



Voter's Choice Act Implementation: Helping Voters Develop a Vote Plan



Future of California Elections (FoCE) is sponsor of Voter's Choice California, a project focused on supporting communities transitioning to the Voter's Choice Act election model.

Additional resources are available at voterschoice.org

Introduction

Voters do not spend much time thinking about how, when and where to vote because their voting experience remains fairly consistent. They are accustomed to having one day and one place to vote. All this changes, however, under the Voter's Choice Act (VCA) for those counties that adopt the new voting model.

In 2020, 15 counties, representing over 50 percent of the California electorate, are implementing the VCA, which provide flexible voting options. Voters in these counties will have more days, more ways and more places to vote. Voter education of the new voting options is essential to ensuring voters can exercise their right to vote. This resource provides a guide to help voters understand and choose their best option for voting.



About the Voter's Choice Act

The Voter's Choice Act significantly changes the voting experience. The VCA frees voters from the limits of voting at just one location on a single day and allows voters to choose a voting option convenient to their lifestyle. This election cycle, voters in Amador, Butte, Calaveras, El Dorado, Fresno, Los Angeles, Madera, Mariposa, Napa, Nevada, Orange, Sacramento, San Mateo, Santa Clara and Tuolumne Counties will have more options for voting.

The Voter's Choice Act allows voters to vote anywhere in their county over an extended period. Voters who vote by mail can return their signed ballot envelopes to any mailbox, drop box or vote center, postage free. Voters also have the option of designating a trusted person to return their ballot on their behalf.



By Mail

No postage necessary



Ballot Dropbox

No postage necessary



Vote Center

Any where in the county

The VCA also improves the voting experience for in-person voting through the use of vote centers. Vote centers, replace neighborhood polling places, and offer improved services to voters. Voters will be able to vote early, up to 10 days before Election Day, including weekends; they will be able to register and vote right through Election Day and vote centers will also offer language assistance to voters for covered languages and accessible voting equipment for voters with disabilities.

A final major change under the VCA, is that all voters in participating counties, except Los Angeles County, will automatically receive their ballot in the mail, even if they did not request it. Los Angeles County voters may vote by mail by registering as a permanent vote by mail voter or requesting a vote by mail ballot directly from the county.

How the Vote Plan Emerged as a Key Component of Voter Education

Developing a vote plan, appeared as a strategy in one of our early reports released in May 2018 and co-authored with California Calls. While that initial report is now outdated due to the many changes in election laws since that publication, we can now build on it based on lessons learned through the 2018 election cycle.

In 2018, Voter's Choice California, a project of Future of California Elections, focused on supporting communities transitioning to the VCA model. We did this through a grants program, capacity building resources and convening the field for knowledge-sharing around voter education and outreach. This work allowed us to travel and connect with nonpartisan nonprofit civic engagement organizations in all five implementing VCA counties. Through the interviews, webinars and convenings of our civic engagement partners we learned that helping voters develop their vote plan was one of the most important steps in voter outreach and education efforts in the VCA counties in 2018.

Civic engagement partners shared that in general, voters were not interested in the details of the new voting model or in why the model was changing. Furthermore, our partners shared that while they included the various voting options as part of their voter education, voters still preferred their original way of voting. In other words, in-person voters, despite, automatically getting a mail ballot, still preferred to go vote at a vote center and mail voters still preferred to mail or drop off their ballot.

The voter education insights provided by our network reshaped our approach of how to educate voters about the Voter's Choice Act. The new approach focuses on giving voters the information they need to cast a ballot by their preferred voting option and to provide additional information as the voter requests this. The concept of developing a plan to vote emerged as a key strategy to help voters understand the VCA changes and prepare to participate in their elections.

Developing a Vote Plan

The first step in developing a vote plan is to learn the voter's voting preferences. Ask the voter if they plan to vote in-person or if they prefer to vote by mail. Listen to their response to guide what information you give them. In 2018, we learned that explaining all the changes of the VCA and introducing the new terminology about the VCA may overwhelm voters. While it is

important for voters to know about the VCA, it is best to give voters the information as they need it and request it.

Once a voter tells you how they want to vote, the next step is to help them identify a specific location of where to return their ballot, whether by mail or in-person. Provide voters the dates and the locations for voting. A voter who votes by mail can return their voted ballot by mail, at any drop box or at any vote center. Help them identify the closest locations to their home address, work, or other location that is important in their daily routine. Let them know that if they still have their ballot the weekend before Election Day, then the best option is to drop their ballot off at a vote center or drop it off at a drop box. Remind them to sign the envelope and that they do not need postage to return their ballot. Let voters know that they can also have any person they trust return their ballot for them. They just need to follow the instructions to designate that person on their vote by mail envelope.

For voters who want to vote in-person let them know about the option to vote early and on the weekends. Additionally, let them know that their voting location may have changed. Help them identify the vote centers closest to their home, work, or other location important to their daily routine. Let them know that they can vote anywhere in the county. Remind them that if they choose to vote on Election Day, they should prepare to be patient as they may experience some lines, depending on when they go.

Helping a voter identify and verbalize their plans for voting makes it more concrete and demystifies the new voting process. Encourage voters to write down the information you are sharing or give them printed materials of where they can find the information. Most county websites have a locator tool to find vote centers and ballot drop boxes.

Help voters develop a vote plan early in the election season. This is an important step because voters in all VCA counties, except Los Angeles County, will receive their ballot by mail, even if they did not request one. We learned that voters in 2018 were often confused as to why they were getting a ballot they did not request. Voters at times confused their real ballot for a practice ballot, since they were not expecting it. By starting the conversations early, voters are more likely to correctly identify their election materials as they arrive in the mail.

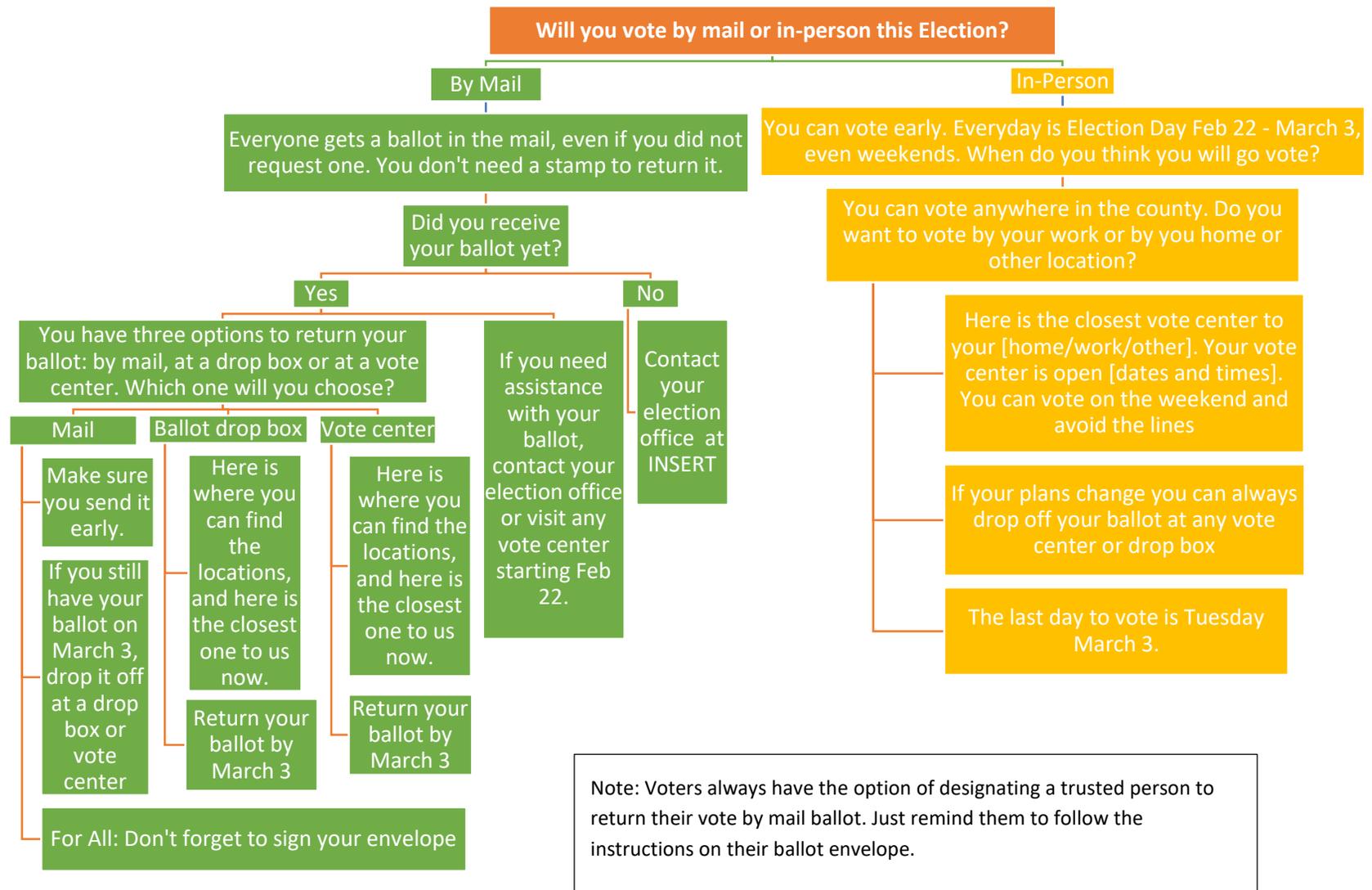
Remember that Los Angeles County voters do not automatically get a ballot in the mail. Voters in LA County who want to vote by mail will need to request a mail ballot by February 25, or earlier.

Finally, as you wrap up the conversation it is important to also let the voter know that they can always get assistance by visiting a vote center. Let voters know that at a vote center they can get language assistance for covered languages, and voters with disabilities have accessible voting equipment available. Finally, let voters know that they can update their registration or register to vote on the same day right through Election Day.

Change is never easy, but the vote plan offers a strategy to make the transition to the new voting model easier. As voters gain more experience with their new options for voting, they will become accustomed to the flexibility of the Voter's Choice Act. In a few more election cycles, having an election model that meets their lifestyle and switching between voting options will become second nature to voters.

Sample Script 1 – All VCA Counties, EXCEPT Los Angeles County
Developing a Vote Plan - March 2020 Primary

The following conversation prompts provide some guidance on how to help a voter develop a vote plan. Use the following for all VCA Counties, except Los Angeles County. See Sample Script 2 for Los Angeles County.



Sample Script 2 – Los Angeles County Only Developing a Vote Plan - March 2020 Primary

The following conversation prompts provide some guidance on how to help a voter develop a vote plan.

