

# Voter Registration Guide 2021



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This reference guide has been prepared in an effort to answer frequently asked questions. It is for general information only and does not have the force and effect of law, regulation, or rule. In case of conflict, the law, regulation, or rule will apply. Refer to the code sections cited for more information.

This guide is distributed with the understanding that the Ventura County Elections Division is not rendering legal advice and that this guide is, therefore, not to be a substitute for private legal counsel.

Unless otherwise indicated, all code sections referenced are California Elections Code.

# Who Can Register to Vote

In order to register to vote, a person must be:<sup>1</sup>

- A United States citizen
- A resident of California
- At least 18 years old on Election Day
- Not currently in prison for the conviction of a felony; and
- Not currently found mentally incompetent to vote by a court.

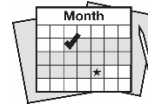


No documentation or proof of the above requirements is required in order to register to vote. The statement on the affidavit of registration which the voter signs under penalty of perjury is all that the law requires.<sup>2</sup> No fees may be charged for registration.<sup>3</sup>

## Pre-Registration

16 and 17 year olds who meet the other requirements listed above may “pre-register” to vote. The registration will become active when the voter turns 18.<sup>4</sup>

## When to Register



Citizens may register to vote at any time, keeping in mind the following guidelines:

### Election Deadline

To vote in an upcoming election, a voter’s registration must be received (or postmarked) no later than 15 days before the election.<sup>5</sup>

The exception to this rule is a voter who becomes a citizen after the 15 day deadline.<sup>6</sup>

### Conditional Voter Registration

After the 15 day deadline, eligible voters who have not registered to vote or have moved and need to update their address may register and cast a provisional ballot.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> §§2000, 2101, 2102 & 2211

<sup>2</sup> §§2111 - 2112

<sup>3</sup> §2121

<sup>4</sup> §2101(b)

<sup>5</sup> §2102(a)

<sup>6</sup> §§3500-3501

<sup>7</sup> §2170

## Signing Petitions

For a voter's signature on a nomination paper or petition to be counted as valid, their registration must be completed on or before the date they sign the petition, and submitted to the Elections Division on or before the date the petition is filed.<sup>1</sup>

## When to Re-register

Registered voters should re-register if they have moved, changed their name, or changed their political party preference.

Instead of executing a new affidavit of registration for a change of address *within* the county, voters may complete the *Update Voter Registration Form* (available online at [venturavote.org/forms](http://venturavote.org/forms)) or send a signed letter to the County Elections Division.

## How to Register

There are several methods available for voter registration.



Registration forms are available from the Elections Division as well as any post office, library, or city clerk's office. Many other government agencies also provide registration forms. No postage is required to return registration forms by mail.



Voters can also register online using the Secretary of State's online registration system at [registertovote.ca.gov](http://registertovote.ca.gov). A California driver's license number is required to complete the registration process online.

## Residency

In order to register, a voter must provide their residence address, so that they may be assigned to the proper precinct. A business address, P.O. Box, or commercial mail receiving service may be used as a mailing address but not as a residence.

Many voters have more than one residence. They may only register at one address, which should be the address where they reside most of the time.

A voter who does not have a residence address may still register to vote by providing a description (such as an intersection or landmark) of the location where they spend most of their time. In this case, a mailing address is also required.

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<sup>1</sup> §2102(b)

## College Students

Students attending college often reside temporarily where they go to school. They may continue to be registered at their permanent residence (i.e. their parents' address) and vote by mail, or they may register to vote at the address where they reside for school.<sup>1</sup> If they choose the latter, they will need to re-register when they move.

## Military and Overseas Voters

Military personnel, their families, and citizens living overseas should register to vote using the Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) form. Visit [fvap.gov](http://fvap.gov) for more information.

## Confidentiality

Addresses of registered voters are not public information, however they are made available to authorized persons for approved purposes such as campaign communications and academic or journalistic research.<sup>2</sup>

Judges and law enforcement officers have the option of keeping their residence address confidential.<sup>3</sup> Contact the County Elections Division for more information.

The California Secretary of State's *Safe at Home* program is designed to help victims of domestic violence, stalking, or sexual assault. Confidential voter registration is available through this program. Visit [sos.ca.gov/registries/safe-home/](http://sos.ca.gov/registries/safe-home/) for more information.

## Political Party Preference

Political Party preference can be a source of confusion. When registering to vote, voters can register with any one of the qualified political parties (there are currently six qualified parties in California).

Voters may also select the option to not disclose a party preference, in which case they will be registered as "No Party Preference" (NPP). In the past this has been referred to as "Nonpartisan," "Decline to State," or "Independent." Note: "Independent" (meaning No Party Preference) is sometimes confused with the American Independent Party, which is a qualified political party.

If a voter does not select an option for political party preference, their party preference will be entered as "Unknown" and they will be registered as NPP for voting purposes.

A voter may also register with a non-qualified political party, or a party attempting to qualify, by selecting "Other" and writing in the name of the party. They will be registered as NPP for voting purposes.

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<sup>1</sup> §2025

<sup>2</sup> §2194

<sup>3</sup> §2166.7

For most elections in California, voters will receive the same ballot regardless of their party preference. The exception is a *presidential primary* election ballot.

In a presidential primary, each party selects its nominee for president. Voters registered with a party can vote for one of that party's candidates for president. Each party has the *option* of allowing NPP voters to vote in their presidential primary election. 135 days before each presidential primary election, each qualified party must notify the Secretary of State whether or not they will give NPP voters this option.

In a presidential primary election, parties may also elect members for their county central committees. Only voters registered with the party may vote for these offices.

## ***Step by Step Instructions***

Following are detailed instructions for completing a voter registration. Item numbers reference the voter registration form. The online registration process includes the same information.

### **Item 1: Citizenship and Age**

The voter must check "Yes" to indicate that they:

1. Are a United States citizen; and
2. Will be 18 or older by the next election, or are 16 or 17 and want to pre-register

### **Items 2, 3 and 4: Name**

The printed first name, middle name (or initial), and last name of the voter must be provided. The title Mr., Mrs., Miss, or Ms. is optional. Using a spouse's name (e.g., Mrs. John Jones) is not allowed.

### **Items 5 and 6: Residence Address**

The voter's *residence* address must be printed. The address cannot be a post office box, a business address or a commercial mail receiving business. Be certain to include the apartment, unit, or space number (if any), the California county, and the zip code.

### **Item 7: No Street Address**

If the voter does not have a residence address, they should provide a description of the location where they usually reside, using cross streets, landmarks, or other information so that they may be assigned to the correct precinct.

### **Items 8 and 9: Mailing Address (Optional)**

If the voter wants election materials mailed to an address other than their residence (such as a business or P.O. Box) they must complete this section. If the voter cannot receive mail where they reside, then a mailing address is required.

### **Item 10: Date of Birth**

The voter should enter their date of birth. A citizen must be at least 18 years old by the date of the next election in order to vote in that election. 16 and 17 year olds may “pre-register” by completing the registration form.

### **Item 11: Place of Birth**

The voter must list the U.S. state, U.S. territory, or foreign country where they were born.

### **Item 12: California Driver License or Identification Card Number or, if none, partial Social Security Number**

The voter must provide their driver license or state identification card number. If the voter does not have a driver license or state identification card, they must provide the last four digits of their social security number.

### **Items 13 and 14: Email Address and Telephone Number (Optional)**

If the registration form is missing any required information, the Elections Division may use the email address or telephone number (if provided) to contact the voter. This information may also be provided to candidates, committees, or political parties for the purpose of contacting voters.

### **Item 15: Political Party Preference**

A voter may register with a qualified political party by checking the box for that party. To register without selecting a party (No Party Preference), check the box for “No, I do not want to disclose a political party preference”. To register with a party not listed on the form, check “Other” and write in the name of the party.

### **Item 16: Permanent Vote-By-Mail Voter (Optional)**

Initial here to automatically receive a Vote-By-Mail ballot for every election that the voter is eligible to vote in.



## Item 17: Previous Registration

Often when a person moves, they will re-register to vote at the new address without canceling their old registration. Filling out this portion of the affidavit will automatically trigger the cancellation of the previous voter registration. If a person has been registered to vote several times previously, the most recent registration information should be given.

If a person changes their name, they should indicate the *new* name in Items 2 and 3 and the *former* name in Item 17.

## Item 18: Declaration, Signature, and Date

All affidavits of registration must be signed by the voter. When a person signs an affidavit, they are certifying, under penalty of perjury, that the information provided on the affidavit is true and correct. A person who is unable to write their name can sign the affidavit with a mark.

Each person registering to vote must date the affidavit in the space immediately after their signature. The date of execution is important, especially during periods close to registration deadlines.

## "Optional" Information Box

Counties use the Optional A, B, and C boxes to collect information about a voter's need for election materials printed in a language other than English, the availability to serve as a poll worker, the ability to provide a polling place, and the voter's ethnic background.

## "Did Someone Help You Fill Out or Deliver This Form?" (Green Box)

If any person helps a citizen complete an affidavit of registration, that person must sign and date the affidavit below the signature of the person registering.<sup>1</sup>

Additionally, any person who is paid to return a completed affidavit must provide their full name, telephone number, and address, as well as the name and telephone number of the person or organization that is paying for the affidavit.<sup>2</sup>

## Serial Number (below Item 18)

A unique serial number is printed on every affidavit of registration. This same number is also printed on the affidavit receipt.

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<sup>1</sup> §§2150(10d)

<sup>2</sup> §2159

## **Voter's Receipt (bottom portion of affidavit)**

There is a receipt stub at the bottom of the affidavit that also has the serial number on it. If a circulator takes a completed affidavit of registration to return it to the elections office, the circulator must sign and date the receipt and provide their full name, telephone number, and address, as well as the name and telephone number of the person or organization (if any) that is paying for the completed affidavit. This receipt must be given to the voter.<sup>1</sup>

If there is a problem with the voter's registration they can use the receipt as proof that they have completed an affidavit and intended to register to vote.

## **Common Errors**

Following are some of the most common errors made on the voter registration form:

### **Citizenship and Age**

The voter must check "Yes" to confirm citizenship and age eligibility.

### **County**

People are accustomed to writing their city and state, but not identifying the county in which they live when writing their address. Information about a person's county is requested in two places on the affidavit: the residence address portion (Item 6) and the prior registration portion (Item 17).

### **Birthplace**

Many people list a city or "United States" rather than the state (or foreign country) where they were born.

### **Identification Information**

Failure to provide the required driver license number, state identification card number, or the last four digits of the social security number may cause delays. A person should fill in the proper identification number if they have one.

### **Prior Registration**

This section must be completed if the voter has been registered before, whether in California or in another state.

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<sup>1</sup> §§2158

## Signature

Unsigned affidavits of registration cannot be processed.

## Date

The date the registration was completed should be written in the box after the voter's signature.

# Conducting Registration Drives

Following are guidelines for individuals and groups planning to register voters or distribute registration forms. For more information, consult the Secretary of State's [Guide to Voter Registration Drives](#).

## *Who Can Register Voters*

The County Elections Division will provide voter registration cards in sufficient quantities to individuals or organizations who wish to distribute them, other than persons who have been convicted of violating Elections Code §2158 within the last five years. There are no statutory requirements specifying citizenship, age or other criteria for persons distributing registration cards.

Individuals and organizations are permitted to distribute affidavits of registration anywhere within the county. Please be advised that distribution in front of commercial businesses may require coordination with the management of the facility to determine appropriate places and times.

Individuals or organizations who distribute voter registration cards must give an affidavit of registration to any person who asks for one.

If distribution of affidavits of registration is undertaken by mailing cards to persons who have not requested one, the person mailing the affidavits must enclose a cover letter or other notice with each card instructing the recipients to disregard the cards if they are currently registered voters.<sup>1</sup> Violation is an infraction punishable by a fine of up to \$200.<sup>2</sup>

## *How to Get Started*

Visit the County of Ventura Elections Division at the County Government Center located at 800 South Victoria Avenue, Ventura. There is no charge for affidavits of registration and the return postage is paid by the Secretary of State. Any individual or organization may obtain up to 50 affidavits of registration simply by asking.

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<sup>1</sup> §2158

<sup>2</sup> §18107

If an individual or organization wishes to obtain more than 50 affidavits of registration, the “*Affidavit of Registration Statement of Distribution*” must be completed. This form is provided by the Elections Division and requires the name, address, telephone number and organization of the person requesting the affidavits, as well as a brief explanation of how the affidavits are to be distributed. If 2,000 or more voter registration cards are requested, a copy of the “*Statement of Distribution*” will be forwarded to the Secretary of State by the County Elections Division.<sup>1</sup>

## ***The Affidavit of Registration***

The affidavit of registration is a legal document that must be used and processed with care. Keep in mind the following Dos and Don'ts:

### **Do:**

- Print legibly.
- Fill in the affidavit of registration accurately using current information.
- Use a black or blue ball-point ink pen.
- Correct an error by drawing one line through it and printing the correction above it.
- Correct a political party selection by placing a line through the incorrect entry and checking the correct square. The correct party must be initialed by the applicant.
- Turn in completed affidavits no more than three days after they are received from the voter. This includes affidavits containing irregularities or minimal information. The determination of validity of the registration will be made by the County Elections Official, not the individual or organization distributing or receiving affidavits.
- Turn in any unused affidavits for redistribution.

### **Don't:**

- Give affidavits of registration to other people or organizations that have not been authorized to distribute affidavits by the County Elections Division.
- Sign blank affidavits in advance.
- Allow recipients to use a place of business as a residence address, unless the applicant is actually living on the business premises.
- Allow recipients to use a P.O. Box or mail drop as a residence address.

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<sup>1</sup> California Administrative Code Title 2, §20001(g)

## ***Planning a Registration Drive***

A good plan is the key to a successful drive. You may want to vary the style and method of reaching people according to different target populations and geographic areas.

### **Registering People at Public Places**

One of the most effective ways to register large numbers of people with a limited number of registration workers is to register people using fixed sites such as shopping centers, neighborhood stores, community centers, local parks, recreation centers, or churches.

It is very important to obtain permission from the manager of the public sites before sending people out to register voters. Parking lots, malls, entrances to stores and sidewalks in shopping centers are considered private property and require permission to use. Be prepared to answer the property owners' questions regarding who you represent, when you plan to be there, how many people will be involved, and what type of displays you may be using.

### **Door-to-Door Registration Drives**

Door-to-door voter registration drives can be very effective if sufficient registration workers are available. One of the most effective techniques has been to assign registration workers to their own neighborhood or to neighborhoods they know.

### **Special Events**

Special events such as high school or college sporting events, concerts, fairs, town meetings, conferences, etc., can be fruitful places to register voters. Request permission to register voters at these events and plan ahead.

Remember, you should not just hand an affidavit to every person that comes through the entrance. This is a wasteful, expensive, and ineffective method. Ask individuals if they are registered to vote, and if not, ask if they would like to register. Check into having an announcement made alerting those attending the event that voter registration is available.

### **Registering People by Mail**

Any mailing of a registration affidavit to a person who did not request one must be accompanied by a cover letter or other notice instructing the recipient to disregard the affidavit if he or she is currently registered to vote and does not wish to change name, address, political party affiliation, or other registration information.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> §2158