



# Elections Communications Toolkit

Earned Media Materials

September 2020

# Media Pitches

## Pitch #1

We'd like to show local media how easy it is to vote absentee by mail this fall. We'll walk through all the steps to making sure your ballot is witnessed and filled out correctly, and reaches its destination in plenty of time to be counted on Election Day.

## Pitch #2

We have received some concerns from our community about the safety of voting at polling places this fall. We'd like to walk through all the ways that people can exercise their individual voting options, including the ability to vote by absentee ballot, either in person or by mail. We'll also touch on some of the processes all clerks have in place to ensure that only eligible voters cast votes on Election Day.

# Talking Points

- It's always been legal to vote by absentee ballot in Wisconsin.
- Every registered Wisconsin voter has the right to vote with an absentee ballot for any reason. Of course, you may also vote on Election Day, too.
- The first step in voting by absentee ballot is to make sure you're registered to vote. You can do it many ways, including in person and online. To do it in person, go to your municipal clerk's office with proof of residence. If you're not sure about what type of ID you need, talk to your clerk.
- If you're not sure you're registered, you can easily verify your voter information online at [myvote.wi.gov](https://myvote.wi.gov) or call your municipal clerk.
- Once you're registered, you can request an absentee ballot online at [myvote.wi.gov](https://myvote.wi.gov), or in writing via mail, email or fax.
- Once you receive your absentee ballot by mail, you'll receive specific instructions about how to fill it out and securely send it back to your municipal clerk in time for Election Day. Be sure to follow the instructions carefully because inaccurate or incomplete information could prevent your vote from being counted.
- One thing to keep in mind is that you'll need to have a witness observe your vote and sign your ballot. It can be any adult U.S. citizen who isn't an election candidate. Once your ballot is complete, simply mail it back to your clerk in the postage-paid envelope. If you prefer, you can drop it off at your municipal clerk's office through Election Day.
- The deadline to register to vote online for the 2020 General Election is October 14, 2020. Of course, you can still register to vote in person in your clerk's office until the Friday before the election, or at your polling place on Election Day.
- The USPS suggests mailing your completed absentee ballot one week before Election Day. For the 2020 General Election, that's October 27.



# Media FAQs

## **Is the WEC requiring all Wisconsin voters to vote by absentee ballot this fall?**

No, Wisconsin voters always have three options to vote under current law: voting at the polls on Election Day, voting absentee in-person at the clerk's office or voting absentee by mail. Given the current public health threat due to COVID-19, we wanted to make sure that all eligible voters know about their options.

## **What are the rules about voting by absentee ballot?**

By state law, absentee ballots cannot be sent automatically; each voter must request a ballot from their municipal clerk, either in-person or by mail. State law also requires eligible voters to register to vote in Wisconsin before requesting an absentee ballot. Voters who request an absentee ballot by mail receive information about voting along with their absentee request form. 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 the indefinitely confined.

## **How do I know my vote by absentee ballot will count?**

To be counted, absentee ballots must be received by Election Day. The USPS suggests mailing your completed ballot at least one week before Election Day. For the November 3, 2020 General Election, that date would be October 27, 2020. After the election, voters can see that their vote was counted at [myvote.wi.gov](http://myvote.wi.gov), once Wisconsin's voter participation records have been published.

## **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](http://myvote.wi.gov). Those making the request by mail must provide a physical copy of their photo ID—like a paper photocopy or 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 [bringit.wi.gov](http://bringit.wi.gov).

## **Will absentee ballots have tracking barcodes on them?**

No. 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, just like they track packages from online retailers.



## **Will people who are dead or who have moved get absentee ballots?**

Absentee ballots are mailed to the address each registered voter provides when they make their request. If a person knows they will be at a different address during an upcoming election, it's important that they keep that in mind when making the request.

Every month the WEC gets death records from the State and helps local clerks remove those voters from the registration list. 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.

## **Will it cost more to have more people voting by absentee ballot?**

If more people vote by absentee ballot, it's likely things like postage, extra help, supplies and printing would be more expensive than if everyone voted in-person on Election Day. At a time when we're still learning about COVID-19, more people voted by absentee ballot this spring and we anticipate that will be the case this fall. We want to make sure everyone knows their voting options for the upcoming elections.

The Wisconsin Elections Commission 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 were able to apply for block grants to cover unbudgeted expenses due to the pandemic.



# Press Release

## Wisconsin Elections Commission

State of Wisconsin  
212 E. Washington Ave., Third Floor  
Madison, WI 53703  
elections@wi.gov (608) 266-8005 <https://elections.wi.gov>

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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## FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:

Reid.Magney@wi.gov or 608-267-7887

## Wisconsin Voting Deadlines and Facts for November 2020

MADISON, WI – Wisconsin voters and election officials have plans in place for the Presidential Election on November 3, 2020.

“We want to make sure every voter who is eligible to vote this fall can do so safely and securely,” said Meagan Wolfe, administrator for the Wisconsin Elections Commission. “We learned a great deal from our elections in April, May and August and believe we have solid plans in place for November.”

Due to continuing concerns about COVID-19, the WEC is providing citizens with information about the various options for registered voters throughout the state to exercise their right to vote.

“We want citizens to choose the option for voting that works best for them. For voters who choose to vote absentee by mail, we want to be sure they have the information they need to navigate that process,” said Wolfe. “Of course, every voter who is eligible to vote in the state can also vote early or in person on election day.”

Here are some key dates and facts to remember for the upcoming Presidential Election on November 3, 2020 – whether you’re voting by absentee ballot or in-person.

**Now:** You don’t have to wait to register to vote or request an absentee ballot. Everything you need to know is online at <https://myvote.wi.gov> or by calling or visiting your local municipal clerk.

“If you’re not registered, you can get registered online if you have a Wisconsin driver license or state ID card - just fill in a few pieces of information,” said Wolfe. “If you are registered, you can request an absentee ballot and it will be mailed to your preferred address. Once it arrives, simply follow the instructions to make sure the ballot is filled out correctly and have an adult U.S. citizen witness your ballot. Then mail it back to the clerk in the postage-paid envelope.”

For voters who are not comfortable with or do not have access to technology, an absentee request paper form will be their option. But for most voters, the MyVote website is the preferred way to make their absentee ballot request. It’s also where voters can register to vote, find their polling place, view a sample ballot, or contact their municipal clerk to learn more about voting by absentee ballot in-person and by mail.

Voters also have the option to drop their absentee ballots off in-person on or before election day. “We recommend that if you’d prefer to vote from home this fall, you get your requests in as soon as possible to which will ensure you have enough time to receive and return your ballot and that local clerks have enough time to process your request,” said Wolfe.



**Early September 2020:** On September 1, the WEC will be mailing information about voting in November to approximately 2.6 million registered Wisconsin voters who have not already requested an absentee ballot. The information packet will include an absentee request form and a postage-paid reply envelope. Wolfe encouraged voters who choose to vote absentee to request their ballot as soon as possible, whether online or by mail.

**September 17, 2020:** This is the deadline for Wisconsin's city, village and town clerks to mail absentee ballots for November 3 to registered voters with requests on file. At 47 days before the election, Wisconsin gives its voters significantly more time to receive and return their ballots than most other states.

**October 14, 2020:** Your last chance to register by mail or online. Visit <https://myvote.wi.gov> to complete the registration process in minutes or find your municipal clerk's mailing address.

**October 15 to November 1, 2020:** During this closed registration period, you must register to vote in your municipal clerk's office or at a satellite voting location run by your municipal clerk.

**October 20, 2020:** The first day that municipal clerks may offer in-person absentee voting in their office or a satellite location. Start dates and office hours vary by municipality. Please visit <https://myvote.wi.gov> to find your municipal clerk office's contact information and learn more about absentee voting in-person for the upcoming election.

**October 27, 2020:** Practical deadline for voters to return their mail absentee ballots to their municipal clerk's office. The US Postal Service recommends allowing one week for your completed absentee ballot to be delivered to your municipal clerk's office. After this date, voters should find other options for returning their absentee ballot, which include delivering it to their municipal clerk's office or a secure drop box if one is provided by their clerk. Most voters can also deliver their ballot to their polling place by 8 p.m. on Election Day, but there are some exceptions. (See below.)

**October 29, 2020:** The legal deadline for most voters to request an absentee ballot by mail. Wolfe said it is unrealistic for any voter to wait this late to request an absentee ballot and expect to receive it in time to return it by Election Day to be counted.

**October 30, 2020:** Final day to register to vote at your municipal clerk's office. Visit <https://myvote.wi.gov> to find your local clerk's contact information and hours of operation.

**November 1, 2020:** The last day that municipal clerks may offer in-person absentee voting in their office or a satellite location. Most clerks only offer absentee voting in their office until Friday, October 30, and office hours vary by municipality. Please visit <https://myvote.wi.gov> to find your municipal clerk office's contact information and learn more about absentee voting in-person for the upcoming election.

**November 3, 2020:** Election Day. Polls are open from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m., and voters who are returning an absentee ballot to their polling place must get it there by 8 p.m. However, there are 35 municipalities including Milwaukee and Green Bay that count absentee ballots at a central location. Voters in those cities, villages and towns should check with their municipal clerk about where to return their ballots on Election Day. A list of central count municipalities is available here: <https://elections.wi.gov/clerks/guidance/central-count-absentee>.

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 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.

