

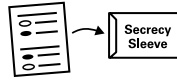
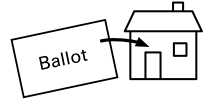
Washington State Vote-By-Mail (VBM) Fact Sheet

Timeline

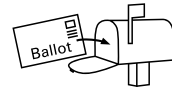
- Pre-1983:** Washington Legislature authorized “permanent absentee” ballots for voters with disabilities and those age 65+, other voters to request absentee ballot for each election in writing.
- 1983:** Special elections allowed to be conducted by mail ballot.
- 1991:** Permanent absentee law expanded to allow any voter to join the list by request; once on the list they receive ballots for every election.
- 1993:** Small precinct VBM law expanded to precincts with under 200 voters, some counties begin splitting precincts and moving to all VBM elections.
- 2005:** Washington Legislature establishes VBM as a permanent option of the election process for all elections, allowing counties to choose.
- 2011:** With 38 of 39 counties switched to VBM, Washington Legislature requires VBM statewide.

How does VBM work?

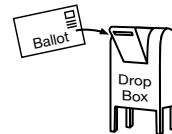
All eligible voters are sent a ballot at least 18 days before election, military and overseas up to 90 days. Mailing address can be anywhere in the world.



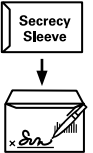
Marked ballot is put in a secrecy sleeve or envelope.



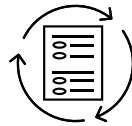
The secrecy sleeve or envelope is put in a return envelope and signed.



Ballots have pre-paid postage and are returned through the mail or at ballot drop boxes. If mailed, must be postmarked by election day. Drop boxes are open until 8 p.m. on election day.



Voters can check their ballot status online or sign up for text notifications. It may take the system 3–4 days for status updates to post.



New ballots can be requested or printed, but will suspend any previously issued ballot and still need to be signature verified.

Benefits

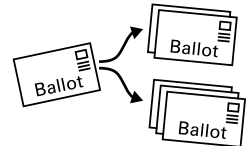
- Fewer pollworkers/sites to coordinate
- Auditable paper trail
- Every eligible registered voter receives a ballot
- Ample time to research and vote
- Higher turnout

Challenges

- Material prep time for printing and mailing
- Requires high levels of staff expertise
- Vendor and equipment coordination (e.g., mailing houses, sorters, scanners, etc.)
- Length of time to report final results

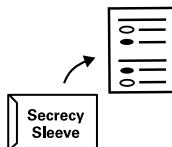
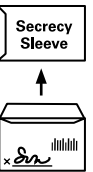
How does a VBM ballot get processed?

Envelope is scanned and marked as “Received” in the VoteWA system, then sorted into batches.



Each signature is checked by trained election staff. Voter is contacted if the signature is missing or doesn’t match the voter registration record.

Return envelope is opened, the secrecy sleeve or envelope is removed, and the two are separated. At this point, the ballot cannot be traced back to the voter.



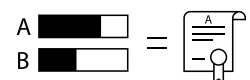
Secrecy sleeve or envelope is opened and ballot is removed for processing.

Ballot is reviewed for potential scanning issues like torn corners, then scanned and securely stored.



Scanners are not connected to any form of network or internet.

Ballots continue to be processed, signatures verified, and votes tabulated until the election results are officially certified.



Contact Washington Office of the Secretary of State Elections Division

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1 (800) 448-4881
sos.wa.gov/elections



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Secretary of State
Elections Division