



Guidance: Ballot Tracking

Issuance Date: July 20, 2021

Revision Date: N/A

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Purpose

On September 17, 2018, Assembly Bill 2218 (AB 2218) was signed into law. AB 2218 added Elections Code section 3019.7, which requires the California Secretary of State (SOS) to establish a system that counties may use to offer ballot tracking to voters. The SOS has made the **Where's My Ballot?** website available for voters to track and receive automatic notifications on the status of their vote-by-mail (VBM) ballot for statewide and local elections. This system allows voters in all counties to sign up to receive emails, texts, and/or phone messages as their VBM ballot is mailed and processed by their county elections official. Voters can receive ballot tracking messages in English and nine other languages. This guidance document describes information on ballot tracking from both the voter and county perspectives.

How do counties sign up?

Statewide Elections

All 58 counties are signed up unless the county opts out.

Special or Local Elections

For special or local elections, the SOS will **not** automatically opt in each county. The county must notify the SOS Ballot Tracking staff at least ninety (90) days prior to the election to allow sufficient time to finalize the county-specific messages and obtain necessary translations.

Interested counties can sign up with the SOS Ballot Tracking team at

ballottracking@sos.ca.gov. Counties must provide the following information to the SOS:

1. Election name
2. Election date
3. Date to have ballot tracking turned on
4. Will Intelligent Mail Barcodes (IMBs) be utilized for outbound, inbound or both?

When conducting special or local elections with ballot tracking, please be sure that your Election Management System (EMS) is uploading voter VBM data to VoteCal in a timely manner, as that is the data used to send messages.

How are messages sent?

There are two different sources that can trigger a ballot tracking message to a voter, VoteCal or Intelligent Mail Barcodes (IMBs).

When a county issues and/or updates VBM ballot or VPH in their EMS and that data is sent to VoteCal, VoteCal sends the voter's VBM Ballot Status Code to the state ballot tracking vendor which triggers the corresponding ballot tracking message to the voter. VoteCal provides the state ballot tracking vendor information from VoteCal VBM Ballot and Voter Participation History (VPH) data to trigger messages to voters. Please refer to the Ballot Processing guidance document revision date July 20, 2021, for more on ballot processing.



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Information can also be provided utilizing IMBs if the county provides this option (see bullet #2 below). Counties are not required to utilize IMBs to meet the ballot tracking requirements in Elections Code section 3019.7.

1. VoteCal

Below is a table detailing VBM Ballot Status Codes that VoteCal sends to the state ballot tracking vendor. This table also provides a description of the codes, type of ballot tracking messages sent, and the source of the trigger to queue the message:

VBM Ballot Status Codes	Description	Message Sent	Source
ISSUED	VBM ballot Sent Date	Outbound	VoteCal or IMB
n/a	Inbound	Inbound	IMB
INR	In Review	Received	VoteCal
ACCEPTED	Accepted	Accepted	VoteCal
VAV	Voter already voted	Not Accepted	VoteCal
NVS	No voter signature	Contact County	VoteCal
NMS	Non-matching signature	Contact County	VoteCal
BME	Ballot missing from envelope	Not Accepted	VoteCal
VDD	Voter deceased	Not Accepted	VoteCal
MIA	Missing or incorrect address on envelope	Not Accepted	VoteCal
MRE	Multiple ballots returned in one envelope	Not Accepted	VoteCal
NOT	Ballot was not received on time	Not Accepted	VoteCal
INF	Please contact your county for further information	Contact County	VoteCal
OTH	(Other codes with multiple reasons)	Not Accepted	VoteCal
UND	VBM ballot was undeliverable	Undeliverable	VoteCal
NID	No ID provided	Contact County	VoteCal
CLD	Cancelled	Not Accepted	VoteCal
Reissued	If more than one ballot in issued status	Reissued	VoteCal
POLL	If the voter has an active VPH with a Participation Method of Polling Place	InPerson	VoteCal
VCR	If the voter has an active VPH with a Participation Method of Vote Center	InPerson	VoteCal

2. Intelligent Mail Barcodes

IMBs are not required but can be used to track an outbound or inbound VBM envelope through the United States Postal Service (USPS). If your county does not plan to use IMB codes, then all messages are sent based on VoteCal data.



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IMB codes are not uploaded to VoteCal. IMBs may be used to track the ballot through the United States Postal Service (USPS) using scan hits on the outbound VBM envelope and inbound VBM envelope. Counties must work directly with their print vendor and the state ballot tracking vendor to set up IMB codes to ensure accurate messaging.

In order to use the IMBs, the county or county print vendor will need to work with the state ballot tracking vendor to set up and enable Informed Visibility. Informed Visibility is the USPS tracking platform that allows transmission of mail scan data from the USPS. Providing the ballot tracking vendor access to the county Informed Visibility Platform allows the ballot tracking vendor to know when a ballot envelope is scanned with the associated IMB code. In addition, your ballot printing vendor will need to provide the state ballot tracking vendor with a tracking file that includes the IMBs and the associated voter ID (VoteCal ID). The tracking file provides a crosswalk of the IMB code and the voter ID, so the ballot tracking vendor knows who to send the outbound or inbound message to.

If your county is using IMBs, the outbound message will be triggered in one of two ways: the IMB code or the "Issued" EMS VBM code. The outbound message will be triggered by whichever indicator the ballot tracking vendor receives first – the IMB scan or the VBM issued/sent date of the ballot.

Messages

The standard text for each ballot tracking message provided/sent to voters is attached to this guidance document (Appendix A).

When voters sign up for ballot tracking they can request notifications via text message, email, and phone. Voters can also select the language for their notification messages. For all elections, voters may choose to receive their notifications in ten languages: English, Spanish, Chinese, Hindi, Japanese, Khmer, Korean, Tagalog, Thai, and Vietnamese.

The SOS will finalize and translate each message and audio file and provide them directly to the ballot tracking vendor.

When voters sign up for ballot tracking, they can choose the timeframe when they would like to receive their notifications. The default timeframe is 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m., but this can be customized based on user preference.

The default for Vote-by-mail ballot tracking messages will be enabled on E-29. Messages will continue to be sent to voters until E+30.

How do voters sign up?

Voters go to <https://wheresmyballot.sos.ca.gov>, where they will need to provide the following information to sign up (must match voter record exactly):

- First Name
- Last Name



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- Date of Birth
- Zip Code

Voters will also select notification preferences on:

- Message language
- Mode of delivery (phone call, email, and/or text message); voters can select all three notification preferences
- Notification hours (for example, receive notifications only between 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m.)

Voters will receive a confirmation text and/or email message based on the notification preference they selected. Confirmation messages are not being provided for phone calls at this time.

If a voter attempts to sign up for ballot tracking and no match is found, the user will be directed to check their voter registration at My Voter Status (<https://wheresmyballot.sos.ca.gov>) or to contact their county.

A voter only needs to sign up once for ballot tracking unless the voter moves to a new county, in which case they will need to sign up again. Once a voter is signed up, the voter will continue to receive notifications for all future elections that the county provides the service for unless the voter opts out or moves out of county.

Assisting Voters

Counties may attempt to assist voters having trouble with ballot tracking sign up by using their EMS. Some issues that may prevent a voter from signing up for ballot tracking include:

- Voter's First Name, Last Name, DOB, or Zip Code was mis-keyed when registering to vote.
- Similar attributes to another voter in the system, requiring a voter ID to differentiate them.
- Voter recently registered to vote, or their voter registration recently changed.
- Voter status is inactive, canceled, or pending.
- Voter is overseas and is entering their overseas zip code instead of the California zip code used to register to vote.
- Voter is entering the date of birth in the wrong format and not as MM-DD-YYYY.

In some cases, if two voters have the same First Name, Last Name, Date of Birth, and Zip code, the Ballot Tracking login screen will request a voter ID. This voter ID is the voter's VoteCal ID. The voter is instructed to call the VoteCal Help Desk at (916) 654-1141 for further assistance. Otherwise, if the sign up problem is due to a data keying error of the voter's information or the voter's registration being inactive/canceled, the voter is directed to contact their county elections office.



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Additionally, the security settings on the voter's device may block them from accessing the ballot tracking vendor's website.

This FAQ is also available on the SOS website at: <https://elections.cdn.sos.ca.gov/statewide-elections/2020-general/ballotrax-troubleshooting.pdf>

SOS-Communications Marketing Toolkit

Marketing Toolkit to advertise ballot tracking to voters is available and provides the following:

- Press release template
- Draft social media language
- "Where's My Ballot?" graphics optimized for social media platforms
- Buckslip (Available in other languages)
- Flyer (Available in other languages)

Please contact the SOS Ballot Tracking team at ballotracking@sos.ca.gov to request more information.

SOS Contact Information

For ballot tracking questions, or to sign up for ballot tracking for a local election, please contact the SOS Ballot Tracking team at ballotracking@sos.ca.gov.

For VoteCal questions or to report issues, please contact the SOS VoteCal Help Desk at 888-868-3225 or email VoteCalHelp@sos.ca.gov.