

Vote by Mail: Frequently Asked Questions

How does a voter request a vote by mail ballot?

To request a ballot, a voter must already be registered to vote in Loudoun County. A mail ballot request can be submitted [online](#) or by [paper application](#). Voters can also choose to request 'permanent' absentee, which means they will be sent a ballot for every election until they opt out.

Who determines if the voter is eligible to vote by mail?

Only staff in the Office of Elections and Voter Registration can approve a mail ballot request. Staff verifies voter eligibility and then approves the request, triggering the process for mailing the ballot once available.

Who decides the best way to mail ballots?

Under a Virginia law adopted in 2021, ([Section 24.2-706 of the Code of Virginia](#)), general registrars in Virginia may contract with a third-party vendor for the printing, assembly and mailing of absentee ballots to registered voters who request them. This change to code was enacted by the General Assembly on a bipartisan basis and signed into law by Governor Ralph Northam.

Who is responsible for the actual mailing of the ballots?

Loudoun has partnered with Fort Orange Press to mail absentee ballots.

Why did Loudoun choose to outsource the mailing of ballots to a vendor?

Changes in election laws were factors in the decision to use a third-party vendor for the printing, assembling and mailing of absentee ballots.

- In 2021, the Virginia General Assembly approved legislation allowing Virginia voters to vote early or by mail with no excuse required, and allowing the general registrar in each locality to contract with a third-party vendor for the mailing of ballots.
- In 2022, the Virginia General Assembly voted to require election offices to report early and mail votes by precinct instead of in a 'lump sum.'

These changes to the Virginia Code have greatly increased not only the number of voters choosing to vote by mail but also the number of ballot 'styles' required to report results by precinct. Due to the increase in the number of ballots, the printing and mailing of ballots by a third-party vendor will ensure greater efficiency and accuracy than when the process was handled manually by local staff because the vendor has computerized systems that are designed for exactly this purpose. Using a third-party vendor will allow local elections workers to focus on other tasks that support the administration of fair and accurate elections.

What contractual obligations does the vendor have regarding accounting and security?

Under its contract with Loudoun County, Fort Orange Press is required to conduct background checks on all staff, control access to its facility, present notarized affidavits detailing all work done, and provide daily, weekly and final reports on the ballots that are mailed, including a detailed list of who they were mailed to. Also, staff in the Office of Elections and Voter Registration will also have access to a robust dashboard that shows the jobs being processed, both historical and real- time.

How does the vendor know who to mail ballots to?

Each day the Absentee Coordinator in the Office of Elections and Voter Registration will transmit a list of voters to be mailed ballots. This list will include only information needed to mail the ballot such as name, address, voting precinct and ballot style to be mailed. It is important to note that the vendor will not have access to the entire Loudoun County voter registration database, only to those specific voters who have requested a ballot by mail.

How does staff verify that only authorized ballots were mailed?

Staff can view the job progress via the dashboard in real time. Staff will also receive a detailed report each day listing voters who were mailed a ballot and the ballot style they received. The daily report of ballots mailed will be compared to the daily report provided to the vendor for mailing to ensure accuracy.

How long will it take for a voter to receive their ballot in the mail after request?

The typical time from submission of a request for a ballot by mail to receiving the ballot in the mailbox is about three to four days. This time frame is comparable to, and in some cases slightly faster, than mailing the ballots from the Loudoun office due to increased efficiencies and systems utilized by Fort Orange Press.

How does a voter track their ballot?

Voters who return their ballot by U.S. mail will be able to track their ballot by accessing an online tracking tool through the Loudoun County government website. Once ballots are received at the Office of Elections and Voter Registration, they are immediately marked as returned in the state voter registration system. Voters will be able to check the state website to confirm receipt.

Where are voted ballots returned?

All voted ballots are returned directly to the Office of Elections and Voter Registration via either U.S. mail (pre-paid postage on the envelope) or a convenient drop-box location in Loudoun County. K&H Printing has absolutely no access to voted ballots at any time.

Who is responsible for verifying that the ballot mailed back to the Office of Elections and Voter Registration meets the qualifications for counting?

Upon receipt at the Office of Elections and Voter Registration, two employees will verify that all statements or oaths were completed properly. Once confirmed, the state voter registration system will be updated to show that the voted ballot has been received. Note that the staff in the Office of Elections and Voter Registration **will not** be able to view the actual ballot or how a voter voted; only the election officers in the Central Absentee Precinct can open the envelope and handle a voted ballot.

What happens to ballots after they are received at the office and verified as eligible for counting?

At the conclusion of each day, all ballots verified by staff as eligible and marked in the state voter registration system as received will be placed into a box which will then be sealed to await processing in the Central Absentee Precinct.

What happens to ballots after they are received if they are not verified as eligible for counting?

Any envelopes that are deemed incomplete will be turned over to the 'cure' team. The cure team will contact the voter and notify them of issues with their statement or oath and give the voter the opportunity to correct issues. Once the issues are corrected, the envelope will be transferred to the Central Absentee Precinct team for processing.

Who is responsible for the actual opening and counting of the ballots?

Only the election officers assigned to the Central Absentee Precinct (CAP) can open the envelope containing a voted ballot. The sealed boxes of voted ballots will be turned over to the CAP team, who will verify the seal number and contents of each sealed box. The ballots will then be sorted into manageable 'batches' for processing. A CAP team consisting of one election officer from each political party will again check the envelope for completion of the oath or statement, and once confirmed will 'check the voter in' through the CAP electronic pollbook. After checking the voter in, the CAP team will open the envelope and remove the ballot to prepare it for processing. At a specified time each day, all ballots processed by the CAP teams will be scanned into the high-speed scanner in the presence of at least one election officer from each political party and any party observers who are present.

How do you ensure that only authorized ballots are counted?

Each ballot mailed and received back at the Office of Elections and Voter Registration is checked at a minimum three times to ensure security and accuracy.

- **First:** The staff must approve a request prior to providing the mailing information to the vendor. Only approved requests are forwarded to the vendor for mailing. Once ballots are mailed, a report is sent to the Loudoun staff, who check it against the list of ballots to be mailed provided to the vendor. The vendor will never have access to the entire voter registration database, only to information related to those voters who have requested an absentee ballot.
- **Second:** When a ballot is mailed back to the office, staff verifies that the ballot was in fact issued correctly and the voter has not already voted via another manner. The system will only allow one ballot per voter to be checked in and counted.
- **Third:** The bipartisan teams of election officers in the Central Absentee Precinct ‘check each voter in’ through an electronic pollbook that is programmed to only allow voters who were issued a ballot to be processed. If the team receives an envelope from a voter who is showing as not being issued a ballot or having already voted early, that ballot cannot be processed and the case is referred to Office of Elections and Voter Registration staff for further investigation.