

# Absentee Management

September 9, 2020

# Agenda

- General Absentee Reminders / Lessons Learned from 2020 Elections
- Dropboxes and Ballot Return
- In-Person Absentee Voting
- Managing In and Outbound Absentee Ballots

# General Reminders

And Lessons Learned from 2020 Elections

## Reminders

**Ballots should only be issued to registered voters who have complete requests on file.** Here's how you can check:

- WisVote
- MyVote (need voter's first and last name and DOB)
- Previous 2020 poll lists

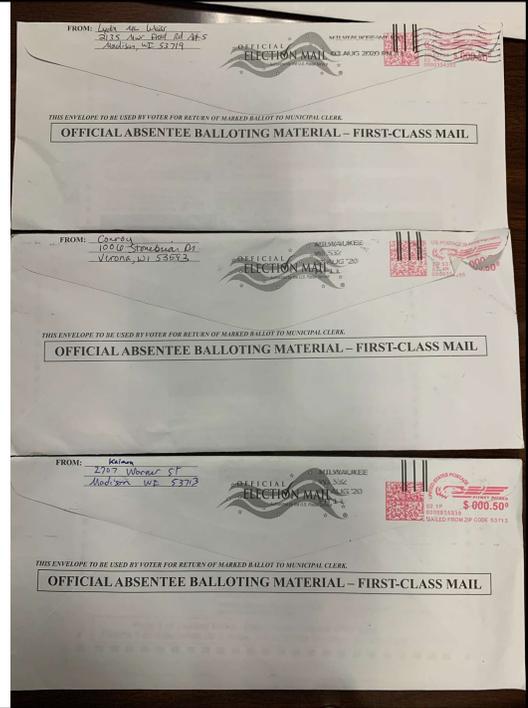
**Postage is required by state law for all ballot return envelopes if they are mailed to voters within the U.S.** Wis. Stat. § 6.87(3)(a)

<https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/statutes/statutes/6/iv/87/3?view=section>

# Reminders

**Be sure that the clerk's return address is provided on the return envelope**

Keep this in mind if you are using overflow envelopes without that information pre-printed on the envelope.



# Reminders

New uniform instructions have been created and there are three versions:

- 1) Regular
- 2) Military and Overseas Voters who receive their ballot by fax or email
- 3) Central Count

All three versions are posted here:  
<https://elections.wi.gov/node/7032>

**Uniform Instructions for Wisconsin Absentee Voters**

Confirm the envelope from your clerk contains your ballot and the envelope you'll use to return your ballot.

- 1 Read and follow the instructions on your ballot. Mistakes may prevent your votes from being counted.
- 2 You must vote your ballot in the presence of an adult witness:
  - Start by showing the witness your unmarked ballot.
  - Mark your ballot in the presence of your witness.
  - Your witness must confirm that you are the one completing your ballot but, because voting is a private activity, your witness cannot tell you who or what to vote for and cannot see the choices you make on your ballot.

Who can be a witness?

  - A witness must a U.S. Citizen who is at least 18 years old.
  - For military or overseas voters, your witness must be at least 18 years old but is not required to be a U.S. Citizen.
  - A witness can be a friend, spouse, family member, neighbor, etc.

Who cannot be a witness?

  - A candidate on the ballot for this election.

If you're having trouble finding a witness or have questions about the witness requirement, please contact your municipal clerk or the Wisconsin Elections Commission for assistance. Contact information can be found on the back of this page.
- 3 Refold your voted ballot and place it inside of the return envelope.
- 4 Seal the envelope in the presence of your witness.
- 5 Fill out the required sections of the form on the absentee return envelope.

To make sure your ballot is counted, double check the following before you return it:

  - **Your voter information:** this section is usually completed by your clerk and includes the date of the election, the county and municipality in which you are registered, your name, the address where you are registered, city, and zip code.
  - **Witness Signature:** you (or your assistant) must sign in the Certification of Voter section.
  - **Witness Signature and Address:** your witness must sign and provide their full address (street number, street name, city) in the Certification of Witness section.
  - Make sure your ballot is in your envelope and make sure the envelope is sealed properly. If any of the required information above is missing, your ballot will not be counted.
- 6 Return your ballot.
  - Your ballot must be received in time to be delivered to your polling place **no later than 8:00 p.m. on Election Day**. There are a few options for returning your ballot.

You can:

    - Mail it back
    - Drop it off at your municipal clerk's office
    - Drop it off at your polling place or central count location
    - Drop it off in an absentee ballot drop box (if available)
  - The United States Postal Service recommends mailing your ballot at least one week before Election Day. Returning a ballot from overseas may take longer.
  - Absentee ballots may not be returned by email or fax.

# Drop Boxes

And other Absentee Ballot Return Options

# Absentee Ballot Drop Box: What and Why?

## What is it?

A ballot drop box provides a secure and convenient means for voters to return their by mail absentee ballot. A drop box is a secure, locked structure operated by local election officials. Voters may deposit their ballot in a drop box at any time after they receive it in the mail up to the time of the last ballot collection Election Day. Ballot drop boxes can be staffed or unstaffed, temporary or permanent.

## Why should I consider using one?

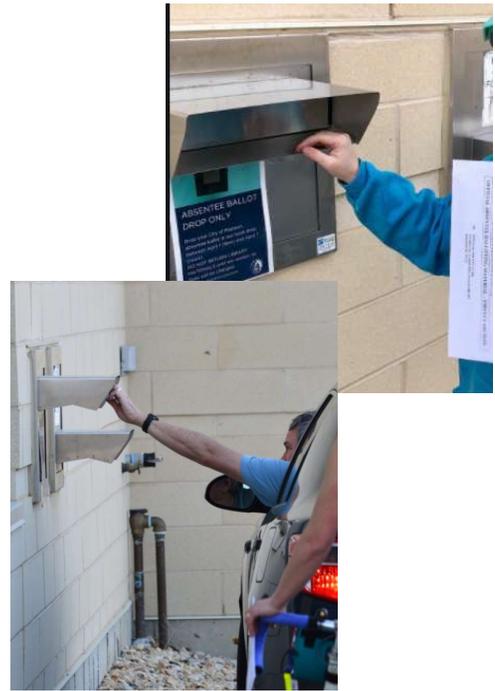
Voters are interested in secure and efficient ways to return the absentee ballot they receive by mail and dropboxes allow a voter to return their ballot quickly conveniently and securely.



## Repurposing Options

Your municipality may already have infrastructure set up for secure collection of payment and materials. Consider repurposing the following options as secure ballot drops:

- Designate drop boxes or mail slots set up for taxes, mail and public utilities as secure ballot drop locations.
- Partnering with public libraries to use book and media drop slots for ballot collection.
- Partnering with businesses or locations that have already implemented social distancing practices, such as grocery stores and banks.



## Outdoor Options

- 1) Staffed, Temporary Drive-Through Drop
- 2) Unstaffed, 24-Hour Ballot Drop Box



## Outdoor Options

### Staffed, Temporary Drive-Through Drop

- A drive-through drop-off location is an easy way to keep traffic flowing when demand for a ballot drop box is at its peak, especially on or around Election Day.
- This drive-through is typically set up in a parking lot or a street depending on the location.
- You can also allow for curbside or drive up absentee ballot drop during any in-person absentee voting hours held at your municipal building or alternate site.



## Outdoor Options

### Unstaffed, 24-Hour Ballot Drop Box

- In high-demand areas, installing a permanent ballot drop box—one that can be accessed by voters 24/7—is a good solution.
- These boxes should be constructed of durable material such as steel and be permanently cemented into the ground.
- This type of ballot drop box may cost as much as \$6,000 each. Other options such as courier boxes are available from industrial supply companies and may be more affordable.



## Indoor Option: Staffed or Unstaffed

### Indoor Temporary Ballot Drop Box

When demand for a ballot drop box is low, a temporary ballot box located in a place such as the municipal clerk's office is a good solution.

These boxes should:

- Be durable
- Have a key or combination lock
- Have a way to securely fasten the box to prevent it from being moved or tampered with.

Staffed drop boxes can also be used at polling places on election day to collect absentee ballots from voters without having those voters wait in line in the voting area. In addition to purchasing or renting the ballot box, you will need:

- Padlock and keys (if not included)
- Bike chain or some other way to fasten the box to prevent it from being removed (if not staffed)
- Security seals



## Dropbox Security

Ballot drop boxes must be secured and locked at all times. Only an election official or a designated ballot drop box collection team should have access to the keys and/or combination of the lock. In addition to locks, all drop boxes should be sealed with one or more tamper evident seals.

For unstaffed 24-hour drop boxes the following security issues should be considered:

- Location with good lighting
- Location monitored by video surveillance cameras. When this is not feasible, positioning the box close to a nearby camera is a good option.
- Place the box in a high traffic area and invite local law enforcement to make regular observations.

For indoor drop boxes in locations where they can be monitored by a person in real time.

If not, unstaffed and unmonitored boxes should be securely fastened to a stationary surface or immovable object, such as a counter or wall, in a way that prevents moving or tampering.

## Chain of Custody

- Chain of custody logs must be completed every time ballots are collected.
- All ballot collection boxes/bags should be numbered to ensure all boxes are returned at the end of the shift, day, and on election night.
- Team members should sign the log and record the date and time, security seal number at opening, and security seal number when the box is locked and sealed again

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## Location

Ballot drop boxes should be placed in convenient, accessible locations, including places close to public transportation routes, near or on college campuses, and public buildings, such as libraries and community centers familiar to voters and easy to find. If there is time, getting input from citizens and community groups is recommended.

All drop box locations should be evaluated for:

- Security
- Lighting (well-lit 24 hours a day)
- High visibility
- Security cameras
- Accessibility

# In-Person Absentee Voting (IPAV)

Public Health Procedures

## The Basics

- **Reminder: After the *One Wisconsin Institute* court ruling, in-person absentee voting can begin no earlier than October 20 and must end by Sunday, November 1, 2020. There are no minimum hours and clerks can still offer appointment-only hours.**
- Face coverings must be used by election officials when conducting in-person absentee voting under the Governor's mandate. ***Please note the Governor's Mandate expires prior to the start of IPAV, so this requirement will need to be reevaluated.***
- Face coverings are strongly recommended for voters but cannot be required. No voter should be turned away for refusal to wear a mask or face covering.
- Drive up, outdoor or curbside voting options should be considered to minimize congestion in enclosed spaces.
- Hand hygiene is essential for voters and election officials during in-person absentee voting.
- CARES Act subgrant funds may be used to support many of the costs associated with changes to in-person absentee voting. Costs such as additional staff, staff time and sanitation supplies are eligible uses for these funds.

## Choosing a Space, Setting Up and Signage

### Choose a larger space in the facility

- More room for spacing out voters and staff
- One-way voter traffic
- Allow for six-feet of space between voters in line

### Signage

Post a sign alerting symptomatic voters that they should be directed to call a phone number on the sign and then the clerk could direct the symptomatic voter to the alternative area or offer a curbside voting option outside of the building, as suggested by the Wisconsin Department of Health Services

These symptoms may include:

- Fever (over 100.4F)
- Cough
- Shortness of breath body aches
- Fatigue
- Headache
- New loss of taste or smell
- Nasal congestion
- Throat
- Nausea or vomiting

## Sanitization and Hand Hygiene

- Clean and Disinfect Hands, Surfaces, and Objects
- Have hand sanitizer present and request voters use it before and after handling voting materials.
- Ensure bathrooms at the clerk's office are supplied adequately with soap, water, and drying materials so visitors and staff can wash their hands before and after voting.
- Limit surface contacts and disinfect regularly.
  - o Keep entrance doors open if possible, to minimize knobs, handles, etc. that voters need to touch.
  - Consider the use of wipeable covers for electronics.
  - Clean frequently touched surfaces, voting booths, and objects after each voter, if possible (e.g., tables, countertops, light switches, doorknobs, and cabinet handles).
  - Provide single-use pens, suggest voters bring own pens, or sanitize pens using Wisconsin Department of Health Services disinfecting information.
- Workers handling ballots and forms should practice hand hygiene frequently.

## Outdoor, Curbside or Drive Up Options

### **Consider the following factors when developing your plan:**

- signage
- A phone number should be provided for voters if the outdoor voting area will not be staffed continuously during voting hours.

### **Voter information will have to be verified:**

- The voter's name and address
- The correct ballot style, if applicable
- Photo ID

## Outdoor, Curbside or Drive Up Options

### **Process:**

- A writing surface such as a table or clipboard should be provided and should be sanitized after each use.
- The election official conducting in-person absentee voting should serve as the witness for these voters and sign the certificate envelope and provide their municipal address just as they would for indoor voting in the clerk's office.
- Voted ballots must be securely stored and transported from the outdoor voting area to the designated storage space in the clerk's office.

## How can this process work?

- “Runners” can be used to greet voters outside and collect information from the voter, such as their name and address, to bring inside to the clerk’s office for verification.
- Voters should be asked to sanitize their hands before handling voting materials such as clipboards, ballots, envelopes and pens.
- Clerk’s office staff can be used to verify the voter’s registration information provided by the “runner” and review the photo ID to confirm eligibility.
- Clerk’s staff can determine the correct ballot style for the voter and provide it to the runner to bring out to the voter.
- Chain of custody procedures should be used to track ballots that have been issued and voted during outdoor voting.
- A tent or other shelter can be set up to provide a space for voters and election officials to safely interact and conduct voting.



## Curbside or Drive Up Voting Procedures

- Hand hygiene still essential
- Face to face interactions should be limited and most of this can take place through a vehicle window
- Face coverings should be used if election officials cannot remain at least six feet from the voter
- Photo ID can be verified through the glass of the rolled-up window
- Materials can be passed back and forth through a window that has been cracked
- The voter should be instructed to sign their ballot in the appropriate section of the certificate envelope
- Election officials should provide the required witness signature and address and information on the certificate envelope and transport the voted ballot back to the clerk's office for secure storage
- Any clipboards, writing surfaces, envelope moisteners, pens or other materials used for this process should be sanitized after each use



## IPAV in the Clerk's Office

- Face coverings for voters are recommended, but not required for voters during in-person absentee voting
- Provide opportunities for voters to wash or sanitize their hands both before and after voting
- Provide curbside or outdoor voting opportunities for symptomatic, at-risk or immunocompromised voters
- Conduct any face-to-face interactions with voters from behind a protective barrier, such as glass or plastic window or tabletop plastic shield
- Have wipes available to clean any voting equipment used during IPAV



## Face Covering Recommendations

- Wash your hands before putting on your face covering.
- Put it over your nose and mouth and secure it under your chin.
- Try to fit it snugly against the sides of your face.
- Make sure you can breathe easily.
- Don't put the face covering around your neck or up on your forehead.
- Don't touch the face covering, and, if you do, wash your hands or use hand sanitizer to disinfect.
- Handle the face covering by the straps to avoid possible cross contamination.
- Wash or sanitize your hands after removing your face covering.

# Managing Absentee Ballots

## Prepare for an Influx of Absentee Ballots

- Use the Calendar of Election Events to prepare. **Please note that absentee ballots must be issued by September 17, with an emphasis on military and overseas voters.**
- New polling places must be approved by your governing body 30 days prior. However, all in-person absentee locations must have been set by June 11, so these cannot be changed.
- Find a location to process absentee ballots if your office is not big enough to accommodate.
- Consider using remote training options that can be found here: <https://elections.wi.gov/covid-19/election-officials>.
- Consider buying additional supplies to help you organize your absentee ballot issuing and processing. Some items to consider are:
  - Mail trays/mail carts on wheels
  - Carts that can be locked or additional secure ballot boxes
  - Folding tables and chairs (possibly rented)
  - Storage racks



## Working with USPS

- Establish a working relationship with your local USPS office(s) early.
- If using a mail vendor, confirm that the EL-122 Certificate envelope will be printed in compliance with USPS standards.
- Buy stamps or work with USPS to get stamps printed onto ballot envelopes. Please note that, per statute, all ballots sent within the United States must have return postage.
- Consider working with the USPS to have election mail held by the local postmaster instead of having it delivered by carrier.
- Consider contacting your local postmaster to see if they're willing to keep election mail local instead of sending it to central processing facilities.



## Organizing and Processing Absentee Ballots

- When receiving absentee ballots, sort them into two stacks: Sufficient and Insufficient.
- What is required:
  - Voter Signature (Please note: Date is not required)
  - Witness Signature
  - Witness Address (Please note: If you are able to determine the witness' address using alternative resources, you must do so.)
- Contact the voter (if there is time) so they can remedy the envelope. If the voter did not provide an email or phone number, send them a letter.
- All envelopes must be remedied by 8 p.m. on Election Day.
- Do not number the ballots before election officials determine whether the envelope is sufficient.
- DO NOT open or process ballots before 7 a.m. on Election Day.

Thank You and  
Questions

