



Overseas Voting Initiative End-of-Project Report

Four Years of Collaborative Success: Improving Voting for Overseas Citizens, Military Personnel and their Dependents



**The Council
of State
Governments**

Introduction

For more than 150 years, states have been at the forefront of ensuring that military personnel are able to vote. Absentee voting and in-person, early voting were first widely used in the election of 1864, so that troops fighting in the Civil War could vote in the presidential election. Today, states continue to be at the vanguard of improving the electoral process.

Many active duty military personnel are located in remote areas abroad and have limited access to life back home, including voting. U.S. citizens living overseas also have unique challenges in exercising their right to vote. The challenges these voters face are complicated by wide variation in how states conduct elections and how absentee ballots are processed. Examining current practice and identifying laws, policies and procedures is critical for improving the voting process.

In September 2013, The Council of State Governments, or CSG, and the Federal Voting Assistance Program, or FVAP, entered into a four-year, \$3.2 million cooperative agreement to study the complex nature of the voting process for service members, their families and U.S. citizens living abroad and to identify effective mechanisms for addressing these voters' specific issues. This partnership, the Overseas Voting Initiative, or OVI, had the goal of leveraging the expertise of state election officials—as well as their local counterparts—and improving the voting process for those citizens subject to the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act, or UOCAVA, with an emphasis on improving the return rate of overseas absentee ballots. States have long been at the forefront of efforts to improve voting for military personnel, their dependents and other overseas citizens. This partnership advanced insights from the states to FVAP, providing insights into how best to improve UOCAVA voting without requiring additional federal legislation or cumbersome “one-size-fits-all” requirements. It also augments FVAP's ongoing efforts to engage its stakeholders—especially state and local election offices—and improves the voting process for individuals covered under UOCAVA and for the election offices that have implemented its provisions.

This CSG-FVAP collaboration was important because, over the past two decades, there have been many voting changes associated with individuals covered by UOCAVA. Since 2000, there have been amendments to UOCAVA included in the Help America Vote Act¹, or HAVA and the Military and Overseas Voter Empowerment², or MOVE, Act. Several National Defense Authorization Acts³ have also modified UOCAVA. These changes require state and local election offices to remain ever-vigilant and to be innovative as they serve the UOCAVA population. For example, election offices are now required to provide an option to transmit blank ballots to UOCAVA voters electronically, a requirement mandated by the MOVE Act.

Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA)

Adopted in 1986, UOCAVA covers U.S. citizens who are active members of the Uniformed Services—the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard, the commissioned corps of the Public Health Service, and of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration—and their eligible family members, members of the Merchant Marine and their eligible family members, and U.S. citizens residing outside the United States.

These changes and proposals have benefitted UOCAVA voters, but they have also created new challenges—and new opportunities—for state and local election offices. In their communications with state and local election officials, FVAP staffers learn about new and innovative practices and programs that election offices develop to benefit UOCAVA voters. FVAP also receives questions from election jurisdictions about UOCAVA voting and how to best serve this population. FVAP recognized that all state and local jurisdictions could benefit from learning about the range of practices that are being implemented across the United States. By engaging with state and local election offices—and working hand-in-hand with them—FVAP learns about methods for improving the UOCAVA process, develops consensus on recommendations that states and localities across the country could implement, and then communicates those recommendations widely.

The CSG OVI worked with FVAP to develop a structure for this effort and initially created two advisory working groups: the Policy Working Group and the Technology Working Group. A third working group, focused on Section B of the Election Assistance Commission's Election Administration and Voting Survey, or EAVS, was created as a result of work and recommendations emanating from the two original OVI working groups as well as input from FVAP.

The goal of the OVI collaboration between CSG and FVAP was to improve the voting process for UOCAVA citizens, especially improving the return rate of overseas absentee ballots. CSG helped FVAP

The CSG OVI Working Groups

augment its ongoing efforts to engage its stakeholders—especially state and local election offices. The working groups provided stakeholders with the opportunity to come together and discuss concrete measures that would improve the UOCAVA voting process for state and, local election offices, and for individuals covered by the law.

The three CSG OVI working groups examined critical areas for improving UOCAVA voting, including:

- Improving communications and connections between UOCAVA citizens and their election offices;
- Making voter registration easier for UOCAVA citizens;
- Considering how DoD digital signature capabilities can facilitate document signing by certain UOCAVA voters;
- Examining how the ballot duplication process can be improved through transparent standard operating procedures and new technologies;
- Identifying a data standard for reporting EAC EAVS Section B, or ESB, data; and
- Recommending critical changes to Section B of the EAC EAVS to streamline the survey and make it less burdensome to state and local election offices.

The membership of these three working groups was comprised of active state and local election officials. The working groups were supported by staff from CSG. Each working group held a series of meetings in which they heard from key stakeholders and considered various ways in which elections could be improved for UOCAVA citizens. At the end of the process, each working group produced a series of recommendations detailing how the UOCAVA process could be improved.

The CSG OVI Policy Working Group was created to examine military and overseas voting recommendations from the Presidential Commission on Election Administration, or PCEA, as well as other successful programs and practices across the country. This working group was a very important starting point for the CSG OVI because it identified barriers to UOCAVA voting that states can typically overcome by being proactive in their policy analysis and adoption. The CSG OVI Policy Working Group used the many successful programs and practices across the country related to military and overseas voting as the foundation for its work. The working group focused its efforts by creating three sub-groups focused on Voter Communication; Voter Registration; and Engagement with the U.S. Military Community.

The working group met multiple times over a two-year period to discuss policy innovations administered at the state and local level. The meetings also included presentations from academic researchers; election data analysts; FVAP officials; U.S. Election Assistance Commission, or EAC, members; and state and local election officials. The members of the working group also met with voting assistance officers—the men and women who work directly with uniformed service members and their eligible dependents—to learn about the UOCAVA process from their perspectives.

CSG Overseas Voting Initiative Policy Working Group

Examples of successful state programs examined by the CSG OVI Policy Working Group:

- Oregon is a national leader in the use of plain language by government agencies. State law requires its agencies to use plain language and the state has a website that guides agencies through the process of turning bureaucratic jargon into easily accessible language.
- Louisiana has an online voter registration system that ensures voters covered by UOCAVA can register to vote and request an absentee ballot easily. If a UOCAVA voter is already registered, he or she can log onto the state's election portal and request an absentee ballot. Louisiana also allows a voter to submit a Federal Post Card Application, or FPCA, one time and have it remain valid across multiple elections, thereby easing the burden on UOCAVA voters.
- The Washington Secretary of State's website links to separate but similarly formatted voter guides for each of its counties (and vice-versa). This strategy ensures that overseas voters will find consistent election information for their county, regardless of whether they are searching the state or county website.

The Voter Communication subgroup investigated strategies to improve communications with U.S. military and overseas voters such as enhancements to written materials, as well as the use of social media and digital communication tools. The subgroup made recommendations related to the use of plain language in election materials, the use of election websites and social media platforms, information regarding the contests that are on a voter's ballot, and information regarding the status of a voter's ballot (either it was accepted or rejected).

The Voter Registration subgroup studied how to improve voter registration and voting processes using the Federal Post Card Application, or FPCA. The FPCA was designed to streamline the voting process for military and overseas voters by combining the voter registration application and the request for an absentee ballot, but it is subject to different rules based on varying state laws. The subgroup reviewed best practices around the country and considered how to improve the administration of FPCAs nationwide. The subgroup recommended that states accept the FPCA as a permanent registration application and establish the period of validity for an absentee ballot request be one full federal election cycle.

The subgroup also considered how to tailor online voter registration systems to accommodate military and overseas voters more effectively. The subgroup reviewed systems in states that have adopted online voter registration and studied best practices associated with this process. The subgroup recommended that states design their online voter registration systems so that a UOCAVA voter can use the online system to register to vote and apply for an absentee ballot, with the request being equivalent to an FPCA submission.

The Engagement with the U.S. Military Community subgroup reviewed successful partnerships between local election offices and military installations to determine best practices on how election officials across the country could build partnerships with military communities to better engage military voters. This subgroup recommended that state and local election administrators implement programs and policies that actively engage their local military communities on overseas voting issues through actions such as the recruiting of military spouses to work and volunteer in local and state election offices.

Findings from FVAP's 2016 post-election survey of state election officials indicates that at least 60 percent of officials were aware of each CSG OVI Policy Working Group recommendation and that most states had already implemented or planned to implement CSG OVI Policy Working Group recommendations in the future as is shown in the following charts:

Figure 1: State Implementation of CSG Voter Registration Recommendations

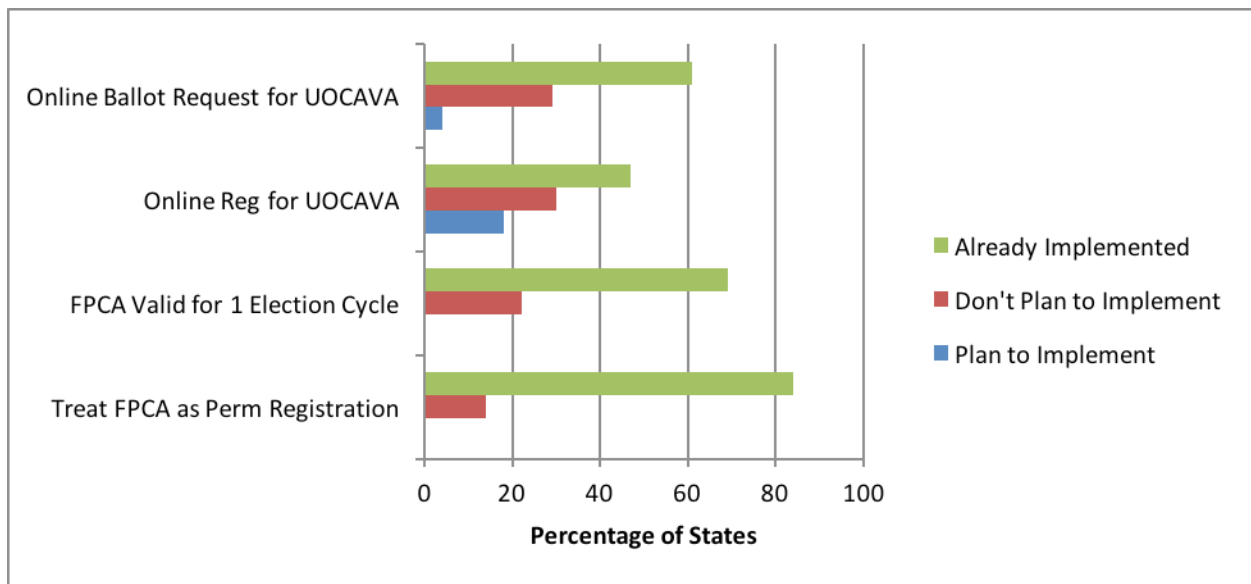


Figure 2: State Implementation of CSG Military Engagement Recommendations

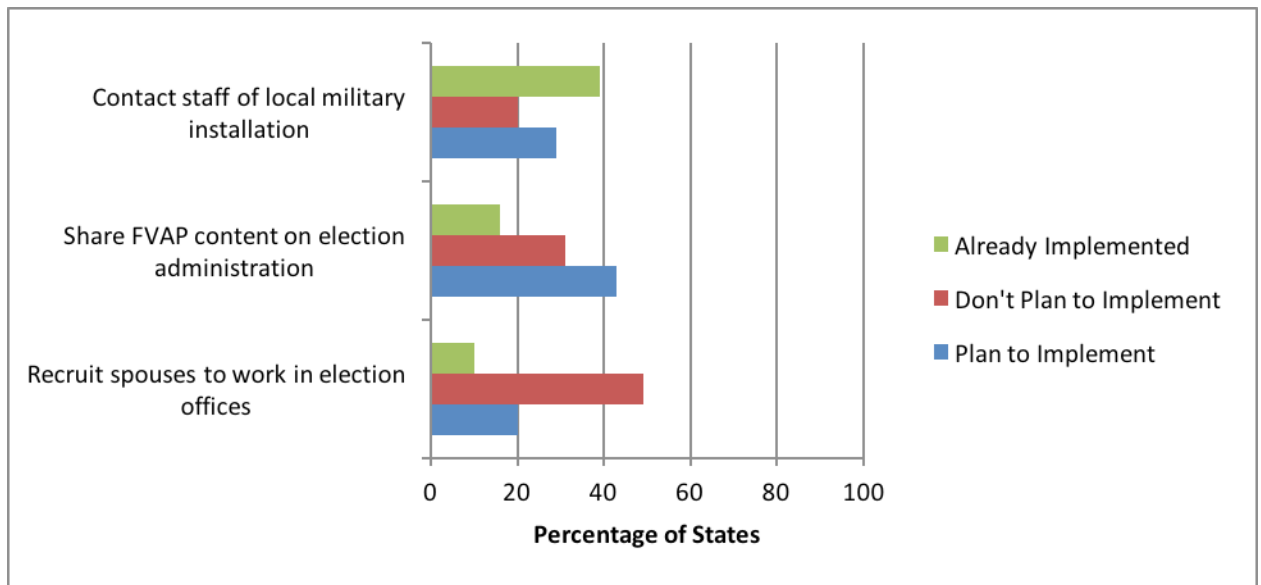
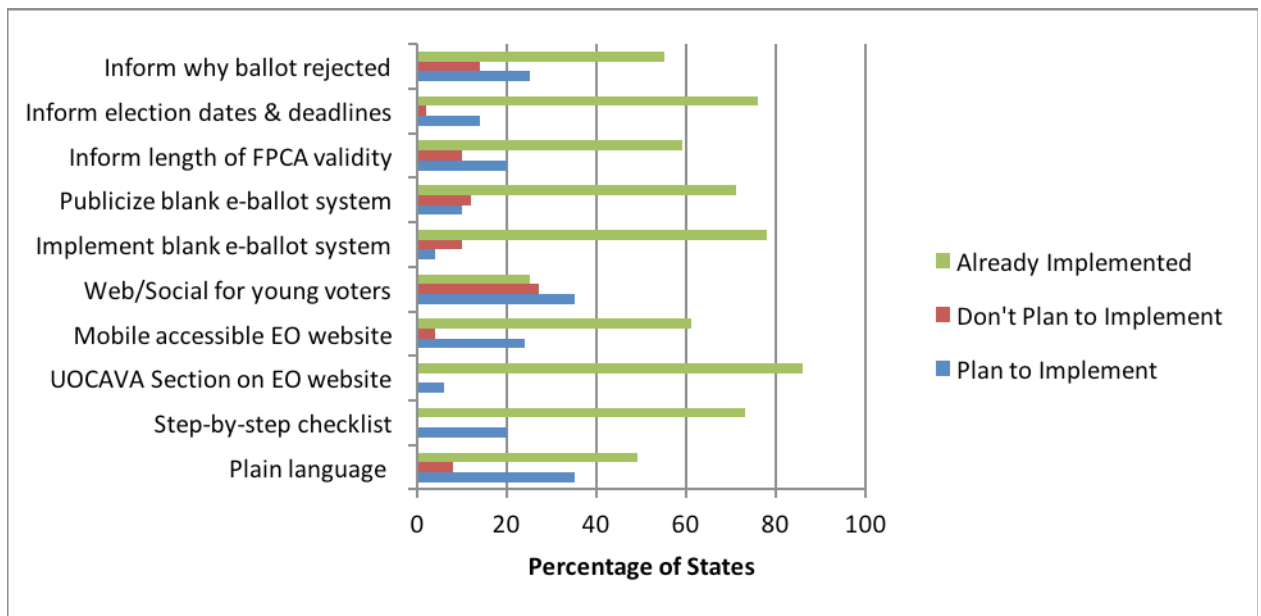


Figure 3: State Implementation of CSG Voter Communication Recommendations



**CSG Overseas
Voting Initiative
Technology
Working Group**

The CSG OVI Technology Working Group was created to consider the role of technology in the UOCAVA voting process and to determine how technology can be used to improve UOCAVA voting. States have long been innovators in the use of technology in elections. Identifying and disseminating best practices has long been a strength of CSG and this working group built upon the excellent work being done in many states. The CSG OVI Technology Working Group members identified three areas to explore based on the increased use of electronic blank ballot delivery within the election community because of the MOVE Act. In response, the CSG OVI Technology Working Group formed the following subgroups to address three core areas: Duplication Methods for Unreadable/Damaged Ballots; Potential Uses of Digital Signatures Originating from Common Access Cards; and using Data Standardization and Performance Metric Methodologies to inform policy decisions for the improvement of UOCAVA processes.⁶

The Military and Overseas Voter Empowerment Act, or MOVE Act, expanded UOCAVA significantly in 2009, when Congress passed the law to provide greater protections for service members, their families and overseas citizens. Among other provisions, the MOVE Act requires states to transmit validly requested absentee ballots to UOCAVA voters no later than 45 days before a federal election when the request has been received by that date, except where the state has been granted an undue hardship waiver approved by the Department of Defense for that election.

The Unreadable/Damaged Ballot Duplication subgroup investigated the types of problems that can result when nonstandard ballots cannot be processed by the tabulation system and the special handling required for these ballots to be processed and counted by a local election office's tabulation system. This subgroup noted that jurisdictions should select a duplication process that fits their legal framework and serves the number of UOCAVA voters appropriately. It recommended that jurisdictions adopt clear procedures for ballot duplication to ensure auditability and that, if the jurisdiction adopts advanced duplication technologies, the system promotes transparency for election officials and external observers.

States have long been at the forefront of introducing technology innovations to government, including to election administration. There are many examples of how states are providing leadership in technology use to improve UOCAVA voting. For example:

- The State of New Jersey worked with ScytI, an election technology solutions provider, to examine ballot duplication solutions and identify the key issues related to the use of technology in ballot duplication. This analysis identified criteria—including cost, auditability, transparency, speed, ease of use, and accuracy—that should be evaluated in comparing whether to use automated ballot duplication instead of manually duplicating a ballot.
- Nevada created an online ballot delivery system that seamlessly integrates all parts of the UOCAVA voting process into a one-stop resource. This system dynamically integrates data from multiple sources for users to complete all of the documents necessary to register to vote, update existing voter registration information, request an absentee ballot, as well as receive and mark their ballot electronically. Building on its existing legal foundation, Nevada permits UOCAVA voters to use electronic and digital signatures to sign voter registration, absentee ballot requests and balloting materials. This innovation reduces barriers encountered by UOCAVA voters. For example, UOCAVA voters are often without access to a printer and/or scanner and therefore less likely to return their ballot due the additional steps necessary to sign their documents with a wet signature.
- Colorado has excellent data collection practices for UOCAVA voters, which allows it to be at the forefront of data standardization efforts. As Colorado developed its statewide voter registration database, they ensured that the data requested for the EAC's EAVS and data requested by FVAP could be captured in the state's system. There was a special emphasis put on tracking data on military and overseas voter registration and participation because this information is frequently requested by legislators for budgeting and bill drafting. The state also works closely with its county clerks and their staff to ensure that the data entry is consistent to maintain the quality of the data.

The Common Access Card/Digital Signature Verification subgroup studied the ability of military personnel, U.S. Department of Defense—or DoD—civilian employees, eligible contractor personnel and certain other individuals to sign documents securely and electronically, using the DoD Common Access Card, or CAC, digital signature. This subgroup recommended that states accommodate the use of CAC digital signatures in the election process for UOCAVA voters and allow the use of a CAC digital signature to complete election-related activities—such as submitting a FPCA to register to vote—and to provide an option for military personnel to designate their UOCAVA voting status using a state's online election portal. They also recommended that state election offices work with FVAP and their local election offices to develop procedures and training materials regarding acceptance and use of a CAC digital signature and that they educate UOCAVA voters about using a CAC digital signature in the voting process.

**CSG Overseas
Voting Initiative
EAVS Section B
Working Group**

The Data Standardization/Performance Metrics subgroup considered the benefits that would be achieved from having a single data standard for collecting and reporting UOCAVA-specific voter data at the transaction level—each critical interaction between the voter and state or local election office. This working group recommended that state and local election offices work with FVAP and the EAC to adopt and implement a UOCAVA Data Standard to reduce the burden of completing federal reporting requirements for military and overseas voting and provide better data related to the voter's experience and the drivers of voter success. The group also recommended that a partner agency be identified to ensure the continued use of this standard and for continued collaborations with the National Institute of Standards and Technology, or NIST, to establish data repositories and related standards to support the long-term sustainability of the ESB.

In August 2015, FVAP attended the EAC's Election Data Summit in Washington, D.C. At the meeting, state and local election officials discussed the issues they confront in responding to the EAC's Election Administration and Voting Survey⁷, or EAVS. A key point of discussion related to Section B of the EAVS, which asks for data regarding various aspects of military and overseas voting covered by UOCAVA. In 2014, FVAP merged the questions from its Post-Election Quantitative Voting Survey of Local Election Officials into the EAC's EAVS Section B so that states and localities only had to provide data about UOCAVA voting once, in a single survey. Although the two surveys asked unique questions, there was overlap in the topics covered. State and local election officials spoke at the Data Summit about the need to address the duplication of questions that existed in Section B after the two surveys were merged.⁸

The U.S. Election Assistance Commission, or EAC, administers the biennial Election Administration and Voting Survey, or EAVS, to collect state-by-state data on the administration of federal elections. The EAVS reports include data on the ability of civilians, military members and overseas citizens to successfully cast a ballot and contain the most comprehensive, nationwide data about election administration in the United States. It is a survey of all states, the District of Columbia, Guam, Puerto Rico, American Samoa and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

FVAP leadership recognized the need to address the burden Section B was creating for states and localities, and requested that the OVI create a working group consisting of state and local election officials to review Section B and determine how it could be streamlined. The CSG OVI EAVS Section B Working Group members met several times and developed key recommendations for improving the EAVS Section B. The recommendations of the working group were provided to FVAP and the EAC at the conclusion of the group's work. The EAC implemented these recommendations in fielding the 2016 EAVS.

The recommendations made by the OVI EAVS Section B Working Group resulted in the EAC improving the EAVS data collection process dramatically in 2016. Based on the recommendations of the working group, the EAC:

- Adjusted the survey instrument so that 73 separate items no longer had to be answered;
- Improved the clarity of the Supplemental Instruction Manual that explains each EAVS item;
- Conducted two webinars that explained various aspects of the EAVS to state and local election offices; and
- Conducted two detailed webinars that explained how to answer the EAVS questions.

The working group recommendations included removing redundancies from the EAVS—a total of 73 questions were removed from the EAVS entirely and parts of four other questions were deleted—and improving the overall understanding of each question by adding better instructions to the Supplemental Instruction Manual that accompanies the EAVS. The working group also recommended that the EAC conduct more outreach to state and local election offices as they work to execute the EAVS, including conducting webinars and creating videos that provide greater assistance in completing the EAVS.

CSG Overseas Voting Initiative Research Projects

Data Standardiza- tion Analyses

CSG and FVAP also worked closely through the CSG OVI on three innovative research projects. These research projects each addressed a specific aspect of the UOCAVA process and were intended to improve the overall experience for UOCAVA voters in the future.

The CSG OVI Technology Working Group made recommendations related to the adoption of the ESB Data Standard.⁹ The ESB Data Standard is used to collect and report transactional data about UOCAVA voters. Such a data standard can be integrated directly with existing election administrative systems and export the UOCAVA transactional data in a common format for post-election reporting and other administrative uses. The transactional data could then be easily and accurately aggregated into the summaries needed for post-election reporting, such as the EAVS, without significant cost or loss of data quality.

One reason why this data standard is so important to states, the election community, and FVAP, is that standardized data can facilitate the collection of better information from states and local election offices regarding the UOCAVA voting experience. FVAP needs these data in order to fulfill its Congressional mandate to assist UOCAVA voters and these data can be used to identify and understand the bottlenecks that exist in the UOCAVA process. Armed with high-quality information, detailed policy analyses can be conducted to determine how identified problems can be ameliorated.

Currently, FVAP and other election researchers typically study voters' experiences using data that is aggregated to the local jurisdiction level; the EAVS data is aggregated this way. Aggregate data can be analyzed in many ways but there are limits to how it can be used. For example, examining the rate of UOCAVA ballots that were rejected can indicate if an issue exists, but it provides little insight regarding where in the process problems are arising or whether multiple issues are occurring.

Individual level data, on the other hand, allows for a much more granular analysis to be conducted, which enables FVAP to identify more clearly the challenges that hinder UOCAVA voters. In order to determine the efficacy of analyzing individual level UOCAVA data, a pilot study was conducted using 2016 general election data from eight states—Colorado, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, South Carolina, Washington, and Wisconsin—as well as from eight counties: Bexar County (Texas), Cook County (Illinois), Escambia County (Florida), Harris County (Texas), Los Angeles County (California), Okaloosa County (Florida), Orange County (California), San Diego County (California).

The pilot data analyses conducted illustrated the benefits of these data. For example, individual level data collected from the participants typically included the date when the ballot was requested, the date the local election office transmitted the ballot to the voter, the date the ballot was received by the local election office from the voter, and the final adjudication of the ballot (accepted or rejected). Under the MOVE Act, UOCAVA voters who request a ballot at least 45 days prior to the election are also required to be sent their ballot by their local election office at least 45 days prior to the election. Using individual level data, it is possible to determine if voters who receive their ballots earlier are more likely to return their ballots and are less likely to have their ballots rejected. It is also possible to determine if delivering the voter their blank ballot electronically—typically by email—results in a faster ballot return and if it impacts the likelihood that the ballots are counted.

The pilot also identified three issues associated with data quality: time inconsistency, coding inconsistency, and coverage inconsistency. Because of the importance of the timing of ballot transmission and submission, accurately and consistently recording the timing of ballot request, ballot transmission, and ballot return are critical. Local election offices need to have standard operating procedures for processing and recording each step in the process for these data to be uniform. States also code various UOCAVA activities, such as electronic ballot transmission, differently, which creates issues for data processing. There is also a divide between state and local jurisdictions that can report individual level data to be included in these analyses and jurisdictions that cannot.

These pilot analyses illustrated the benefits that can come from adopting a data standard for UOCAVA data. If more states adopt the ESB standard, FVAP will be able to do more sophisticated studies that are likely to improve the UOCAVA voting process over the long-term.

Too often, discussions surrounding absentee ballots for active duty military serving overseas center on the belief there is a systemic problem with successfully transmitting ballots to these voters by mail. When these voters cast their absentee by-mail ballots, they are often unsure of the status of their ballots in the process, unless their state or local election jurisdiction is one that notifies voters when their ballots are received and processed. For military voters, this uncertainty is heightened because their ballots travel through two different mail systems: the Military Postal Service, or the MPS, and the United States Postal Service, or the USPS.

Additionally, previous research conducted by FVAP illustrates that a challenge exists in dispelling the myth that the ballots of active duty military serving overseas are only considered for tabulation and counted in close elections. Dispelling this myth requires a method to positively assure military voters

Military Ballot Tracking Pilot

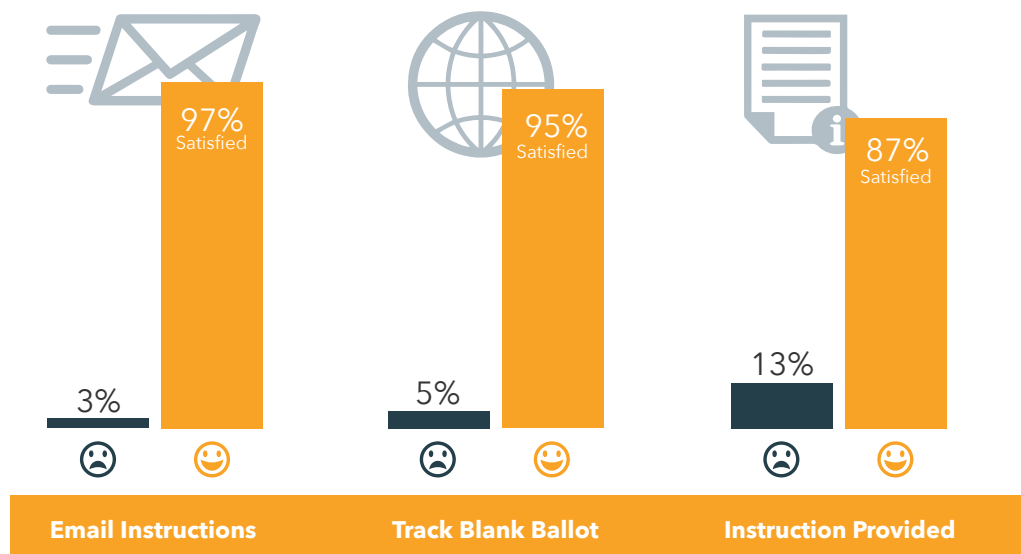
that their ballots are accepted for tabulation, not just a notification to them if their ballot is rejected, which occurs in some jurisdictions. One way to address this issue is to track military ballots through the entire overseas military voting process, from the election office to the voter, and back to the election office.

Through the CSG OVI, FVAP implemented the Military Ballot Tracking Pilot, or MBTP, with direct support from the USPS and the Military Postal Service Agency, or MPSA. Through the MBTP, overseas military ballots were tracked during the 2016 general election in six local election jurisdictions. The local election offices that participated in the pilot included: City and County of Denver, Colorado; Escambia County, Florida; Harris County, Texas; Okaloosa County, Florida; Orange County, California; and San Diego County, California. Each ballot was tracked from the time it left the local election office, as it was transferred through the USPS, through the MPS, and finally as it was delivered to the military voter. The return trip, from voter to local election office, was also tracked.

The MBTP examined the feasibility of providing a full life cycle tracking of ballots to and from military personnel serving overseas as a method of increasing customer service and visibility, and improving data collection so that systemic problems with the mailing of ballot materials to military personnel serving overseas could be identified.

The MBTP's evaluation included analysis of election management transactional data—which captures each local election office-voter interaction—furnished by participating local election offices, parcel scan data furnished from MPSA and USPS, technical feedback from the pilot's principal stakeholders (CSG, FVAP, CSG, the MPSA and the USPS) and participating local election offices, and a customer satisfaction survey of voters who were afforded this tracking service. Additionally, participating military personnel who received materials through the MBTP were asked about their overall satisfaction with the pilot.

MBTP participating voters expressed satisfaction levels for various segments of the process and the instructions provided. The vast majority of respondents indicated that they were satisfied and found the process to be 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.



The evaluation found that 85 to 90 percent of all ballots were successfully delivered to destination Military Post Offices, or MPOs. One issue identified by the pilot was that variable application of parcel scans within the postal system on balloting materials illustrated the need for greater business processing improvement; mail that is not scanned cannot be appropriately tracked. Critically, 98 percent of all overseas active duty military personnel who participated in the MPTB were satisfied or very satisfied with their experience. Based on the MBTP's success, the USPS is examining the development of new products and services to enable local election officials to offer a similar ballot tracking experience to military personnel overseas for the 2018 general election, with the possibility of continued enhancements in time for the 2020 presidential election.

FWAB/FPCA Usability Testing

Under UOCAVA, FVAP is required to design the national voter registration and absentee ballot request form, the Federal Post Card Application, or FPCA, as well as the Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot form, or FWAB. FVAP is committed to ensuring that these forms are as easy and effective as possible for both voters and election officials to use and reviews the forms every two years. The FPCA allows eligible UOCAVA voters to apply to register to vote, request an absentee ballot, and update their contact information with their local election office, and is often the primary method of communication between UOCAVA voters and their election officials. The FWAB is a write-in absentee ballot that can be used as a backup by UOCAVA voters who have not received their requested state ballot in time to vote by the election deadline. Both forms are produced in paper form for distribution, are online as a PDF, and can be completed via an online assistant on the FVAP website.

FVAP asked CSG to oversee this important review and redesign of the FPCA and FWAB through the OVI. The OVI worked with Fors Marsh Group to conduct this research, bringing together experts in form design, plain language, user experience, qualitative research, and election administration. There were five steps to this review.

1. Key stakeholders—including state and local election officials—were interviewed and provided insights regarding the current form and issues they had experienced with the survey.
2. Based on stakeholder feedback and an expert review of the forms, new draft forms were created and then tested on current, former, or potential UOCAVA voters. The results of this initial round of usability testing were used to make recommendations for changing the forms, and for creating new draft forms.
3. Detailed feedback was gathered on the second draft of the prototype forms from FVAP personnel, election officials, and voting assistance officers. These stakeholders again provided feedback, pointing out features of the draft forms that they felt would improve usability, and suggested areas for further improvements to the draft forms.
4. Information gathered to date was used to create a third iteration of the draft FPCA and FWAB forms. Another round of usability testing was conducted to obtain additional feedback from current, former, or potential UOCAVA voters. Based on findings from this round of testing, the recommendations for changing the forms were provided to FVAP and CSG OVI staff. Once a consensus was reached, the draft forms were modified in an effort to further improve their usability. These draft forms took into account all of the information gathered up to this point in the project.
5. A final round of usability testing was conducted on the draft forms. This final round of testing provided insights into any potential remaining usability issues for the prototype forms. This round of testing showed that many of the previous difficulties with the forms had been resolved and a final round of edits was made based on the final round of usability tests. The resulting forms were made available to FVAP for DoD approval, public comment via the Federal Register, and final review by the Office of Management and Budget.

Improving the UOCAVA Election Administration Landscape

The goal of the OVI collaboration between CSG and FVAP was to improve the voting process for UOCAVA citizens, especially improving the return rate of overseas absentee ballots. The two organizations also wanted to see this relationship augment FVAP's ongoing efforts to engage its stakeholders—especially state and local election offices. The working groups created under the CSG OVI provided stakeholders with the opportunity to come together and discuss concrete measures that would improve the UOCAVA voting process for states, local election offices, and for individuals covered by the law.

The three CSG OVI working groups examined critical areas for improving UOCAVA voting over the course of the four-year initiative with over a dozen working group meetings and numerous subgroup meetings and conference calls. The efforts of these working groups were heavily publicized by CSG at their 2015 and 2016 annual meetings, which provided an opportunity for state legislators, state election officials, and others to learn about this important work. In addition, CSG created and shared several reports based on the findings and recommendations from each of the OVI working groups. These reports and specific recommendations are available on the CSG OVI website:

<http://www.csg.org/ovi/>.

The CSG OVI has also provided FVAP with the opportunity to conduct pilot studies of military ballot tracking and data analyses using individual level UOCAVA data. The success of both these pilots provided FVAP with evidence that further explorations in these areas will likely provide valuable information to state election offices regarding how to better serve their UOCAVA population.

The CSG OVI working groups and the pilot projects—with their associated research—have provided FVAP with connections to state and local election officials with the opportunity to serve as ambassadors to their peers regarding the importance of improving UOCAVA voting and participating in future pilot initiatives.

Acknowledgements

The success of the OVI was made possible due to the contributions of many, especially the members of the three working groups who volunteered their time, provided insight, and exemplified leadership and perseverance throughout this multi-year effort.

CSG OVI Policy Working Group:

- Jim Condos, Secretary of State, Vermont
- Lance Gough, Executive Director, Board of Election Commissioners, Chicago, Illinois
- Jon A. Husted, Secretary of State, Ohio
- Keith Ingram, Director of Elections, Texas
- Kevin Kennedy, Director and General Counsel, Government Accountability Board (Retired)
- Tammy Patrick, Senior Advisor for Elections, Democracy Fund
- Gary Poser, Director of Elections, Minnesota
- David Stafford (Co-Chair), Supervisor of Elections, Escambia County, Florida
- Michael Vu, Registrar of Voters, San Diego County, California
- Kim Wyman (Chair), Secretary of State, Washington

CSG OVI Technology Working Group:

- Marci Andino, Executive Director, South Carolina State Election Commission
- Lori Augino, Director of Elections, Washington Office of the Secretary of State
- Thomas Connolly, Director of Election Operations, New York State Board of Elections
- Robert Giles, Director of Elections, New Jersey Department of State
- Neal Kelley, Registrar of Voters, Orange County, California
- Paul Lux, Supervisor of Elections, Okaloosa County, Florida
- Amber McReynolds, Director of Elections, City and County of Denver, Colorado
- Donald Palmer (Auxiliary Member), Democracy Project Fellow, Bipartisan Policy Center
- Stan Stanart, County Clerk, Harris County, Texas
- Justus Wendland, HAVA Administrator, Nevada Office of the Secretary of State

CSG OVI EAVS Section B Working Group:

- Lynn Bailey, Supervisor of Elections, Richmond County, Georgia
- Edgardo Cortes, Commissioner, Virginia Department of Elections
- Veronica Degraffenreid, Elections Preparation & Support Manager, North Carolina State Board of Elections
- Keith Ingram, Director of Elections, Office of the Texas Secretary of State
- Michele McNulty, Election Administrator Principal, Office of Minnesota Secretary of State
- Lauri Ealom, Director, Kansas City, Missouri Board of Elections
- Aaron Nevarez, Intergovernmental Relations Liaison, Office of the Registrar of Voters, Los Angeles County, California
- Noah Praetz, Director of Elections, Cook County, Illinois
- Hilary Rudy, Deputy Director of Elections, Colorado, David Stafford, Supervisor of Elections, Escambia County, Florida

- Russell Terry, Voter Engagement Advocate, Oregon Elections Division
- Linda von Nessi, Clerk, Essex County Board of Elections, New Jersey
- Sandi Wesolowski, City Clerk, Franklin, Wisconsin

CSG thanks the local election officials and their staff members representing the following jurisdictions who were key to the success of the Military Ballot Tracking Pilot: City and County of Denver (Colorado), Escambia County (Florida), Harris County (Texas), Okaloosa County (Florida), Orange County (California), San Diego County, (California). In addition, we thank the U.S. Postal Service and the U.S. Military Postal Service Agency for their commitment to, and partnership on, this important effort.

CSG thanks those jurisdictions that shared data with our team as part of the UOCAVA Data Standardization Project, including Colorado, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, South Carolina, Washington and Wisconsin as well as Bexar County, Texas; Cook County, Illinois; Escambia County, Florida; Harris County, Texas; Los Angeles County, California; Okaloosa County, Florida; and Orange County, California.

CSG thanks James Goodwin, Allison Martin, Josh Donnelly, and Scott Williamson at Booz Allen Hamilton, and Tom Fogarty at SBG Technologies, and their team members and researchers for their work with aspects of the Overseas Voting Initiative related to data standardization and associated research.

CSG acknowledges the many organizations that served as resources to our working groups on a variety of topics that advanced our knowledge and furthered our efforts to assist military and overseas voters. These groups include the following: Adobe Corporation, Clear Ballot, Democracy Live, The U.S. DoD Defense Manpower Data Center the Election Administrator's Office of Bexar County, Texas, Election Systems & Software, Everyone Counts, the Nevada Secretary of State's Office, Pew Charitable Trusts' Election Initiatives, Program for Excellence in Election Administration at the Humphrey School at the University of Minnesota with special thanks to Doug Chapin from this program, Runbeck Elections, and the South Dakota Secretary of State's Office.

CSG thanks the U.S. Election Assistance Commission for their participation and insight on this effort, specifically EAC Chair Matt Masterson, commissioners Tom Hicks and Christy McCormick, and EAC staff members Brian Newby and Sean Greene. Additionally, we acknowledge the National Institute of Standards and Technology, and specifically Mary Brady and John Wack, for their work with us across many OVI topic areas.

CSG thanks the Fors Marsh Group for their partnership on the OVI effort and specifically Brian Griepentrog and the FMG team of researchers, including Thad E. Hall, Krysha Gregorowicz, Kinsey Gimbel, Kelly Wurtz, Colin Macfarlane, Carrie von Bose and R. Michael Alvarez.

CSG especially thanks FVAP for its leadership, vision and collaboration on this critically important work. Without FVAP's support, the OVI effort would not have been possible. Thank you to FVAP Director David Beirne for his expertise, support and dedication to the success of this project. CSG would also like to acknowledge former FVAP Director Matt Boehmer, Katherine Roddy, Scott Wiedmann and the entire FVAP staff for their invaluable support.

The work of the CSG OVI was supported by Kamanzi G. Kalisa, OVI director; Michelle M. Shafer, OVI election technology senior research adviser; Jared Marcotte, OVI senior technology adviser; Ann McGeehan, OVI special adviser; and Jessica Kirby, OVI research associate.

Endnotes

¹ The Help America Vote Act, or HAVA, was passed by the U.S. Congress in 2002 to make sweeping reforms to the nation's voting process. HAVA addresses improvements to voting systems and voter access that were identified following the 2000 election. More about HAVA can be found here: <https://www.eac.gov/about/help-america-vote-act/>

² Information about The Military and Overseas Voter Empowerment, or MOVE, Act can be found here: www.justice.gov/opa/pr/fact-sheet-move-act

³ The National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) is a United States federal law specifying the budget and expenditures of the United States Department of Defense. The U.S. Congress oversees the defense budget primarily through two yearly bills: the National Defense Authorization Act and defense appropriations bills. More information can be found here: <https://armedservices.house.gov/ndaa/history-ndaa>

⁴ The recommendations of the Policy Working Group can be found here: <http://knowledgecenter.csg.org/kc/system/files/CSG%20OVI%20Recommendations%20Report%20Updated.pdf>

⁵ An overview of the needs of UOCAVA voters and how the working group strove to address these needs can be found here: <http://www.csg.org/ovi/SpecialReport2016.aspx>

⁶ The recommendations of the Technology Working Group can be found here: <http://www.csg.org/OVI/documents/KKOVITechRecs.pdf>

⁷ For more information on the EAVS, see: www.eac.gov/research-and-data/election-administration-voting-survey/.

⁸ The recommendations of the working group can be found here: http://www.csg.org/OVI/documents/Improving_Military_and_Overseas_Election_Data_Collection.pdf

⁹ The official EAVS Section B or ESB Data Standard documentation can be found here: <https://eavs-section-b-data-standard.readthedocs.io/en/latest/>



ABOUT CSG

Founded in 1933, The Council of State Governments is our nation's only organization serving all three branches of state government. CSG is a region-based forum that fosters the exchange of insights and ideas to help state officials shape public policy. This offers unparalleled regional, national and international opportunities to network, develop leaders, collaborate and create problem-solving partnerships.

ABOUT OVI

Many active duty military personnel are located in remote areas abroad and have limited access to state voting information and, in some cases, their ballot. U.S. citizens living overseas also have unique challenges in exercising their right to vote. These challenges are complicated by extreme variation in how states conduct elections and how absentee ballots are processed. In late 2013, CSG and FVAP entered into a four-year cooperative agreement to improve the research and understanding surrounding the complex nature of the voting process for service members, their families and U.S. citizens living abroad.



**The Council
of State
Governments**