

# Public Communications Guide

## Presidential General Election

**November 3, 2020**



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Assessor-County Clerk-Recorder

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OFFICE OF  
**ASSESSOR-COUNTY CLERK-  
RECORDER & ELECTIONS**  
COUNTY OF SAN MATEO

**MARK CHURCH**  
CHIEF ELECTIONS OFFICER &  
ASSESSOR-COUNTY CLERK-RECORDER

Dear Election Partners:

It is my pleasure to present our Public Communications Guide for the November 3, 2020 Presidential General Election.

This guide is created to recognize our unprecedented circumstances of administering an election during a global pandemic. We respond to a variety of questions and comments from voters, candidates, interest groups, community organizations, the media and others about the safety, access, and logistics of voting this November. We aim to equip our election partners with a comprehensive communications toolkit, ensuring a unified message to our voters that voting in San Mateo County is safe, secure and convenient.

To help you understand and provide information about election rules, procedures, dates and activities, and to do so with uniformity among all the members and volunteers within your organization, we have put together this reference guide. We ask you to share this guide with each one of your associates who will be communicating with voters.

The Public Communications Guide contains:

1. Election Messaging during COVID-19
2. Important Dates and Deadlines
3. The Mechanics of the All-Mailed Ballot - Vote Center Election
4. Frequently Asked Questions
5. Tools and Resources

My staff will field many calls and inquiries, but many voters will call you as a trusted and familiar source of information. Please don't hesitate to refer people to our office for assistance or additional information at 650.312.5222 or [registrar@smcacre.org](mailto:registrar@smcacre.org). Our election website, [www.smcvote.org](http://www.smcvote.org), is also a great resource for you and the public.

Please direct questions related to this document to our Elections Supervisors, Michael Lui at 650.312.5238 or [MLui@smcacre.org](mailto:MLui@smcacre.org) and Martin McTaggart at 650.312.5316 or [mmctaggart@smcacre.org](mailto:mmctaggart@smcacre.org).

Sincerely,

Mark Church

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## Important Dates and Deadlines

See Elections Website Calendar: <https://www.smcacre.org/post/november-3-2020-election-calendar>

## Elections Messaging During COVID-19

### Safe, Secure and Convenient Voting Options

Ballots for the November 3, 2020 Presidential General Election will be mailed to all registered voters in the beginning of October. As a leader in California Vote-by-Mail Elections, San Mateo County has established the highest standards of excellence for Vote-by-Mail Elections. Voting by mail is safe, secure and convenient in this COVID-19 environment. Voters may vote from the safety and convenience of their homes, vote in person at one of our 45 Vote Centers or use our new Remote Accessible Vote-by-Mail Ballot system.

## Mechanics of the All-Mailed Ballot - Vote Center Election

### All-Mailed Ballot - Vote Center Election

San Mateo County will conduct the November 3, 2020 Presidential General Election as an All-Mailed Ballot - Vote Center Election.

In the beginning of October, every voter in the county will be mailed an Official Ballot, postage-paid return envelope and voting instructions. Delivery of the official ballots by the U.S. Postal Service to an individual voter will depend on the voter's local mail service. Many voters will vote as soon as they get the official ballot.

Voters may return the ballot through the mail using the postage-paid return envelope. Returned ballots postmarked on or before November 3 will be accepted provided the ballots are received by November 20.

Voters can also return their official ballots in-person at a Vote Center or Ballot Drop Box.

In order for a ballot to be counted:

1. The ballot MUST be received on time.
2. The voter's signature on the return envelope MUST match the signature in the voter's registration record. (This signature may be from their driver's license or state id.)

### Ballot Drop Box Locations & Hours of Operation

39 accessible Ballot Drop Box Locations will be available beginning 29 days before Election Day<sup>\*\*</sup>. Outdoor Ballot Drop Boxes will be open 24/7 until 8 p.m. on Election

Day. Indoor Ballot Drop Boxes are open during the building hours of operation of each location. Locations for all boxes are listed on our website here: [www.smcacre.org/ballot-drop-box-locations](http://www.smcacre.org/ballot-drop-box-locations) or go to [smcvote.org](http://smcvote.org) and click Ballot Drop Box Locations.

\* Note: City Hall Ballot Drop Box Locations are open during regular city hall business hours including on Election Day. City Hall hours may vary.

+ Under California Elections Code Section 4005, “a vote center that includes an exterior ballot drop box counts only as a single ballot drop location.”

#### [Vote Centers Locations & Hours of Operation](#)

A complete list of Vote Centers and their hours of operation can be found on our website here: [www.smcvote.org](http://www.smcvote.org) and click Vote Center Locations. An interactable Vote Center search/locator can be found on our website here: [www.smcacre.org/vote/all](http://www.smcacre.org/vote/all)

Voters may drop off ballots, get a new ballot or vote independently and privately on a ballot marking tablet at any Vote Center. All Vote Centers are accessible, and personnel will be on site to help voters requesting assistance.

All Covid-19 safety recommendations will be followed (masks, hand sanitizer, single use pens, etc.)

## Frequently Asked Questions

**Q: Why is San Mateo County conducting the November 3, 2020 Presidential General Election as an All-Mailed Ballot – Vote Center Election?**

A: Senate Bill 450, also known as the California Voter’s Choice Act (VCA), was signed into law on September 29, 2016, authorizing any California county, including San Mateo, to conduct any election as an All-Mailed Ballot - Vote Center Election commencing in 2020. This legislation was part of a broad collection of election reforms designed to increase voter participation, increase voter engagement, and expand voting options, fundamentally changing how elections will be conducted in San Mateo County and participating jurisdictions.

Due to COVID-19, all registered voters in California will automatically receive a ballot in the mail for this election.

**Q: What are the benefits of holding the November 3, 2020 Presidential General Election as an All-Mailed – Vote Center Ballot Election?**

A: There are several potential benefits to this program for both voters and districts.

1. Increased Voter Participation – In looking at San Mateo County’s own history of conducting countywide All-Mailed Ballot - Vote Center Election, the county saw an increase of 10% in voter turnout from a traditional polling place countywide special election to an all-mailed ballot special election. It is expected that a similar increase will be seen in November.
2. Increased Efficiency and Effectiveness – Through real time access to countywide voter registration records at Vote Centers voter eligibility questions will be identified and resolved, which will dramatically reduce provisional voting. As well, unofficial results on Election Night will be reported faster as fewer locations will deliver ballots to the Registration & Elections Division office on Election Night.
3. Voter Convenience – Voters will now have a ballot in hand beginning 29 days before Election Day. Voters may choose to return their ballot by mail with a postage paid return envelope or drop it off at 39 accessible Ballot Drop Box locations throughout the County at any time during the 30-day voting period. They may also choose to cast their ballot in person at 45 of our Vote Centers during the 30-day voting period.

**Q: What are the requirements of VCA for the November 3, 2020 election?**

A: Under the VCA, every voter will receive their ballot in the mail with a postage paid return envelope. The law requires that Vote Centers and Ballot Drop Box locations

be accessible to voters with disabilities, located near population centers, public transportation and near low-income and language minority communities.

**Q: Do I have to vote by mail?**

A: No. San Mateo County voters may vote in person at any Vote Center in the county, with the first Vote Centers open 29 days before the election, and 45 Vote Centers open on Election Day. Information on Vote Centers can be found on our website here: <https://www.smcacre.org/vote-center-locations>.

**Q: If I live in Redwood City and want to vote in person on Election Day, will I have to go to the Redwood City Vote Center?**

A: No. One of the many benefits of the VCA is that voters can cast their ballots at any Vote Center countywide.

**Q: When will I receive my ballot in the mail?**

A: Ballots will be sent out at the beginning of October. If a voter doesn't receive their ballot by October 12, 2020, they should contact our office by phone at 650.312.5222 or by email at registrar@smcacre.org. Voters can also vote in person at a Vote Center on or before Election Day.

**Q: Will the City Clerk's Office have a ballot box?**

A: Yes, as in prior elections, we will continue to have ballot boxes available for drop off beginning 29 days prior to Election Day at each City Clerk's office in the County. Drop boxes may be located outdoors or indoors depending on the city. Details can be found here: <https://www.smcacre.org/ballot-drop-box-locations>.

**Q: I missed the October 19 voter registration deadline; can I still vote?**

A: Yes. You can now register and vote the same day at any Vote Center all the way through Election Day.

**Q: Is the Registration & Elections Division going to do any outreach for those voters who don't usually vote by mail?**

A: Yes. It is very important that our office conduct a thorough outreach and media campaign. Voters who don't usually vote by mail will be alerted that they will receive a ballot by mail this October. The Elections Division will be contacting voters several times before and throughout the voting period to ensure that voters are aware the election will be conducted by all-mailed ballot. These extra mailings are an additional way our office can get address updates for voters in the county.

Our office will also be working with different media platforms to get the message out. This includes television, radio and newspaper that cater to the major language preferences of our voters (English, Spanish and Chinese). We will use social media, billboards and voter outreach events throughout the county to inform our voters.

**Q: Does my vote by mail ballot need to reach the Elections Office by 8 p.m. on Election Night to count?**

A: No. On June 18, 2020, Governor Newsom signed into law Assembly Bill 860. This law states that as long as a vote by mail ballot is postmarked on or before Election Day and received within 17 calendar days, it will be counted. Accordingly, for the November 3, 2020 election, all ballots that are postmarked on or before November 3, 2020 and received by November 20, 2020 are on time. This legislation is for all elections, not just those under the California Voter's Choice Act.

**Q: How has COVID impacted the election? What are you doing to mitigate the risks?**

A: Whether you vote by mail or vote in person, voting is safe and secure in San Mateo County. Every registered voter will be sent a ballot in the mail in early October. Voters who need to vote in person may visit any of our 45 Vote Centers where face masks and social distancing will be enforced. Voters can also receive and mark their ballot on the Remote Accessible Vote by Mail system – ballots must be printed and either mailed or dropped off in an envelope with their Oath of Voter form. We can accept and count ballots that are postmarked on or before Election Day if they are received by our office until 17 days after Election Day.

**Q: What is your plan if the USPS is shut down?**

A: Voters have numerous voting options for the November election. Voter may obtain a ballot (or vote) at one of 45 Vote Centers or via the [Remote Accessible Vote by Mail system](#). Voters may return their mail ballots at any one of 39 ballot drop box locations and at a Vote Center. We can accept and count ballots that are postmarked



on or before Election Day if they are received by our office until 17 days after Election Day.

**Q: I heard hundreds of thousands of ballots were thrown out in March. How do I ensure my vote counts for this election?**

A: Every vote by mail ballot envelope is required to be signed by the voter. Every signature is reviewed by an elections official to ensure it matches the signature on the voter's registration. Our office also compares the signature to past signatures on file from previous elections and/or electronic DMV signatures. If a signature is missing or does not match the voter's record, staff will reach out to the voter via mail, email, and phone call to invite the voter to provide a signature. If a signature is never provided or a match cannot be made after our outreach efforts, the ballot cannot be counted. To track your ballot's status, sign up for BallotTrax at [Wheresmyballot.sos.ca.gov](http://Wheresmyballot.sos.ca.gov) to ensure that your ballot is received by our office.

**Q: What are my voting options for November?**

A: Voters may vote by mail, drop off their ballot into a County Ballot Drop Box, vote in-person, or vote via the Remote Accessible Vote by Mail system.

- Vote by Mail: every registered voter will receive a ballot in the mail beginning October 5.
- Drop Boxes: 39 locations throughout the County. Info is posted here: [www.smcvote.org](http://www.smcvote.org).
- Vote Centers: 45 locations throughout the County. Social distancing and masks are mandatory at all locations. Info is posted here: [www.smcvote.org](http://www.smcvote.org).

**Q: What changes can I expect to see at a Vote Center?**

A: Every Vote Center will require social distancing and the wearing of masks. All voting equipment, supplies, entrances/exits, chairs, and countertops will be regularly cleaned and sanitized.

**Q: How often are Ballot Drop Boxes checked/emptied?**

A: Indoor and Outdoor Ballot Drop Boxes will be checked and emptied twice a week, on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

**Q: I'd like to request and obtain a Vote by Mail ballot now. How do I do that?**

A: Every registered voter in San Mateo County will automatically be sent a ballot in the mail in early October – no action needed. Unfortunately, you cannot obtain a ballot sooner – the ballot is currently being designed and created. To track the status of your ballot to and from our office, please register for a new service called BallotTrax at [wheresmyballot.sos.ca.gov](http://wheresmyballot.sos.ca.gov).

**Q: I haven't received my ballot yet**

A: Ballots will arrive in early October. Every registered voter will receive a ballot in the mail.

**Q: How can I track my Vote by Mail ballot? How do I know my ballot was counted?**

A: You can use a new service called "Where's My Ballot?" to track your Vote by Mail ballot. Where's My Ballot is a way of tracking your Vote by Mail ballot every step of the process. You can sign up to receive text messages, emails or phone calls when your ballot was mailed, when it was received by the post office if you mailed it back and when it was accepted by the Elections Office. If you do not subscribe to "Where's My Ballot?", you can still check the status of your ballot at "[My Election Info](#)".

**Q: I am having problems logging in to Where's My Ballot.**

A: To log in to [wheresmyballot.sos.ca.gov](http://wheresmyballot.sos.ca.gov) you need to use the exact first name, last name, date of birth, and zip code that you are registered with. It needs to be your residence address zip code not your mailing address zip code. If you are still unable to log in, please contact our office.

**Q: Is there anything else I should know?**

A: Yes! San Mateo County is excited to be a part of the California Voter's Choice Act, and we believe that it will greatly benefit voters, providing voting options and increasing voter participation. Please contact our office at 650.312.5222 or [registrar@smcacre.org](mailto:registrar@smcacre.org) if you have any further questions.

## Tools and Resources

### Community and Voter Outreach Materials

The San Mateo County Registration & Elections Division is conducting a comprehensive outreach program which is described on our website [www.smcacre.org/california-voters-choice-act](http://www.smcacre.org/california-voters-choice-act).

There you can view our:

- Community & Voter Outreach Plan which details how we will use technology, traditional media, direct-to-voter mailings and community engagement to increase voter participation in the All-Mailed Ballot – Vote Center Election.
- Community Partners
- Download the [Voter Education and Outreach Toolkit](#)

### Shuttle Services

Since there will be fewer polling places during this all-mailed ballot election, voters may want to plan transportation to and from the Vote Centers and City or Town Halls. We have alerted San Mateo County Paratransit to this need. If a voter is certified to use Redi-Wheels, they should call the number on their card at least one day in advance or call the SamTrans customer service center at 1.800.660.4287.

### Online Voter Registration

Voters may now register to vote online at [www.registertovote.ca.gov](http://www.registertovote.ca.gov). The deadline to register for this election is 11:59 p.m. on October 19, 2020. See our website [www.smcacre.org/register-vote](http://www.smcacre.org/register-vote) for more information about registering to vote.

### Personalized Voter Information and Resources

Voters can receive personalized voting information on our website at [www.smcacre.org/my-election-info](http://www.smcacre.org/my-election-info).

This convenient tool allows voters to access information at every stage of the election process. By entering his or her house number, zip code, and birth date (mmddyy) into the form, the voter will be able to:

- Confirm their voter registration status
- Find Vote Center information for this election
- View and/or Print the Sample Ballot & Official Voter Information Pamphlet
- Request a replacement Vote by Mail ballot
- Track & confirm the dates the ballot was mailed to the voter and received by the Elections Office

## Important Websites

- San Mateo County Registration & Elections Division  
[www.smcacre.org](http://www.smcacre.org) and [www.smcvote.org](http://www.smcvote.org)  
Twitter & Instagram @SMCvote, YouTube - smcvote
- California Secretary of State  
[www.sos.ca.gov](http://www.sos.ca.gov)  
@CASOSvote
- League of Women Voters  
[votersedge.org](http://votersedge.org) and [easyvoterguide.org](http://easyvoterguide.org)

## Sample Articles for Community News

We have drafted samples of articles you may like to use in newsletters or other venues to give your community more information about the November 3, 2020 Presidential General Election. Feel free to copy, paste and send.

### **A. Approximately 150 words**

Need-to-Knows about November's All-Mailed – Vote Center Ballot Election:

#### **WHEN?**

- Watch for your ballot in the mail in early October.
- Voter Registration closes on October 19, 2020. Pick up a paper voter registration card or go online [registertovote.ca.gov](http://registertovote.ca.gov) by 11:59 p.m. October 19. Postmarks count.
- Voters not registered can still vote. Stop by at a Vote Center in the County, register and vote.
- Return your ballot by Election Day, November 3, 2020. Postmarks count.

#### **WHERE?**

- At home, at work, or on the go! Cast a Vote-by-Mail ballot starting early October
- 45 Vote Centers and 39 Ballot Drop Box locations

#### **HOW?**

- Vote-by-Mail: US Postal Service. Return or postmark your ballot by November 3
- Drop Off Voted Mail Ballot at any Vote Center or Ballot Drop Box Locations in San Mateo County starting October 5 through 8 p.m. on Election Day
- Vote in Person at a Vote Center starting October 5

#### **WHAT?**

- [www.smcacre.org/current-election](http://www.smcacre.org/current-election) shows what is up for election
- [www.smcacre.org/my-election-info](http://www.smcacre.org/my-election-info) shows what is on YOUR ballot

### **B. Approximately 250 words**

Starting in early October, all registered voters will be mailed an Official Ballot with a postage-paid return envelope for the November 3, 2020 Presidential General Election. Voting by Mail is safe, secure and convenient. Voters may return their ballot in the mail,

to a Ballot Drop Box or at a Vote Center. New to this election, voters can use “Where’s my ballot?”, a new feature enabling voters to track their ballots from the moment they are mailed by our office to the time they are returned. Sign up at [www.smcvote.org](http://www.smcvote.org) to receive text alerts, email notification, and updates. If voters haven’t received their ballot by October 12, contact the Registration & Elections Division at 650.312.5222 or [registrar@smcacre.org](mailto:registrar@smcacre.org).

For in-person voting, voters may visit any one of 45 Vote Centers in San Mateo County. All Vote Centers will comply with County Health Department and CDC COVID-19 safety standards. Voters must wear masks and adhere to all social distancing practices. Three Vote Centers will be open 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. from October 5 to October 30 (weekdays only). 45 Vote Centers will be open 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. from October 31 to November 2. All 45 Vote Centers will be open 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. on November 3 (Election Day). At a Vote Center, voters can drop off their voted ballot at our Curbside Ballot Drop-Off, get a new or replacement ballot or vote on a ballot marking tablet. Check the Sample Ballot & Voter Information Pamphlet or [www.smcvote.org](http://www.smcvote.org) for location details.

### C. Approximately 370 words

Dear Voter,

As the November 3, 2020 Presidential General Election approaches, we are providing you information on how you can vote safely, securely, and conveniently this election during this COVID-19 pandemic.

Starting in early October, all registered voters will be mailed an Official Ballot with a postage-paid return envelope for the November 3, 2020 Presidential General Election. Voting by Mail is safe, secure and convenient. Return your ballot in the mail, to a Ballot Drop Box or at a Vote Center.

New to this election, you can use “Where’s my ballot?”, a new feature enabling voters to track their ballots from the moment they are mailed by our office to the time they are returned. Sign up at [www.smcvote.org](http://www.smcvote.org) to receive text alerts, email notification, and updates. If you haven’t received your ballot by October 12, contact the Registration & Elections Division at 650.312.5222 or [registrar@smcacre.org](mailto:registrar@smcacre.org).

For in-person voting, you may visit any one of 45 Vote Centers in San Mateo County. All Vote Centers will comply with County Health Department and CDC COVID-19 safety standards. Voters must wear masks and adhere to all social distancing practices. Three Vote Centers will be open 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. from October 5 to October 30 (weekdays only). 45 Vote Centers will be open 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. from October 31 to November 2. All 45 Vote Centers will be open 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. on November 3 (Election Day). At a Vote Center, voters can drop off their voted ballot at our Curbside Ballot Drop-Off, get a new or replacement ballot or vote on a ballot marking tablet. Check your Sample Ballot & Voter Information Pamphlet or [www.smcvote.org](http://www.smcvote.org) for location details.

If you would like to learn more, please visit [www.smcvote.org](http://www.smcvote.org) where you can find in-depth information on this upcoming election, including Ballot Drop Box and Vote Center locations and hours of operation.

Let’s go vote!

Regards,

Your name

### Suggested Hashtags

#### **Specific to November 3, 2020 Presidential General Election**

- MoreDaysMoreWays
- #DontDelayVoteToday
- #NovemberGeneralElection

- #PresidentialGeneralElection
- #smcVote2020
- #smcvote

### Links and Website Buttons

- California Voter's Choice Act: SB 450 [www.smcacre.org/california-voters-choice-act](http://www.smcacre.org/california-voters-choice-act)
- Register to Vote: [registertovote.ca.gov/](http://registertovote.ca.gov/)
- Election Overview Splash Page: [www.smcvote.org](http://www.smcvote.org)
- My Info: <https://www.smcacre.org/VoterLookup>
- Twitter @smcvote: [twitter.com/smcvote](https://twitter.com/smcvote)
- Instagram @smcvote: <https://www.instagram.com/smcvote/>
- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/CountyofSanMateo>
- YouTube: [www.youtube.com/user/democracylive](http://www.youtube.com/user/democracylive)
- Go Green!: [www.smcacre.org/go-green](http://www.smcacre.org/go-green)
- Subscribe to Our Mailing List: [service.govdelivery.com/accounts/CASMATEO/subscriber/new](http://service.govdelivery.com/accounts/CASMATEO/subscriber/new)
- Inscribirse para Votar: [registertovote.ca.gov/zh/](http://registertovote.ca.gov/zh/)
- 登記投票: [registertovote.ca.gov/zh/](http://registertovote.ca.gov/zh/)
- [Voter Registration](#)
- [Voting Options](#)
- [Candidates & Campaigns](#)
- [Elections](#)
- [Election Officers](#)
- [Resources](#)
- [Español](#)
- [中文](#)