



ALEX PADILLA | SECRETARY OF STATE | STATE OF CALIFORNIA
ELECTIONS DIVISION

1500 11th Street, 5th Floor, Sacramento, CA 95814 | Tel 916.657.2166 | Fax 916.653.3214 | www.sos.ca.gov

January 8, 2020

County Clerk/Registrar of Voters (CC/ROV) Memorandum #20009

TO: All County Clerks/Registrars of Voters

FROM: /s/ Catherine Ingram-Kelly
Voting Services Manager

RE: VoteCal: Ballot Processing Guidance Document

As new functionality is added to the VoteCal system, the Secretary of State provides updated and/or new guidance documents to county users in order to provide counties with direction and processes to effectively use the VoteCal system. Listed below are the documents which are new or updated as of January 6, 2020:

- Ballot Processing

Please take the time to review this guidance document as it will assist you with the VoteCal processes. This document will also be posted on the VoteCal Communications Portal with the other guidance documents.

If you have any questions or need clarification regarding this CCROV or other VoteCal matters, please contact the VoteCal Help Desk at 888-868-3225 or via email at VoteCalHelp@sos.ca.gov.

Attachments



Guidance: Ballot Processing

Issuance Date: May 7, 2018

Revision Date: January 7, 2020

Page 1 of 10

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Purpose of this Guidance Document	2
2. Guiding Principle – “First in Wins”	2
3. “Lights” for Issuing and Counting.....	2
4. Polling Place Roster Adjudication Status Dashboard - “Bingo Board”	4
5. Setup for the Election	4
6. Vote-by-Mail (VBM) Ballots	4
7. Conditional Voter Registration (CVR) Provisional Ballots	6
8. Nonprovisional CVR (NCVR) Ballots – “Instant CVR”	7
9. Vote Center Regular Ballots	7
10. Provisional Ballots	8
11. Polling Place Regular Ballots	9
12. Voter Participation History (Participation Method and When Sent).....	9
12.1 Review of VPH Methods	9



Guidance: Ballot Processing

Issuance Date: May 7, 2018

Revision Date: January 7, 2020

Page 2 of 10

1. Purpose of this Guidance Document

This document provides guidance on when a vote-by-mail (VBM), conditional voter registration (CVR) provisional, nonprovisional CVR (NCVR), provisional, vote center regular, or polling place regular ballot is accepted/counted anywhere in the state and what information county elections officials must provide to VoteCal, via their EMS, to facilitate the cross-county knowledge that a vote was accepted/counted.

All other current procedures for ballot processing are still in effect.

2. Guiding Principle – “First in Wins”

First ballot in wins – This is defined as an accepted/counted vote documented in the EMS and sent to VoteCal. This could be a VBM ballot, CVR provisional ballot, provisional ballot, vote center regular ballot, or polling place regular ballot. This first ballot in is the ballot counted; any other ballot received for the voter should be rejected as “Voter already voted” by the county.

If a provisional or CVR voter re-registers after the 15-day cutoff and was a “poll voter” in the previous county (no VBM ballots issued), any ballot cast in the new county should be held until the previous county indicates that their poll history (i.e. rosters) has been uploaded to VoteCal (see 4. Polling Place Roster Adjudication Status Dashboard - “Bingo Board”).

3. “Lights” for Issuing and Counting

VoteCal supports validation checks by the EMSs for determining if a ballot (VBM, CVR provisional, provisional, vote center regular ballot, or polling place regular ballot) has been accepted/counted for a voter for the election. EMSs support the following:

- Ability to do a validation check to VoteCal to determine if a ballot has been accepted/counted for a voter.
- Notification to prevent a ballot from being issued when a ballot has already been accepted/counted for a voter.
- Functionality to allow a user to override and issue a provisional ballot (CVR or regular) to a voter.

EMSs have implemented a three “traffic light” concept to inform the counties if it is ok to issue and/or count a ballot. Though the EMS implementation will vary, the “light” definitions are:



Guidance: Ballot Processing

Issuance Date: May 7, 2018

Revision Date: January 7, 2020

Page 3 of 10

- **Issuing** Ballot “Lights” Definitions:

Ballot Issuance Lights	
Light Color	Definition
Red Light	The voter has already cast an “Accepted” ballot. County should not issue a vote center, CVR ballot, or NCVR ballot and can choose to issue a provisional ballot.
Yellow Light	The voter has outstanding message(s) (such as potential duplicate or merge voter determine survivor) that should be worked before making a decision to issue a ballot. County should work and resolve any outstanding messages sent to their county for this voter. This is critical as, if the resolution of the message results in a voter merge, the newly combined single record will show if the voter has cast a ballot anywhere else in the state.
Green Light	There are no red or yellow light issues. County can issue a ballot.

- **Counting** Ballot “Light” Definitions:

Ballot Counting Lights	
Light Color	Definition
Red Light	The voter has already cast an “Accepted” ballot. County should not count this ballot.
Yellow Light	The voter has outstanding message(s) (such as potential duplicate or merged voter determine survivor) OR voter is an existing registered “poll voter” in another county (defined as a voter who re-registered after the E-15 cutoff, came from another county, and has no VBM ballots issued). County should work any outstanding messages sent to their county for this voter and, if a poll voter in another county, check the “Bingo Board” to verify the voter did not choose to cast a ballot at the polls (explained in the next section 4. “Polling Place Roster Adjudication Status Dashboard – ‘Bingo Board’”) before counting the ballot.
Green Light	There are no red or yellow light issues. County can count ballot.



Guidance: Ballot Processing

Issuance Date: May 7, 2018

Revision Date: January 7, 2020

Page 4 of 10

4. Polling Place Roster Adjudication Status Dashboard - “Bingo Board”

For each election, counties, via their EMS, indicate that they have completed their roster adjudication and have uploaded their Voter Participation History (VPH) to VoteCal. VoteCal has added a secured county portal containing the dashboard “Bingo Board” so that counties know when other counties have completed uploading their polling place VPH.

Using a county-specific URL provided by the VoteCal Help Desk, counties launch the “Bingo Board,” pick an election, and then view a listing of all 58 counties. If a county has indicated their roster adjudication is complete, a green checkmark is displayed for that county. If adjudication is not complete, a red “X” is displayed. If a county is not participating in the selected election, “N/A” is displayed for the counties not involved in the selected election (e.g. not statewide).

Counties use this “Bingo Board” to determine when to count a ballot that is showing a yellow light in the EMS because the voter is an existing registered “poll voter” in another county (County A). County B will view the dashboard for County A where the voter is an existing registered “poll voter.”

- If County A shows a green checkmark on the dashboard, this means that the county has uploaded their VPH and the voter did not cast a poll ballot.
 - County B can count the ballot that is receiving a yellow light in the EMS.
- If County A shows a red “X” on the dashboard, this means that the county has not uploaded their VPH and it is unknown if the voter has cast a poll ballot.
 - County B must wait until County A shows a green checkmark on the dashboard.
- If County A shows a green checkmark on the dashboard and the voter DID cast a “poll” ballot, County B should see a red light in the EMS for that ballot.

5. Setup for the Election

The county elections officials must ensure the EMS is configured to send ballot information to VoteCal automatically; the EMS implementation will vary.

The county elections officials must also ensure that all local values for ballot return method and ballot rejection reason codes are mapped to VoteCal standard values.

6. Vote-by-Mail (VBM) Ballots

The county elections official should refer to Section 3. ““Lights” for Issuing and Counting” above to determine if a VBM ballot should be counted. Contact your EMS for assistance.

The county elections official must update the voter record in VoteCal, via the EMS, with the following data when a VBM ballot is issued:



Guidance: Ballot Processing

Issuance Date: May 7, 2018

Revision Date: January 7, 2020

Page 5 of 10

- Issue Date (This is a user entered date and can be different from the date VoteCal actually receives the issued ballot information from the EMS/county)
- Issue Method

The county elections official must update the voter record in VoteCal, via the EMS, with the following data when a VBM ballot is returned. These values entered via the EMS are updated in near-real time to VoteCal:

- Received Date
- VBM Return Method
- VBM Ballot Return Status (Accepted or Not Accepted)
- VBM Ballot Reject Reason Code (required if VBM Ballot Return Status is not “Not Accepted”)

The following data must be updated in the voter record in the EMS for a VBM ballot:

- VBM Return Method
 - Drop Box (indicates an unattended stand-alone drop box location)
 - Drop Off Location (indicates VBM ballots returned at a location such as at a polling place or at the county elections office)
 - Vote Center Drop Off (for VBM ballots returned at a vote center)
 - Mail
 - Fax
 - Non-Deliverable
 - Other
- VBM Ballot Status
 - Accepted
 - Not Accepted
- VBM Ballot Reject Reason Code (must be indicated when VBM Ballot is Not Accepted)
 - Voter already voted
 - No voter signature
 - Non-matching signature
 - Ballot missing from envelope
 - Voter deceased
 - Missing or incorrect address on envelope
 - Multiple ballots returned in one envelope
 - Ballot was not received in time
 - Please contact your county for further information
 - VBM ballot was undeliverable
 - In Review (this is a temporary reason and cannot be used for final adjudication)



Guidance: Ballot Processing

Issuance Date: May 7, 2018

Revision Date: January 7, 2020

Page 6 of 10

The VPH Participation Method Code for accepted VBM ballots must be Vote-By-Mail.

The county elections official should verify that a sample of a ballot of each type (VBM, CVR provisional, provisional, vote center regular ballot, or polling place regular ballot) are updated appropriately in VoteCal and, if not, should check for related failure messages in the EMS. Contact your EMS for assistance.

The voter's VBM ballot status (and the ballot rejection reason, if applicable) will display on the voter's My Voter Status page. This will be visible to voters in near real time.

7. Conditional Voter Registration (CVR) Provisional Ballots

The county elections official should refer to Section 3. "“Lights” for Issuing and Counting” above to determine if a CVR provisional ballot should be issued and/or counted.

The following data must be updated in the voter record in the EMS when a CVR provisional ballot is counted:

- CVR Provisional Ballot Status
 - Counted
 - Not Counted

If the CVR provisional ballot is not counted, then the Provisional Ballot Not Counted Reason Code must be specified:

- Provisional Ballot Not Counted Reason Code
 - Voter already voted
 - No voter signature
 - Non-matching signature
 - Ballot missing from envelope
 - Voter not registered
 - Voted in wrong county
 - Envelope and/or ballot was incomplete and/or illegible
 - Please contact your county for further information
 - In Review (this is a temporary reason and cannot be used for final adjudication)

The VPH Participation Method Code for counted CVR provisional ballots must be CVR.

The county elections official should verify that a sample of the voter records are updated appropriately in VoteCal and, if not, should answer related failure messages in the EMS. The county elections official can utilize the “VoteCal Portal” or “Statewide Search” within the EMS to ensure that the ballot information was updated in VoteCal. Contact your EMS for assistance.



Guidance: Ballot Processing

Issuance Date: May 7, 2018

Revision Date: January 7, 2020

Page 7 of 10

The county elections official shall resolve the “in review” status of a registrant’s ballot within the canvass period. The voter’s CVR provisional ballot status and, if not counted, the Provisional Ballot Not Counted Reason Code will display on the voter’s My Voter Status page. This will be visible to voters in near real time.

8. Nonprovisional CVR (NCVR) Ballots – “Instant CVR”

An “Instant CVR” ballot is issued to a voter when the county and voter meet the conditions outlined in CCROV 19125 (dated November 20, 2019) and the voter has not returned an accepted/counted ballot for the election anywhere in the state. The county elections official should refer to Section 3. ““Lights” for Issuing and Counting” above to determine if an “Instant CVR” ballot should be issued and/or counted.

When an “Instant CVR” ballot is issued, a VPH for that voter should be noted in the EMS which is updated in VoteCal in near real time. The VPH Participation Method Code for counted NCVR ballots must be Nonprovisional CVR – “Instant CVR”.

The county elections official should verify that a sample of the voter records are updated appropriately in VoteCal and, if not, should answer related failure messages in the EMS. The county elections official can utilize the “VoteCal Portal” or “Statewide Search” within the EMS to ensure that the ballot information was updated in VoteCal. Contact your EMS for assistance.

The voter’s “Instant CVR” ballot status will display on the voter’s My Voter Status page. This will be visible to voters in near real time.

9. Vote Center Regular Ballots

A vote center regular ballot is issued to a voter who arrives at an established vote center when the county elections official can verify that the voter is an eligible registered voter and has not returned an accepted/counted ballot for the election anywhere in the state. The county elections official should refer to section 3. ““Lights” for Issuing and Counting” above to determine if a vote center regular ballot should be issued.

When a vote center regular ballot is issued, a VPH for that voter should be noted in the EMS which is updated in VoteCal in near real time. The VPH Participating Method Code for an issued/cast vote center regular ballot must be “Vote Center”. Additionally, the vote center at which the vote was cast must also be identified.

The county elections official should verify that a sample of the voter records are updated appropriately in VoteCal and, if not, should answer related failure messages in the EMS. The county elections official can utilize the “VoteCal Portal” or “Statewide Search” within the EMS to ensure that the ballot information was updated in VoteCal. Contact your EMS for assistance.



Guidance: Ballot Processing

Issuance Date: May 7, 2018

Revision Date: January 7, 2020

Page 8 of 10

The voter's vote center ballot status will display on the voter's My Voter Status page. This will be visible to voters in near real time.

10. Provisional Ballots

The following data must be updated in the voter record in the EMS when a provisional ballot is adjudicated using the following standard values:

- Provisional Ballot Status
 - Counted
 - Not Counted

If the provisional ballot is not counted, then the "reason" must also be specified:

- Provisional Ballot Not Counted Reason Code
 - Voter already voted
 - No voter signature
 - Non-matching signature
 - Ballot missing from envelope
 - Voter not registered
 - Voted in wrong county
 - Voted wrong ballot
 - Envelope and/or ballot was incomplete and/or illegible
 - Please contact your county for further information
 - In Review (this is a temporary reason and cannot be used for final adjudication)

The VPH Participation Method Code for counted provisional ballots should reflect the method the provisional ballot was cast. For example:

- If the provisional ballot was cast at a polling place, the VPH Participation Method Code would be "Polling Place".
- If the provisional ballot was cast at a VCA county's vote center, the VPH Participation Method Code would be "Vote Center".

The county elections official should verify that a sample of the voter records are updated appropriately in VoteCal and, if not, should answer related failure messages in the EMS. The county elections official can utilize the "VoteCal Portal" or "Statewide Search" within the EMS to ensure that the ballot information was updated in VoteCal. Contact your EMS for assistance.

The elections official shall resolve the "in review" status of a registrant's ballot within the canvass period. The voter's provisional ballot status and, if not counted, the Provisional Ballot Not Counted



Guidance: Ballot Processing

Issuance Date: May 7, 2018

Revision Date: January 7, 2020

Page 9 of 10

Reason Code will display on the voter's My Voter Status page. This will be visible to voters in near real time.

11. Polling Place Regular Ballots

When polling place adjudication history is sent to VoteCal, the VPH Voting Method must always be "Polling Place".

Once the county elections official has completed uploading all polling place roster adjudication history to VoteCal, the elections official indicates through the EMS interface that they are complete so other counties can access this information via the dashboard "Bingo Board." For more information see section 4. "Polling Place Roster Adjudication Status Dashboard – "Bingo Board"" above.

12. Voter Participation History (Participation Method and When Sent)

The county elections officials will apply the VPH to the voter record in the EMS to indicate voter credit (voter cast an accepted/counted vote). The VPH can be sent to VoteCal any time after polls open.

If a voter casts a vote center regular ballot, the VPH for that voter must be sent immediately to VoteCal.

Counties shall apply final VBM Ballot Rejection Reason codes and Provisional Ballot Not Counted Reason codes to voter records in the statewide voter registration system. These reasons will display on the voter's My Voter Status page. This will be visible to voters in near real time.

12.1 Review of VPH Methods

- VBM Ballots - If a VBM ballot has been returned and the county elections official has accepted the ballot, the VPH Participation Method must be "VBM". This VPH record must be sent to VoteCal immediately so other counties will know that the voter has cast a ballot for this election.
- CVR Provisional Ballots - If a CVR provisional ballot has been cast and the county elections official has counted the ballot, the VPH Participation Method must be "CVR". This VPH record must be sent to VoteCal immediately so other counties will know that the voter has cast a ballot for this election.
- Nonprovisional CVR (NCVR) Ballots - "Instant CVR" - If an "Instant CVR" ballot has been cast, the VPH Participation Method must be "Nonprovisional CVR – "Instant CVR"". This VPH record must be sent to VoteCal immediately so other counties will know that the voter has cast a ballot for this election.
- Vote Center Regular Ballots - If a vote center ballot is cast, the VPH Participation Method must be "Vote Center", and the vote center where the voter cast their vote must be specified. This VPH record must be sent to VoteCal immediately so other counties will know that the voter has cast a ballot for this election.



Guidance: Ballot Processing

Issuance Date: May 7, 2018

Revision Date: January 7, 2020

Page 10 of 10

- Provisional Ballots - If a provisional ballot has been cast and the county elections official has counted the ballot, the VPH Participation Method must reflect where the provisional ballot was cast. For example:
 - If the voter cast the provisional ballot at a polling place, the VPH Participation Method would be "Polling Place".
 - If the voter cast the provisional ballot at a VCA county's vote center, the VPH Participation Method would be "Vote Center".
- Polling Place Regular Ballots – If a polling place regular ballot has been cast, the VPH Participation Method must be "Polling Place".