

How to design VBM envelopes for USPS

Use this booklet for:

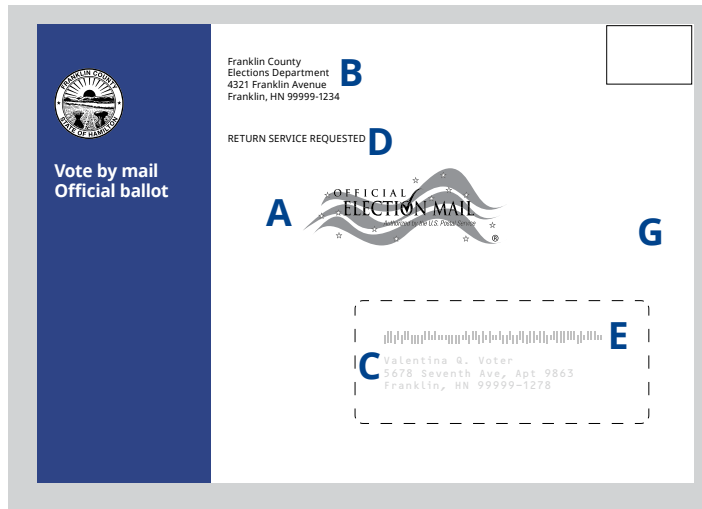
- an introduction to the elements you'll need to send your vote at home envelopes through USPS.
- best practices and tips related to navigating USPS.
- links to more information and resources.



Intro to VBM envelopes

What USPS requires

Outgoing envelope



Outgoing and return envelopes:

- A** Election mail logo
- B** Election office return address
- C** Voter's mailing address: printed on back of return envelope and seen through window of outgoing.

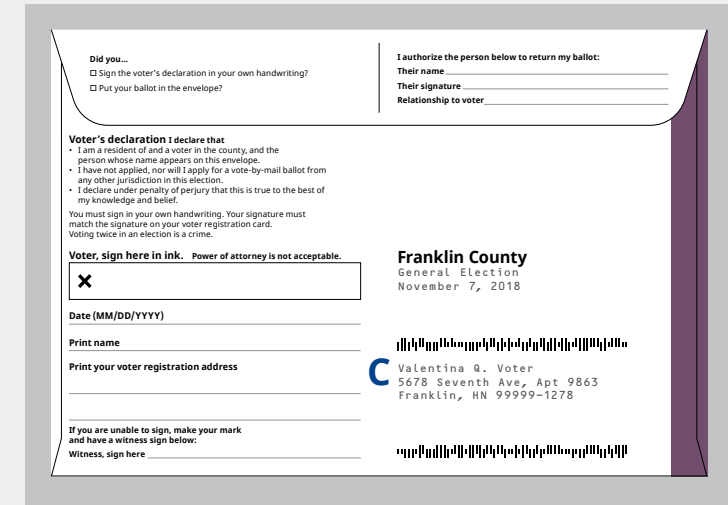
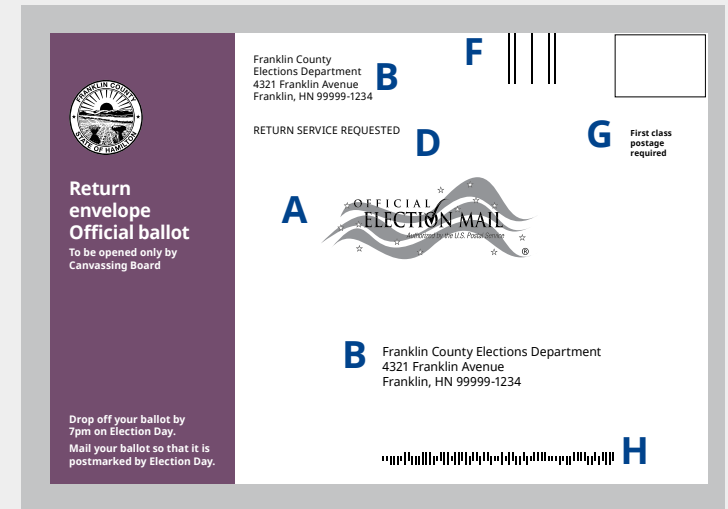
Outgoing envelope only:

- D** Return service requested notice
- E** Outgoing Intelligent Mail Barcode (IMb) with STID

Return envelope only:

- F** Facing Identification Mark (FIM)
- G** Postage Paid or Postage instructions
- H** Return Intelligent Mail Barcode (IMb) with STID

Return envelope



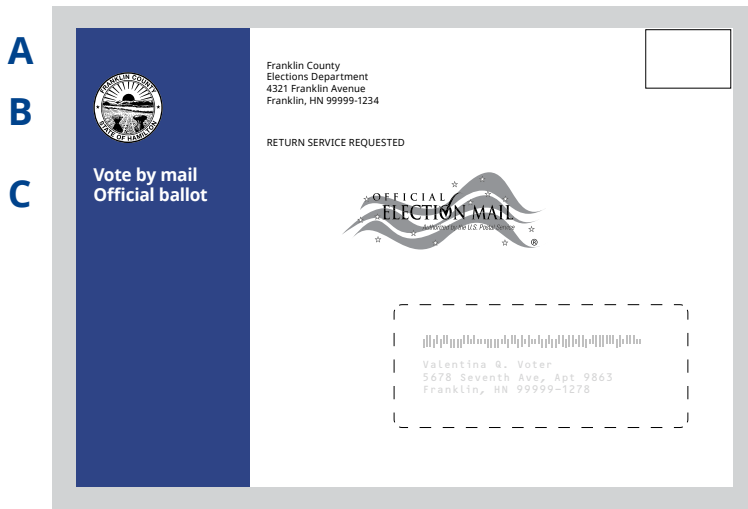
USPS resources

- **Learn about election mail:** <https://about.usps.com/gov-services/election-mail/welcome.htm>
- **Learn about color, weight, logos, etc.:** <https://about.usps.com/election-mail/design-election-mail.htm>
- **Find your Election Mail Coordinator by region:** <https://about.usps.com/gov-services/election-mail/political-mail-map.htm>

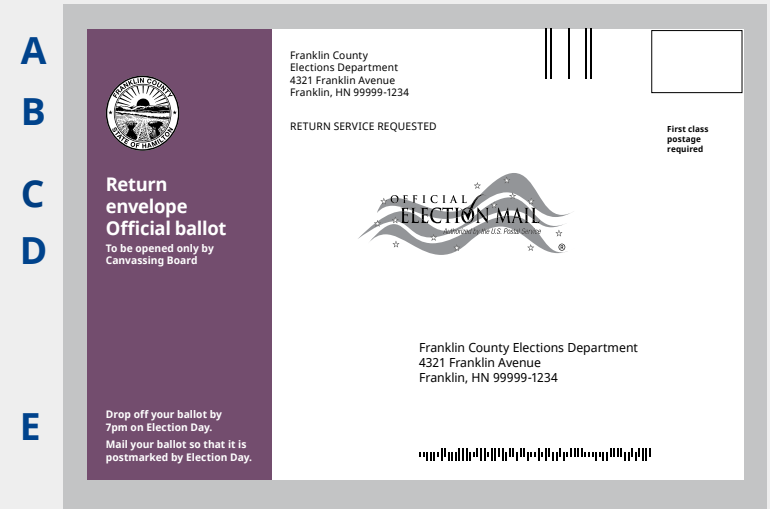
Intro to VBM envelopes

What helps voters recognize VBM envelopes

Outgoing envelope



Return envelope



Outgoing and return envelopes:

- A Wraparound color bar
- B County seal
- C Official ballot notice

Return envelope only:

- D Canvassing board notice
- E Ballot return information

Best practices resources

- **Vote at home training for election officials:** <https://www.techandciviclife.org/vote-at-home/>
- **Designing vote at home envelope and materials workbook:** <https://civicdesign.org/fieldguides/104-designing-vote-at-home-envelopes/>

Size and weight

To keep postage costs down, choose an envelope size that fits the ratio, size and weight in the USPS definition of a letter.

How USPS defines a letter

Ratio: to find the ratio of the envelope, divide the length of the envelope by its height.

This number must fall between 1.3 to 2.5.

Size: your envelopes must have a:

- maximum thickness of 1/4".
- minimum size of 5" width x 3 1/2" height.
- maximum size of 11 1/2" width x 6 1/8" height.
- maximum weight of 3.5 oz.

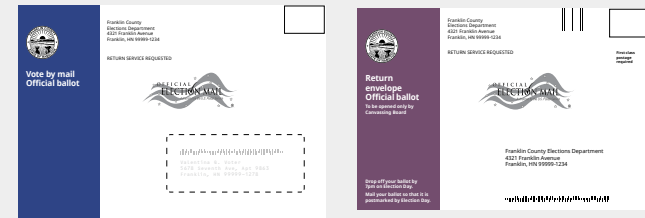
Resources

- **Election Mail Guidelines:** <https://about.usps.com/election-mail/design-election-mail.htm>
- **Balloting Materials in DMM 700 Special Standards:** <https://pe.usps.com/text/dmm300/703.htm#ep1174014>

VAH tips and best practices

Using familiar sizes makes it easier to create envelopes that work with vendors and USPS machines.

6x9" outgoing and return envelopes



10.5" outgoing and return envelope



The most common sizes for return envelopes used across the U.S. are:

- 6 x 9"
- 10.5 x 5"

Outgoing envelopes are a bit bigger.

What else to consider

Envelope size and weight depends on the materials that you send with the ballot. As you design your envelopes, you may want to take the opportunity to re-design the other materials that go with the ballot.

Want to learn more about other materials that go into a vote at home package? Watch 'Preparing helpful supplementary materials' webinar from Center for Tech and Civic Life, Vote at Home Institute: <https://www.techandcivicle.org/vote-at-home/>

Color

Color is a useful way to differentiate types of envelopes. This can help election offices and USPS get the right envelope to the right place.

You can use color to differentiate:

- ballot type,
- district,
- type of election,
- political party, or
- inserts.

There are a few USPS guidelines to consider when applying color:

- keep the envelope either white or a light pastel around the address and other USPS markings.
- print the delivery address and other USPS markings in black ink.

USPS resources

- **Election Mail Guidelines:** <https://about.usps.com/election-mail/design-election-mail.htm>
- **MDA Customer Service Help Desk**
 - by phone at 855-593-6093
 - by email at mda@usps.gov

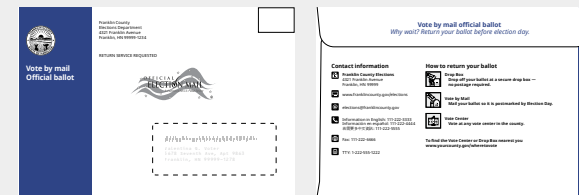
Best Practice resources

- **Full envelope color palette:** <https://civicdesign.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/VBM-color-palette-18-0209-PMS.pdf>

VAH tips and best practices

Wraps a color from the front of the envelope to the back. This builds recognition for voters, USPS, and election admins.

This also helps sort envelopes and even pick out ones that belong in other districts.



Outgoing envelopes

PMS: 7687

CMYK: c100 m78 y0 k18

RGB: r29 g66 b138

Hex: 1a428a

Return envelopes

PMS: 7659

CMYK: c57 m76 y35 k15

RGB: r116 g76 b110

Hex: 744c6e

UOCAVA

PMS: 483

CMYK:c35 m68 y99 k31

RGB: r130 g77 b32

Hex: 824d20

Coordinate with surrounding counties to use different colors on your return envelopes. This way USPS or election officers can quickly recognize if return envelopes end up in the wrong office, get those ballot where they need to go.

Election mail logo



The official USPS logo tells voters that they'll find trusted information inside.

The logo can only be used by federal, state, and local government voter registration and election officials. It may not be used for partisan mailing.

There are 3 different sizes for the logo:

Small logo: for envelopes smaller than 4 1/8 x 9 1/2 inches (the standard #10 envelope).

Medium logo: for envelopes larger than 4 1/8 x 9 1/2 inches (the standard #10 envelope).

Large logo: for all envelopes larger than 6 1/8 x 11 1/2 inches.

When applying the logo:

- follow requirements for clear space required around the logo,
- stay out of the 'exclusion zone' that is 4.46" from the right edge of the envelope and 0.9" from the top.

Resources

- **USPS Pub 631:** information about the election mail logo and samples of correct placement.
 - Go to page 6 for info on logo size.
 - Go to page 8 for info on exclusion areas.

<https://about.usps.com/publications/pub631.pdf>

VAH tips and best practices

Most election mail envelopes use the medium size logo.

Color of the logo: use the logo in black instead of the red or blue. This color is easier to read and more neutral, allowing other color-coding elements on the envelope to stick out.

Use the right size logo: when applying the logo, make sure to use the right size. Do not shrink or stretch the logo image for any reason.

Want help with the logo? Contact a Mail Design Analyst for a copy of the logo to use. MDA Customer Service Help Desk:

- by phone at 855-593-6093
- by email at mda@usps.gov

Facing identification mark (FIM)



The FIM tells USPS equipment which side of the envelope is the front. This primes the machines to find the addresses embedded in the barcodes.

Selecting the right FIM

There are 5 types of FIMs that you might use.

FIM A: use for Courtesy Reply Mail with an IMb

FIM B: use for Business Reply Mail, with IMb

FIM C: use for Business Reply Mail without IMb

FIM D: use for letter-size First-Class Mail with postage meter

FIM E: use for postcard-size and letter-size First-Class Mail with an IMb

Placing the FIM

The position of the FIM is important. You must leave clear space surrounding the FIM. Check the DMM for exact measurements.

Make sure the FIM won't get covered by postage meter tape.

Resources

- **DMM 202 Elements on the Face of a Mail-piece FIM Section 8.0:** <https://pe.usps.com/text/dmm300/202.htm#ep1123678>

VAH tips and best practices

Using a FIM is not required, but highly recommended.

The FIM tells USPS machines what side of the envelope is the front. This way the machines can read the bar codes or IMbs and deliver the envelopes to the right place.

Postage Paid or Postage instructions

**Postage
required
Post Office
will not deliver
without proper
postage.**

**NO POSTAGE
NECESSARY
IF MAILED
IN THE
UNITED STATES**

The postage block tells voters what type of postage - if any - they need to add.

The postage block goes in the upper right corner.
Font size must be a minimum of 8 points.

Follow USPS regulations, including clearance areas.

Resources

- **Learn about postage area clearance areas in PUB 631 page 8:** in <https://postalpro.usps.com/service-type-identifiers/STID Table BallotMail>

VAH tips and best practices



**Postage required
Post Office
will not deliver
without proper
postage.**

What to do if postage is needed

Put language below an empty box. This tells people that postage is needed. If the words are put into the box, folks interpret it at a glance as post-paid.

Include postage, if you can

Providing postage increases voter turnout.

If paying for return postage, print postage like this:

**NO POSTAGE
NECESSARY
IF MAILED
IN THE
UNITED STATES**

Intelligent Mail Barcode (IMb)



The Intelligent Mail Barcode (IMb) is a barcode made up of 65 vertical lines.

USPS uses this bar code to track mail pieces.

What to do if not using the IMb

If you do not print an IMb with a delivery point routing code in the address field then you must leave space for a barcode. This rectangular area starts at the bottom right edge of the envelope on the side with the address.

Find the boundaries of the barcode clear zone as follows:

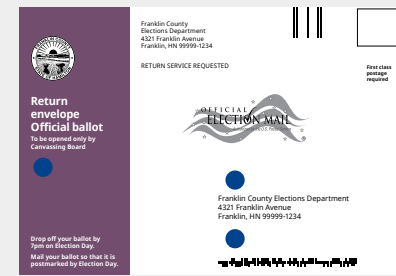
- left:** $4\frac{3}{4}$ inches from the right edge of the piece.
- right:** right edge of the piece.
- top:** $\frac{5}{8}$ inch from the bottom edge of the piece.
- bottom:** bottom edge of the piece.

Resources

- **IMb Technical Resource Guide:** https://postalpro.usps.com/storages/2017-08/221_USPSIMB-Tech-Resource-Guide.pdf
- **IMb Tracking User Guide:** https://www.usps.com/mailtracking/_pdf/imb-tracing-user-guide-v1-6-final.pdf
- **DMM 202 Elements on the Face of a Mailpiece:** information about barcodes <https://pe.usps.com/text/dmm300/202.htm#ep1047220>

VAH tips and best practices

The IMb embeds unique address information in a barcode to get the envelope where it needs to go. Use a different IMb for every outgoing and return envelope.



Common places to put the IMb:

- above the address block
- below the address block
- above or below the optional endorsement (such as Business Reply Mail or Official Use Only)
- above or below any "Keyline information" (unique code that assists in locating the addressee in their database – like the voter record lookup code)

Contact a Mail Design Analyst for a copy of the logo to use.

MDA Customer Service Help Desk:

- by phone at 855-593-6093
- by email at mda@usps.gov

Service Types Identification (STIDs)



The Service Type Identifier (STID) is a unique 3-digit sub-code placed within the IMb. It tells the post office that they are handling election mail.

When scanned, the STID tells USPS workers that they are carrying official election material.

What info you need

When deciding which STID to use in IMb, think about

- the mail class
- the address correction service
- the service option
- the fees, if any, that will be associated with the use of each STID.

Common election mail STIDs

STIDs have different identifiers for outbound and return ballots.

- Return ballot first class mail: 777
- Return ballot business reply mail: 778
- Return ballot permit reply mail: 779

See link below for full list of STIDs.

Resources

- **List of STIDs for ballot mail:** https://postalpro.usps.com/service-type-identifiers/STID_Table_Bal-lotMail
- **Consult a Mail Design Analyst:** mda@usps.gov

VAH tips and best practices

Election officials advocated for STIDs to help USPS sort envelopes quickly and identify ballot packages as election mail.

STIDs are used to:

- offer voters up to date tracking information for both outbound and return Election Mail.
- provide USPS with enhanced tracking capabilities to quickly identify and process ballots throughout the mail network.

Want to learn more about tracking ballots?

Ballot Scout is an application that tracks ballots sent through the mail using IMbs.

To learn more, visit:
<https://ballotscout.org/partners/58864640-771c-4c51-90a8-4e14ba0a9bfb/search-info>

Address + addressing area

Follow these guidelines to make sure USPS machines and postal employees can read addresses and get ballots to the right place.

Making sure the address is in correct USPS format. See resources below.

Make sure you write addresses in text that is:

- left justified
- at least 10 point font

Resources

See general addressing information for ballots in DMM 703.8.0:

- <https://pe.usps.com/cpim/ftp/manuals/dmm300/703.pdf>
- <https://pe.usps.com/text/dmm300/703.htm#ep1174014>
- This also is the place with the postage exemption for overseas voters (though it only applies to within the US)

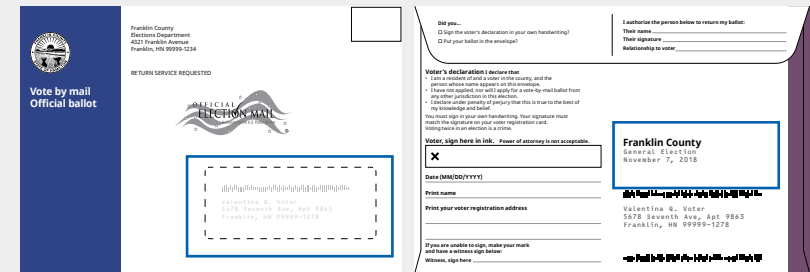
See general instructions on addresses in DMM 602:

- <https://pe.usps.com/text/dmm300/602.htm#ep1078946>

VAH tips and best practices

You have options for how to print the voter's address. Choose the option that works best for your technological and staff capacity.

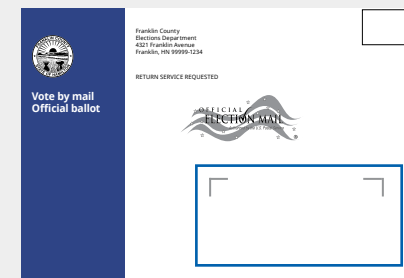
- A** Print the address on the return envelope and position it through the window on the outgoing envelope.



Left: Outgoing envelope shows voter's address printed on the return envelope and visible through the window.

Right: Return envelope with voter's address.

- B** Print the address on labels and affix to outgoing envelope.



Above: Outgoing envelope shows where to affix label. Print gray marks on envelope to help with consistent label placement.

Election office's return address

There are a few more rules to know about the return address.

Outgoing envelope: the election office's return address must match the postal permit number used for postage.

This should be the full zip code, including the 4 extra numbers. 99999-1234.

Return envelopes only when postage is pre-paid: you need to include space for a return address. You have 2 options:

- A** print your elections office return address in this space. This puts the election office as both the outgoing and return address, which adds one more chance for the ballot to get returned to the right place.
- B** put 3 blank lines for the voter to write their return address.

Resources

See general instructions on addresses in DMM 602:

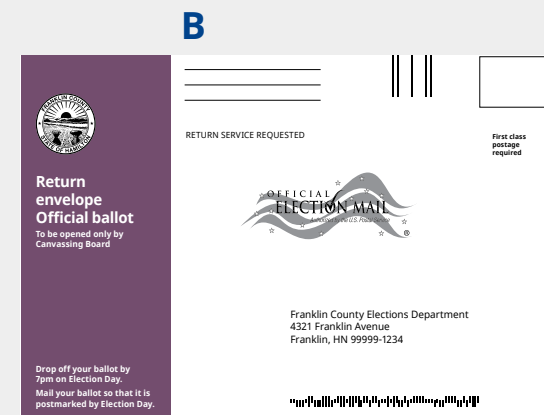
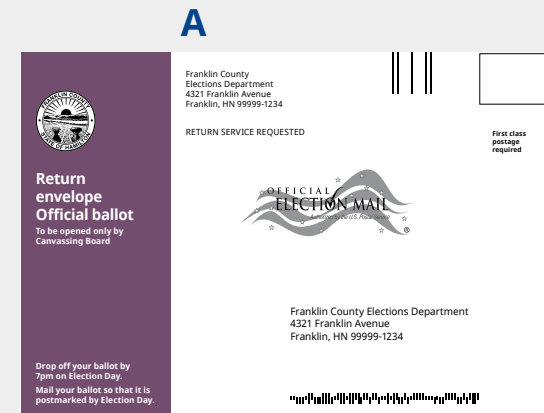
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VAH tips and best practices

On the vote at home envelope templates, the addressing area is defined as the space to the right of the wraparound bar.



USPS rules checklist

Check that your envelope:

- Follows restrictions for:
 - size
 - weight
 - ratio
- Uses black ink on white envelopes in the addressing area
- Includes an election mail logo on both the outgoing and return envelope
- Leaves clearance space where required by USPS:
 - around postage
 - around logo
 - around return service
 - exclusion zone at top right of instructions
 - exclusion zone at bottom right of instructions
- Applies FIM to front of the envelope
- Uses IMb customized to the voter's address with STID on outgoing and return ballot
- Uses correct USPS format for all addresses
- Uses a font for the addresses that is:
 - at least 10 points
 - left justified

Best practices checklist

When designing your envelope, consider:

- Using common envelope sizes.
- Using a wraparound color bar to indicate different types of envelopes.
- Setting up round trip tracking to trace that outgoing envelopes get to voters and ballots get received and counted.
- Offering pre-paid postage for voters.

Thank you for reading!

Visit the Center for Civic Design website for more tips for designing vote by mail envelopes and other materials.

Designing vote at home envelopes and materials workbook:

<https://civicdesign.org/fieldguides/104-designing-vote-at-home-envelopes/>

Center for Civic Design:

 Website: <https://civicdesign.org/>

 Email: hello@civicdesign.org



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