

FAQs about Vote By Mail Ballots

Note: The answers to the questions in this section are governed by the election laws of the State of Florida.

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Signing up for Vote By Mail (VBM), and getting my ballot

Who can sign up to receive VBM ballots?

Any person registered to vote in Manatee County can sign up to receive VBM ballots, and no reason is needed.

How can I sign up to receive VBM ballots?

Sign up for VBM ballots by:

- **Phone** 941-741-3823 ext. 6472
- **Email** info@VoteManatee.com
- **Fax** 941-741-3820
- **Letter** Michael Bennett, Supervisor of Elections, PO Box 1000, Bradenton, FL 34206-1000
- **Website** www.VoteManatee.com

If making your request in writing, include your full name, **and** your date of birth **or** voter identification number, **and** your residence address. Also, state which election(s) you would like a ballot for; if you do not, you will automatically be signed up for all elections through the next two General Elections (Section 101.62, *Florida Statutes*).

Can I sign up someone else for VBM ballots?

VBM ballot sign up can be done for a spouse, child, parent or other family member, as well as anyone for whom you are the legal guardian or caretaker. You will be identified in the voter's record as the requestor of the VBM ballots for that voter.

How many elections can I sign up for to receive VBM ballots?

You can sign up for any one election, or several specific elections, or for the maximum, which is all elections through the next two General Elections (Section 101.62, *Florida Statutes*). If no choice is specified in your request, you will be signed up for all elections through the next two General Elections. You must renew your request after every two General Elections (about four years) from when you sign up.

When do I have to sign up to receive VBM ballots?

VBM ballot sign up is available at any time. However, if you are making a new request and an election is coming up, you must do so no later than 10 days prior to the election.

If you have an existing request and did not receive your ballot, you may request a replacement ballot any time prior to the election. Keep in mind that you will need enough time to receive, complete, and return your ballot so that it is **physically in the SOE Office** no later than 7:00 pm on Election Day.

When is the VBM ballot mailed to me?

The VBM ballot is mailed via the US Postal Service approximately five weeks prior to each election. When requesting a ballot, it is important to keep in mind **not** where you will be on Election Day, **but** where you will be during the time it will arrive in your mailbox.

Can I receive my ballot via email?

Only military personnel serving overseas and/or stateside, and American citizens residing overseas, may receive their ballot via email. (See the section below, *Military or overseas citizens*.)

If I am having my mail forwarded by the US Postal Service, how is my VBM ballot affected?

VBM ballots cannot be forwarded (Section 101.62(4)(c)1, *Florida Statutes*) by the US Postal Service. If you will not be at your Manatee County address to receive your VBM ballot, call the SOE Office at 941-741-3823 to find the best option for having a ballot sent to you.

How can I have my VBM ballot sent to an address other than my Manatee County address?

If you have already had a VBM ballot sent to you at a different address, and that address is in your voter record at the SOE Office, you can use it again at any time. That address will be used for **only** your ballot; all other correspondence to you from the SOE Office will be sent as usual to the residence or mailing address on file in your voter record.

If you would like to have a VBM ballot sent to you at a location other than your Manatee County address, and it is not an address already on file in your voter record, you must submit a written request that includes your full name, **and** your date of birth **or** voter identification number, **and** your residence address, **and** the address where the ballot is to be sent, **and** your signature. Once an alternate address is in your voter record, you can make future requests over the phone to use that address for VBM ballots.

Completing and returning my ballot

What is in the VBM ballot packet?

The VBM ballot packet contains your ballot, an instruction sheet (which doubles as a secrecy sleeve), a special return envelope (printed with a Voter's Certificate that you must sign), and an "I Voted By Mail" lapel sticker. The ballot packet is sent to you about five weeks prior to each election. This is so that you have time to research the candidates and issues on the ballot, vote for your choices, and allow time for the mail to deliver the ballot back to the SOE Office.

What is the "secrecy sleeve"? What if I forgot to put my ballot into the sleeve before mailing it back?

There is a folded piece of paper in your VBM packet labeled "Secrecy Sleeve". Follow the instructions printed on it for completing and returning your ballot. When you are ready to mail your ballot, you can place it inside this secrecy sleeve for added security.

However, using the sleeve is not required. If you have returned your ballot without the secrecy sleeve, do not worry, your ballot will be processed just the same.

What if I think my signature has changed and may not match the one in my voter record?

If it has been some time since you updated your voter signature of record, you should complete a Florida Voter Registration Application (FVRA) to have your current signature officially entered into your file. This can be done at any time, but especially no later than two weeks before any election for which you will be receiving a VBM ballot.

If your signature on the VBM ballot envelope Voter's Certificate does not match the one in your voter record, you will be sent a Signature Cure Affidavit. The Affidavit must be completed and **physically in the SOE Office**, with the required identification enclosed, no later than 5:00 pm on the second day following Election Day. Your Affidavit and identification are reviewed by the Canvassing Board, and a decision is made on whether or not the ballot is valid.

What if I forgot to sign my VBM ballot envelope Voter's Certificate?

If you did not sign the VBM ballot envelope Voter's Certificate, you will be sent a Signature Cure Affidavit. The Affidavit must be completed and **physically in the SOE Office**, with the required identification enclosed, no later than 5:00 pm on the second day following Election Day. Your Affidavit and identification are reviewed by the Canvassing Board, and a decision is made as to whether the ballot is valid.

Can my Power of Attorney (POA) sign my VBM ballot envelope Voter's Certificate for me?

No, your POA cannot sign your VBM ballot envelope Voter's Certificate (Sections 101.65(No.7), and 709.2201(3)(c), *Florida Statutes*). Each voter must sign their own Voter's Certificate.

How can I return my completed VBM ballot?

Your completed VBM ballot must be returned in the special return envelope that has the Voter's Certificate printed on the back: **sign in the red box**. If there are multiple voters in your household, be sure to **sign the envelope that has your name on it**. To return it to the SOE Office you may:

- **Mail it:** Affix postage to the self-addressed envelope and mail it via the US Postal Service.
- **Hand deliver it to the SOE Office:** You or someone else may put it into the Ballot Drop-Off slot built into the front of the SOE Office, just behind the flagpole, no postage required. The Ballot Drop-Off slot is available 24/7 starting from the day that VBM ballots are mailed out, and ending at 7:00 pm on Election Day.
- **Hand deliver it to an Early Voting location:** **Only** during the days and hours of Early Voting, a secure drop box is available at each location just for VBM ballots sealed in their signed return envelopes, no postage required. At the **SOE Office** Early Voting location, use the Ballot Drop-Off slot (described in the entry just above this one). At the five other locations (addresses at <https://www.votemanatee.com/Vote-By-Mail-Early-Voting/Early-Voting>), look for the Elections Deputy at the entrance and ask for the Vote By Mail drop box.

Note: Ballot envelopes are not accepted by any person at the SOE Office or at Early Voting; they must be deposited into the assigned, secure Ballot Drop-Off slot or box.

How much postage do I put on the VBM ballot return envelope?

The postage for the VBM ballot return envelope, with the ballot and secrecy sleeve inside, is the same as for a regular first class letter. Affix a Forever stamp, or a stamp for the current rate of a regular first class letter; **however**, if the ballot is multiple pages and requires extra postage, you will receive a message in your VBM ballot packet stating the exact amount of postage needed to return your ballot via the US Postal Service.

Ballot processing at the Supervisor of Elections (SOE) Office

How can I confirm that the SOE Office received the VBM ballot that I mailed back?

You can track the progress of your VBM ballot at www.VoteManatee.com. Click **Vote By Mail & Early Voting**, then **Track Your Vote By Mail Ballot**. Enter your details to access your voter information. By clicking through the various options, you will see information including the date the ballot was sent out to you, the date the ballot was received back by the SOE Office, and confirmation that the ballot was counted. These tracking points are based on the processing of your unopened return envelope; your ballot remains anonymous at all times.

What happens when the SOE Office receives my VBM ballot?

Ballot envelopes are delivered to the SOE Office daily from the US Postal Service, and from each of the Early Voting sites during their operating period. They are also collected daily from the secure Ballot Drop-Off slot in the front of the building. In a tightly controlled process, incoming ballots are scanned in batches of hundreds. The signature on each Voter's Certificate is compared to that in the voter's record. If the signature matches, the ballot envelope is opened and the ballot is tabulated (counted). On election night, Vote By Mail ballot tabulations are reported along with Election Day tabulations and Early Voting tabulations, and the official election results are announced.

How do I know my VBM ballot will be counted?

Every valid VBM ballot is counted. Your ballot is valid if it is **physically in the SOE Office** no later than 7:00 pm on Election Day, **and** your signature on the ballot envelope Voter's Certificate matches the signature on file in your voter record.

Vote By Mail for military personnel and overseas citizens

When is the VBM ballot mailed to me?

VBM ballots are sent to Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA) voters via the US Postal Service, or via email, at least 45 days prior to each election.

Can I receive my ballot via email?

According to the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA), military personnel serving overseas and/or stateside, and American citizens residing overseas, may receive their ballot via email. The ballot is emailed with full instructions, and it is important to know that you will have to print out the ballot, and the Voter's Certificate, and return them via fax or postal mail. **Note: Ballots cannot be returned via email.**

Note that **stateside military personnel** must return their VBM ballot in the special return envelope via postal mail; fax return is not permitted.