

Ten Tips for Registering Californians to Vote

Compiled by Kim Alexander, California Voter Foundation, www.calvoter.org, April 7, 2018

These tips are designed for in-person, paper-based voter registration efforts. There are important restrictions on who is eligible to register to vote, but there are no restrictions on who can register OTHERS to vote - you do not need to be a registered voter, or be a particular age, or be a resident of the area to register people to vote. But if you do help someone fill out an application, you must complete and sign the assistance questions.

See this guide from the Secretary of State for more information about registering others to vote in California:

<http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/publications-and-resources/guide-vr-drives/>

For more information about voter registration itself, see this FAQ from the Secretary of State:

<http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/frequently-asked-questions/#voterreg>

1. Let people know they can register online

If you encounter people who want to register or update their registration but don't have time or prefer to do it online, direct them to the Secretary of State's online registration web site:

<http://Registertovote.ca.gov>

2. Make sure applicants neatly fill out the application in black or blue ink

Voter registration applications completed on paper must be data-entered; if the information is not legible the prospective voter's data won't be entered correctly, which can result in them not being properly registered. Encourage the applicant to take their time completing the application and make sure they have a level, flat surface to work on when doing so. All the questions should be answered to the best of the applicant's ability. The applicant's driver's license number, birth date, and signature with date are especially important. Review the application and make sure nothing was left out. If someone makes an error, start over again with a new application.

3. Only register people who are eligible to vote

In order to be eligible to vote, an individual must:

- Be a United States citizen
- Have a residence address in California
- Be at least 18 years old (or pre-register if 16 or 17, and must be 18 or older to vote on Election Day)
- Not currently in a state or federal prison or on parole for the conviction of a felony
- Not currently found mentally incompetent to vote by a court

You must be a citizen of the United States of America to register to vote. When someone signs the voter registration application, they are signing under penalty of perjury, which means they have committed a felony if they knowingly provide false information, such as claiming citizenship status. It is also a felony to knowingly register someone who is ineligible to vote. A non-citizen who mistakenly registers to vote and later applies for citizenship may have that application denied because they had registered and claimed citizenship under penalty of perjury, even if it was an honest mistake.

4. Re-register people to vote, if needed

Sometimes people need to update their registration. The reasons people would need to re-register are:

- They've moved
- changed their name
- Want to change their political party
- Want to update their voter signature
- They are unsure if they are currently registered to vote

5. Don't refuse an application to anyone

You can register people to vote on behalf of a party or cause, but if someone requests an application who doesn't share your belief, you are obligated under state law to provide them with one. You do not need to assist them in completing it but you cannot withhold an application from someone whose views you do not share.

6. Help applicants understand their political party choices

Applicants can select a political party or they can choose "no party preference" which is the term we use in California to describe independents - voters who choose not to join any political party. Research shows that many applicants mistakenly select the American Independent Party when they register to vote, believing that's the choice for registering as independent. It's not. California's Political Parties' Statements of Purpose are online at <http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/political-parties/party-statements/>.

7. Encourage applicants to take note of their signature

The majority of California voters cast vote-by-mail ballots which require voters to sign the outside of the envelope in order for their ballot to be counted. The ballot envelope signature is compared to the voter's registration signature. If the signatures don't sufficiently compare, the ballot is rejected. This is especially problematic for young people who may not yet have formed a lasting signature at the time they register.

Urge applicants to sign a second time on their application receipt and refer to it later if they vote by mail to make sure they sign their ballot envelope signature the same way. They can also take a photo of their signature for record-keeping.

8. Fill out and sign the voter registration assistance receipts

State law requires those who assist others with registering to vote to provide additional information to both the election office and the voter and sign and date the voter's registration receipt. This tear-off receipt also contains the serial number that corresponds to the voter's registration application.

9. Turn in completed applications promptly

If you accept a completed voter registration application, the law requires you to turn it in within 72 hours or by close of registration, whichever is first.

Applications returned by mail must be folded (so the applicant's personal information is not showing) and *taped*, not stapled, which ensures the application shows up intact and is not torn during transit.

10. Let applicants know how they can verify their registration

Counties are required to send notification cards out to successful registration applicants; these can arrive anywhere from two weeks to two months after the card has been submitted. Registered voters also automatically receive in the mail voter guides and, if they signed up to vote by mail, a vote-by-mail ballot. Applicants can also call or go online to their county's election office or the Secretary of State's My Voter Status page to check their registration status: <http://Myvoterstatus.sos.ca.gov>.