Presidential Commission on Election Administration
Recommendations & the Impact of the New Reality with the
United States Post Office
NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF STATE LEGISLATORS
CHICAGO, IL
AUGUST 8TH, 2016
"Defending our freedom, though, is not just the job of our military alone. We must all do our part to make sure our God-given rights are protected here at home. That includes our most fundamental right as citizens: the right to vote. When any American, no matter where they live or what their party, are denied that right because they can’t afford to wait for five or six or seven hours just to cast their ballot, we are betraying our ideals. **So tonight, I’m announcing a nonpartisan commission to improve the voting experience in America.** And it definitely needs improvement. I’m asking two long-time experts in the field -- who, by the way, recently served as the top attorneys for my campaign and for Governor Romney’s campaign -- to lead it. We can fix this, and we will. The American people demand it, and so does our democracy."

President Barack Obama  
State of the Union,  
February 12th, 2013
PCEA Recommendations

• Expansion of Voting Opportunities
  • Vote By Mail
    • USPS Communication
    • USPS Ballot Tracking
  • In Person Early Voting
  • Vote Centers
Audiences:

- Legislature
- State Election Official
- Local Administrator

Funding for voting equipment & Electronic Poll Books, Online Voter Registration & Data Sharing, Schools as polling places, Expansion of Voting: Early & VBM

Administrative efficiencies, Data collection, Resource allocations, EPB best practices

Training, Resource allocations, Data collection, EPB & Vote Center best practices, Technology
This Primary season we also saw how state-specific election rules & an engaged electorate can generate lines...
The ability to vote by mail depends on state laws:

- Excuse required
- No excuse
- Permanent List
- All-mail elections

Deadlines to request vary greatly across the states, with some allowing for requests as late as the Monday before Election Day Tuesday.

*Laws should allow time for the voter to be successful.*
“The bottom line – The Postal Service Our commitment – Election Mail will be processed within our Delivery Standards”

These standards changed early in 2015.
First-Class Mail:  DMM 333.2.0
- Personal, handwritten, or typed information
- **2-5 day delivery (50 United States)**
- Free forwarding and return
- Sealed against inspection

Standard Mail:  DMM 243.2.0
- No personal, handwritten, or typed information
- **3-10 day delivery (Contiguous 48 United States)**
- Forwarding/return require endorsement and a fee
- May be opened for postal inspection
Although USPS processes more than 60 billion (with a B) mail pieces a month, their volume is down in this digital age.

For the last few years they have been optimizing their processing capacity with a network rationalization plan.

This plan has closed many smaller processing plants and eliminated direct local delivery resulting in all mail going to the larger facilities for processing.

For many, mail isn’t just “going across town” any more...
Voters need to be mindful when dropping ballots into blue boxes of pick-up/collection times…

Ballots dropped on Saturday could sit there all weekend and not be picked up until Monday.
Delivering Democracy: The Critical Role of USPS® in American Elections

Tammy Patrick
Bipartisan Policy Center Fellow

Webinar conducted for USPS on July 6th that shared by over 980 Postal Service employees

Presentation July 18th for Election Mail Specialists
Consistent Advice Around Election Mail is Essential

Poll workers, USPS® employees and the Mailing Industry are on the front lines in providing consistent guidance and service to election customers.
Some allow for application:
• By mail
• By phone
• Online
• In person

Do your state deadlines to request a ballot allow for sufficient time under the new USPS delivery standards?

Can a voter be successful under your rules?
State Laws & Absentee/Early Voting

Are voters able to request a ballot:
• Just for a single election?
• For an election cycle (Primary & General)?
• For all elections in a calendar year?

This increases the efficiency of your election offices & reduces administrative burdens.
Elections rely on USPS® for:
- Pollworker solicitations
- Sample Ballots
- Polling place location cards
- Candidate information
- Publicity Pamphlets
- NCOA and List Maintenance
- Ballot requests

Perhaps most critically for many voters:

BALLOT DELIVERY

It is important to review the statutory mailing dates for all of these things!
Ballot Delivery to the Voter
The heaviest mailing day of the week is Friday, avoiding having your required date to mail landing on a Friday will improve the service to the voter.
If voters have the ability to request a ballot after the delivery standards, they may not get their ballot before Election Day—let alone vote it and return it in time.
Ballot Return
Envelope Design Considerations

Consider the design of the back of your ballot return envelope if you have that codified.

Formatting so that the voter’s address and any barcodes used internally are in the general where a delivery address would be can cause problems with the USPS orientation software (& send the ballot back to the voter…)
This is right where a delivery address would be located...
Envelope Design Considerations

Many examples of this
Use of color in the envelope or in striping increases the visibility of the ballot in the mail stream.
What to Look Out For
Many return deadlines do not take into consideration the new delivery standards.

Voting instructions should clearly advise the voter of mailing dates.

USPS was advising:

**IN HAND**  Mail 5 days prior

**POSTMARK**  Mail 2 days prior

Recently came out with a uniform, national message
“The Postal Service recommends that voters mail ballots *one week* before the due date to account for any unforeseen events or weather issues and to allow for timely receipt and processing by election officials”

Do your laws align? What options are there?
States with in-hand deadlines are looking to reduce the numbers that arrive late that cannot be counted. Looking to use of postmark.

States using postmarks have issue with lack-of or illegible ones. Considering going back to in-hand or other alternatives.
Voters can go into any USPS counter and ask that their ballot envelope be hand-cancelled (also referred to as a “round-stamp”).
Ballot Return Considerations

Postmarking/cancellation issues have driven states to allow for other methods to ensure that the voter submitted the ballot in the statutory timeframe:

- WA: Use of the date the voter used in signing the affidavit
- OH: Use scanning data from USPS®
b. The sealed return envelope may be mailed to the commissioner by the registered voter or by
the voter’s designee. If mailed by the voter’s designee, the envelope must be mailed within
seventy-two hours of retrieving it from the voter or within time to be postmarked, or bear an
intelligent mail barcode showing the point of entry into the mail system, not later than the day
before the election, whichever is earlier.

2. In order for the ballot to be counted, the return envelope must be received in the
commissioner’s office before the polls close on election day or be clearly postmarked by an
officially authorized postal service, or bear an intelligent mail barcode showing the point of entry
into the mail system, not later than the day before the election and received by the commissioner
not later than noon on the Monday following the election.

3. If the law authorizing the election specifies that the commissioner may authorize voting
throughout the day on the election date, the envelope must be mailed no later than the close of
the polls.
Do voters have any options other than mailing back their ballot? At official drop-boxes? At local government offices? At the polls on Election Day?
Election Day Drop-offs...

Be prepared for the potential to have LOTS of ballots dropped at the polls and procedures in place so that voters don’t have to wait in line & consider how it will get tracked & reported to the public/media.
Election Official Data Collection

Don’t wait until ED+1 (Wednesday) to discover if there are issues!

Election officials are advised to train staff to look for dates out of the delivery range & missing postmarks (if applicable) as they process the incoming ballot envelopes.
Postal Bulletin (PB22437)

Clearly defines services relating to Election Mail.

A review to see if state law comports with postal regulations helps service quality to voters.
The New Realities of Voting by Mail in 2016

Checklist for voters who vote by mail
Checklist for election administrators
Checklist for state legislators
Checklist for USPS®
For tens of millions of voters their mailbox is their ballot box
By working together we can be certain that their voices are heard!
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