

Wisconsin Elections Commission

State of Wisconsin

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WEC Prepares for Fall Elections by Approving Block Grants to Municipalities and Mailing to Voters

MADISON, WI – The Wisconsin Elections Commission has approved spending \$7.2 million in federal CARES Act funding, including a \$4.1 million block grant program to help local election officials and voters prepare for Fall 2020 elections amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Wisconsin voters and election officials need to be ready for anything this fall,” said Meagan Wolfe, administrator of the WEC. “We are using the lessons we learned from the Spring Election in April and the federal grant funds to ensure we are prepared for November.”

The \$4.1 million block grant program will help municipalities deal with significant unbudgeted expenses for fall elections like postage and envelopes due to high demand for absentee ballots at the Spring Election, when nearly 1.16 million ballots were cast by mail.

In addition to giving block grants to municipalities, the WEC will send an informational mailing to approximately 2.7 million registered voters later this summer about their voting options for November, including an absentee ballot request form and a return envelope. The Commission will consider final plans for the mailer at its June 10 meeting.

The voter mailing is designed to inform voters who have not already requested an absentee ballot for November about their three voting options, including absentee voting by mail or in-person at the clerk’s office and voting at the polls on Election Day, Wolfe said.

“We want voters to know what their options are, and for anyone who is considering voting by mail to make their request as soon as possible so clerks are not overwhelmed right before the election,” Wolfe said.

For most voters the MyVote.wi.gov website is the easiest way to make their absentee ballot request any time prior to October 29, 2020, while for other voters who are not comfortable with or do not have access to technology having access to a paper form will be their best source of information. MyVote.wi.gov is also where voters can register to vote, find their polling place, view a sample ballot, or contact their municipal clerk to learn about in-person absentee opportunities.

Questions and Answers about Wisconsin's Readiness Plan for Fall Elections

Is the WEC mailing absentee ballots to everyone? Will Wisconsin become an all-vote-by-mail state?

No, changes such as these would require the legislature to pass and amend existing law, and the Wisconsin Elections Commission does not have the authority to make these changes. Under the current law, all Wisconsin voters have three options to vote – voting at the polls on Election Day, voting absentee in-person at the clerk's office or voting absentee by mail. State law requires registered voters to request an absentee ballot and any voters who receive the mailing will receive information about voting and an absentee request form, but each voter must still request a ballot from their municipal clerk. By state law, absentee ballots cannot be sent automatically. Voters must also be registered to vote in Wisconsin before they request an absentee ballot. All voters must submit a copy of their statutorily acceptable photo ID with their first by-mail request, with the exception of military and overseas voters and indefinitely confined voters.

Do absentee voters have to provide a photo ID just like voters at the polls?

Yes, with limited exceptions. Registered voters requesting an absentee ballot online can upload a picture or scan of their photo ID at [MyVote.wi.gov](https://myvote.wi.gov). Those making the request by mail must provide a physical copy of their photo ID – a paper photocopy or even a photograph.

Wisconsin's photo ID law contains an exception for absentee voters who are indefinitely confined to their homes due to age, disability, illness or infirmity. This exception was designed for voters with disabilities, seniors and others who do not have access to an acceptable photo ID or whose photo IDs may have expired, but it can also apply in other cases. For more information about limited exceptions to Wisconsin's photo ID law, visit our photo ID website: <https://bringit.wi.gov>.

Will absentee ballots have tracking barcodes on them?

No, that is a misunderstanding. The WEC will soon start using USPS Intelligent Mail Barcodes (IMB) for absentee ballot envelopes, not the ballots. IMBs will let voters and clerks track where a ballot is in the postal system as it travels from the clerk's office to the voter's home and back to the clerk's office, just like they track packages from online retailers.

Will people who are dead or who moved get the mailer?

Every month the WEC gets death records from the State and helps local clerks remove those voters from the registration list. Excluded from the 2.7 million registered voters who will get this mailing are voters on the "ERIC Movers mailing list" who have not either reregistered at a new address or confirmed that they have not moved. The same is true for other ineligible voters. Local election officials regularly receive list maintenance updates and deactivate voters who are on felon status, have moved out of state, or are otherwise ineligible.

How much will everything cost and where does the money come from?

The Wisconsin Elections Commission has received a \$7.3 million federal CARES Act grant designed to help cover unbudgeted election expenses due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

All 1,850 Wisconsin municipal clerks can apply for block grants to cover unbudgeted expenses due to the pandemic, including postage, envelopes, extra help, supplies, etc. Each municipality can receive a base grant of \$200 plus \$1.10 per registered voter.

Program	Expense
Block Grants to Local Election Officials	\$4,126,528
Voter Information Mailer	Not more than \$2,252,035
Sanitation and PPE Supplies	Not more than \$500,000
WEC staff, development costs for USPS IMB, and reserve fund for April/May costs.	Not more than \$400,000
Total	\$7,278,563

Much more information about the grants to municipalities is available on the WEC's website: <https://elections.wi.gov/node/6916>.

How can clerks apply for a block grant?

The WEC will be contacting clerks with information about how to apply for grants and intend to conduct informational webinars on this topic in June.

What's next?

At their regular meeting on June 10, the six, bipartisan members of the Wisconsin Elections Commission are scheduled to review and approve details of the mailer before it can be sent for printing.

The exact date the voter information mailer will be sent has not been determined, but it will be sometime after the August 11, 2020 Partisan Primary but before September 1, 2020. The deadline for municipal clerks to send absentee ballots to voters with valid requests on file for the General Election is September 17, 2020, which should give voters a few weeks to make requests before ballots must be sent. Ballot requests received after this deadline will be fulfilled by local clerks on an ongoing basis.

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The Wisconsin Elections Commission is responsible for administration and enforcement of election laws in Wisconsin. The Commission is made up of six Commissioners – four appointed directly by the State Senate Majority Leader, Speaker of the Assembly and the Minority Leaders in the State Senate and Assembly. The remaining two Commissioners are appointed by the Governor with confirmation by the State Senate from lists of former municipal and county clerks submitted by the legislative leadership in each party.