



**Overseas Voting Initiative**  
THE COUNCIL OF STATE GOVERNMENTS

# TOOLKIT: BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH LOCAL INSTALLATIONS

## Introduction

Military members, their spouses and family members residing on or near military installations—domestic bases, camps, posts, stations, centers or other entities under the jurisdiction of the Secretary of Defense—can face unique challenges when voting and registering to vote. Many voters on domestic installations will vote absentee in a state different from the base location, some will want to vote locally near the base and may need assistance with the process; others will need support preparing to vote if deployed. Many of the voters on military installations are [UOCAVA voters](#) whose legal basis for absentee voting are established by the [Uniformed Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act \(UOCAVA\)](#) of 1986. To engage these voters, the Council of State Governments (CSG) [Overseas Voting Initiative \(OVI\)](#) recommends election officials build relationships with relevant stakeholders on base, including servicemembers, spouses and civilian staff.

The OVI created this toolkit to support election officials in building relationships with local installations, providing guidance and resources for election officials to reach out to installation voting assistance officers (IVAOs) and other relevant stakeholders, get involved in events and stay informed about deployments to provide timely registration and voting assistance. As highly mobile individuals, military voters often require special attention to plan for upcoming deployments and ensure they are registered to vote and have submitted a ballot request. Election officials can make voting more accessible to military voters by fostering relationships with the personnel at local military installations.

# Background

Election officials can kickstart relationship-building efforts with local installations by developing open lines of communication with the IVAO. Each military installation must have a designated IVAO tasked with ensuring that military voters and their families understand their federal voting protections, know how to register to vote and can request and return an absentee ballot. Installations are also required to have [unit voting assistance officers](#) (UVAOs) responsible for each unit. IVAOs can be members of the uniformed service or civilians. Being an IVAO is an ancillary duty for the individual assigned, which means that the responsibilities may not always be their highest priority. Depending on the installation, IVAOs may change frequently due to [Permanent Change of Station \(PCS\)](#) moves or deployments and some individuals may be more engaged than others in supporting the absentee voting process for those on base. Civilians usually have a longer tenure when designated as the IVAO, which is helpful for continuity.

Each base is required to have a brick-and-mortar [Installation Voter Assistance Office](#) by [10 USC §1566a](#) and is collocated with another base office in a high-traffic area. The office location varies by military branch and installation.

The Air Force and Space Force house a centralized Voting Assistance Office.

Active-Duty Air Force and Space Force house the Voting Assistance Office in the Military and Family Readiness Center.

Active-Duty Army installations have a Soldier Support Center on base which typically houses the Voter Assistance Office.

FVAP offers a tool to find contact information for Installation Voter Assistance Offices, which can be accessed [here](#). If you are not successful in reaching the IVAO, call FVAP for assistance.

Table 1 contains a breakdown of the different IVAO models within the military branches.

When developing lines of communication with IVAOs for the National Guard and the reserves, additional steps may be required as each reserve component installation is unique based on its unique operational status and function.

Election officials should be aware of nuances in command and organizational structure by reading this toolkit and referencing information specific to their local installation. Election officials can speak with the base personnel to build relationships with local installations. This relationship helps provide a better understanding of the installation's unique structure to best serve those voters.

Another valuable contact on military installations is the base Public Affairs Office (PAO). The Public Affairs Officers advise senior leaders on communication strategy, lead communication teams and engage with the public and media. As such, they can be a valuable resource for participating in events both on and off base, as well as activities related to voter awareness and assistance.

Military Branch	IVAO Model
U.S. Air Force	Military and Family Readiness Center
U.S. Space Force	Military and Family Readiness Center
U.S. Army	Soldier Support Center
U.S. Navy	Utilize FVAP's IVAO Search Tool
U.S. Marines	Utilize FVAP's IVAO Search Tool
U.S. Coast Guard	Utilize FVAP's IVAO Search Tool

TABLE 1

Different IVAO models based on military branch

# Seven Tools for Developing Relationships with Local Installations

Election officials can utilize the following seven tools when seeking to facilitate UOCAVA and local voting by building relationships with local installations.

## 1. Connect with IVAOs at least twice annually.

- Identify the IVAO at your local installation using the search tool on FVAP’s Contact Page. You can find the contact information for US Army, US Navy, US Marine Corps, US Air Force and US Coast Guard IVAOs and filter by state. If you have questions, FVAP workshops serve as a valuable resource in connecting with IVAOs. Keep an eye out for emails from FVAP to find out when their staff will be at nearby installations for a voting assistance training workshop (usually during the first six months of even-numbered years).
- Learn the rank structure on base and apply military courtesies to whoever you interact with. The best way to do this is by researching the individuals you plan to meet with on base and searching military customs and courtesies associated with the rank of the individual. For a comprehensive view of all enlisted rank structures, see the Department of Defense’s enlisted insignia page. When all else fails, just go with “Sir” or “Ma’am” to show respect for the person in uniform.
- Figure 1 depicts the beginning of the enlisted rank structure.
- Reach out to IVAOs at least two times per year: once in January and once in July. IVAOs may change frequently on certain installations, so it is important to check back in with local installations to ensure you have the latest contact information for IVAOs. IVAOs may change every 24 months or more frequently during high deployment periods, whereas civilian IVAOs may stay in the same position for multiple years. In odd-numbered years, election officials should still make contact to ensure a continued relationship.
- Send IVAOs an email or give them a call to introduce yourself. The IVAO on base may be able to give you a sense of how many installation members vote locally. Many will want to vote in their state of residency outside of your state, and the IVAO will be able to assist them in registering to vote absentee. Election officials should point voters to resources on [FVAP’s web page](#) if they have questions about voting in other states. See Appendix A: Email Outreach Template for a model email to send to IVAOs.

ENLISTED INSIGNIA						
Enlisted Paygrade	Army	Marine Corps	Navy	Air Force	Space Force	Coast Guard
<p>Service members in paygrades E-1 through E-3 are usually either in some kind of training status or on their initial assignment. The training includes the basic training phase where recruits are immersed in military culture and values and are taught the core skills required by their service component.</p> <p>Basic training is followed by a specialized or advanced training phase that provides recruits with a specific area of expertise or concentration. In the Army and Marine Corps, this area is called a military occupational specialty; in the Navy it is known as a rate; and in the Air Force it is simply called an Air Force specialty.</p>						
E-1	Private	Private	Seaman Recruit (SR)	Airman Basic	Specialist 1 (SpC1)	Seaman Recruit (SR)
E-2	Private (PV2)	Private First Class (PFC)	Seaman Apprentice (SA)	Airman (A1)	Specialist 2 (SpC2)	Seaman Apprentice (SA)
E-3	Private First Class (PFC)	Lance Corporal (LCpl)	Seaman (SN)	Airman First Class (A1C)	Specialist 3 (SpC3)	Seaman (SN)

FIGURE 1

Enlisted rank structure

Source: <https://www.defense.gov/Resources/Insignia/>

## 2. Send all email communications to local installations from a local or state elections email account.

- Use a generic elections email account like elections@county.gov to improve response times from contacts on local installations. A generic email clues the recipient in on the email's contents by the information in the sender's address.
- Conduct all outreach to UOCAVA voters and civilians associated with military installations from a local or state election office email account.

## 3. Conduct voter outreach and voter registration drives on base.

- Conduct outreach and registration drives for voters on local military installations to offer information and materials about how to register to vote in your jurisdiction.
- Bring forms and instructions for voters who wish to register locally.
- Be sure to remind voters that if they register to vote locally, they are becoming a legal resident of your state and there may be other implications to that decision. If they are unsure, recommend they speak to their legal or Judge Advocate General (JAG) office about the ramifications, and if they do register locally, inform them that they should request a residency change on their "Leave and Earnings Statement."
- IVAOs are trained and prepared to provide information about absentee voting in other states. In your outreach, be sure to acknowledge the differences between your role as a local election official and the IVAO's role.
- Refer voters to relevant state-specific contact information and websites for registering in their state. The [2024-25 Voting Assistance Guide](#) has information and contacts for every state.
- Attend the installation training or FVAP workshops and offer to be physically present for activities surrounding [voting emphasis weeks](#), [National Voter Registration Day](#) and [other base events where voter registration can occur](#).
- Reference [FVAP's outreach materials page](#) for all relevant and state-specific information.
- Collaborate with the local IVAO to ensure that outreach and voter registration efforts are not duplicated.

## 4. Stay informed about upcoming deployments.

- Reach out to local IVAOs, installation commanders and installation public affairs officers for information about upcoming deployments. It is important to inform voters and prepare them to vote from abroad.
- Utilize relationships built during outreach events to ask for information about upcoming deployments, especially those that are close to an election. Keep in mind that some deployment information will not be readily available. Combat exercises and regularly scheduled deployments will be easier to keep track of. Offer to have a staff member present to assist as a group prepares for deployment, especially in the weeks leading up to an election.
- Work with FVAP and the installation IVAO to ensure that UOCAVA voters with upcoming deployments know how the voting process works and have done the necessary preparations to vote from abroad.

## 5. Invite military members and installation affiliates to local election events and participate in events at the local military installation.

- Consider the installation to be a part of your community. Reach out to them frequently to invite them to any off-base voting registration drives, open houses or other election-related events.
- Most installations have an [honorary commander program](#) to build lasting relationships with the local community and educate community leaders about their missions. Consider joining an honorary command program to strengthen relationships with members on base. After participation in the program, most honorary commanders continue to receive invites to changes of command and other events that can inform your outreach.

## 6. Reach out to installation affiliates and service-related organizations to strengthen your offices' relationship with the local installation.

- Get to know the following individuals and organizations affiliated with the military installation (in addition to the IVAO):
  - Installation Commander: This person is responsible for operations on the base.
  - Personnel Readiness/Soldier Support Center/Military and Family Readiness Representative: On Air Force installations, this person is usually a civilian with prior service or a lot of military knowledge who serves as the primary contact for the families of servicemembers at the Military and Family Readiness Center. This person may also be the IVAO, depending on which branch of the military. They are extremely active on base and have extensive knowledge of resources when deploying. They dispense a lot of information, including voting awareness.
  - Public Information/Affairs Office: Most installations have an office designated for public affairs and information that specializes in communications and media. Contact the Public Information Officer (PIO) at the local installation if confusion arises about the IVAO program management structure. PIOs will be able to connect you with the relevant IVAO on base. To find contact information for the Public Affairs Office, search: "[Local Installation Name] + Public Affairs Office." See Figures 2 and 3 for an example of a Google search for Fort Knox's Public Affairs Office. Several military branches have search tools to identify PAOs for that branch of the military: the [Navy](#), [Marines](#), [Coast Guard](#) and [Air Force](#).

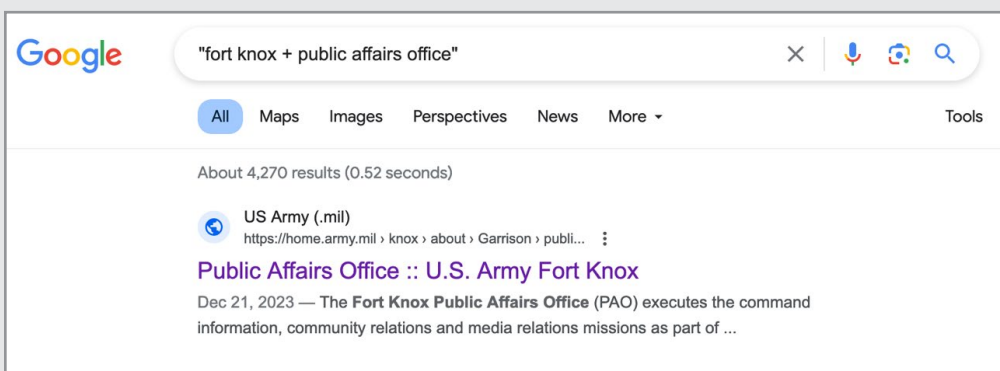


FIGURE 2

Google Search for Fort Knox Public Affairs Office



FIGURE 3

Fort Knox Public Affairs Office Contact Information

- **Military Spouses Organizations:** Often these groups have deep knowledge of the voting process for UOCAVA voters and have connections to individuals on military installations. [Secure Families Initiative](#) is an example of an organization that can help inform your outreach to local military installations.
- **Veteran Service Officers (VSOs):** These individuals help veterans navigate the many federal, state and local resources and benefits available to them. Typically, VSO members do not reside on base but may have helpful connections and insight to develop relationships with key stakeholders on a military installation.
- **Parents of Service Members:** Facebook groups and local parents of service members organizations can also provide valuable connections to local installations.

## 7. Refrain from any partisan or candidacy promotion on an installation.

- Do not engage in anything that could be perceived as partisan or promoting a candidate on an installation, especially if you are an elected official. These activities are strictly prohibited on military installations.

## Conclusion

Discussions with UOCAVA voters will also inform best practices for election officials engaging with local military installations. [FVAP](#) has many resources in addition to those listed in this toolkit to support election officials with outreach and UOCAVA voter education including a page [specifically for election officials](#) and an [election official social media toolkit](#). In addition to this guide, OVI has published several other quick-start guides: Best Practices for State UOCAVA Webpages [\[add link\]](#) and [Best Practices for Emailing Military and Overseas Voters](#).

## About the Overseas Voting Initiative

[The Overseas Voting Initiative \(OVI\)](#) is a collaboration between The [Council of State Governments \(CSG\)](#) and the Federal Voting Assistance Program ([FVAP](#)) focused on improving voting access for Service members, their families and other U.S. citizens residing overseas who may face many challenges when obtaining and casting their ballots in U.S. elections. Service members deployed to remote areas or on ships or submarines, students studying abroad or government workers living abroad in difficult-to-access locations must overcome hurdles not faced by most domestic voters to exercise their right to vote. Mail operations and access to the internet can be intermittent or nonexistent in some locations. Access to technology hardware such as printers and fax machines can be equally challenging to find yet may be critical to successfully cast a ballot.

The OVI Working Group is comprised of practicing local and state election officials with two subgroups to focus on specific areas of election policy and technology centered on improving voting access and outcomes among [UOCAVA voters](#). The OVI has conducted policy research, identified technology solutions, informed state and federal policymakers about overseas voting issues and shared best practices with state and local election officials and other stakeholders.



# Appendix A: Email Outreach Template

For Election Officials Reaching out to IVAOs:

*Subject: IVAO Partnership with **[Local/State]** Election Official*

*Dear Installation Voting Assistance Officer,*

*I am **[title]**, the **[local/state]** election official from **[county, state]**, reaching out to offer assistance in your outreach to voters who may wish to vote in **[county/state]**. Below are some resources for **[base name]** UOCAVA voters seeking to vote in this jurisdiction: **[voter registration information and the deadlines for the upcoming election.]***

***[Copy any relevant voter registration information and dates/deadlines here. It is best practice to not include attachments. See OVI's [Best Practices for Emailing Military and Overseas Voters](#) for more email tips to UOCAVA voters.]***

*I know that many voters on base vote in other states and you have that assistance well in hand. For those who would like to vote locally, my contact information is below. As an election official, my job is to provide official, non-partisan, and timely education and outreach to all voters, including those stationed on military installations. Voters on the installation are part of our community. Please let me know how I can be helpful in your mandate as IVAO for **[local military installation]**.*

*Sincerely,*

***[Your name/contact information]***