



# 6 TIPS

## For Helping UOCAVA Voters and their Families

The U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC) collaborated with the U.S. Department of Defense's Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) to develop these tips for working with Service members, their families and citizens residing overseas.

Service members, their families and overseas citizens face unique challenges in registering to vote and in requesting, receiving and returning their ballots. These six tips can help you more efficiently navigate the process for this special group of absentee voters.



### 1 Reach Out to Your UOCAVA\* Voters

Use technology to stay in touch. Many UOCAVA voters have multiple email addresses you can use to notify them of their registration status, the receipt of their voted ballot and to let them know whether or not their ballot was accepted or rejected.

- 60 days prior to an election, consider emailing/ mailing a notice of election to all UOCAVA voters every election in order to confirm their current email/ mailing address. Remember this is a group of people who move frequently.

Keep information on your website current and be sure to:

- Publish your election year calendars with clearly marked deadlines for registration, ballot requests and ballot return.

### REMEMBER



Provide a generic email address for UOCAVA voters to contact your office (e.g., UOCAVAvoters@county.gov), so the address remains the same *even with* election staff turnover. This practice allows multiple staff members to have access to the account.

\*The term UOCAVA stands for Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act. This Federal law protects the voting rights of members of the Uniformed Services and U.S. Merchant Marines who are absent from the place they vote, their eligible family members and U.S. citizens residing outside the United States.





Tip 1 continued

- Link to any online voter status search tools your state offers and provide clear and plain-language instructions on how to register, request an absentee ballot and how to return a ballot to your office.
- Provide updated contact information for your office including a direct email link and toll-free number.
- Dedicate a section for UOCAVA voters and link to the Federal Voting Assistance Program website ([www.FVAP.gov](http://www.FVAP.gov))
- Partner with local military establishments and connecting with your local military base personnel who are Voting Assistance Officers.

## 2

### Be Sure to Know Your State's Procedures and the Federal UOCAVA Requirements

- Most states have special processes and procedures for UOCAVA voters so it's important to watch for updates to your state laws. Check with your state Election Official for the most current information. Don't assume the process has remained the same from the last election.
- In 2009, Congress amended portions of UOCAVA with the *Military and Overseas Voter Empowerment (MOVE) Act* that created some important Federal requirements:
  - Ballots validly requested by a UOCAVA voter must be transmitted 45 days before a Federal election.
  - In addition to mail, voters have the right to receive their ballot by at least one electronic method (email, online or fax) or by mail.

- States must have a system in place for voters to determine if their voted ballot was received by their election official.
- UOCAVA voters are encouraged to use the Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) when they register and request absentee ballots. This standard form can help you identify a voter who is a member of this protected group.

### REMEMBER



Watch for helpful clues that voters belong in this category (such as listing an Air/Army Post Office (APO), Fleet Post Office (FPO) or Diplomatic Post Office (DPO)) when he or she fills out a state registration form that doesn't allow a designation as a UOCAVA voter. While this is not the only way to determine if someone is a UOCAVA voter, it is an indication that someone may be outside of the U.S.

### Quick Clicks

Sign up for state-specific alerts regarding changes to UOCAVA procedures at [www.FVAP.gov](http://www.FVAP.gov)



### 3 Educating UOCAVA Voters

For a UOCAVA voter, the voting process can be complicated so outreach and education is key to helping them vote.

Help your UOCAVA voters determine their voting residence.

- UOCAVA voters must have a legal voting residence in the jurisdiction where they want to vote. It's important to clarify the difference between their legal voting residence and their mailing address. The voter's mailing address is where they want their ballot to be sent, *it generally should not be the same as their voting residence*. The UOCAVA voter must be physically absent from his or her voting residence.
- For Service members and their family members who are eligible to vote this can be the last address where they lived prior to entering military service or the state or territory they have since claimed as their legal residence.
- A family member who is eligible to vote can have a different legal voting residence than his or her Service member.

- Overseas citizens who are voting will use the address in the state or territory where they lived immediately prior to their departure from the U.S.

#### REMEMBER



UOCAVA voters can use an address as their legal voting residence even though they no longer maintain formal ties to it (i.e. if someone else is living there or if the structure no longer exists).

#### REMEMBER



Some states allow children of U.S. citizens residing overseas, (who are also U.S. citizens but have never resided in the U.S.), to use one of their parent's legal state of residence as their own. Check with your state Election Official to determine if this applies to your state.

#### Quick Clicks

For more on UOCAVA voting requirements see the Department of Justice's website <http://www.justice.gov/crt/about/vot/>

### 4 More Ways to Educate Your UOCAVA Voters

Understanding and using the UOCAVA voting forms (FPCA and FWAB) is key to helping them vote.

- The Federal Post Card Application (FPCA or SF-76) – which will identify your UOCAVA voters – allows them to request absentee ballots, to update their contact information and to register to vote with their local election office (in states where it's required).
- The Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot (FWAB or SF-186) can be used by voters who have requested an absentee ballot, **but** the official ballot has not arrived in time for it to be returned or the return mail service is unreliable.
- Some states allow a UOCAVA voter to register to vote, to request his or her ballot and to simultaneously vote with the FWAB. Be sure to check with your state Election Official to determine if you can accept a FWAB as a registration and request form as well as a voted ballot.


#### Quick Clicks

FVAP provides online assistance to UOCAVA voters and will "walk them through" completing the forms. [www.FVAP.gov](http://www.FVAP.gov)

## 5 Be Sure to Work With Your Local Post Office

Each election year, the United States Postal Service (USPS) and the Military Postal Service Agency (MPSA) will have special procedures for handling UOCAVA outgoing and incoming ballots.

- Establish a partnership with the local post office and your staff understand the timelines and process for sending and receiving election mail.

**REMEMBER** 

Notify the post office, local military installations and FVAP when your office contact information such as address, phone, fax and email change.

## 6 Finding Ways to Better Serve Your UOCAVA Voters

Using EAC's survey statistics to see what worked and what didn't

- Every election cycle you provide your state Election office with UOCAVA data for the EAC Election Administration and Voting Survey (EAVS). The data include how many UOCAVA ballots were transmitted, how many were counted, how many were rejected and why.
- Starting in 2014, you will be reporting information to your state on the various ways you transmitted ballots to your UOCAVA voters.

- Take advantage of this information to identify ways to better manage the process you're using to transmit ballots to your UOCAVA voters and to learn what may be causing these ballots to not get counted.
- Consider taking the UOCAVA Election Official Online Training Course (<http://www.FVAP.gov/eo>) and training at least two of your election staff on these processes and encourage them to take the training before each election cycle.

### Quick Clicks

Information regarding the postage free mailing of UOCAVA election materials is available from the USPS in the Domestic Mail Manual (DMM) section 703.8.2  
<http://pe.usps.com/text/dmm300/703.htm#1174014>

Information from MPSA is available here  
<http://hqdainet.army.mil/mpsa/main.htm>  
 also review the USPS Domestic Mail Manual (DMM) procedures at [www.usps.com/electionmail](http://www.usps.com/electionmail)

