



PERSONNEL AND
READINESS

UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
4000 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301-4000

NOV 24 2021

MEMORANDUM FOR ASSISTANT TO THE PRESIDENT FOR DOMESTIC POLICY

SUBJECT: Military Ballot Tracking Pilot Research Report

I am pleased to forward the attached Military Ballot Tracking Pilot Project Report, previously submitted to Congress in July 2021, in accordance with section 520D of the National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2020. The report describes efforts to support end-to-end ballot tracking for absentee ballots cast by Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA) voters and supplements the revised strategic plan to meet the requirement of Section 8(c) of Executive Order (EO) 14019, which the Secretary of Defense submitted to you on June 17, 2021.

The Department's Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) is the lead Department of Defense office for implementation of the EO's requirements. In its role administering UOCAVA on behalf of the Secretary of Defense, as the Presidential designee for UOCAVA, FVAP works to ensure covered citizens are aware of their right to vote and have the tools and resources to successfully do so from anywhere in the world. FVAP plans to conduct a study on the feasibility of a pilot program that provides full ballot tracking of overseas military absentee ballots through the mail stream in a manner similar to its 2016 Military Ballot Tracking Pilot Program.

My point of contact, if you require further information, is David Beirne, Director, FVAP, at (703) 589-6966 or david.e.beirne,civ@mail.mil.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gilbert R. Cisneros, Jr.", written in a cursive style.

Gilbert R. Cisneros, Jr.

Attachment:
As stated



PERSONNEL AND
READINESS

UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
4000 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301-4000

JUL 13 2021

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
H-209, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Madam Speaker:

The Department's response to section 580D of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 (Public Law 116-92) and Senate Report 116-48, page 186, accompanying S. 1790, the NDAA for FY 2020, is enclosed. As requested, the report explores the possible expansion of the Military Ballot Tracking Pilot (MBTP).

The Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) intends to conduct a series of procedural and technical tests to establish supporting procedures for the 2022 general election that closely replicate the 2016 level of effort, but limited to existing authorizations. The MBTP research report includes:

1. The scope and cost of the expanded pilot program;
2. The projected cost of extending this pilot program to all eligible voters under the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (Public Law 99-410);
3. The organizations that provided FVAP substantial support in conducting the pilot, a description of the support, and the associated costs; and
4. Recommendations on the process and steps necessary to expand the pilot program to all eligible overseas military members and their families.

Thank you for continued strong support for the voting rights of Uniformed Service members, their families, and U.S. citizens residing overseas. I am sending similar letters to the President of the Senate and the relevant congressional committees.

Sincerely,

Virginia S. Penrod

Virginia S. Penrod
Acting

Enclosure:
As stated



PERSONNEL AND
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UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
4000 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301-4000

JUL 13 2021

The Honorable Kamala D. Harris
President of the Senate
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Madam President:

The Department's response to section 580D of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 (Public Law 116-92) and Senate Report 116-48, page 186, accompanying S. 1790, the NDAA for FY 2020, is enclosed. As requested, the report explores the possible expansion of the Military Ballot Tracking Pilot (MBTP).

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WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301-4000

JUL 13 2021

The Honorable Adam Smith
Chairman
Committee on Armed Services
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

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Virginia S. Penrod

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Enclosure:
As stated

cc:
The Honorable Mike D. Rogers
Ranking Member



PERSONNEL AND
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UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
4000 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301-4000

JUL 13 2021

The Honorable Susan E. "Zoe" Lofgren
Chairperson
Committee on House Administration
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Madam Chairperson:

The Department's response to section 580D of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 (Public Law 116-92) and Senate Report 116-48, page 186, accompanying S. 1790, the NDAA for FY 2020, is enclosed. As requested, the report explores the possible expansion of the Military Ballot Tracking Pilot (MBTP).

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Sincerely,

Virginia S. Penrod
Acting

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As stated

cc:
The Honorable Rodney Davis
Ranking Member



PERSONNEL AND
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UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
4000 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301-4000

The Honorable Rosa L. DeLauro
Chairwoman
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

JUL 13 2021

Dear Madam Chairwoman:

The Department's response to section 580D of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 (Public Law 116-92) and Senate Report 116-48, page 186, accompanying S. 1790, the NDAA for FY 2020, is enclosed. As requested, the report explores the possible expansion of the Military Ballot Tracking Pilot (MBTP).

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Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Virginia S. Penrod".

Virginia S. Penrod
Acting

Enclosure:
As stated

cc:
The Honorable Kay Granger
Ranking Member



PERSONNEL AND
READINESS

UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
4000 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301-4000

JUL 13 2021

The Honorable Patrick J. Leahy
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman:

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Virginia S. Penrod

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cc:
The Honorable Richard C. Shelby
Vice Chairman



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UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
4000 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301-4000

JUL 13 2021

The Honorable Jack Reed
Chairman
Committee on Armed Services
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman:

The Department's response to section 580D of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 (Public Law 116-92) and Senate Report 116-48, page 186, accompanying S. 1790, the NDAA for FY 2020, is enclosed. As requested, the report explores the possible expansion of the Military Ballot Tracking Pilot (MBTP).

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Sincerely,

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Virginia S. Penrod
Acting

Enclosure:
As stated

cc:
The Honorable James M. Inhofe
Ranking Member



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UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
4000 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301-4000

JUL 13 2021

The Honorable Amy J. Klobuchar
Chairwoman
Committee on Rules and Administration
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Madam Chairwoman:

The Department's response to section 580D of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 (Public Law 116-92) and Senate Report 116-48, page 186, accompanying S. 1790, the NDAA for FY 2020, is enclosed. As requested, the report explores the possible expansion of the Military Ballot Tracking Pilot (MBTP).

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Virginia S. Penrod

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Enclosure:
As stated

cc:
The Honorable Roy D. Blunt
Ranking Member



REPORT
Military Ballot Tracking Pilot Research
Submitted to Congress

July 2021

Submitted by the Department of Defense (DoD)

The estimated cost of this report or study for the Department of Defense is approximately \$4,200 in Fiscal Year 2020-2021. This includes \$0 in expenses and \$4,200 in DoD labor.

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Executive Summary

The Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) submits this report in response to the following:

(1) Section 580D of the NDAA for Fiscal Year (FY) 2020, requiring the Director of FVAP to conduct a study on the feasibility of a pilot program providing full ballot tracking of overseas military absentee ballots through the mail stream and provide a report including:

a) an estimate of the costs and requirements needed to conduct the pilot program;

Total funding consists of postage costs for mailpieces/packages consisting of at least four tests to 1,500 participants (i.e., Voting Assistance Officer (VAO)) at an estimated cost not to exceed \$300,000. This estimate is based on the conduct of approximately four full testing efforts for delivery to and return of materials from overseas personnel and associated administrative costs incurred during pilot program implementation.

b) a description of the organizations that would provide substantial support for the pilot program;

The Council of State Governments (CSG) is the lead sponsor and project management source providing project management, financial, and administrative support to election officials. The Federal Voting Assistance Program is acting as the lead federal facilitator for project and overall government sponsor for cooperative agreement with CSG and the primary researcher for post-pilot data and findings. The United States Postal Service (USPS) is providing key technical assets for guidance and technical support for setup and configuration of the project. The Military Postal Service Agency (MPSA) is also providing key technical assets for guidance with the Military Postal System (MPS) and standardized guidance to MPS personnel on scanning MBTP mail pieces. Finally, local election officials are the key implementers of program specifications, preparing official ballot packages with assigned barcodes for outbound and returning ballot envelopes.

c) a time line for the phased implementation of the pilot program to all military personnel actively serving overseas;

FVAP is conducting a series of tests to support greater implementation and ballot tracking in time for the 2022 general election with the least amount of disruption to business operations of the State Department, state and local election officials, the USPS, and the MPSA.

d) a method to determine under the pilot program if a ballot was counted, and a way to provide such information to the member of the Armed Forces casting the vote; and

The MBTP provided voters information as to the location of their blank ballot from the election office to the voter, and then the voted ballot up to its delivery at the election

office. Election officials would relay information upon request directly to the voter as to the ultimate disposition of the voted ballot.

e) a description of the efforts being undertaken to ensure a reliable and secure military ballot tracking system.

Federal agencies, state agencies, and national election organizations are partners in carrying out their roles and responsibilities in securing election infrastructure. The community of election infrastructure stakeholders consider security when designing and implementing any direct or supporting election systems. Any military ballot tracking system would not change the overall security profile already administered by USPS and MPSA.

(2) Senate Armed Services Committee Report 116-48 on S. 1790 the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for FY 2020 (Reported Jun 11, 2019) requests the Director of FVAP to provide a report on a possible expansion of the Military Ballot Tracking Pilot (MBTP) to include:

a) The scope and cost of the expanded program;

Total funding consists of postage costs for mailpieces/packages consisting of at least four tests to 1,500 participants (i.e., VAO) at an estimated cost not to exceed \$300,000. This estimate is based on the conduct of approximately four full testing efforts for delivery to and return of materials from overseas personnel and associated administrative costs incurred during pilot program implementation.

b) The projected cost of extending this program to all eligible voters under the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA) (Public Law 99-410);

The 2016 MBTP consisted of approximately 1,500 ballots. The Department's current MBTP consists of the equivalent level of volume and at least four rounds of testing leveraging participants from Voting Assistance Officers serving at overseas military installations or various U.S. Embassies and Consulates.

Total funding for initial testing to consist of postage costs for mailpieces/packages consisting of at least four tests to 1,500 participants (i.e., VAO) at an estimated cost not to exceed \$300,000.

It should be noted these tests and long term implementation will be constrained by two key factors: the voluntary nature of state and local election officials to offer ballot tracking services in absence of a federal mandate; and the limited ability to require other countries to perform scanning of international mail pieces within the structure of the Universal Postal Union (UPU).

c) The organizations that provided the FVAP substantial support in conducting the pilot, a description of the support, and costs associated with that support; and

The Council of State Governments (CSG) was the lead sponsor and project management source providing project management, financial, and administrative support to election officials. The Federal Voting Assistance Program acted as the lead federal facilitator for project and overall government sponsor for cooperative agreement with CSG and the primary researcher for post-pilot data and findings. The United States Postal Service (USPS) provided key technical assets for guidance and technical support for setup and configuration of the project. The Military Postal Service Agency (MPSA) also provided key technical assets for guidance with the Military Postal System (MPS) and standardized guidance to MPS personnel on scanning MBTP mail pieces. Finally, local election officials were the key implementers of program specifications, preparing official ballot packages with assigned barcodes for outbound and returning ballot envelopes.

d) Recommendations on the process and steps necessary to expand the program to all eligible overseas members and their families.

The 2016 MBTP was the first of its kind to provide full life-cycle tracking of ballots throughout the USPS-MPS network. It increased customer service for voters and provided valuable research data to help identify areas for improvement on both a federal and local level.

FVAP will conduct a series of tests to support the use of existing USPS barcode technology or similar barcodes, for election officials to voluntarily use and enable comprehensive ballot tracking for ballots mailed to the military, their families, and overseas citizens. FVAP will conduct a series of testing to support greater implementation and ballot tracking in time for the 2022 general election with the least amount of disruption to business operations of the State Department, state and local election officials, the USPS, and the MPSA.

In response to the FY20 NDAA requirements, FVAP will conduct an additional pilot program consisting of a series of procedural and technical tests that closely replicate the level of effort conducted in 2016, but conducted outside an election event. These tests will look for opportunities to support greater ballot tracking visibility for the 2022 general election.

These tests will leverage a control group of voting assistance officers (VAO), U.S. State Department officials, and local election officials (LEOs). FVAP's current cooperative agreement with the Council of State Governments (CSG), a region-based forum that fosters the exchange of insights and ideas to help state officials shape public policy, represents the most flexible path to bring together state and LEOs to assist, but to also reimburse these jurisdictions directly with any postage or administrative costs associated with the conduct of the pilot program. FVAP will work with the Council of State Government to implement these testing procedures and prepare a final report to discuss results and recommendations.

Additionally, it should be noted these tests and long-term implementation will be constrained by two key factors: the voluntary nature for state and LEOs to offer ballot tracking services in absence of a federal mandate and the limited applicability of supporting international countries to honor requirements to conduct scanning on international mail pieces within the structure of the Universal Postal Union (UPU).

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Introduction

FVAP works to ensure members of the Uniformed Services and the U.S. Merchant Marine, as well as their eligible family members, and overseas U.S. citizens are aware of their right to vote and have the tools and resources to successfully do so - from anywhere in the world. However, voting is more complicated for active duty military members and overseas citizens than for local voters.

In 2009, Congress amended the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA) to include provisions that further informed the 2016 Military Ballot Tracking Pilot (MBTP) concept. Each state official must provide a free access system for military and overseas citizens to verify the status of their respective voted ballots, specifically whether or not the local election official received the ballot.

In addition, the 2009 amendments established expedited mail service for members of the Uniformed Services who are absent overseas voters returning voted ballots in general elections. In cooperation with the MPSA and the USPS, this expedited mail service for returning ballot envelopes from a voter to their respective Board of Election is the equivalent of Express Mail domestically and is readily identified through a dedicated label, known as the Label-11 DoD. Since the 2010 election, this label has provided the ability solely for overseas military personnel and their qualifying dependents to verify the transmittal status of their voted ballot as it travels to the election office. The use of this label leverages existing Military Postal Service (MPS) business rules for the manual processing of parcels, versus standard flat mail pieces, which are handled in bulk and not flagged for individual processing and scanning.

Since its inception, the Label 11-DoD continues to demonstrate its value with the tracking of the voted ballot back to the election official and expedited handling. However, by statute Label 11-DOD does not afford the opportunity for overseas military personnel to track the status of blank ballot packages on route to them from LEOs. The MBTP intended to provide voters with assigned tracking numbers to anticipate arrival of a ballot or to take action by completing a Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot (FWAB) as a backup ballot should the official state ballot suffer delivery delays.

The MBTP intended to serve as a proof-of-concept approach to leverage existing infrastructure to serve these voters in a more effective fashion and designed to accomplish multiple objectives:

1. Demonstrate the viability of providing full lifecycle tracking of ballots to and from overseas military personnel;
2. Provide enhanced customer service for overseas military personnel to verify successful shipment of voted ballots to election official from overseas locations; and
3. Leverage tracking data to help identify whether this level of tracking may also dispel perceptions of inherent problems with overseas mail shipments and systemic mail problems.

The 2016 MBTP accomplished all of these objectives based on a limited analysis of just over 1,500 ballots dispatched to overseas military personnel. The scale of the 2016 MBTP was constrained by existing infrastructure, financial resources, and reliance on the voluntary participation of election officials through the FVAP-sponsored cooperative agreement with the CSG. In 2018, the CSG prepared and published a report on the conduct of the 2016 MBTP, which is included as a technical appendix with pertinent excerpts incorporated directly into this report.

In 2016, FVAP leveraged its cooperative agreement with the CSG to conduct a pilot study on the use of full-circle tracking of military ballots transmitted to and from overseas military personnel. Research conducted by FVAP in 2012 pointed to an ongoing myth of voted ballots returned from overseas military personnel not being considered for counting toward election results unless the election totals fell within a particularly close margin. FVAP recognized and continues to combat this myth through its informational materials and broader awareness campaigns to educate active duty personnel and overseas citizens that each ballot that is timely received must be considered for final disposition, as either accepted or rejected, in compliance with state laws and administrative reviews.

This report addresses the possible expansion of a pilot similar to the 2016 MBTP, costs associated with the possible inclusion of all voters eligible to vote under UOCAVA.

In passage of the FY20 NDAA, Congress specifically required that FVAP report on the possible expansion of the MBTP, but also requested a review of the MBTP to include a broader applicability to all eligible citizens:

SEC. 580D. STUDY ON TWO-WAY MILITARY BALLOT BARCODE TRACKING.

(a) STUDY.—The Director of the Federal Voting Assistance Program of the Department of Defense shall conduct a study on the feasibility of a pilot program providing full ballot tracking of overseas military absentee ballots through the mail stream in a manner that is similar to the 2016 Military Ballot Tracking Pilot Program conducted by the Federal Voting Assistance Program.

(b) REPORT.—Not later than one year after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Director shall submit to Congress a report on the results of the study conducted under subsection (a). The report shall include—

- (1) an estimate of the costs and requirements needed to conduct the pilot program described in subsection (a);*
- (2) a description of the organizations that would provide substantial support for the pilot program;*
- (3) a time line for the phased implementation of the pilot program to all military personnel actively serving overseas;*
- (4) a method to determine under the pilot program if a ballot was counted, and a way to provide such information to the member of the Armed Forces casting the vote; and*
- (5) a description of the efforts being undertaken to ensure a reliable and secure military ballot tracking system.*

As further noted in the Conference Committee Report:

"The committee encourages the FVAP to continue and expand the MBTP to additional military voters and their eligible family members. The committee directs the Director, FVAP, to submit to the Committees on Armed Services of the Senate and the House of Representatives, the Senate Committee on Rules and Administration, and the House Committee on Administration, not later than January 29, 2021, a report on the expanded MBTP. This report shall include: (1) The scope and cost of the expanded program; (2) The projected cost of extending this program to all eligible voters under the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (Public Law 99-410); (3) The organizations that provided the FVAP substantial support in conducting the pilot, a description of the support, and costs associated with that support; and (4) Recommendations on the process and steps necessary to expand the program to all eligible overseas members and their families."

On March 7, 2021, President Biden signed Executive Order 14019 requiring the following:

The Secretary of Defense, in coordination with the Department of State, the Military Postal Service Agency, and the United States Postal Service, shall take all practical steps to establish procedures to enable a comprehensive end-to-end ballot tracking system for all absentee ballots cast by military and other eligible overseas voters under the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act, 52 U.S.C. 20301 et seq.

Implementation of the 2016 Military Ballot Tracking Pilot

During the initial planning stages of the 2016 MBTP, all the principals (CSG, the USPS, FVAP and the MPSA) identified the inherent risk involved with developing and implementing a pilot initiative during a Presidential election. With this caution in mind, all the pilot participants began to document the existing environment and infrastructure for tracking of military ballots overseas, but also the supporting legal framework for offering this level of service. The principals formalized key areas of responsibility to ensure that all aspects of the MBTP were assigned to the appropriate responsible party.

MBTP Project Areas of Responsibility

The Council of State Governments

- Lead sponsor and project management source
- Project management, financial and administrative support to LEOs

Federal Voting Assistance Program

- Lead facilitator for project and overall government sponsor for cooperative agreement with CSG
- Primary researcher for post-pilot data and findings

United States Postal Service

- Key technical asset for guidance
- Technical support for setup and configuration

Military Postal Service Agency

- Key technical assets for guidance with MPS
- Standardize guidance to MPS personnel on scanning MBTP items

Local Election Officials

- Key implementer of program specifications
- Preparing official ballot packages with assigned barcodes for outbound and returning ballot envelopes

Early project discussions focused on clarifying the existing business rules and technical infrastructure to support the pilot program. Currently, the use of Intelligent Mail barcode, or *IMb tracking provides visibility to one of two gateway points (Chicago and Miami)* prior to entering the MPS network, at that point any blank ballots are not tracked since they are regular flat envelopes, not parcels. *IMb tracking is typically used to assist LEOs with tracking of ballots within the USPS mail stream and may be present on mailing address labels placed on traditional ballot envelopes, or flats. Absentee or by-mail voters do not have the ability to independently track ballot envelopes using IMb tracking.*

The USPS uses in-stream processing automation to capture *IMb tracking information. However, MPS is not equipped to scan IMb barcodes in the field, mainly due to the supporting logistics and existing business processes for handling standard envelopes versus parcels. MPS personnel are equipped with barcode scanners and regularly scan parcels that have an Intelligent Mail Package Barcode, or IMpb, but they do not currently do this for letters or flats with an IMb.*

Additionally, once an absent overseas uniformed services voter receives a general election ballot, votes it, and returns it to a Military Post Office (MPO), each ballot receives a Label 11-DoD, which is manually applied to the envelope by military postal clerks. Subsequent to the 2016 MBTP, use of the Label 11-DoD has been expanded to include active duty military personnel operating at embassies and consulates with access to Diplomatic Post Offices (DPO). This barcoded tracking number provides full tracking visibility from the time of scan acceptance, to first formal entry point into the MPS and delivery to the local election office.

The MBTP project team focused on leveraging existing MPO business processes to support the pilot and lower the overall risk in execution of the project. Consensus quickly pointed to the need for processing these ballot materials as parcels and using existing products offered by the USPS in order to leverage the *IMpb as the standard. An existing USPS product platform, Click-N-Ship Business Pro, was leveraged as the primary tool to support the preparation of prograde MBTP materials (that is, those sent from the United States to overseas MPOs).*

Figure 1: Initial Ballot Package Setup Used During the 2016 MBTP

Two-Way Military Ballot Barcode Tracking:

- Outbound – Priority Mail -- unmarked ballots



Priority Mail Label with barcode (IMpb) for ballot sent to voter.

- Return – Priority Mail Express – marked ballots



Nested Priority Mail Express ballot return envelope containing pre-affixed and pre-assigned Priority Mail Express Barcode (Label-11 DoD), Official Election Mail log and LEO office address enables full visibility of voter's ballot in transit.

Existing Authorizations

Pursuant to section 3406 of Title 39, United States Code (U.S.C.), Congress authorizes the use of a postage paid indicia for designated election materials (emphasis added):

“(a) Balloting materials under the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (individually or in bulk)—(1) shall be carried expeditiously and free of postage; and (2) may be mailed at a post office established outside the United States under section 406 of this title, unless such mailing is prohibited by treaty or other international agreement of the United States.”

At the time of UOCAVA’s passage in 1986, the USPS offered Express Mail levels of service, but Congressional intent at the time indicated that while Express Mail was available, it did not seem necessary to codify this level of service. As a result, most prograde ballots sent under section 3406 are mailed by Election Officials using First-Class Mail. In 2009, Congress enacted the MOVE Act requiring the return of voted ballots from overseas absent uniformed service voters in an expedited fashion pursuant to section 20304(b)(2) of Title 52, U.S.C.:

“Cooperation and coordination with the United States Postal Service the Presidential designee shall carry out this section in cooperation and coordination with the United States Postal Service, and shall provide expedited mail delivery service for all such marked absentee ballots of absent uniformed services voters that are collected on or before the deadline described in paragraph (3) and then transferred to the United States Postal Service.”

This section of the UOCAVA applied the term “expedited” once again, but also includes a specific window for the successful return of these voted ballots back to election officials from

overseas military personnel and their eligible family members, which necessitated the use of a particular minimum level of service to meet the new timeframe. Section 20304(b)(3) of Title 52, U.S.C., states:

“Except as provided in subparagraph (B), the deadline described in this paragraph is noon (in the location in which the ballot is collected) on the seventh day preceding the date of the regularly scheduled general election for Federal office.”

In order to meet this threshold of seven days or less for the return of voted ballots, the USPS enabled the Label 11-DoD to provide the expedited return, a Priority Mail level of service. In 2016, these two differing levels of service for prograde ballots under section 3406 of Title 39, U.S.C., and free postage (i.e., first class mail) versus the retrograde return of voted ballots from overseas military personnel (i.e., Express Mail) created a challenge in the MBTP as each participating jurisdiction would have to effectively agree to increase the class of service associated with prograde ballots to Express Mail to leverage parcel level tracking.

This increased class of service and resulting increased level of postage was subject to reimbursement by the CSG as federal agency partners could not process participating balloting materials for prograde transmission based on limitations in current statute. However, the return of voted ballots (retrograde) was subject to existing authorizations and postage due to its existing authorities for expedited mail treatment.

Setting The Course

The MBTP federal stakeholders identified key business requirements that would support the execution of the pilot project. These elements consisted of the following:

1. All prograde (i.e., outbound from the election office to the voter) ballots for military personnel serving overseas would be processed with IMpb tracking through the USPS Click-N-Ship Business Pro downloadable software.
2. Postage for these blank balloting materials at the increased Priority Mail rate would be paid for by CSG through its FVAP cooperative agreement.
3. Flat Rate shipping envelopes would be provided by the USPS to participating election offices.
4. The Label 11-DoD would be dispatched and staged at each participating local election office for direct application for the return envelopes.
5. Each assigned return ballot envelope, with the Label 11- DoD attached, would be placed inside the prograde flat rate envelope.

6. Prograde and retrograde (i.e., voted ballot returning from voter to local election office) barcode pairings would be associated with a voter record to assist with customer service and overall tracking.
7. Voters would access official scan information via the USPS Track a Package application.

These agreed upon business requirements demonstrated a high-level consensus; however, they needed to be tested and refined in a realistic election setting.

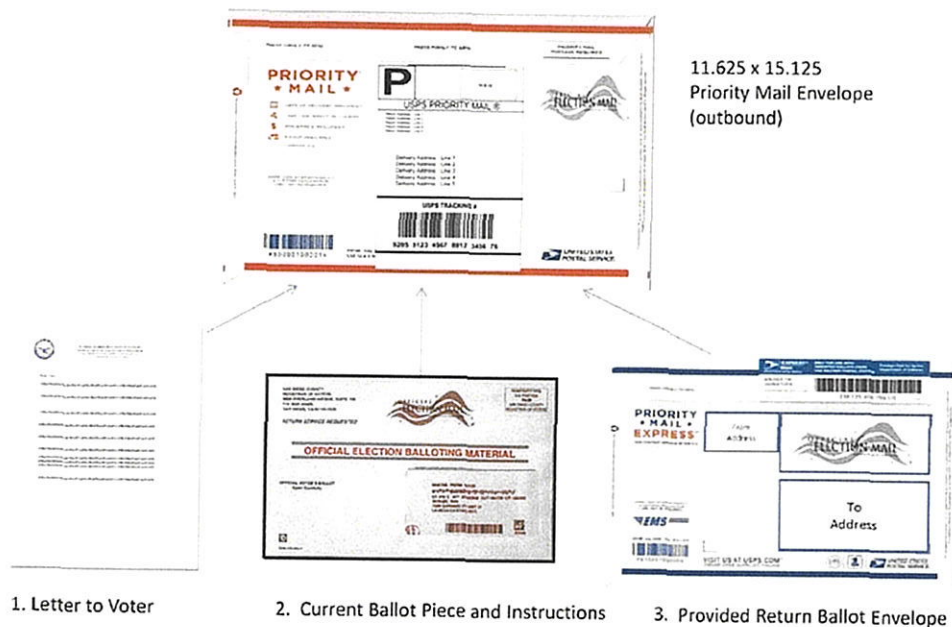
The Orange County (California) Registrar of Voters agreed to facilitate testing of the initial planning stages of the MBTP. The cooperation of the Orange County Registrar of Voters was a critical point of success for the MBTP, as it allowed for the development and refinement of the overall MBTP approach before introducing it to the five remaining election jurisdiction participants in the MBTP. Ultimately, the Orange County Registrar of Voters became the test site for the initial design work of the MBTP. In the spring of 2016, the MBTP developed a test that verified the technical requirements of the MBTP design, but did not include applying the Label 11-DoD. Orange County used Click-N-Ship Business Pro downloadable software, which incorporates IMpb barcodes, to verify alignment with existing parcel-scanning operations throughout the MPS network.

With the successful conclusion of the Orange County test, MBTP orchestrators (CSG, FVAP, USPS and MPSA) formalized the design of the pilot parameters and hosted a webinar in June 2016, with all six participating local election jurisdictions to conduct a walkthrough on the approach. During this webinar, Escambia County (Florida) recognized the importance of leveraging existing balloting materials and instructions from the local election office to minimize the disruption to the voters' experience. Any deviation to the standard voter instructions would create voter confusion and lead to an increase in ballot rejection risk if voters failed to properly sign returned balloting materials.

Based on this discussion, the following additional features were incorporated into the official MBTP mail piece contents:

The final mail piece design for the MBTP consisted of a letter from the FVAP Director, the official ballot envelope used by each local election jurisdiction, and the ballot return envelope with a pre-affixed Label 11-DoD. All of these contents were placed into a large prograde flat rate envelope with a shipping label generated from Click-N-Ship Business Pro downloadable software. Each local election official would assign barcodes to the voter records and notify all voters qualified for processing under the MBTP how to access tracking information on USPS.com.

Figure 2: Final Ballot Package Used in 2016 MBTP Reflecting Two Nested Barcodes

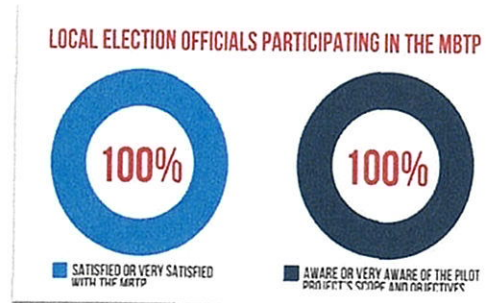


The USPS provided direct customer support to each local election official on how to operate Click-N-Ship Business Pro downloadable software to ensure no disruptions with postage processing. By September 23, 2016, all ballots were dispatched to existing absentee ballot applicants receiving mail at an Army/Air Force or Fleet Post Office (APO/FPO) address. Each election official reported prompt acceptance of the materials within the USPS mail stream, and no technical support requests were received. At this point, the MBTP pilot was in full execution and in the hands of voters to receive, vote, and return their ballots.

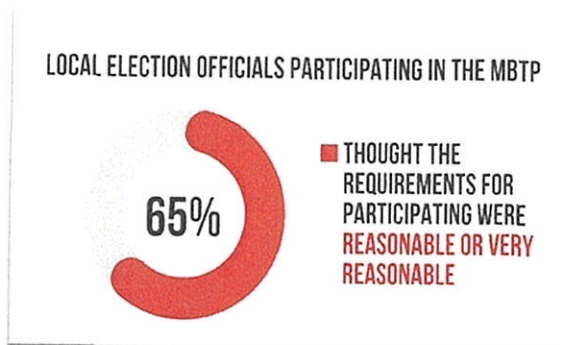
Key Observations by Participating LEOs

Feedback from participating LEOs included:

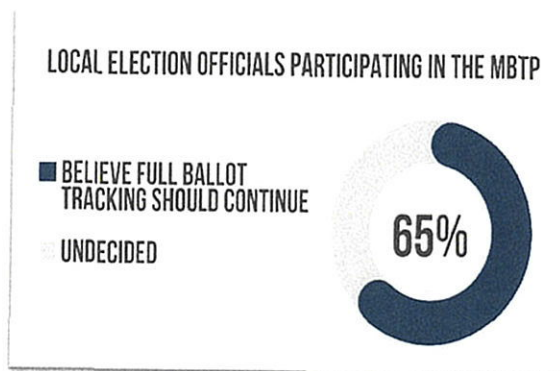
1. One-hundred percent of the LEOs participating in the MBTP were satisfied or very satisfied with the MBTP.
2. One-hundred percent of the LEOs participating in the MBTP were aware or very aware of the pilot project's scope and objectives.



3. Sixty-five percent of the LEOs participating in the MBTP thought the requirements for participating were reasonable or very reasonable.



4. Sixty-five percent of the LEOs participating in the MBTP believe full ballot tracking should continue, with 35 percent undecided.

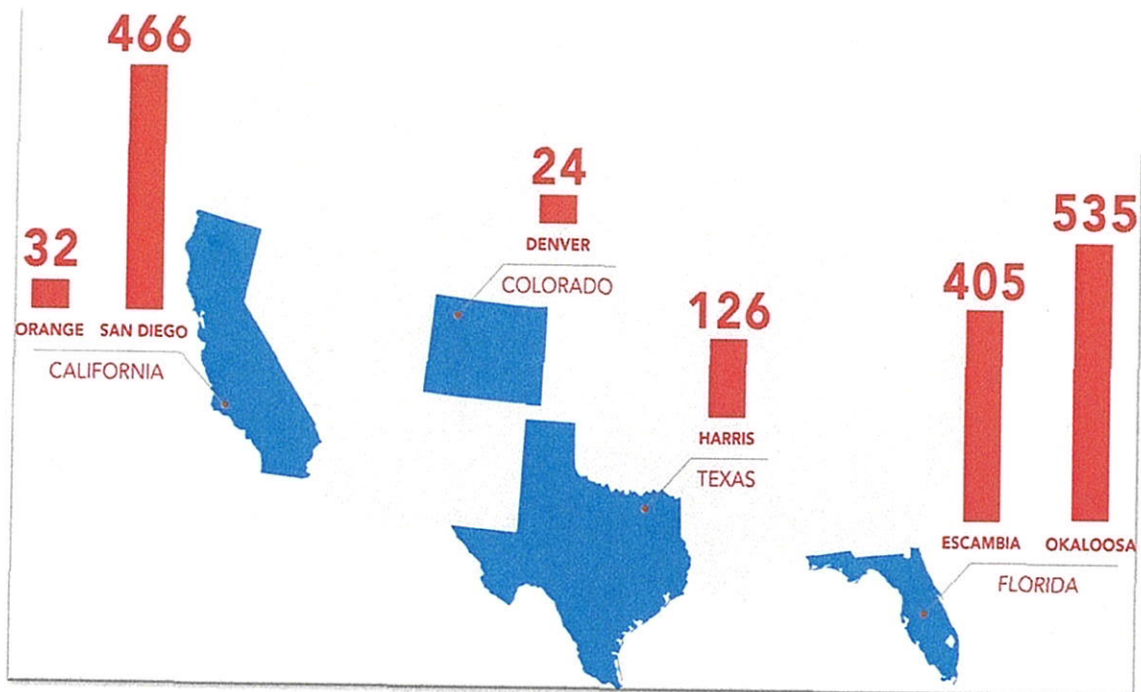


Based on feedback from the participating jurisdictions, the manual application of shipping labels and assembly of envelopes were the most onerous parts of the process. This raised concerns over the long-term viability of the MBTP as a permanent service model for overseas balloting materials, unless automation is possible through the use of a standard-sized parcel envelope to support processing through commercial mail service providers.

Other suggestions identified amongst the key participants of the MBTP included:

- Ballot tracking numbers should be printed internally by local election offices.
- Expanded size of flat rate envelope limits flexibility (i.e., no window envelopes).
- Future efforts should be expanded beyond six jurisdictions.
- Validation of the overseas military addresses was the biggest challenge due to legacy absentee ballot applications and old addresses.
- The USPS-provided envelopes were an asset.
- Expedited return and tracking of balloting materials should include all overseas voters, including non-military overseas citizens.
- Leverage proactive e-mail communication to voters to engage them throughout the process.

Figure 3: Participating Jurisdictions and Number of Ballots Processed in 2016 MBTP



Voter Satisfaction

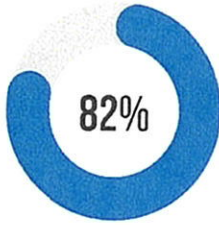
The most valuable data came from the military voters themselves, via the satisfaction survey sent from their respective local election jurisdictions. The survey had 14 questions that primarily asked about whether they had received ballot materials, used the tracking system for their blank and voted ballot, and how satisfied they were with the materials and tracking system. Of participating voters, 98 percent were satisfied or very satisfied with the conduct of the MBTP, and 87 percent were confident or very confident their ballot would be counted in the election.

 **98% WERE SATISFIED OR VERY SATISFIED WITH THE CONDUCT OF THE MBTP**

87% WERE CONFIDENT OR VERY CONFIDENT THEIR BALLOT WOULD BE COUNTED IN THE ELECTION



The vast majority of respondents said they were satisfied and found the process easy. Nearly all respondents answered that they were satisfied with the email instructions, found it easy to use the ballot tracking process and found the instructions easy to navigate.



**AMONG USERS OF
THE MBTP
TRACKING SERVICE,
82 PERCENT WERE
VERY SATISFIED.**

Among users of the MBTP tracking service, 82 percent were very satisfied. Of the voters who did not use the tracking information available to them, 62 percent said they were satisfied with the service. Fifty respondents commented on why they did not check the status of their blank ballot.

They primarily said:

1. They trusted the system, meaning they trusted their ballot would be delivered.
2. The ballot arrived so quickly after they received the notice that it wasn't necessary to check.
3. They were busy with work or life.

All of these qualitative findings point to a service that was very well-received for those who used it. For those who did not use it, overall satisfaction registered based on the knowledge that it was there for their use should it become necessary.

Qualitative Findings

The evaluation of the MBTP consisted of a series of parts including the technical feedback from the key federal stakeholders, CSG, and each participating local election jurisdiction. These findings were intended to isolate the technical challenges with the MBTP and assist with questions about the scalability of this approach for all election jurisdictions in the United States to consider. Another piece of the evaluation consisted of a qualitative satisfaction survey sent to the voters themselves who received an MBTP parcel. The final stage of the evaluation focused on the quantitative research findings that could be pulled from the overall date/time scan event data for all ballots within the MBTP.

Technical Findings

The total number of ballots processed through the MBTP was 1,588. All ballots were mailed to active duty military personnel who requested that a ballot be mailed to an APO/FPO address for the 2016 general election. Ballots were sent from three jurisdictions with larger military populations: San Diego (California), Escambia (Florida), and Okaloosa (Florida), and three jurisdictions with smaller military populations: Orange (California) Denver (Colorado), and Harris (Texas).

The MBTP was designed to capture data on the following research questions:

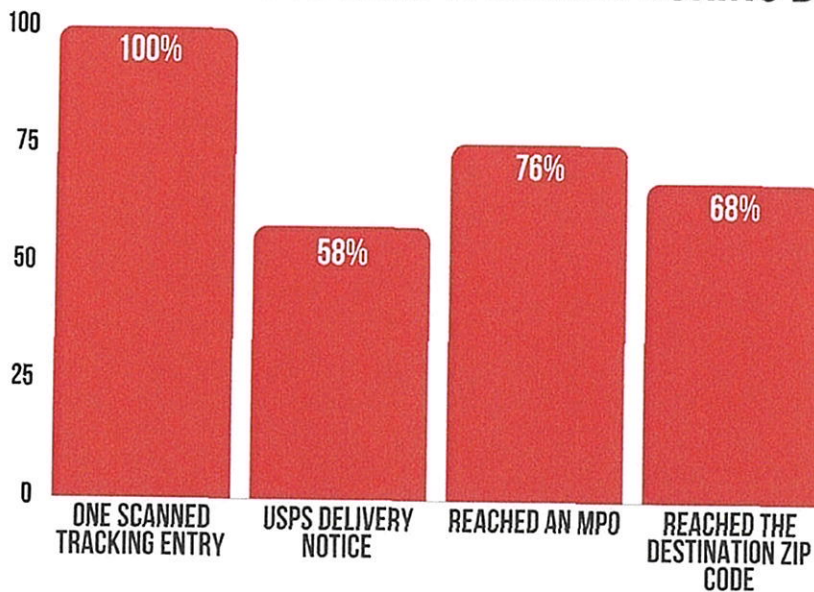
1. What percentage of ballots were successfully tracked and returned?
2. How uniform is the scanning data throughout the tracking process?
3. Were there regional differences between military mailboxes in Asia, Europe, and the Americas?

4. How long did the absentee voting process take overall and by segments?

The resulting data analysis attempted to develop a cumulative picture of the scan events and all available points to assess the overall ballot delivery success:

1. **Tracked Anywhere:** One-hundred percent of ballots had at least one scanned tracking entry. This means a voter could visit the tracking system and at least see some evidence that his or her ballot was on the way.
2. **USPS Delivery Notice:** Fifty-eight percent of ballots had a USPS delivery notice. This means a voter could visit the tracking system and know for sure that his or her ballot was delivered. This is important since active duty military may need to visit their MPO to retrieve their ballot, instead of having their ballot hand-delivered to a personal mailbox.
3. **Reached MPO:** Seventy-six percent of blank ballots reached an MPO on their outbound journey. This does not guarantee it was the correct MPO, but it is strongly correlated with the destination ZIP Code based on the existing absentee ballot application on file with the local election office.
4. **Reached Destination ZIP Code:** Sixty-eight percent of ballots reached the destination ZIP Code identified by each jurisdiction. This was calculated by comparing the jurisdiction destination ZIP Code to the last valid outbound ZIP Code.
5. **Final Ballot Destination Determined:** Ninety-three percent of ballots either reached an MPO, reached their destination ZIP Code, had a USPS delivery notice, or were successfully returned to their jurisdiction—indicating that the ballot arrived to the voter, but it did not show in the data.

TOTAL SCANS RECEIVED DURING BALLOT TRANSIT



93 PERCENT
OF BALLOTS EITHER
REACHED AN MPO,
REACHED THEIR
DESTINATION ZIP
CODE™, HAD A USPS
DELIVERY NOTICE, OR
WERE SUCCESSFULLY
RETURNED TO THEIR
JURISDICTION.

Overall Findings

- An estimated 85-90 percent of all ballots were successfully delivered to destination APOs/FPOs.
 - This calculation was a result of the overall data analysis with additional validation reported from FVAP's 2016 Post-Election Survey of active duty military personnel, in which 83 percent reported receiving their ballots.
 - Given the margin of error and all circumstances, the projection of 85-90 percent delivery success is a reasonable approximation for measuring the delivery of ballots to destinations.
- The majority of participating voters were satisfied or very satisfied with the conduct of the MBTP.
- A majority of participating voters were also confident or very confident their ballot would be counted in the election.
- Variability with the application of parcel scans requires further analysis to better identify proxies for identifying successful deliveries and isolating key milestones for voter visibility.
- MPS far exceeded the 7-day service level target with average return time of 4 days.



**AN ESTIMATED 85-90 PERCENT
OF ALL BALLOTS WERE SUCCESSFULLY
DELIVERED TO DESTINATION APOS/FPOS.**

THE MAJORITY OF PARTICIPATING VOTERS



**WERE SATISFIED OR
VERY SATISFIED WITH
THE CONDUCT OF THE
MBTP**



**WERE CONFIDENT OR
VERY CONFIDENT THEIR
BALLOT WOULD BE
COUNTED IN THE
ELECTION**

Tracking Data

Average ballot transit time for MBTP ballots when isolating Armed Forces Europe and Armed Forces Pacific:

- Armed Forces Europe (AE): prograde—10 days, retrograde—3 days.
- Armed Forces Pacific (AP): prograde—11 days, retrograde—4 days.

- Ballots sent to AE installations were slightly more likely to be successfully scanned and returned and have final destination scans applied confirming delivery (13 percent).
- Across the vast majority of measures, ballots transmitted to AE and AP regions performed very similarly. AE took a median 27 days and AP a median 30 days to complete the absentee ballot process. Ballots sent to AP regions at the median took 1 day longer to reach the voter, 1 day longer to vote, 1 day longer inbound time and 1 day longer transit time.
- The median prograde ballot took 10 days to reach its last recorded destination. This calculation is based on the date provided by the participating local election office for when the ballot was mailed.
- The median time a voter held on to the ballot before voting and submitting it to the MPO for return was 12 days.
- The median retrograde ballot took 4 days between the date of mailing and the date that the participating local election office reported receiving it.

It is important to note that the median retrograde transit time was about 2.5 times as fast as the prograde transit time, which aligns with the expedited treatment of voted ballots from MPOs operating overseas. The overall cost of the 2016 MBTP was just under \$31,000 with the vast majority of these costs associated with postage resulting from an initial test mailing and subsequent Priority Mail postage for prograde balloting materials.

Findings for the Expansion of the MBTP

As requested by Congress, the inclusion of all citizens eligible to vote under UOCAVA into the parameters of a MBTP may not be possible for all overseas voters, because not all foreign postal operators offer the types of tracked services that serve the needs of mailers sending balloting materials. While substantial progress could be made in connection with major trading partners, a universal solution may not be possible at this stage. However, going forward testing will occur to determine possible tracking solutions available for voted ballots returning into USPS operations from Embassies and Consulates.

Scalability for Expanding the Pilot or Institutionalizing Service Level

The 2016 MBTP benefited from its small size and partnerships as existing software products and mailing infrastructure were repurposed with heavy reliance on manual processes. Depending on the level of infrastructure there may be impacts to administrative and/or business operations especially for those jurisdictions that must scale up to accommodate a larger number of voters. Therefore, FVAP envisions a pilot program in the future as a series of tests to educate and refine possible technical solutions to support greater levels of implementation across election jurisdictions with varying levels of populations.

Technical Research into a Standardized Barcode for Ballot Tracking

Under current Federal law, state and LEOs are not required to provide comprehensive ballot tracking. Jurisdictions typically use an IMb or a third-party vendor system to track ballots sent by mail. The continued expansion of the IMb usages across election jurisdictions points to

the need for USPS and MPSA to conduct testing on how best to integrate the IMb into a comprehensive tracking effort and adjust business processes accordingly. IMb is designed to provision scan data back to the mail owner or mail service provider. Some LEOs use IMb scan data to monitor ballot mail movement in the mail stream and provide methods for voters to track outbound and return ballot mail. Testing will ultimately determine the overall viability of the IMb versus another type of barcode that more closely aligns with MPS processes and provides a plain text tracking code directly to voters.

Integration of Scan Data into Election Systems

The ballot tracking experience in 2016 leveraged the existing ballot tracking gateway available on the USPS website, but this ballot tracking experience does not capture the final disposition and confirmation by the election official that the ballot was received and subject to final acceptance and tabulation. Existing barcode scan events identify only a change in custody and receipt. Future pilot efforts would identify specific scan events and identify key data points for election officials to integrate with their own internal reporting systems voters are able to use to verify final disposition of their returned ballots.

USPS/MPSA Process Improvements

Before offering recommendations regarding seamless UOCAVA Ballot Mail processing and tracking, any pilot program and any subsequent testing will need to be completed in order to evaluate various commercially available barcode options and envelope designs to determine the least disruptive and highest efficacy solution. In recognition of some of the current business process limitations regarding ballot mail visibility, USPS can work with FVAP, MPSA, and other organizations to provide election officials with new letter and flat size UOCAVA ballot envelope templates. Pilot participants can test the efficacy of various envelope template designs. The pilot would also provide participants an opportunity to identify business process improvements for all stakeholders, including DPM, USPS, and MPSA, as well as opportunities to improve scanning processes, such as handheld scanner deficiencies.

From time of authorization of an expanded pilot program and with appropriate funding, FVAP and its federal partners could provide initial technical and process recommendations and costs associated with enhancements to existing business processes and services within one calendar year. Any new technical solutions and measurements will require more evaluation.

Future Pilot Program Design and Strategic Milestones

In pursuit of answering these technical challenges, FVAP envisions a pilot program conducted as a series of tests to educate and refine possible solutions to support greater levels of implementation across election jurisdictions. The 2016 MBTP represented an effective proof-of-concept in terms of its original objectives, but any future pilots should be used to conduct field testing outside of actual elections. The 2016 MBTP consisted of approximately 1,500 ballots. Any future pilot program would consist of the equivalent level of volume and at least four rounds of testing leveraging participants from VAO serving at overseas military installations or various U.S. Embassies and Consulates. Currently, over 1,200 VAO conduct voting assistance

responsibilities at overseas locations with approximately 242 embassies and consulates also supporting voting assistance activities. Through interagency partnerships, these populations would be leveraged to conduct a series of tests on the technical parameters and to identify specific answers to the challenges identified during the 2016 MBTP.

FVAP remains in an existing cooperative agreement with the CSG through December 31, 2022. The existing cooperative agreement established the Overseas Voting Initiative as a working group of state and LEOs to identify best practices when serving UOCAVA voters. This mechanism served FVAP well in 2016 as all associated postage and administrative costs to include reimbursement of participating jurisdictions, were included in the operation of the cooperative agreement at that time. These tests will examine the following elements:

1. Integration of IMb, or acceptable alternatives, for tracking setups for prograde ballots;
2. Ballot envelope design changes to improve visibility, automation, and manual processing;
3. Identification of key scan events, provisioning scan events to mail owner or mail service providers events and data for integration into election official databases;
4. Possible changes to Label 11-DoD distribution or label generation by state and local election officials; and
5. Qualitative user experience data collection.

At the end of these tests, FVAP, DPM, USPS, and MPSA will determine business processes with the highest efficacy and will define a way forward.

Conclusion

The 2016 MBTP was the first of its kind to provide full life-cycle tracking of ballots throughout the USPS-MPS network. It increased customer service for voters and provided valuable research data to help identify areas for improvement on both a federal and local level.

In response to requirements enacted in the FY20 NDAA, FVAP engaged its federal partners to review the potential for an expanded pilot program that addresses the following requirements:

- (1) The scope and cost of the expanded pilot program;
- (2) The projected cost of extending this pilot program to all eligible voters under the UOCAVA (Public Law 99-410);
- (3) The organizations that provided FVAP substantial support in conducting the pilot, a description of the support, and costs associated with that support; and
- (4) Recommendations on the process and steps necessary to expand the program to all eligible overseas members and their families.

In pursuit of these requirements, FVAP will carry out an expanded pilot program consisting of a series of procedural and technical tests that closely replicate the level of effort conducted in 2016, but conducted outside an election event.

Glossary

APO	Army / Air Force Post Office
CSG	Council of State Governments
DPO	Diplomatic Post Office
DPM	Diplomatic Pouch and Mail Division
FPO	Fleet Post Office
FVAP	Federal Voting Assistance Program
IMb	Intelligent Mail Barcode
IMpb	Intelligent Mail Parcel Barcode
LEO	Local Election Official
MBTP	Military Ballot Tracking Pilot
<i>MOVE Act</i>	<i>Military and Overseas Voter Empowerment Act</i>
MPO	Military Post Office
MPS	Military Postal Service
MPSA	Military Postal Service Agency
NDAA	National Defense Authorization Act
Prograde	Materials sent to voters
Retrograde	Materials returning from voters
<i>UOCAVA</i>	<i>Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act</i>
UPU	Universal Postal Union
U.S.C.	United States Code
USPS	U.S. Postal Service
VAO	Voting Assistance Officer



SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
1000 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, DC 20301-1000

JUN 17 2021

MEMORANDUM FOR ASSISTANT TO THE PRESIDENT FOR DOMESTIC POLICY

SUBJECT: Executive Order 14019, "Promoting Access to Voting"

I am pleased to forward you the attached Strategic Plan for the Department of Defense (DoD) in accordance with Executive Order (EO) 14019, "Promoting Access to Voting," March 7, 2021. The Department's Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) is the lead DoD office for implementation of the EO's requirements. In its role administering the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA) on behalf of the Secretary of Defense as the Presidential designee for UOCAVA, FVAP works to ensure covered citizens are aware of their right to vote and have the tools and resources to successfully do so from anywhere in the world.

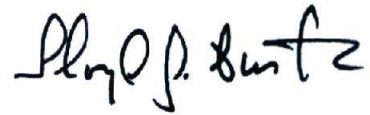
To satisfy the requirements of EO 14019, FVAP revised its Strategic Plan, building on an already successful structure, to further promote voter awareness of registration and voting procedures in support of absentee voting and provide broader support to those who may wish to vote. The revised Strategic Plan includes:

1. Promotion of opportunities to register to vote and participate in elections, to include civilian employees working for the Department who vote locally;
2. Distribution of voter information and use of vote.gov in conjunction with fvap.gov and current communications to support a comprehensive approach to voter awareness;
3. Continued creation of innovative solutions to reduce barriers and increase voter awareness of their status in the *UOCAVA* absentee voting process, including increased visibility of overseas ballots;
4. Development of materials to support voters with limited English proficiency with absentee voting; and
5. Continued implementation of the National Voter Registration Act through the Recruiting Commands and implementation of Installation Voter Assistance Offices.

Supporting the Strategic Plan is an upcoming report to Congress that is near completion, which will describe efforts to support end-to-end ballot tracking for all absentee ballots cast by UOCAVA voters.

Also, please find attached additional supporting documents, including part 233 of title 32, Code of Federal Regulations, "Federal Voting Assistance Program," September 18, 2021, as amended, and DoD Instruction 1000.04, "Federal Voting Assistance Program," November 12, 2019.

Please let me know if you require any further information. My point of contact is David Beirne, Director, FVAP, at (703) 589-6966 or david.e.beirne.civ@mail.mil.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gregory J. Burtz". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Attachments:
As stated



FVAP.GOV

FEDERAL VOTING ASSISTANCE PROGRAM



Strategic Plan

2021-2025

Message from the Director

Each day of the year, the staff of the Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) come to work to support the voting rights of Uniformed Service members, their families, and overseas Americans living and working around the world. In pursuit of this mission, the FVAP team applies a spirit of customer service not only to voters themselves, but to all of our partners and stakeholders. FVAP does this through its uncommon dedication and a special passion for its work.



In response to Executive Order 14019, "Promoting Access to Voting," March 10, 2021, FVAP adjusted its strategic plan to reflect not only its ongoing support and requirements identified through the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act, but the need to increase overall voter awareness for all individuals affiliated with the Department and those receiving assistance. This strategic plan identifies the role of FVAP as the Department lead to promote awareness of voting resources not only for those living and working away from home, but also those who register and vote in their local jurisdictions.

The goals set forth below inform FVAP's work into a cohesive strategic plan reflecting lessons learned from prior election cycles and setting objectives for the program's performance over the next 5 years. This strategic plan also sets forth a framework for approaching specific absentee voting challenges for the customers we serve. In consideration of its continuous program improvement, FVAP embarked on a multi-faceted approach in consideration of its Strategic Plan involving every phase of an election cycle it supports and reliance upon customer and stakeholder involvement.

FVAP's program activities, after each federal election cycle, are focused on improving the resources, online tools and tactics necessary to measure key performance indicators in order to raise voter awareness and overall program effectiveness. In that spirit, FVAP recognizes the importance of applying critical thinking in its approach to measuring program performance. The next 5 years represent a new opportunity for FVAP to use structured administrative data to better identify factors that ultimately drive absentee voter success or failure when attempting to navigate the absentee voting process. Serving away from home in our military or living overseas each represent unique challenges for improving readiness and ensuring voting eligibility. FVAP's Strategic Plan embraces the past successes providing quality customer service to a population of over 5 million eligible voters, but renews the need to lean forward and address ongoing challenges.

The opportunity for improvement is constant and the FVAP staff epitomizes the sense of purpose identified in the three goals of this Strategic Plan. As public servants, the team at FVAP will dedicate ourselves to these goals and to all the work we do on behalf of the American people.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "David Beirne". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a light blue horizontal line.

David, Beirne, Director

FVAP's Mission

The Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) supports Uniformed Service members, their families, and overseas citizens with absentee voting.

Goal 1: Be a highly valued customer service program to military members, their eligible family members, voting assistance officers, overseas voters, civilian personnel, and election officials.

Goal 2: Reduce obstacles to military and overseas absentee voting success.

Goal 3: Increase *Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA)* voter awareness of available tools and resources.

Our Vision

The Federal Voting Assistance Program is a premier organization providing first-class assistance so that all Service members, their families, and overseas citizens can successfully vote absentee from anywhere in the world. In pursuing this guiding vision, we place value in:

- Maintaining a customer service outlook,
- Collaborating with stakeholders on new and ongoing activities and initiatives,
- Striving for innovation in the accomplishment of our goals,
- Demonstrating dedication to work and mission, and
- Ensuring the assistance provided is timely, nonpartisan and accurate.

The goals outlined in the Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2021-2025 are consistent with our vision and mission and provide a clear trajectory for FVAP in the years ahead.

In turn, this plan is aligned with the Defense Human Resources Activity (DHRA) Strategic Plan and the Department's National Defense Strategy of 2018. Specifically, FVAP's operations align to DHRA's Strategic Plan goal for providing effective Force support products and services to stakeholders and customers.

Commitment to our vision informed FVAP's decision to commission a research effort with the RAND Corporation in 2013 to align FVAP's strategy and operations to better reflect its core mission. Throughout the effort, FVAP worked closely with RAND and stakeholders to begin implementing initiatives that align with its recommendations. The plan is in keeping with the findings from the RAND report, released in 2015.

Additionally, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) reviewed FVAP leading up to the 2016 Presidential election. The GAO report, "DoD Needs More Comprehensive Planning to Address Military and Overseas Absentee Voting Challenges," GAO-16-378, of April 2016, recommended a revised strategic plan that exhibits the six selected leading practices of federal strategic planning, including, but not limited to:

- A statement of mission and goals,
- An identification of strategies that address management challenges and resources needed to achieve goals,
- A description of leadership involvement and accountability,
- A description of stakeholder involvement in the development of FVAP priorities,
- A coordinated strategy to communicate the program's mission and goals to other Federal Agencies, and
- A description of performance measures, aligned with program goals that FVAP will use to track progress toward achieving goals.

Strategic Context:

The Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA) extends federal absentee voting rights to members of the Uniformed Services on active duty and the Merchant Marine who are U.S. citizens as well as eligible family members of such persons. The Uniformed Services include the Armed Forces, the commissioned corps of the Public Health Service and the commissioned corps of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Additionally, *UOCAVA* extends to U.S. citizens residing outside the United States. This act provides the legal basis for these citizens' absentee voting requirements for Federal offices.

UOCAVA was amended in 2009 to require states to send absentee ballots to *UOCAVA* voters at least 45 days before a federal election and electronically upon request.

FVAP is the Department of Defense office charged with administering *UOCAVA* on behalf of the Secretary of Defense. In serving this role, FVAP works to ensure citizens covered under the law are aware of their right to vote and have the tools and resources to successfully do so from anywhere in the world. Furthermore, FVAP directly assists voters through its implementation of a centralized information resource, FVAP.gov, and by prescribing a standardized voter registration and absentee ballot request form, the Federal Post Card Application (FPCA), as well as a backup ballot known as the Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot (FWAB).

On March 7, 2021, the President signed Executive Order 14019, "Promoting Access to Voting." FVAP is the lead office for implementation of the Order's requirements within the Department, which positions FVAP to support DoD efforts to promote general awareness on all voting resources beyond those covered by *UOCAVA*, including DoD civilian personnel who are eligible to vote locally and not just in an absentee status.

In light of these requirements, FVAP's customer base is varied. FVAP serves the following customers: members of the Uniformed Services, members of the Merchant Marine, eligible family members, overseas citizens, DoD civilian personnel, Voting Assistance Officers (VAOs), Service Voting Action Officers (SVAOs), and state and local election officials.

In completing FVAP's mission, we routinely engage and collaborate with a wide array of stakeholders. FVAP's stakeholders include the following: election officials, representative non-governmental organizations (NGOs), DoD entities (e.g., Military Postal Service Agency, Inspector General, representatives of the Uniformed Services), Federal agencies (e.g., U.S. Election Assistance Commission, Department of Justice, United States Postal Service, Department of State, Department of Homeland Security), overseas citizens NGOs, various election advocates, Congressional Oversight Committees, and Congressional staff.

Our interaction with these customers and stakeholders is additionally informed by DoD guidance and directives. DoD Instruction 1000.04, Federal Voting Assistance Program, establishes Department policy, assigns responsibilities, and provides procedures for the implementation of FVAP in accordance with *UOCAVA*. The Instruction also establishes policy and assigns responsibilities to: implement installation voter assistance (IVA) offices under Section 1566a of

Strategic Context

Title 10, U.S.C.; and implement jointly with each state, procedures for persons to apply to register to vote at Military Service recruitment offices under Section 20506 of Title 52, U.S.C.

DoD has a well-established chain of command in carrying out its responsibilities under *UOCAVA*. The lines of accountability are articulated in the DoD Directive 5124.02, Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, June 23, 2008, and the DoD Instruction 1000.04, Federal Voting Assistance Program, November 12, 2019

Guiding our interaction with other federal agencies is the Code of Federal Regulations, Title 32, Part 233, Federal Voting Assistance Program. The procedures in Part 233.6(c) clearly state the responsibilities of government departments, agencies, and other entities in providing voter assistance to uniformed employees, overseas employees, and their families to the maximum extent practicable with assistance available from FVAP. These procedures include the requirement for each agency to enter into agreements with FVAP toward this end.

FVAP and each of its employees are evaluated under yearly performance measures tied to work done on a daily basis. These measures are tied to FVAP's overall mission and this strategic plan. The annually updated performance measures track upward from the individual to FVAP leadership, the Defense Personnel and Family Support Office, the Defense Service Support Center, the Defense Human Resources Activity, the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, and overall Departmental strategies and goals. The strategic goals below are informed by these rules and directives, which inform and guide collaboration with stakeholders (as outlined above) and FVAP staff. All of these goals and key performance indicators are included within post-election and annual Congressional reports.

Goal 1

Be a highly valued customer service program to Uniformed Service members, their eligible family members, voting assistance officers, overseas voters, civilian personnel, and elections officials.

It is FVAP's mission to ensure Uniformed Service members, their families, and overseas citizens are aware of their right to vote and have the tools and resources to successfully do so – from anywhere in the world. For UOCAVA citizens, FVAP provides information for potential voters to learn about the absentee voting process and find the necessary forms, materials, and assistance to vote from wherever they are. FVAP promotes awareness of voter registration participation methods for DoD civilian employees through internal messaging and other U.S. citizens through U.S. Armed Forces Recruitment offices.

Objective 1.1: Provide professional, timely, and helpful assistance to UOCAVA voters and the general public to ensure the ability to successfully register, request, and return an absentee ballot.

Strategies for Achieving the Objective

- Provide accurate and timely state-specific absentee voting information and other voting materials, in print and online, to UOCAVA voters in order to facilitate an individual's awareness of the voting process, important dates, and local election official contact information.
- Partner with state and local election officials to discuss updates to FVAP.gov in order to maintain up-to-date information and easy access to crucial voting information for voters, to include the listing of federal candidates in federal elections.
- Provide direct customer service by providing accurate nonpartisan absentee voting information within an established service level.
- Work within the Department of Defense, the Military Departments, and Service structure to ensure DoD civilians are aware of the election process and provided support in contacting their election office for voter registration and voting.

Performance Measures

- Customer satisfaction with our Voting Assistance Center as evidenced by post-inquiry survey data. Goal is to maintain a customer satisfaction rate at or above 4.0 out of 5.
- Customer satisfaction with trainings as evidence by feedback on pre- and post-workshop evaluation forms. Goal is to maintain an attendee satisfaction score at or above 4.5 out of 5.
- Usefulness and satisfaction feedback on tools and resources as shown by post-election survey data. Goal is a 75 percent or higher usefulness rate for FVAP resources.
- Qualitative feedback from stakeholders (i.e., communicating with voters at public fora and/or digital platforms) as well as more informal "face-to-face" feedback after and during presentations or workshops.
- Quantitative feedback data from the Election Administration and Voting Survey (EAVS), the EAVS Section B (ESB) Data Standard Information Collection, and the Overseas Citizen Population Analysis.

Goal 1

- Maintaining critical relationships with state and local election officials to facilitate the most up to date information for voters, as well as provide *UOCAVA* policy support when required.

Objective 1.2: Provide professional, timely, and helpful assistance to election officials, who administer elections, to ensure the ability of *UOCAVA* and other U.S. citizens to successfully register to vote, request an absentee ballot or vote in-person.

Strategies for Achieving the Objectives

- Re-evaluate and update, as needed, the *UOCAVA* training program for election officials.
- Partner with state and local election officials and stakeholder organizations to discuss updates to FVAP.gov and state provided *UOCAVA* information to maintain up-to-date information and easy access to crucial voting information on the respective websites.
- Provide valuable training and presentations for state and local election officials to help them understand their requirements under Federal law and how to help *UOCAVA* citizens to vote successfully.
- Provide resources in alternative languages to support eligible voters who have Limited English Proficiency.
- Work with the Service Recruiting Commands to ensure responsibilities are carried out in accordance with Section 3.5 of the DoDI 1000.04.
- Work with the Services to ensure responsibilities associated with implementation of Installation Voter Assistance Offices are implemented.

Performance Measures

- Continued operation of the Voting Assistance Center in a manner that ensures election officials receive accurate, timely, and professional help.
- Customer satisfaction with our Voting Assistance Center as evidenced by post-inquiry survey data. Goal is to maintain a customer satisfaction rate at or above 4.0 out of 5.
- Usefulness and satisfaction of tools and resources as evidenced by customer satisfaction surveys of state election officials.
- Qualitative feedback from election community meetings, conferences, and the Post-election survey.
- Leverage partnerships to ensure awareness of best practices and challenges election officials experience.
- Quantitative feedback data from the Election Administration and Voting Survey and administrative data to better identify success and challenges in the absentee voting process through ballot acceptance and rejection rates.
- State feedback on registration applications received from Armed Forces Recruitment Offices or Installation Voter Assistance Offices.

Objective 1.3: Provide professional, timely, and helpful support to VAOs at all levels, ensuring their ability to assist voters in successfully casting an absentee ballot.

Strategies for Achieving the Objective

- Deliver valuable training in a variety of mediums to ensure VAOs understand their responsibilities in carrying out the law and the state-specific rules and deadlines.
- Re-evaluate and update, as needed, our training program for VAOs to address operating conditions and adult learning tactics.
- Provide updated Voting Assistance Guides and other voting materials to VAOs and overseas citizens in order to facilitate an individual's awareness of the voting process, important dates, and local election office contact information.
- Partner with relevant stakeholders to discuss updates to the voting assistance portal and FVAP.gov in order to maintain an up-to-date resource and easy access to crucial voting information.
- Produce useful tools and resources for VAOs that help them fulfill their requirements as described in DoD policy and Federal law, respectively.
- Provide direct customer service to VAOs to answer questions about the UOCAVA voting process as well as maintaining Portal accounts.

Performance Measures

- Continued operation of the Voting Assistance Center in a manner that ensures customers receive accurate and professional help.
- Customer satisfaction with our Voting Assistance Center as evidenced by post-inquiry survey data. The goal is to maintain a customer satisfaction rate at or above 4.0 out of 5.
- Customer satisfaction with trainings as evidenced by feedback on pre- and post-evaluation forms.
- Usefulness of and satisfaction with tools and resources as evidenced by post-election survey data.
- Qualitative feedback from the VAO workshops.
- Quantitative feedback data from the Election Administration and Voting Survey, the EAVS ESB Data Standard Information Collection, Post-Election Voting Surveys: Voting Assistance Officers, and Post-Election Voting Surveys: Active Duty Military.

External Factors and Emerging Issues

Most factors that influence the success of a voter are outside the control, or even influence, of DoD. States run elections and individual voters must take the actions necessary to register to vote, request a ballot, and vote in a timely manner. FVAP works to facilitate the process between these groups and to monitor and assess postal impacts for UOCAVA voters both domestically and internationally. This includes working with key agency partners such as the Military Postal Service (MPS), the United States Postal Service (USPS) and the State Department.

In anticipation of these factors, FVAP can and does develop materials, online resources and communications to assist voters. For example, FVAP maintains online assistants on FVAP.gov to cut down on the time it takes to fill out the form (and process it). FVAP provides messaging throughout the year concerning dates and deadlines, as well as reminders to sign and date forms

Goal 2

and other important aspects necessary to fill out the form. FVAP further provides direct customer service in the form of a call center, so that voters can quickly have their questions answered. This includes providing contact information for their local election officials in order to make the process that much more clear and efficient.

Goal 2

Reduce obstacles to military and overseas voting success

DoD's voting assistance resources work together to support Uniformed Service members and overseas voter's ability to participate in the electoral process. Since an election cycle includes primary, general, and run-off elections for Federal office, FVAP provides continual support over the course of an election cycle. FVAP also emphasizes metrics as a method of tying the execution and performance of supporting voting assistance activities to that of program effectiveness during an election cycle. Effectiveness for FVAP, therefore, includes reducing obstacles that allow for voter participation should a voter decide to vote in a given election.

Objective 2.1: Provide voting assistance tools and resources for Uniformed Service members and overseas voters to support their ability to participate in the electoral process.

Strategies for Achieving the Objective

- Evaluate and update the Voting Assistance Guide in order to reflect accurate, up-to-date, state-specific guidelines with standardized content written in plain language. This includes coordinating with local election officials to verify these guidelines and voting deadlines.
- Produce, re-evaluate, and solicit stakeholder input every 2 years (including state election officials, active duty military, and U.S. citizens living overseas) to better understand changes in state laws and the obstacles the UOCAVA population experience during the voting process.
- Produce, re-evaluate, and solicit UOCAVA stakeholder input every 2 years to update, as needed, the key forms used by UOCAVA citizens to request voter registration, request an absentee ballot, and successfully vote by absentee ballot.
- Provide website and online tools to guide voters through the process of filling out key absentee voting forms according to their state's laws, rules, deadlines, and regulations.
- Continue to provide accurate information to stakeholders via email and telephone regarding key voting forms and election dates as well as information on the general UOCAVA absentee process via the FVAP Call Center.
- Continue to create innovative solutions to known barriers and increase voter awareness of their status in the UOCAVA absentee voting process, which may include pilot programs and cooperative agreements to spread general awareness of the UOCAVA voting process and seek usage of inexpensive but timesaving measures.
- Use data to understand trends impacting U.S. citizens worldwide to anticipate the effective support necessary for UOCAVA voters.

Performance Measures

- General resource usage data, especially information on FVAP's Online Assistant and website usage results (Google Analytics).
- Continued operation and functional enhancement of FVAP.gov throughout election cycles.
- Voting Assistance Metrics from VAOs and the FVAP Call Center.
- Continued updates to the Portal on a quarterly basis, targeting new arising issues.
- Feedback on the effectiveness of current forms, website, and Portal from SVAOs, FVAP staff, election officials, and other stakeholders. This information is used to inform possible future form changes.
- Metrics on overall awareness, use, and effectiveness of FVAP products and services for SEOs, VAO, ADM, and local election officials regarding awareness, use, and effectiveness of FVAP products and services.
- Creating After-Action Reviews to streamline FVAPs projects and procedures including AARs for workshops as well as for new projects.
- Overall utilization of the FPCA as the preeminent tool for voters.

Objective 2.2: Work with stakeholders to identify and address obstacles to *UOCAVA* absentee voting process.

Strategies for Achieving the Objective

- Assist election officials with identifying policies, strategies, and best practices in customer service and increase their awareness of their requirements under Federal law.
- Continue working with the Council of State Governments (CSG) focusing on the importance of issues surrounding the *UOCAVA* absentee voting process to the election community and seeking potential innovations.
- Examine the effect of technological improvements made by USPS and MPS on the delivery of absentee ballots.
- Explore innovative techniques to support *UOCAVA* voters in the absentee voting process.
- Coordinate with MPS to develop and promote recommended mailing deadlines.

Performance Measures

- Assess whether USPS and MPS mail modernization efforts reflect a positive impact on delivery of absentee ballots.
- Identify best practices for supporting *UOCAVA* voters regardless of operational conditions and international postal disruptions.
- By October of each odd numbered year, develop recommended mailing deadlines and include these deadlines in FVAP messaging efforts.

Objective 2.3: Influence improvements to the absentee process and support the absentee voting process.

Strategies for Achieving the Objective

- Serve as a legislative resource at both the state and Federal level by responding to requests for feedback or input on a given, *UOCAVA*-related topic.
- Monitor the passage of voting-related state and Federal legislation and continue working with the states to reduce additional requirements to the *UOCAVA* process.
- Work directly with state and local election officials to identify best practices to better serve military and overseas voters.
- Work with state and local election officials to examine the use of administrative data and technology to assess the impact of technology in election administration.
- Continue to examine the impact of electronic blank ballot delivery and Federal mandates for the transmission of ballots 45 days prior to each Federal election.
- Work with stakeholders to explore content and process improvements for military and overseas voter data.
- Utilize FVAP's innovative performance management dashboard to apply a critical thinking model to identify locations where additional voting assistance is needed.
- Develop targeted research to guide current policy and guide/adjust future policy implementation and program operations.

Strategic Measures

- Further collaborative efforts with the CSG and state and local election officials to develop targeted and actionable proposals that states can easily implement either through administrative or legislative action.
- Advance collaborative efforts with CSG and state and local election officials to standardize data and explore technology best practices in order to provide an improved sense of the root causes for ballot rejections.
- Consolidate information collection efforts and leverage administrative data to provide a greater amount of actionable information on the impact of technological and administrative requirements in the *UOCAVA* process.
- Leverage the performance management dashboard as a resource to ensure installations or Service members are receiving sufficient assistance and support.

External factors and Emerging Issues

FVAP recognizes that the act of voting is between a voter and their state, as the states run elections. Therefore, FVAP can work with stakeholders, such as CSG and election officials, to identify and recommend policy and technology best practices. States can then implement these best practices to improve existing processes for serving *UOCAVA* voters. FVAP also works to conduct research, offer guidance, and communicate trends reported from the election community.

Additionally, FVAP understands there are other barriers (whether real or perceived) for overseas citizens who are attempting to vote successfully, including those identified in the Overseas Citizen Population Analysis. For example, depending on where the voter lives, the time needed to send ballots for federal elections may be longer than anticipated or there may be a significant distance between a voter and their nearest U.S. Embassy or consulate for voter assistance services including voted ballot drop-off. Further, there may be a lack of available resources such as a stable internet connection or access to scanners or fax machines. A voter may also live in a country with a slow or unreliable postal system.

FVAP focuses on factors that have the potential to be resolved in future elections through voter education, state legislation changes, and communication with local election offices. This includes communicating voting and mailing deadlines for all voters who fall under *UOCAVA*, making forms and other information readily available in a central location (FVAP.gov), and evaluating new ways to expand education and outreach initiatives.

Goal 3

Increase UOCAVA general voter awareness of available tools and resources

Survey data over several election cycles consistently indicate that *UOCAVA* voters are more successful in casting a ballot when they have consulted a DoD resource (e.g., FVAP.gov or VAOs). FVAP will initiate activities to increase awareness and encourage use of tools and resources based on the strategic application of enhanced performance metrics, including increased stakeholder engagement and a strong communications plan.

Objective 3.0: Create and administer more efficient outreach, education and general voter awareness initiatives for all *UOCAVA* populations and encourage the use of tools and resources.

Strategies for Achieving the Objective

- Identify lessons learned from previous election cycles and plan and implement new approaches for upcoming election cycles. This includes FVAP staff off-sites and FVAP's various program analysis reports.
- Send emails to .mil addresses highlighting absentee voting information, deadlines, key resources, forms, election dates, and general reminders using simple, concise messages (90, 60, 30 days during a Federal election year).
- Develop targeted marketing and communication plans to reach appropriate audiences in multiple languages: Uniformed Service members with particular emphasis on younger, potential first-time voters; known active duty Uniformed Service members; military spouses; overseas citizens; and election officials.
- Develop earned media and shared media campaigns to advance FVAP's brand strategy by raising awareness of resources.
- Continue working with and furthering FVAP's relationship with the Department of State in order to reach overseas citizen populations.
- Use data from EAVS data and the ESB Data Standard Information Collection to better

Goal 3

understand how to encourage *UOCAVA* voters to take action earlier and to help local officials understand the *UOCAVA* voting population.

- Structure supporting activities for *UOCAVA* voters across all Executive Branch agencies.
- Evaluate new ways to expand educational and outreach initiatives, including the possibility of pilot programs.

Strategic Measures

- Executed communication plans resulting in meeting or exceeding the intended goals as shown by various analytics (i.e., impressions or interactions and engagements on digital and social platforms, downloads of information in foreign languages).
- Results of expanded outreach efforts reflected in post-election survey results and digital/online analytics when comparing data across similar election cycles (i.e., midterm election cycle versus presidential election cycle). This data can be seen in the following metrics included in FVAP Congressional reports:
 - Voter registration rate
- Voter participation rate
- Awareness of voting assistance resources
- Satisfaction/usefulness of voting assistance resources
- Usage of voting assistance resources
- Percentage receiving voting information from family and friends, especially among married active duty members
- Web traffic to FVAP.gov

External Factors and Emerging Issues

UOCAVA voters span the world and are highly-mobile. Reaching U.S. citizens requires the development of targeted and engaging communications strategies given that U.S. citizens consist of diverse groups such as; study abroad students, long-term residents, Uniformed Service members on active duty, eligible families, and others. FVAP is committed to better understanding where U.S. citizens are around the globe and to creating informative and engaging materials for these communities.

When creating any program, the issue of continuity and partnerships is at the forefront. Within the voting realm, VAOs are a significant resource for active duty members, their families, as well as overseas citizens. Often times, the functions of VAO are collateral duties that fail to take priority and are transferred from person to person based on the length of an individual's tour of duty.

Anticipating this situation, FVAP.gov has a dedicated section as a resource for VAOs. It includes VAO training, information on directives and guidance that are crucial to their roles, as well as materials that explain their duties. Further, FVAP requires that military VAOs maintain a continuity binder designed to be passed onto the next Service member who is given the duty of Unit or Installation Voting Assistance Officer. Each Service, including the Department of State, has a Service Voting Action Officer as a resource for Service- or department- specific information. FVAP's Call Center is also a great resource for questions.

Summary

FVAP is committed to supporting Uniformed Service members, their families, civilian personnel and overseas citizens with the voting process by:

1. Being a highly valued customer service program to Uniformed Service members, their eligible family members, voting assistance officers, overseas voters, civilian personnel, and election officials;
2. Reducing obstacles to Uniformed Service members and overseas voting success;
3. Increasing *UOCAVA* voter awareness of available tools and resources.

FVAP intends to accomplish these goals by continuing to refine its program operations and resources while working with its key stakeholders to respond effectively to any change to the overall election administration environment. This overall strategic plan reflects past efforts to align FVAP mission elements directly to its statutory authorizations, but also to look forward and recognize how voters interact with the absentee voting process. This strategic plan captures the series of improvements made in the past, addresses key measures in meeting future goals, while providing key opportunities for updates on FVAP progress through its Congressional reporting requirements. This plan will continue to guide these efforts and ensure that *UOCAVA* voters, and all agency civilian personnel, are aware of their right to vote and have the tools and resources to successfully do so - from anywhere in the world.