



# ***Chapter 3: Voter Registration***

# Chapter 3 Contents

- 37 *Section 3.1: Voter Registration*
  - Voters' Rights
  - Discrimination and Fraud
  - Voter Eligibility
  - Voter Registration Deadlines
  - Public Access to Voter Registration Records
  
- 41 *Section 3.2: Voter Registration Applications*
  - Required Information for New Applicants
  - Identity Verification
  
- 46 *Section 3.3: Special Circumstance Voter Registration*
  - Registering Service and Overseas Voters (UOCAVA)
  - Registering ACP Voters
  - Registering Future Voters
  
- 49 *Section 3.4: Notices to Voters*
  - Acknowledgment Notice
  - Automatic Voter Registration Acknowledgment Notice Package
  - Verification Notice
  - Confirmation Notice
  - Identification Notice
  
- 52 *Section 3.5: Voter Registration Status*
  - Active and Inactive Status
  - Inactive Voter – Response to a Confirmation Notice
  - Inactive Voter – No Response to a Confirmation Notice
  
- 55 *Section 3.6: The Statewide Voter Registration System (VoteWA)*
  - Voter Registration Data Entry
  - Data Integrity Processes & Daily Data Maintenance
  - Voter Registration Transfers
  - Name Changes
  - Canceling Voters

# Section 3.1: Voter Registration

 [RCW 29A.04.205](#)

**State policy.** It is the policy of the state of Washington to encourage every eligible person to register to vote and participate fully in all elections, and to protect the integrity of the electoral process by providing equal access while guarding against discrimination and fraud. The election registration laws and voting laws of the state of Washington must be administered without discrimination based upon race, creed, color, national origin, sex, or political affiliation. No voter may be required to disclose political faith or adherence in order to vote.


Notes

---

## Voters' Rights

The rights of Washington voters are protected by its constitution and laws.

- The right of qualified voters to vote in all eligible elections.
- The right of absolute secrecy of the vote.
- The right to cast a vote in eligible races without limitation based on party preference or affiliation.

 *Voters who participate in the presidential primary must make declare a party affiliation for that election only. For more information about the presidential primary, see [“Presidential Primary Ballots” on page 70](#) and the [Presidential Primary Resources & Training Materials](#) page on the Office of the Secretary of State website.*

## Discrimination and Fraud



Notes

***What constitutes discrimination or fraud?***

- Knowingly altering, destroying, defacing, concealing, or discarding a completed registration form, signed ballot declaration, or voted ballot, except for the voter who completed the form, declaration, or ballot, or the County Auditor acting as authorized by law.
- Refusing or neglecting to perform any duty required by law.
- Destroying, mutilating, concealing, changing, or altering any voter registration record except as authorized by voter registration law.
- Registering or allowing someone to register a person who is not entitled to be registered to vote.
- Intentionally denying any person eligible to vote the right to register.
- Canceling a voter registration except as authorized by voter registration law.
- Knowingly using or altering the statewide voter registration database inconsistent with the performance of job duties.
- Examining or assisting another person examining any voter record, ballot, or election material for the purpose of unlawfully identifying the name of the voter and how they voted, or revealing such information.
- Removing a ballot from a voting center or drop box except as authorized by law.
- Providing unauthorized access to the statewide voter registration database.
- Deliberately failing to return a registration form in a timely manner.
- Knowingly providing false information on a voter registration application.
- Offering to pay another person a fee per registration.
- Accepting payment based on a fixed amount per registration.


**Penalty:** “A person who willfully violates any provision of this title regarding the conduct of mail ballot primaries or elections is guilty of a class C felony punishable under [RCW 9A.20.021](#).”

# Voter Eligibility

 [Washington State Constitution, Article VI, Sections 1 & 3](#)

An “elector” is any person qualified to vote. To register to vote, the person must meet these requirements:

- United States citizen.
- Legal resident of Washington State.
- 18 years old at time of voting. Voters who pre-register to vote starting at age 16 are Future Voters. Voter pre-registrations are pending until they become eligible to vote.
- Not currently serving a sentence of total confinement in prison under the jurisdiction of the Department of Corrections (DOC) for a Washington felony conviction.
- Not currently incarcerated for a federal or out-of-state felony conviction.

 *If a Future Voter is pre-registered to vote and will be 18 years old by the November general election, they may vote in state, local, and presidential primaries. For more information about issuing ballots to primary-only voters, see [“Creating Primary-Only Voter Ballots” on page 101](#) and [“Issuing Primary-Only Voter Ballots” on page 110](#).*

# Voter Registration Deadlines

 [RCW 29A.08.140](#)

Voters must register in order to participate in an election. The date of receipt by an election official, including the Office of the Secretary of State, is the date of registration for mail-in applications.

## Eight-Day Deadline

New applications, address changes, name changes, and voluntary cancellations that are submitted by mail, online, email, or fax must be received by an election official by the eighth day before an election.

## Same-Day Voter Registration

After the eight-day deadline, new applications, address changes, name changes, and voluntary cancellations may be submitted in person at any County Auditor-designated location until 8:00 p.m. on Election Day to update the registration record and receive a current ballot.


## Notes

### Exception — Service and Overseas Voters

If members of the Armed Forces (as defined by [RCW 29A.04.163](#) and [WAC 434-235-010](#) as a service voter) and overseas electors (defined in [RCW 29A.04.109](#) and [WAC 434-235-010](#) as an overseas voter) consider Washington State their residence, new applicants are exempt from the in-person requirement and may submit their application remotely (online, email, fax) until 8:00 p.m. on Election Day.

If they are already registered in Washington State, current same day registration and eight-day deadlines apply.

This exception does not automatically apply to dependents and spouses of military and overseas voters. If a spouse or dependent is away from their place of residence because of the service or overseas status of the voter, they may also register to vote as a service or overseas voter.

 *For more information about service and overseas voters, see the [Service and Overseas Voters](#) clearinghouse notice on the Office of the Secretary of State website.*

---

### Public Access to Voter Registration Records

 [RCW 29A.08.710](#)

Following items are public information and available upon request:

- Name
- Address
- Political jurisdiction (precinct/district)
- Gender
- Year of birth
- Voting record
- Date of registration
- Registration number

Following items are not available to the public:

- Source of registration (Department of Licensing, state agency, etc.)
- Declination of registration
- Date of birth
- Phone number, email address
- Status as a service or overseas voter
- Anything else on the registration form that isn't specified as public information
- All 16- and 17-year-old Future Voter registrants — once a 17-year-old is eligible to vote, their voter registration information becomes public information and available upon request.

# Section 3.2: Voter Registration Applications

 [RCW 29A.08, WAC 434-324](#)

Notes

## Acceptable Applications and Methods of Registration


- Washington State mail-in/paper form
- Online voter registration (OLVR)
- Department of Licensing
- Agency-based form
- Health Benefit Exchange
- In-person (registration drives, over the counter)
- Federal applications

## Required Information for New Applicants

New applications to register to vote must include five required pieces of information:

- Name
- Residential address within the state of Washington (may be a non-traditional address)
- Date of birth
- Affirmation of U.S. citizenship or presentation of documents as part of another government transaction confirming citizenship
- Signature attesting to truth of information provided on the form

**Required Information for Registration**



five  
required  
pieces

**Note:** Identification **is not required** information to register an applicant., but **it is required** before accepting a ballot.



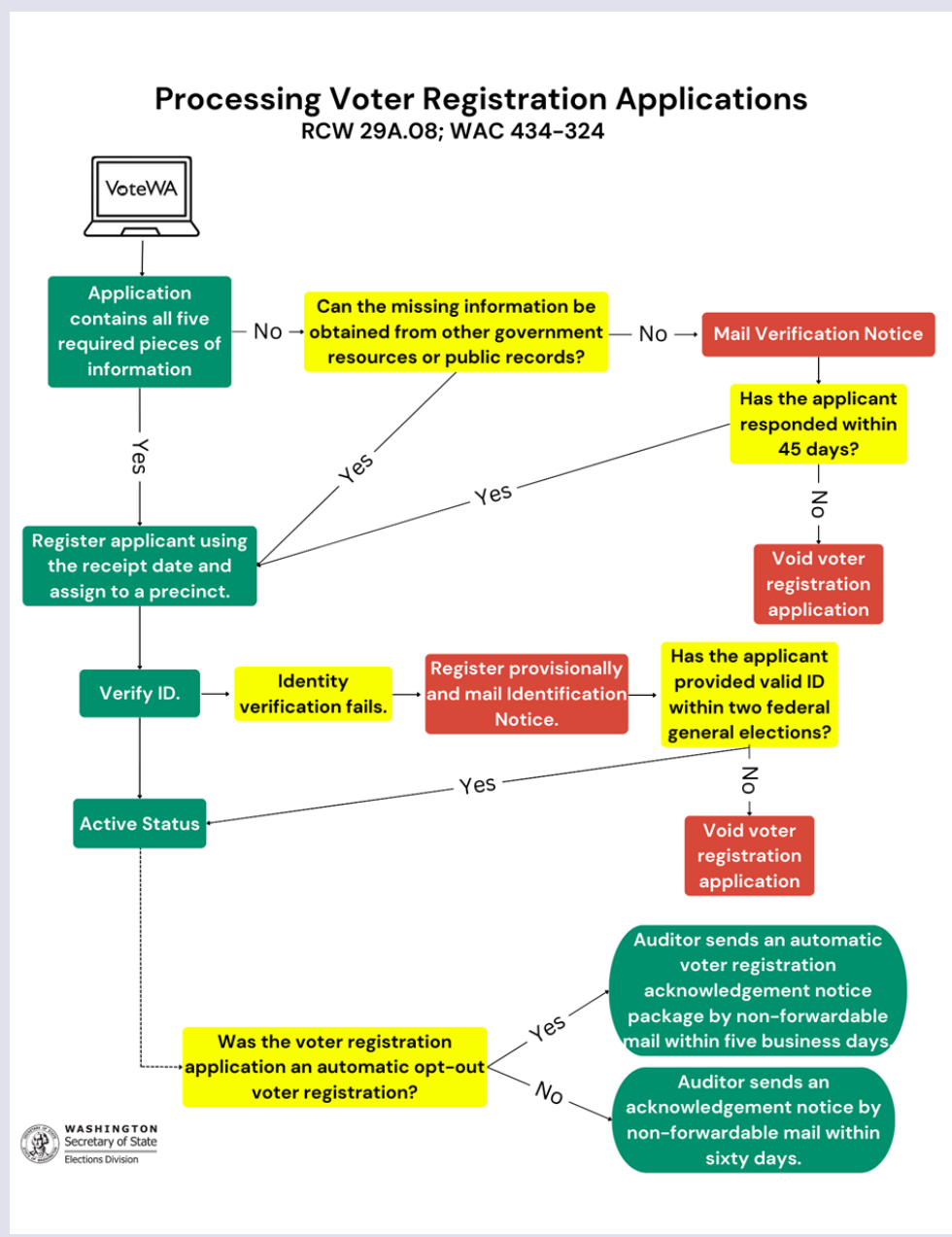
## Processing a Completed Voter Registration Application

After confirming an application contains all five pieces of required information, register the voter:

- Enter the applicant's information into VoteWA.
- If it is a paper form, scan it and save an image of the signature.
- Verify the state driver's license, learner's permit, state ID, tribal ID, or Social Security Number. (When the ID is not confirmed or provided, register the voter provisionally.)
- Send an Acknowledgment Notice (voter ID) to the voter within 60 days of receiving the application.


### Notes


### Processing Voter Registration Applications





- If the voter was registered to vote automatically upon completing a transaction for an enhanced card from the Department of Licensing, send an automatic voter registration acknowledgment notice package within five business days.
- Automatic voter registrants who decline registration within 15 days from the acknowledgment notice package’s date of mailing shall be removed from the voter registration database and deemed never to have been registered. If a declined registration is received after this deadline, the registration shall be canceled.

 For more information about provisionally registered voters, see [“Identity Verification” on page 44.](#)

 For more information about automatic voter registration, see [“Automatic Voter Registration Acknowledgment Notice Package” on page 50.](#)

### Processing a Voter Registration Application that is Missing Information

When the application is missing one of 5 required pieces of information:


- Do not register the applicant.
- Send a Verification Notice to the applicant requesting only the missing information.
- Hold the application until the missing required information is received or the deadline of 45 days has passed.

If the applicant responds within 45 days:

- Finish processing the voter registration application, change the voter’s status to Active, and send an Acknowledgment Notice.
- The date of registration for the voter is the date the original application was received.

When an applicant fails to respond within 45 days, the applicant cannot be registered, and the registration application is not valid.

The Verification Notice must not be used for requesting identification.

 **Never send a Verification Notice to a voter who is already registered!**

## Notes

## Identity Verification

The [Help America Vote Act of 2002 \(HAVA\)](#) requires ID verification. The ID numbers requested on the form are from the Department of Licensing (DOL) or the last four digits of the Social Security Number (SSN).

### Is ID required to register a new voter?

ID is not a required piece of voter registration information.

When an application is missing ID, or the ID cannot be verified, the voter must be registered provisionally and issued a ballot.

- A provisional registration (temporary) is dependent on receiving ID eventually.
- All provisionally registered voters must receive ballots; however, the ballots cannot be counted until the voter provides identification.



**Exception: Overseas and service voters are not required to provide ID when registering to vote, meaning they are never registered provisionally.**

If the voter does not provide a DOL or SSN, or the County Auditor is unable to verify the ID number(s) provided, follow these steps:

- Provisionally register the applicant and flag the registration as needing ID.
- Use other public records and other government sources and databases (e.g., DOL records and LexisNexis) to confirm the voter's ID. If confirmed, remove the provisional status from the registration.
- If unable to verify using other sources, you may contact the voter by phone, email, text, or other means. If the voter provides valid ID, remove the provisional status from the registration.
- If, after these attempts, you are unable to verify the voter's identity, send an Identification Notice.
- When the voter provides ID, remove the provisional registration status and change to Active.


The county elections department shall cancel any provisional voter registration that has been flagged as provisional through two federal elections.

### Alternative Forms of ID are Acceptable!

- Valid photo ID.
- Valid tribal enrollment card of a federally-recognized tribe in Washington.
- Current utility bill.
- Current bank statement.
- Current paycheck.
- Current government check.
- Any government document, except for a voter registration card, that shows the registrant’s name and current address.

Notes

When a voter provides an alternate form of ID, save a notation or scan of the document source in the voter’s registration record.

 *For more information about interacting with provisionally registered voters, see [“Verification Notice” on page 50](#) and [“Issuing Ballots to Provisionally Registered Voters” on page 108](#).*

## Section 3.3: Special Circumstance Voter Registration

### Notes

### Registering Service and Overseas Voters (UOCAVA)

 [RCW 29A.08](#), [WAC 434-235](#)

Citizens overseas or on active duty service are protected by the [Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act \(UOCAVA\)](#).

To qualify as a UOCAVA voter in our state, the voter must use their most recent residential address in Washington, or the most recent residential address in Washington of a family member.

An overseas voter, as defined in [RCW 29A.04.109](#), is any elector of the state of Washington outside the territorial limits of the United States on Election Day.

Deadlines for new voter registrations do not apply to citizens overseas; active-duty service electors; dependents and spouses of service members that are away from their residence due to the member's active-duty assignment.

A service or overseas voter may register to vote by providing one of the following items:

- A voter registration application issued by Washington State.
- A federal post card application (FPCA) issued by the [Federal Voting Assistance Program \(FVAP\)](#).
- A federal write-in absentee ballot (FWAB) issued by FVAP.
- A national mail voter registration form issued by the [Election Assistance Commission \(EAC\)](#).
- A ballot (envelope), the ballot declaration signed by a service or overseas voter.

Deadlines for voter registration updates apply to currently registered UOCAVA voters.

### Processing Applications for Service and Overseas Voters

If an application from a service or overseas elector lacks a Washington State address, contact the applicant to request the address of the applicant's last known residence in Washington State. An address of a relative may be used if the applicant has never lived in the United States.

If there is insufficient time to obtain the missing registration information prior to an election, or the voter does not respond to your attempt to make contact,


precinct the registration using the County Auditor’s Office address. Only offices that are countywide or in the courthouse Congressional District can be counted for the voter.

After the election or primary, if the voter does not provide a Washington address, the County Auditor must place the voter on inactive status and send a confirmation notice to obtain the voter’s correct residential address.

A service or overseas voter is not required to provide ID when registering. Service and overseas voters’ dependents who do not qualify as a UOCAVA voter are not included in the exemption and must provide valid identification.

Service and overseas voters must be offered the option of receiving ballots electronically or by postal mail. If the registration application does not indicate a choice, you must try to contact the voter. Send the ballot by mail if the voter has not responded by the UOCAVA ballot mail date.

Rules for processing service and overseas (UOCAVA) voter registrations and issuing ballots are located in the Service and Overseas Voters clearinghouse notice.

 For more information about ballots issued to service and overseas voters, see [“Issuing Ballots to Service and Overseas Voters \(UOCAVA\)” on page 106.](#)

---

## Registering ACP Voters

 [RCW 40.24, WAC 434-840](#)

Address Confidentiality Program (ACP) voters must not be entered into VoteWA.

The Address Confidentiality Program protects victims of domestic violence, participants in the legal system, and election officials facing harassment or stalking. Participants of the program may register to vote, but their registration and balloting information is strictly confidential. Their information is exempt from public disclosure and must never be entered into VoteWA.

A special voter registration form is used for ACP participants. ACP participants applying to register to vote must provide documentation they are in the program. Each County Auditor’s office should have staff designated to accept and process these registrations as well as send and process the ballots.

The County Auditor sends a ballot to the registered program participant at the substitute mailing address provided by the ACP.

ACP participants who are 16 or 17 years old may pre-register to vote as ACP voters.

---

## Registering Future Voters

Notes


 [RCW 29A.08, WAC 434-232](#)

An applicant can pre-register to vote as long as they are at least 16 years of age, a US citizen, and a Washington State resident. Pre-registrations can be submitted by mail, online, or through the Department of Licensing. These registrations are pended as Future Voters until they are eligible to vote.

Information on pre-registered individuals are exempt from public disclosure and cannot be released or included on any official list of registered voters, until

- The person reaches 18 years of age, or
- Until the person is eligible to participate in the next presidential primary, primary, or election.

This information is exempt from public inspection and copying under [Chapter 42.56 RCW](#). Information may be disclosed for the purpose of processing and delivering ballots.

 *Future voters who will be 18 before a general election are eligible to participate as primary-only voters in the preceding primary or presidential primary. For more information about primary-only voters, see [“Voter Eligibility” on page 39](#).*

# Section 3.4: Notices to Voters

 [National Voter Registration Act \(NVRA\)](#),  
[Help America Vote Act \(HAVA\)](#), [RCW 29A.08.030](#)

Whenever a voter’s registration is accepted or updated in any way, the voter receives a notice.

Applicants must be notified when an application is incomplete, a residence address appears to be incorrect, or an ID check fails. For these purposes, we use:

- Acknowledgment Notices
- Automatic Voter Registration (AVR) Acknowledgment Notice Packages
- Verification Notices
- Confirmation Notices
- Identification Notices

Each type of notice serves a distinct purpose. To understand which notice to send, start with the application.

- Is required information missing?
- Did the ID check fail?
- Did you receive undeliverable mail or an undeliverable ballot from a registered voter?
- Did the voter update a name?

Each answer requires a different notice.

---

## Acknowledgment Notice

When a voter registers, transfers (address change), changes their name, or reactivates an inactive registration, the County Auditor must mail a notice to the voter.

The County Auditor sends an acknowledgment notice whenever a voter is assigned to “active” status. It must be:

- Sent by first-class, non-forwardable mail; and
- Mailed to the voter within 60 days of receipt of the application.


A voter registration card may serve as the Acknowledgment Notice. It must list:

- Voter’s full name
- Mailing address
- County name
- Precinct name and/or number
- Registration date

Notes



The County Auditor may include additional information.

 *After redistricting, voters must be notified of any precinct changes. For more information about redistricting, see [“Redistricting” on page 64.](#)*

Notes

---

## Automatic Voter Registration Acknowledgment Notice Package

An Automatic Voter Registration (AVR) Acknowledgment Notice Package as a type of acknowledgment notice sent to voters who are registered automatically registered to vote when obtaining an Enhanced Driver License or ID. Acknowledgment Notice Packages include all of the elements of an Acknowledgment Notice as well as information about how to opt out.

---


## Verification Notice


A registration is not valid until it contains all five of the required pieces of information.

A Verification Notice must be sent when the form is missing a signature, a citizenship affirmation, or when you’re unable to obtain missing information any other way. The purpose of the notice is to obtain the missing piece of information and to notify the applicant that a 45-day deadline exists in which the application is viable. The notice must:

- Be sent by forwardable mail.
- Include a postage paid, preaddressed return form/envelope.
- Notify the applicant that they must respond within 45 days or the application is void.

Request missing information only. Applicants are not obliged to provide required information more than once. The Verification Notice must only ask for the information missing from the original registration application.

 **Exception: If a voter is missing a signature or a mark confirming citizenship, the voter must provide this.**

 *For more information about the minimum requirements for voter registration, see [“Required Information for New Applicants” on page 41.](#)*



## Section 3.5: Voter Registration Status

 [RCW 29A.08](#), [WAC 434-324](#)

### Notes

A voter's registration status falls into one of the following categories:

- Active** — Voter is fully qualified to vote.
- Inactive** — When notification is received from the USPS or a state agency that provides voter registration services, such as the Department of Licensing (DOL) and Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS), that a voter has moved out of county or out of state, or when election mail sent to the voter is returned undeliverable.
- Pending** — The record is processing or an issue must be resolved (this includes Future Voters)
- Provisionally Registered** — The voter is registered and issued a ballot but must provide ID prior to the ballot being counted.
- Canceled** — The voter is no longer registered.

---

### Active and Inactive Status

The default status for voters is active — meaning, they are eligible to vote.

**A voter's status changes from active to inactive when:**


- USPS provides an out-of-county change of address.
- Any undeliverable document mailed by the County Auditor is returned by the USPS without address correction information.
- Any official state agency that registers voters reports an out-of-state address for an active voter.

In these cases, send a Confirmation Notice.

**Reactivate a voter by changing the status from inactive to active when the voter:**

- Attempts to vote.
- Requests a ballot.
- Updates registration information.
- Responds to a Confirmation Notice by providing a residence address located within the same county.

Unless specified by law, only the number of active registered voters determine qualifying numbers such as voter turnout or the number of votes needed to validate.

 For more information about validation of election results, see [“Determine Taxing District Turnout for Validation” on page 152.](#)

## Inactive Voter – Response to a Confirmation Notice

When an inactive voter responds to the notice by providing a residential address within the county or confirms the current address is correct, update the voter’s address and status to active.

When an inactive voter responds to the notice by providing a residential address outside of the county, but within Washington, the voter’s status remains inactive:

- The former county of residence does not cancel the registration; and
- Should immediately forward the notice to the new county.

The new county confirms the transfer and activates the voter.



**The law related to voters who transfer to another county will change on June 1, 2025.**



*For detailed requirements for transferring voters between counties, see the [Voter Registration Transfers](#) clearinghouse notice on the Office of the Secretary of State website.*

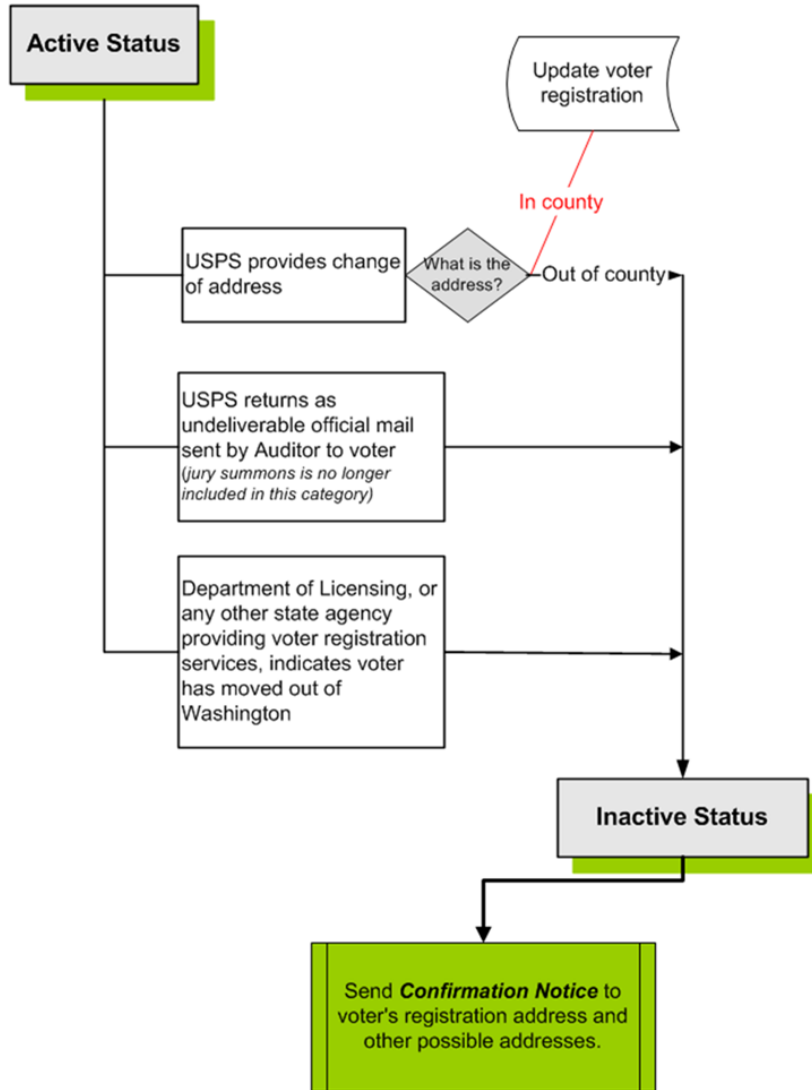
## Inactive Voter – No Response to a Confirmation Notice

The County Auditor must wait for the inactive voter to take any of the following actions:

- Voter attempts to vote — change status to active.
- Voter confirms the address or provides a new residential address within the state — follow procedures for transfers.
- Voter makes no contact through two federal elections – cancel registration.

Notes

Processing Voter Registration Applications





## Data Integrity Processes & Daily Data Maintenance


 [WAC 434-324-040](#), [WAC 434-324-045](#)

### Notes

Integrity checks, and duplicate checks identify potential issues. The county must research and resolve each of the flagged records.

- Validate Voter ID:** If the ID verification fails, the voter record must be assigned a status of provisionally registered, pending verifiable ID. County Auditors may verify voter ID using other governmental information or the acceptable documents listed in [WAC 434-324-045](#).
- Duplicate Voter Search:** Review and resolve duplicate and transfer reports daily and whenever new registrant information is added.
- Cancellations:** The voter registration database allows a comparison lists of deceased voters with the Department of Health, and Social Security Death Index. The county must research those matches for potential cancellations.
- Felony Screening and VoteWA:** The Office of the Secretary of State handles the cancelation of all felons through our voter registration database and the Washington State Department of Corrections. For more information, see the “Restoration of Voting Rights After Felony Conviction” clearinghouse. If you receive notification of a felony conviction, contact the Office of the Secretary of State. Voters with felony convictions should not be canceled at the county level.

## Voter Registration Transfers

 The law related to voters who transfer to another county will change on June 1, 2025.

### Transfers Within the Same County

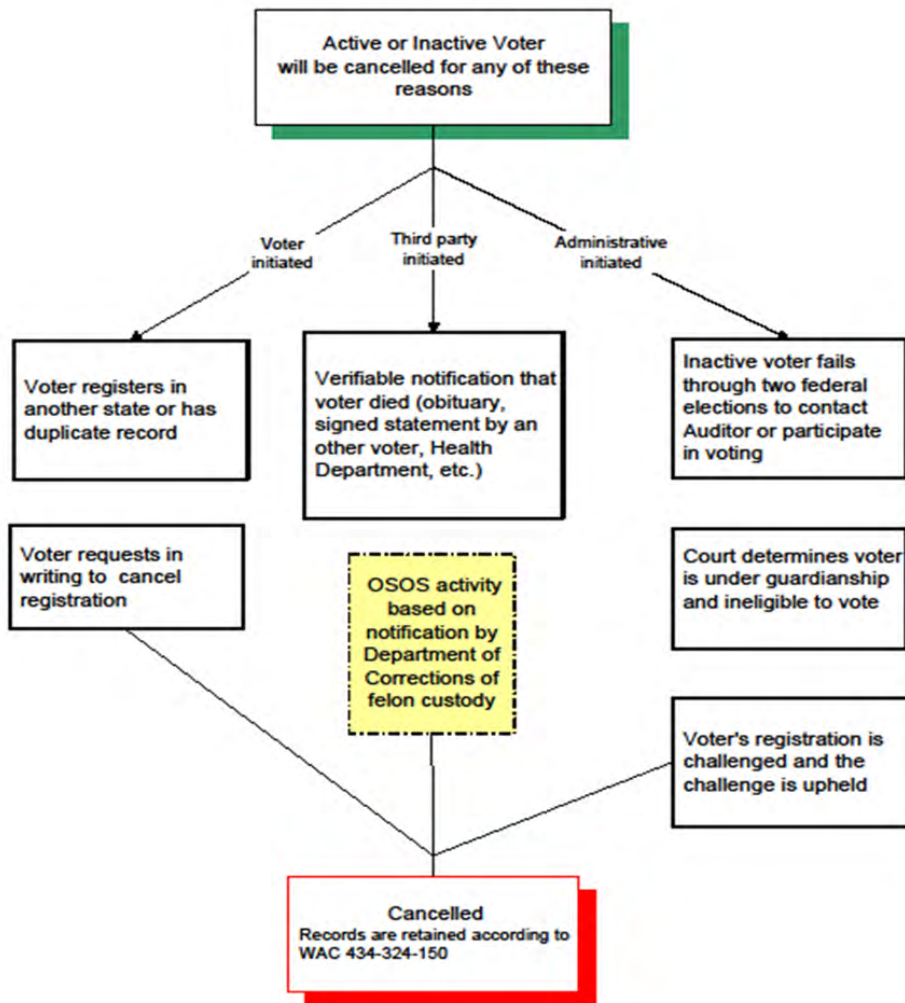
To transfer (change residential address) within the county, the voter may:

- Update their address by contacting the County Auditor in writing, in person, by phone, or by email.
- Submit an update through the VoteWA online portal, DOL, Health Benefit Exchange, or other designated agencies.
- Submit a voter registration application.
- Respond to a Confirmation Notice with a new address within the county.
- The US Postal Service provides a new address within the county.



**Activation, Inactivation & Cancellation**

Notes



**Transfers to Another County**

To transfer into a new county, the voter may:

- Submit a new paper registration application.
- Submit an update through VoteWA online portal, DOL, Health Benefit Exchange, or designated agencies.
- Respond to a signed Confirmation Notice that will be forwarded by the former county to the new county of registration.

The County Auditor of the new county will use VoteWA to verify whether the registration is a transfer.

Notes

For county-to-county transfers, a voter is only required to provide the minimum information necessary to complete the transfer:

- Name.
- Residential address.
- Signature to the oath in [RCW 29A.08.230](#).
- Either the voter’s DOB or voter ID number.

Affirmation of citizenship is not required because the voter is already registered to vote in our state.

The County Auditor must not transfer a voter out of another county without first obtaining the minimum information listed above. If the minimum information is not supplied, correspondence may be sent to the voter to obtain it, but the voter’s registration record in the current county shall not be flagged or pended in such a way that will trigger a void/cancellation after 45 days. For detailed procedures regarding Confirmation Notices and transfers, refer to the Voter Registration Transfers clearinghouse notice.

---

## Name Changes

Voters must provide the following information to the County Auditor in writing (written note, voter registration application, etc.):

- Name on current registration
- New name
- Residence
- New signature

A signed ballot envelope or Confirmation Notice containing all the required elements is acceptable for updating a voter’s name. Retain a copy of the envelope or notice for updating the record.

# Canceling Voters

## What cancels a voter’s registration record?

### Active & Inactive Voter Registrations:

- A signed request for cancellation from the voter
- A completed transfer out of your county into another county
- Official information from another state shows that the voter has registered to vote in their state
- Notification from the Office of the Secretary of State that the voter has registered to vote in another state through a dual registration program, such as ERIC
- A signed confirmation notice from the voter confirming the out-of-state address change
- An email from the email address on file with the voter’s registration record, if any, that they have moved out-of-state.
  - If the voter does not have an email address on file, or the email is sent from a different email address than the one on file, the emailed request to cancel their voter registration record cannot be accepted.
- An electronic image of a hand-signed cancellation request, such as a PDF or JPG
- Duplicate records in VoteWA
- Successful challenge to a voter’s registration
- Deceased
  - Notification of death from the registrar of vital statistics, Social Security Administration, or published obituary information
  - Notification of death with signature from another registered voter
  - Copy of official death certificate
- The Office of the Secretary of State receives information from the Department of Corrections (DOC)
- Official notice from court of guardianship or incapacitation status

### Inactive Voter Registrations Only:

- Failure to vote or confirm registration address for a period of two federal general elections

## Cancellation Due to Felony Conviction

 [RCW 29A.08.520](#)

The Office of the Secretary of State compares records in VoteWA with records from the Department of Corrections (DOC). The Office of the Secretary of State places the voter on a “Pending — Potential Felon” status and sends a letter to the voter. The voter has 30 days from the date of the letter to respond before the registration is canceled by the Office of the Secretary of State.

Notes

*How Are Voting Rights Restored?*

 [RCW 29A.08.520](#)

Notes

For the purposes of this section, a person is under the authority of the DOC if the person is serving a sentence of total confinement in the custody of the DOC.

Voting rights are automatically restored whenever that person is no longer in total confinement under the custody of the DOC. The person with a felony conviction must register to vote after leaving total confinement to receive ballots again.