



Secretary of State

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Voters without Traditional Residential Addresses

Clearinghouse Elections Notice

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This Clearinghouse is reissued to reflect legislative changes in Senate Bill 5079 and replaces Clearinghouse #11-02, issued on June 14, 2011.

A voter registration must be based on the location where the voter resides. However, a traditional residential address is not required to register a voter. Voters without traditional residential addresses may be experiencing homelessness, residing in a shelter, park, motor home, marina, unmarked home, or other identifiable location that the voter deems to be their residence.

RCW 29A.08.112 provides that a voter registration applicant who meets all the qualifications to be registered, but lacks a traditional residential address will not be disqualified from registering to vote. The RCW also states, "A voter who lacks a traditional residence will be registered and assigned to a precinct based on the location provided."

To assist you in registering these voters, please consider the following questions and answers:

- **How do we determine a street address in order to appropriately assign a precinct for the voter?** The address is anywhere the voter currently considers his or her residence. It may be the location at which they spend most of their time, or where they sleep at night. The location may be a description, such as a specific bridge or park. If you are unable to pinpoint the address in the election management system, you may choose a street address closest to the location indicated by the voter to issue the correct ballot.
- **What about voters who do not indicate a specific location that they regularly inhabit?** Encourage the voter to choose a location that they consider to be their home or residence. Again, this may simply be a location where they currently spend most of their time. State law only requires the voter to provide a narrative description of the location of the voter's residence with sufficient detail to allow the voter to be assigned a proper precinct.

- **Must a voter have a mailing address?** Yes. RCW 29A.08.112 requires voters with a nontraditional address to provide a valid mailing address. “General Delivery” with a specific post office address is a valid mailing address.
- **What should we do if a voter without a traditional residential address also fails to provide a valid mailing address?** A valid mailing address is required in RCW 29A.08.112. Treat this like an incomplete application. Send the applicant a verification notice to whatever address was provided (or best approximation if a narrative description of a location was provided). The applicant has the statutory 45 days to respond to the verification notice (RCW 29A.08.110(2)).
- **Is it correct to register and precinct the voter at a government building, such as a United States Post Office?** No, unless the voter considers the government building as his or her location of residence. The voter must not be arbitrarily assigned a government building as the voter’s residence.
Exception: A federally recognized tribe may designate one or more tribal government buildings to serve as a residential or mailing addresses or both for voters living on an Indian reservation or on Indian lands. The building must be located in the same precinct as the voter’s permanent residence.
- **Is it correct to register and assign a precinct to a voter at a business address?** A voter may be registered at a business address if he or she considers the location to be his or her residence. If you receive a voter registration with a known business address, process the registration as is. You may notify the voter that they cannot use a business address unless it is also their residential address, but you cannot “pend” the registration until you have more information. Pending a registration simply because a business address was used is essentially a voter registration challenge, but without the due process of a formal voter registration challenge. If a voter does not live at the address indicated on the registration form, the registration may be challenged after they become a registered voter.
Exception: A post office box cannot be used as a residential address.
- **What should we do with a voter currently registered at the courthouse?** At one time voters without traditional residential addresses were assigned the county courthouse or other government buildings as their residential location. If you still have voters using the county courthouse address, we suggest contacting the voter for more information.

RCW 29A.08.010

Minimum information required for voter registration.

(2) The residential address provided must identify the actual physical residence of the voter in Washington, as defined in RCW 29A.04.151, with detail sufficient to allow the voter to be assigned to the proper precinct and to locate the voter to confirm his or her residence for purposes of verifying qualification to vote under Article VI, section 1 of the state Constitution. A residential address may be either a traditional address or a nontraditional address. A traditional address consists of a street number and name, optional apartment number or unit number, and city or town, as assigned by a local government, which serves to identify the parcel or building of

residence and the unit if a multiunit residence. A nontraditional address consists of a narrative description of the location of the voter's residence, and may be used when a traditional address has not been assigned or affixed to the voter's residence or when a voter resides on an Indian reservation or Indian lands, pursuant to the conditions in RCW 29A.08.112.

RCW 29A.08.112

Voters without traditional residential addresses.

(1) No person registering to vote, who meets all the qualifications of a registered voter in the state of Washington, shall be disqualified because he or she lacks a traditional residential address. A voter who lacks a traditional residential address will be registered and assigned to a precinct based on the location provided.

(2) For the purposes of this section, a voter who resides in a shelter, park, motor home, marina, unmarked home, or other identifiable location that the voter deems to be his or her residence lacks a traditional address. A voter who registers under this section must provide a valid mailing address, and must still meet the requirement in Article VI, section 1 of the state Constitution that he or she live in the area for at least thirty days before the election.

(3) A nontraditional residential address may be used when a voter resides on an Indian reservation or on Indian lands.

(4) A federally recognized tribe may designate one or more tribal government buildings to serve as a residential address or mailing address or both for voters living on an Indian reservation or on Indian lands. However, a voter may not use a tribally designated building as the voter's residential address if the building is in a different precinct than where the voter lives.

(5) A person who has a traditional residential address and does not reside on an Indian reservation or on Indian lands must use that address for voter registration purposes and is not eligible to register under this section.