

Chapter 7

The National Mail Voter Registration Form

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I. General Information and Background

The National Voter Registration Act of 1993 (NVRA) required the Federal Election Commission (FEC) to design a national mail voter registration form (National Form), in consultation with state elections officials. The NVRA also required states to accept voter registrations submitted by mail using the National Form.

In 1994, the FEC created the National Form after consulting with state and county elections officials, social service agencies, and advocacy groups. Since each state has its own voter registration requirements and forms, the FEC took into consideration the various paper sizes, voter information, and voter registration database technologies used in the states in designing the National Form. The National Form is similar to the California Voter Registration Card (VRC) but there are a number of differences detailed below.

The National Form can be printed from the Election Assistance Commission (EAC) website at www.eac.gov. The Secretary of State and county elections offices can make available paper copies of the National Form upon request.

The National Form may be used to register to vote in any state. The form includes general instructions as well as state-specific instructions on how to complete the form. Since the United States has no national or federal voter registration system, completed forms are sent to the appropriate county elections office and are processed in the same manner as the state VRC.

II. Use of the National Form

The vast majority of voters continue to use the state VRC to register to vote, and elections officials may continue to encourage use of the state VRC. However, elections officials must make the National Form available upon request and may wish to provide the National Form to organizations targeting outreach efforts to more than one state. Individuals and groups who may prefer to use the National Form include:

- College students who want to register to vote in the state where they permanently reside;
- Political party convention organizers;
- Travelers from out-of-state; and
- Military personnel.

III. Distribution of National Form to Counties

The Secretary of State provides both the state VRC and the National Form to counties upon request. However, since the National Form may be downloaded and printed directly from the EAC website, county elections officials typically only place orders for

supplies of the state VRC. The Secretary of State invites each county to place orders for VRC supplies four times a year, at the beginning of each quarter.

Additionally, the Secretary of State has designed a website that provides an online voter registration application at RegisterToVote.ca.gov. This application is available in English, Spanish, Chinese, Hindi, Japanese, Khmer, Korean, Tagalog, Thai, and Vietnamese.

IV. Items on the National Mail Voter Registration Form

The form requests the following information:

Name: Last, first, and middle, any suffix – such as “Jr.,” and any prefix – such as “Mr.” or “Ms.”

Home Address: Street address, Apt. Lot #, City/Town, State, Zip Code. The instructions direct applicants not to list a post office box or rural route without a box number. For applicants who live in rural areas or non-traditional homes, the National Form provides a space for people to draw a residence map.

Mailing Address: If different from home address.

Date of Birth: Month, day and year of birth.

Telephone Number: Optional.

ID Number: The California instructions for the National Form require applicants to provide either a California driver license or California identification card number (DL/ID), if the applicant has one, or the last four digits of their social security number, if any. If this information is not included, the applicant will be required to provide identification when they vote for the first time.

Choice of Party: Unlike the state VRC, which provides checkboxes for qualified political parties, the National Form simply provides a blank space to fill in the name of a political party. The California instructions for the National Form ask applicants to write the name of a political party, or “No Party Preference” to state” to indicate that the application does not have a party preference. The California instructions also encourage applicants to contact the Secretary of State at 1-800-345-VOTE (8683) or visit www.sos.ca.gov to get a list of qualified political parties and to learn which political parties allow voters with no political party preference to participate in presidential primary elections.

Race or Ethnic Group: Similar to the state VRC, the National Form provides a blank space for applicants to fill in a race or ethnic group. The California instructions for the National Form direct applicants to leave this field blank, because county elections officials do not enter data from this field into the voter registration database.

Signature: Applicants must sign and date the National Form and affirm that they:

1. Are a United States citizen,
2. Meet state eligibility requirements and subscribe to any state oath required; and
3. Have provided true information to the best of their knowledge under penalty of perjury.

The California instructions for the National Form clarify that to register in California, the applicant must be:

1. A U.S. citizen;
2. A resident of California;
3. At least 18 years old at the next election in order to vote;
4. Not currently serving a state or federal prison term for the conviction of a felony;
and
5. Not currently found to be mentally incompetent to vote by a court.

Name, address, and phone of anyone who helped the applicant: If the applicant is unable to sign, the general instructions for the National Form provide a space at the end of the form for the name, address, and phone of the person who helped the applicant complete the form. This information must only be included if the applicant is unable to sign. [Note: Phone number is optional.] By contrast, the state VRC contains a space for the contact information of anyone who assists the applicant in completing *any part* of the VRC, regardless of whether the applicant is able to sign the VRC.

Change of name: The National Form provides a space for a prior name, if the form is used for a name change.

Change of address: The National Form provides a space for a prior address, if the form is used for an address change.

Map: As noted above, the National Form provides a space to draw a residence map for applicants who live in rural areas or non-traditional homes.

While the state VRC requests the additional information below, the National Form does **not** request the following:

- California county
- Foreign country
- U.S. state or foreign country of birth
- Vote By Mail Choice
- Email address
- Text messaging

- Language Preference
- Accessible format

V. Format and Layout of the National Form

The National Form fits onto regular 8.5" × 11" paper and can be printed from the Internet. The form includes General Instructions and specific State Instructions for each state on how to complete the form. Currently, the National Form is available in English, Spanish, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Tagalog, Vietnamese, Hindi, Bengali, and Khmer. The National Form does not contain a return postage stamp.

By contrast, under current state law and regulations, the state VRC is printed on paper of a special size and weight and contains a unique affidavit number. The VRC also contains a return address of local elections officials or the Secretary of State, depending on the VRC and can be mailed without a postage stamp. These restrictions prevent the state VRC from being printable from the Internet.

Elections officials **must** accept copies of the National Form printed from a computer image of the form, as long as the form is completed and signed by the applicant and either hand-delivered or mailed with first class postage.