

Facilitating the Processing and Delivery of Return Ballots

From Voters Using Prepaid Postage

Background:

It is essential to the integrity of our nation's elections that state and local election directors establish procedures for voting by mail that take into account the requirements of the U.S Postal Service® to ensure the timely delivery of the mail. This document outlines the options available to elections directors to provide voters with prepaid return envelopes for completed ballots in a manner that will facilitate the Postal Service's ability to process and deliver Election Mail.

Election directors are reminded to consult with the USPS® Mailpiece Design Analyst (MDA) helpdesk prior to printing the envelopes for Election Mail, in order to ensure that mailings are compatible with USPS automated processing. Failure to consult with an MDA may result in improperly designed mailpieces, which can cause delays in processing and delivery. In addition, the Postal Service's service standards, identified below, apply to BOTH outbound mailings to voters and return mailings from voters to elections offices.

The Postal Service recommends that you contact your USPS Election Mail Coordinator to help you understand how the timelines for designing, printing, and sending outbound Election Mail, and receiving return ballots can impact your ability to ensure that every ballot is counted.

USPS Service Standards

Priority Mail Express®: 1-2 days
First-Class Mail®: 2-5 days
USPS Marketing Mail®: 3-10 days

The prepaid mail options on the following page are available from the Postal Service for states looking for a solution for prepaying return ballots. Please consult with your designated Election Mail Coordinator and MDA for more information regarding each prepaid reply mail option prior to making your decision.

| Prepaid Reply Mail Option | Features | Limiting Factors |
|---|--|--|
| Qualified Business Reply Mail™ (QBRM™) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pay only for responses received • Intelligent Mail® barcode (IMb®) tracking • Intelligent Mail barcode Accounting (IMbA) compatible • Mailpiece design analysis available to improve automated processing • Discounted postage rates compared to regular Business Reply Mail® (BRM) • ZIP+4® Code and barcode for efficient sorting • Lower postage than stamp price | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires specific BRM envelope formatting • Annual Account Maintenance Fee + per piece rate |
| QBRM High Volume | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pay only for responses received • IMb tracking • IMbA compatible • Mailpiece design analysis available to improve automated processing • Discounted postage rates compared to Regular BRM • ZIP+4 Code and barcode for efficient sorting • Lower postage than stamp price • Cost efficiency on return ballots • Lowest per-piece fee for BRM | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires specific BRM envelope formatting • Annual Account Maintenance Fee + per piece rate • Processing (or Quarterly) Fee (paid quarterly) |
| Business Reply Mail® (BRM) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pay only for responses received • Mailpiece design analysis available • One ZIP+4 Code designation for all mail types • Lower postage than stamp price | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires specific BRM envelope formatting • Manual processing at USPS facilities Permit Required • Annual permit fee + per piece rate |
| BRM High Volume | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pay only for responses received • Mailpiece design analysis available • Cost efficiency on return ballots • Lower postage than stamp price | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires specific BRM envelope formatting • Manual processing at USPS facilities Permit Required • Annual Permit Fee + per piece rate • Annual Account Maintenance Fee |
| Stamps | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • States with limited reply needs can prepay return postage on single pieces • No per-piece fee • No account or permit necessary | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pay for return postage whether or not piece is returned • No tracking available • Manual processing at USPS facilities • May require coordination with Stamp Fulfillment Services |
| Metered Reply Mail | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • States with limited reply needs can prepay return postage on single pieces • No per-piece fee • May be used on labels or printed envelopes • Valid on Priority Mail Express, Priority Mail®, and First-Class Mail services • IMb tracking available • Lower postage than stamp price | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pay for return postage whether or not piece is returned • No tracking available • Permit required • Requires special printing machinery • Usually available through a third party contactor • Must <u>not</u> include a date in the metered postmark as it may interfere with states' postmark requirements for ballot acceptance |
| Permit Reply Mail | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No per-piece fee • May be used on labels or printed envelopes • Lower postage than stamp price | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pay for return postage whether or not piece is returned • Valid permit imprint account required • Must be distributed as part of the contents of an <i>outgoing</i> First-Class mailing • Must apply for authorization through the Business Mail Entry office where the permit imprint account is held • Requires specific Permit Reply Mail envelope formatting • Requires proper Mailer Identifier (MID) and Service Type Identifier (STID) to utilize Informed Visibility® (IV®) |

Actual Fee costs can be located at: <https://www.usps.com/business/return-services.htm>. More information can be found at "[Fees Associated with Permit Imprint and Return Services](#)."