications are often the most cost-effective option, and they are easy to distribute to volunteers. However, given the availability of online forms, there are several disadvantages to using paper applications.

- Paper applications can be misplaced.
- Poor handwriting and human error in data entry can lead to errors with paper applications.
- Paper applications contain personal identifying information of registrants that may put applicants at risk if the applications are not properly secured before delivery to the appropriate county.
- It is harder to ensure that all required fields are completed with a paper application, which can lead to delays in processing the registration or ballot application.
- Paper applications need to be mailed or hand-delivered to the county elections office, which can be costly and time-intensive.
- Because there may be delays in submitting paper applications, they can result in more duplications and burdens.

Paper applications are available for download on the Department's website. You may also request paper applications by emailing ra-voterreg@pa.gov.

For more information about any of the options listed above, contact the Pennsylvania Department of State at:
- 1-877-VOTESPA (1-877-868-3772)
- ra-voterreg@pa.gov

How to Complete an Application

Follow these guidelines for completing voter registration and mail ballot applications. **Applications should be complete, accurate, and submitted only once.**

One of the most important services you can provide is ensuring the voter includes all the necessary information on the application. Missing or inaccurate information on the voter registration or mail ballot application may delay processing and prevent the person from registering or receiving their ballot in time for the election.

Duplicate applications can also be a significant cause of delay.
- If someone is not sure of their registration status, look up their information before you have them complete an application. Voter status can be found at vote.pa.gov/status.

Tips for Voters
- If you are completing a paper voter registration or mail ballot application, **take your time**

and write clearly, using a pen with blue or black ink. If the county cannot read your handwriting, it will cause errors or delays in processing your application.

- **It is a good idea to include your phone number or email address**, even though it is not required. This will allow the county to contact you in case there are any questions about your registration or ballot application.
- If you have moved, include your previous address.
- **Reminder: When writing your mailing address, remember to use the address where the mail will be picked up: Mail ballots are often designated as non-forwardable.**
- Be sure to sign your full name and date the form!

Tips for Voters for the Online Voter Registration Application

A voter's signature is an important part of their voter registration record. Make sure the voter completes the following steps to ensure their record contains a signature when registering to vote online.

- **If you have a Pennsylvania driver's license or PennDOT ID card, provide that number.** If you do not have a PennDOT ID, enter the last four (4) digits of your Social Security number. **This is especially important when registering online.** The county will use the signature on file with PennDOT to complete your voter registration. If you do not provide a valid PennDOT ID number, you will need to either upload a signature or send in a signature by mail. The online voter registration application cannot process information from a paper PennDOT Driver's License Update or from a junior license.
- **Input your information the way it is on your PennDOT ID card so that the online voter registration application can find a matching record in PennDOT's files. This includes middle names or initials, double or hyphenated names, and address abbreviations.**
- If you do not have a usable Pennsylvania driver's license or PennDOT ID card, you may upload a signature. Follow these instructions to upload a signature:
    - Sign your full name on clean, white paper.
    - Use a blue or black pen or marker.
    - Take a digital photo of the signature.
    - Make sure the picture is high contrast (dark letters on a white background).
    - Do not upload a picture of an ID card or any other
    images. Images must:
    - Be in JPG, BMP, PNG, or TIFF file format.
    - Have a resolution of 65 dpi or greater.
    - Be at least 180 x 60 pixels.

If you do not have a Pennsylvania driver's license or PennDOT ID card and you do not upload a signature:
    - Select "continue" to print and mail the signature request form.
    - Print the signature request form, complete it, and mail it to your county.
    - If you do not submit a signature, your county elections office will send you a signature request form.

Poll Worker Recruitment

When people complete a voter registration application, they have the option to indicate that they are interested in being a poll worker. If a voter says they want to learn more about the job, encourage them to check the box. Note that some individuals, such as certain state and local government employees, are not permitted to serve as poll workers. Learn more on the Department's [Become a Poll Worker](#) webpage.

Why become a poll worker?

Pennsylvania depends on poll workers to run smooth elections, but it is increasingly hard for counties to find enough people to work on Election Day. They also need people from all backgrounds. For example, many counties need poll workers who are fluent in more than one language. It also helps to have workers who are comfortable learning how to set up and operate voting equipment and use electronic poll books. Serving as a poll worker is a great way to be involved in the community, earn some extra money, and support the democratic process.

What does the job entail?

Poll workers generally work for the entire day on Election Day, from before the polls open at 7:00 am, until after the polls close at 8:00 pm.

Each poll worker's responsibilities depend on the position assigned. Duties may include:

- Checking in voters, answering voters' questions, setting up and testing voting machines, issuing ballots and other tasks.
- Helping voters who encounter problems, from registration issues to voter ID questions to language barriers.
- Attending training held by the county to learn the job duties ahead of the election.

What happens when you check the box?

If a voter checks the box saying they are interested in being a poll worker, they may be contacted by their county's elections office. It's important that voters who are interested in being a poll worker include a phone number and email address on their application so the county can contact them. Voters should also feel free to call their county elections office to inquire about the position. Even if the county does not need poll workers for the upcoming election, they might contact the voter for help with future elections.

Before the Voter Registration and Mail Ballot Application Drive

Voter drives can be rewarding, but they are also a lot of work. Prior planning can help make your program successful. Once you understand the rules and decide how you will submit applications, you are ready to plan your drive in greater detail.

Pick the dates

When you are picking dates for your drive, consider voter registration and mail ballot application deadlines, national campaigns like National Voter Registration Day, and special events in the area. You should also ensure that staff and volunteers are well-trained on the requirements of Pennsylvania voter registration law and the criminal ramifications for unlawfully registering to vote or improperly soliciting a registration. Essentially, organizers must ensure their staff and volunteers are well prepared to go into the field, and that there is not a rush to collect and submit a large number of applications just before the deadline which would inhibit an organization's quality control and review processes. Plan to collect and submit applications to the county elections office ahead of the deadline.

Secure your supplies

You may need the following supplies:
- Computers, tablets or mobile devices.
- Voter registration applications:
  - You can request applications from the Department of State at ra-voterreg@pa.gov, or download them from the Resource Center.
- Mail-in and absentee ballot applications:
  - Available in the online Resource Center at https://www.pa.gov/agencies/vote/resources/forms-and-documents.
- Voter educational materials:
  - There are informational materials in the online Resource Center at https://www.pa.gov/agencies/vote/resources/forms-and-documents and via the Department's Voter Education Toolkit.
- Staff or volunteer identification.
- Information about your organization.
- Clipboards.
- Blue or black pens.

Communicate with county election officials

It is a good idea to reach out to the county elections director in each county where you will submit applications. This is especially important for large registration drives. Establishing these connections will ensure that the counties are prepared and that you are familiar with the counties' procedures for receiving and processing voter registration and ballot applications. County contact information may be found at vote.pa.gov/county. If you have trouble reaching a county elections official, contact the Department of State at (717) 787-5280 or ra-voterreg@pa.gov.

 Review the following information with a county elections official:

- The size and scope of the drive.
- Contact information for your organization.
- Identify the contact person at the county.

- The process for flagging problems with applications collected by your drive.
- When and how often you plan to drop off paper applications.

Special considerations for address specifications (including building names, etc.)

Find and Train Workers

You may staff your drive with paid workers or volunteers. In either case, it is vital that the workers understand the importance of their role, know the law, and agree to follow your organization's policies and procedures. Your workers must understand the qualifications for registering to vote under Pennsylvania law and the serious criminal consequences for someone who attempts to register when they are not qualified to do so. It is additionally important to understand that it is unlawful to give, solicit or accept payment or financial incentive based upon the number of voter registration applications obtained.

Have a written process for recruiting, hiring, and dismissing full-time and part-time staff and volunteers that complies with federal and state laws. Provide training to all staff and volunteers on your organization's policies and procedures as well as the relevant law. **Note that Pennsylvania law prohibits individuals from receiving payment that is based on the number of voters they register or applications they submit**.

Monitoring

It is important to track workers' effectiveness in the field. Doing so will aid in avoiding delays in processing applications at the county. Here are some suggestions for monitoring workers and ensuring accountability:

- Track the number of applications given to your volunteers and staff and returned by them after each shift or event. (This can also help ensure that all applications are timely turned into the counties).
- Record the total number of applications collected per shift or event, including the number that were complete, incomplete, or spoiled, and note any issues with applications.
- Group incomplete or problematic applications together when submitting to counties. This will help counties quickly identify applicants who must be contacted to successfully complete their application.
- Enforce quality standards that require workers to only collect complete applications from eligible voters.
- Periodically observe your workers in the field and provide feedback to them or their team leaders.
- If you are running your drive with a DOS API product, you can review the acceptance rates of submitted applications to spot patterns or repeated concerns.

During the Drive

Transparency

Individuals running the drive should clearly identify your organization and provide contact information in case applicants have follow-up questions. If your organization plans to keep voter information and/or use the information for any purpose other than registering the person to vote or applying for a mail ballot, be sure to explain to voters what you will do with their information.

Tracking applications

There are several ways a person will know that their application was approved.

- If they have submitted a registration application online, voters can check their application status at vote.pa.gov/appstatus.
- If the person applied online and provided an email address, they will receive an email once their application is approved.
- Typically, counties will send a voter registration card within 14 days once they approve a voter registration application.
- If the voter completes a paper registration application, and does not receive a voter registration card, they may contact the county to confirm that the county received their application. County contact information is available at vote.pa.gov/county.
- Voters who apply for a mail ballot can track the status of their application and ballot by going to vote.pa.gov/MailBallotStatus.

Your organization may also be interested in tracking applications that you submit. There are at least two ways to track submitted applications.

- The most efficient way to track applications is to utilize a web API, which provides status information for individual applicants (see previous details on APIs).
- Another way to track applications is to record the information from the applications before submitting them. If you plan to store or use voters' information, you should tell voters how their information will be used.

Handling paper applications

- Plan to submit batches of applications to county elections offices on specific dates, and at a regular cadence.
    - Waiting and submitting a large number of applications close to the voter registration or mail ballot application deadline may not give the county enough time to correct errors or collect missing information on applications.
        - For mail ballot applications, it may leave voters with insufficient time to receive, complete, and return their ballot.
    - Discuss your plans for submitting applications with county elections officials before your drive.
- Put controls in place to guarantee that all completed paper applications collected are submitted to the county elections offices. For example, compare the number of applications collected by volunteers to the number of applications submitted to counties.
- Paper applications must have original signatures in order to be processed. You may not submit photocopies, scans, or facsimiles of applications.
- If you collect more than one application from someone, you should submit the

application with the more recent date. If you suspect you have two applications from the same person, but you are not sure, submit both applications to the county elections office, but make them aware that there may be a duplicate. **Processing and identifying duplicate registrations consume valuable time and resources on the part of county elections workers.**

Handling incomplete applications

Make sure your drive workers know what to do when they find that people have not completely filled out an application.

- If an application is incomplete, you may fill in the missing information ONLY with the applicant's permission. For voter registration applications, you must complete the section of the form that says you provided assistance with the form. **You may not complete any information on the application without permission from the applicant.**
- If you cannot obtain the applicant's permission to complete the form, do not complete it. For paper forms, submit the incomplete form to the county elections office.
- Online applications can only be submitted when all the required information is complete, so you will not be able to submit incomplete online applications.
- The best approaches are to spot-check each paper application while the voter is present, and make sure that the voter clicks through to the confirmation page of the online application.

Quality control

In order for your drive to be successful, you should make every effort to ensure that you are collecting and submitting accurate and complete information from eligible voters. Consider the following tips for establishing a quality control system for your drive.

- Create a standard protocol for identifying, documenting, and addressing quality issues, such as illegible or missing information on applications. The protocol may include:
  - A visual review of all applications collected.
  - A system for identifying which staff or volunteer collected each application.
  - A regular report regarding the findings of the quality control efforts.
  - Steps to take to address issues related to quality.
- Other quality control tips:
  - Regularly review quality control reports to look for recurring problems and patterns.
  - Maintain a separate and secure space for quality control staff and programs.
  - Maintain a separate and secure space for applications you collect.
  - Have a system for reporting quality issues to election officials.
  - Make efforts to prevent duplicate applications.

After the Drive

The most important thing you can do after a voter registration or mail ballot application drive is review and evaluate the success of your drive. There are many reasons to collect and evaluate data related to your drive. For example:

- To learn how to increase the number of people registered in the future.
- To improve the quality of applications collected in the future.

- To improve staff knowledge and the effectiveness of training.

Sources of data may include:

- Feedback from the county elections offices where you submitted applications.
- The number of voters who checked their voter registration status and required no further updates.
- The number of applications collected at each drive location and on each date.
- The percentage of applications approved.
- Volunteer/ staff survey.
- Quality control data.

Extra Planning Required: Ballot On-Demand Drives

Voters can also apply for, receive, and cast a mail ballot all in one visit to their county elections office or other designated locations. If visiting a county elections office (including authorized county satellite elections office) before the voter registration deadline, applicants can submit both a voter registration application and mail ballot application in the same visit.

Submitting on-demand ballot applications is not the same as early voting. County elections officials still need time to process in-person requests and print your materials. If you are planning a drive for in-person on-demand requests, consider taking the following steps:

- Contact your county elections office to plan ahead for times and expected capacity.
    - Ask if they prefer online submissions or pre-filled applications.
- Arrange for applicants to bring all materials they will need.
    - Recommend that voters complete their applications before they arrive.
    - Recommend that voters bring their photo ID – many counties hand-check photo identification -- which will speed up the process of verifying identity.
- Make sure to keep applicants aware of the process – wait times may go up during high volume elections, especially at or near the deadline to apply for a ballot.

Voters with Special Considerations
When you are registering voters or completing mail ballot applications in the field, you will encounter voters with a wide variety of backgrounds, abilities, and needs. The following sections will help prepare you to assist a diverse range of voters.

Voters with disabilities
Any voter with a disability, including those who live in assisted living facilities, may register and vote. Voters with disabilities experience many obstacles to voting, including difficulties in registering. Your organization can help voters with disabilities by being mindful of the diverse needs of people with disabilities.

The Department of State provides information and resources for voters with disabilities on its website at vote.pa.gov/AccessibleVoting. You should educate yourself and your team about the various accommodations that election officials can provide to make each step of the voting process accessible to all voters.

Things to consider before your drive:
- Is your drive location wheelchair or mobility device accessible?
- Do you have Wi-Fi access or a hotspot to help voters with visual disabilities use the online voter registration or mail ballot application system?
- Do you have relevant paperwork, like copies of the Third-Party Ballot Delivery for Mail Voting Form for allowing people to declare that they need assistance to vote, or the Designated Agent Form for voters to designate an individual to assist them with the voting process? At the very least, consider having instructions on how to obtain these resources.

Other things to consider:
- Use "people-first" language. For example, "people with disabilities" not "disabled people."
- Don't assume that people with disabilities need help. Ask first and then let them tell you what assistance they need.
- If a voter has an aide or a sign-language interpreter, speak directly to the voter, not the aide or interpreter.
- If you are working with a voter who is blind, make sure you introduce yourself by name.
- Speak to people at eye level. If they use a wheelchair, sit or kneel if you can.
- When assisting a voter who is deaf, speak clearly in a normal tone. (Don't shout.) Look directly at them when you're talking to them.

Voters who have a criminal record

There is a very limited group of people who may not register and vote in Pennsylvania due to a criminal conviction. Individuals who are incarcerated on a misdemeanor conviction or in pre-trial detention may register and vote so long as they meet the general eligibility requirements.

The ONLY people who are NOT eligible to register and apply for a mail ballot are:

- People who are currently confined in a penal institution for conviction of a felony and who will not be released until after the next election.

- People who are in a halfway house or other alternative correctional facility on pre-release status for conviction of a felony and who will not be released until after the next election.

- People who were convicted of violating any provision of the Pennsylvania Election Code within the last four years.

Those who are incarcerated for a non-felony offense but eligible to register may register using either the address where they resided prior to their incarceration or the address where they plan to reside after their release. The correctional facility may be used as a mailing address, and they can apply to receive a mail ballot there.

More information is available at https://www.pa.gov/agencies/vote/voter-support/your-rights-and-the-law/criminal-status-and-voting.html.

Voters who are limited English proficient

You may encounter people with limited English proficiency when you are running your drive. This means they speak another language and have difficulty speaking or understanding English. Before your drive, do some research about the languages spoken where you will be holding the drive and plan accordingly.

- It is a good idea to recruit drive workers who are multilingual and can help voters in another language.
- The Department provides many of its forms and applications in languages other than English. Review the available translations at https://www.pa.gov/agencies/vote/resources/forms-and-documents.html.
- You can refer people to the Pennsylvania Department of State for help answering questions in another language. The Department will use an interpreter to communicate with the voter at no cost.
- You may wish to have forms available for people to declare that they need assistance to vote or instructions to obtain the form.

High school students

For high school students, and teenagers in general, the biggest obstacle is making sure that they understand their eligibility to vote.

- Keep in mind that they do not have to be 18 to register. They only must be 18 years old on or before the date of the next election.
- This means that special elections may affect the registration cut-off date. Check with the county elections office to confirm whether there are upcoming special elections.

If you plan to hold a drive at a high school, here are some other things to keep in mind:

- You may want to include pledge cards for students who are not yet eligible to register, so that they can make a commitment to register and vote in the future when they are eligible
- Research has shown it is most meaningful when a peer asks another young person to register to vote. Consider engaging with student volunteers.
- In addition to hosting a table event, it is effective to register students to vote in a classroom setting.
- Remind students to bring the materials they need, like their driver's license or Social Security number. Keep in mind that junior licenses will not be recognized on the online voter application.
- Ensure that students are educated on registration qualifications. Make sure to explain each section of the registration or mail ballot application form to students, because it may contain terms that they are not familiar with.
- Explain how selecting a party will affect their ability to vote in primary elections.
- Data show that young voters are among the least likely to complete and return their mail ballot on time. Consider extra efforts to encourage these voters to apply for their mail ballot early and plan to follow up to encourage them to submit their ballot before the deadline.

High school students as young as 17 are eligible under state law to serve as poll workers. Talk to the county elections administrators where you are holding your drive about whether they use student poll workers. If so, you could add a poll worker recruitment component to your drive.

Lastly, the Pennsylvania departments of State and Education recognize high schools with the

Governor's Civic Engagement Award if they register at least 65% of their eligible students to vote. To find out more about the award, go to vote.pa.gov/gcea.

College students

There are many common errors that occur when registering college students to vote. It is vital that drive workers understand the options available to college students and that they explain the consequences of the students' decision to register to vote in Pennsylvania.

First, college students at residential campuses generally have two options when they register to vote:

1. College students may register and vote where they live while attending college in Pennsylvania. Their address can be an on-campus or off-campus address in that community.
2. They may choose to register and vote at their prior home address. Most commonly, this would be their parents' address.

Be sure to submit the application to the appropriate county elections office in a timely manner. For example, if someone attends Penn State University at Main Campus, and lists their residence in Berks County, the application must be sent to Berks County, not Centre County.

In addition, registration drive volunteers should be prepared to explain the following information:

- Voters cannot be registered in more than one place in Pennsylvania. If a student was previously registered in another county in Pennsylvania, that registration will be cancelled when they register in a different county.
- Likewise, students may only vote in one place. Explain that students from out of state who decide to register and vote in Pennsylvania are not permitted to also vote in their prior state of residence (even if they remain registered there).
- Students may only vote where they are registered. For example, if a student attends school in Centre County, but lists their residence in Berks County on the application, they may only vote on Election Day by traveling to Berks County. It may be more appealing to vote by mail: let them know about the process for requesting a mail-in ballot.
- One common error on student registration or mail ballot applications is their address— universities and colleges sometimes have unique mailing address conventions for dorms or residences. It will be helpful if your drive workers know and explain this to students.
    - Working with your county elections officials and university contacts can be very helpful in cutting down on address errors. If you know in advance how the address for each dorm building must be entered, you can help the voter fill it out correctly (or work with your organization to pre-fill it!).
    - For colleges where the voter might receive mail at a different address than their dorm room (such as through a campus Post Office Box), make sure the applicant fills out the sections for both the registration address and mailing address, and that they know the difference between the two types of addresses.
- Remind voters that their county will mail them a voter registration card if the application

is accepted, or a letter if more information is necessary. Always look out for mail from your local election office!

Many colleges have nonpartisan student groups or administrative offices dedicated to encouraging students to get involved in the electoral process. Consider contacting them before your drive to learn best practices for setting up an event on campus and to plan possible collaboration.

Military and overseas voters

Although you may be unlikely to encounter many voters during your drive who will be casting a ballot from overseas, it is helpful to know that special rules apply to those voters registered to vote in Pennsylvania who are living overseas or who are serving in the United States military (or their families). You can learn about these rules at www.vote.pa.gov/Voting-in-PA/Pages/Military-and-Overseas-Voters.aspx.

Unhoused or nomadic voters

Individuals who may be experiencing homelessness or temporarily lack a permanent residence who nonetheless consider Pennsylvania their home may register to vote at the address where they are usually found. This can be a prior residence, homeless shelter, or other care facility; it can also be depicted graphically on a map provided for on the voter registration application.

Frequently Asked Questions from Voters

How will I know that I successfully registered to vote?

After the county elections office processes your voter registration application, they will send you a registration card in the mail. The card is confirmation that your voter registration application has been processed and approved.

If you do not receive a registration card, there are other ways to check on the status of your application:
- Check your registration status online by visiting www.vote.pa.gov, and clicking on Check Your Registration Status.
- If you registered to vote online, you can use your application number to track your voter registration application at vote.pa.gov/AppStatus.
- You can contact your county's voter registration office to ask about the status of your application. County contact information is at vote.pa.gov/county.

Do I have to vote in person on Election Day?

No.

You may choose to vote by mail instead of going to vote in person at your polling place. If you want to vote by mail, you must apply for the ballot by the deadline and return it by Election Day. Mail-in ballots are available to all voters.

You can apply for a mail ballot using a paper application, which is available at

vote.pa.gov/MailBallot. Or, you can apply online at vote.pa.gov/ApplyMailBallot. Your county elections office must receive your application by 5:00 p.m. on the Tuesday before the election.

If you vote by mail, your vote is considered final. If you receive a mail ballot and return it to your county by 8:00 pm on Election Day, you may not vote at your polling place. If you are unable to return your voted mail-in ballot by the deadline, you may only vote a provisional ballot at your polling place on Election Day, unless you surrender your mail-in ballot and the return envelope containing the Voter's Declaration to the judge of elections at your polling place. Your mail ballot will then be voided, and you can vote by regular ballot. To find out more about mail voting, visit vote.pa.gov/MailBallot.

Voters can also apply for, receive, and cast a mail ballot all in one visit to their county elections office or other designated locations. Contact your county for more information.

Military and overseas voters should refer to this page for information on how to vote absentee: https://www.vote.pa.gov/Voting-in-PA/Pages/Military-and-Overseas-Voters.aspx.

If I choose to vote in person on Election Day, where do I vote?

When you look up your voter registration status online, it will list your polling place. You can look up your voter registration status at vote.pa.gov/status.

What does it mean if my voter registration status is "inactive"?

Your voter registration may be "inactive" if you have not voted in a recent election. You can still vote if you are listed as inactive if your name, address, and party affiliation have not changed. When you go to your polling place on Election Day, you will be asked to sign an affirmation. Once you vote, your status will be changed back to active status. Complete and submit a voter registration application if you need to update your name, address, or party affiliation.

Do I have to register with a political party?

You do not have to register with a political party, but you cannot vote in a primary election in Pennsylvania unless you register as a Democrat or Republican, or unless there is a ballot question on the ballot. If you do not register as a Democrat or Republican, you will only be allowed to vote in special elections, November general elections, and on ballot questions in a primary election.

Do I need to show identification when I vote?

You must present identification if you are voting in your election district for the first time. Acceptable ID includes both photo and non-photo ID. Non-photo ID must have your address on it. Some examples of acceptable ID are:

- o Pennsylvania driver's license or PennDOT ID card.
- o U.S. passport.
- o U.S. Armed Forces ID
- o Student ID
- o Confirmation issued by the County Voter Registration Office.
- o Firearm permit.

- Current utility bill.
- Current paycheck

More information on identification and requirements is available at vote.pa.gov/VoterID.

Voters casting a mail ballot must provide either their driver's license number or the last four digits of the Social Security number, which constitutes their proof of identification.

What is a provisional ballot?

Provisional ballots are paper ballots used by in-person voters at the polling place on Election Day when the poll workers cannot confirm the voter's eligibility to vote. The voter completes the ballot, provides other information, and turns it in at the polling place. Then the county Board of Elections will follow legal procedures to decide whether to count the vote.

You may be asked to vote using a provisional ballot if there is a problem on Election Day. For example, if you go to vote and you are not included on the list of voters in the pollbook, or if you are voting for the first time at a particular polling place and you did not bring identification, you may be given a provisional ballot. You may also vote a provisional ballot if you submitted a mail ballot to your county but received notice that there was an error potentially resulting in its rejection. You should only use a provisional ballot if there is no other way for you to vote.

For more information on provisional ballots, visit https://www.vote.pa.gov/Voting-in-PA/Pages/Voting-by-Provisional-Ballot.aspx.

If I choose to vote in person on Election Day, what kind of voting equipment will I use?

Visit vote.pa.gov/ReadyToVote to learn about your county's voting system. You will find step-by-step instructions, as well as information about the ADA-compliant accessible features of the voting system.

What if I need help voting?

If you need assistance by reason of disability or inability to read or write, you can have someone help you vote, as long as that person is not your employer, your union representative, or the judge of elections. (The judge of elections is the head poll worker in charge at the polling place).

When you sign in at the polling place, tell the poll worker that you need help voting. You will be asked to sign a "Declaration of Need of Assistance."

I received a question that wasn't listed here.

There is a lot of useful information for voters at vote.pa.gov. If you receive a question that you cannot answer, you can refer voters to that website, to the PA Department of State, or to your county's elections office.

Version	Release	Revisions
1	July 2019	Initial release
2	September 2019	Update to deadlines section; Update to DOS email address; Update to absentee ballot application information; Correct links
3	February 2020	Updated to reflect changes to the law per Act 77 of 2019
4	March 2020	Removed the option to use OVR drive to register voters; updated FAQ about voting using mail-in or absentee ballots per SB 422 of 2020
5	March 2022	Updated votesPA.com to vote.pa.gov
6	September 2022	Updated to add OVR available in Chinese
7	September 2025	Comprehensive general updates, including to add information for incorporating mail ballot applications into the drive.