Shifting to voting by mail

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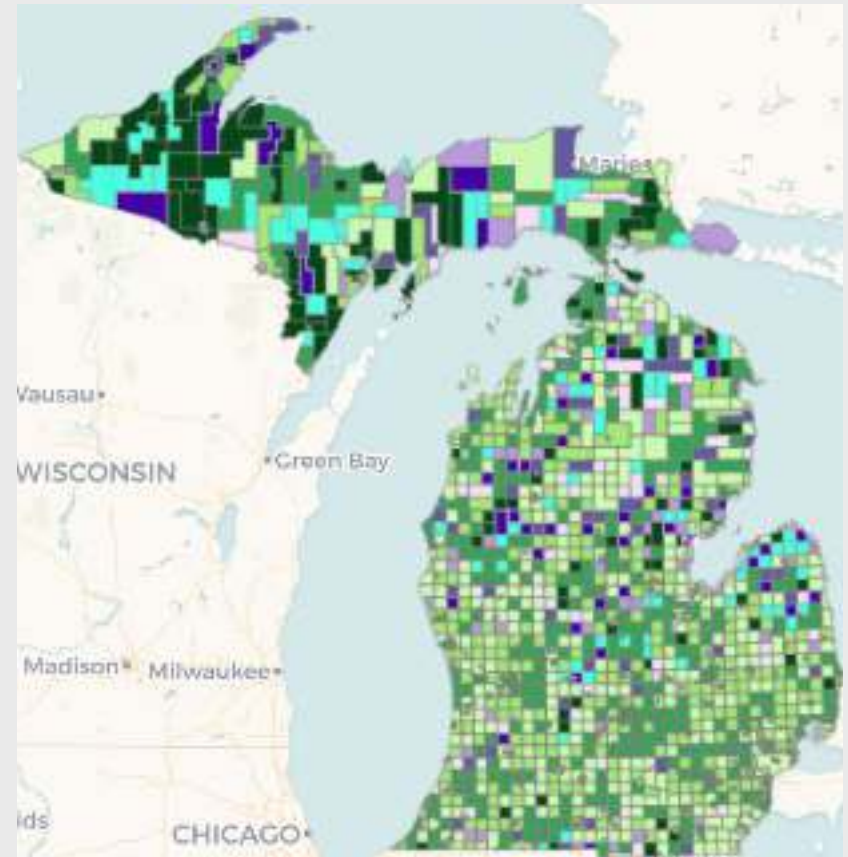**NCoC**
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Michigan

No-excuse absentee voting passed in 2018

Size of change: Flint, Michigan

- Flint is one of 25 communities with more than 30,000 residents reporting an increase of MORE THAN 100% in mail ballots issued

- **From 2016 to 2020, Flint's mail ballot requests increased for the presidential primary by 854%** (Source: MLive.com 28 February 2020)

- Statewide, requests were up 70% for the primary

Communities with 30,000 or more residents

Community	County	2016	2018	% Increase
Flint city	Genesee	196	1,870	854%
Brownston Twp.	Wayne	365	2,903	695%
Grand Blanc	Genesee	233	873	274%
Pittsfield Twp.	Washtenaw	901	3,090	242%
East Lansing	Ingham	913	2,721	198%
Novi city	Oakland	2,521	7,184	184%
Eastpointe	Macomb	1,102	3,086	180%
Kalamazoo city	Kalamazoo	1,546	4,174	169%
Livonia	Wayne	4,019	10,610	164%
Madison Heights	Oakland	1,112	2,887	159%

Communities with fewer than 30,000 residents, and at least one absentee ballot issued in 2016

Community	County	2016	2018	% Increase
Menominee Twp.	Menominee	1	154	15,300%
Rolland Twp.	Isabella	1	34	3,300%
Newark Twp.	Gratiot	1	29	2,800%
Olivet	Eaton	1	28	2,700%
Otsego	Allegan	13	358	2,653%
Sheridan Twp.	Clare	1	25	2,400%
Marlette Twp.	Sanilac	1	17	1,600%
Decatur Twp.	Van Buren	9	146	1,522%
Nottawa Twp.	St. Joseph	17	275	1,517%
Wakefield Twp.	Gogebic	1	16	1,500%

Size of change: Michigan
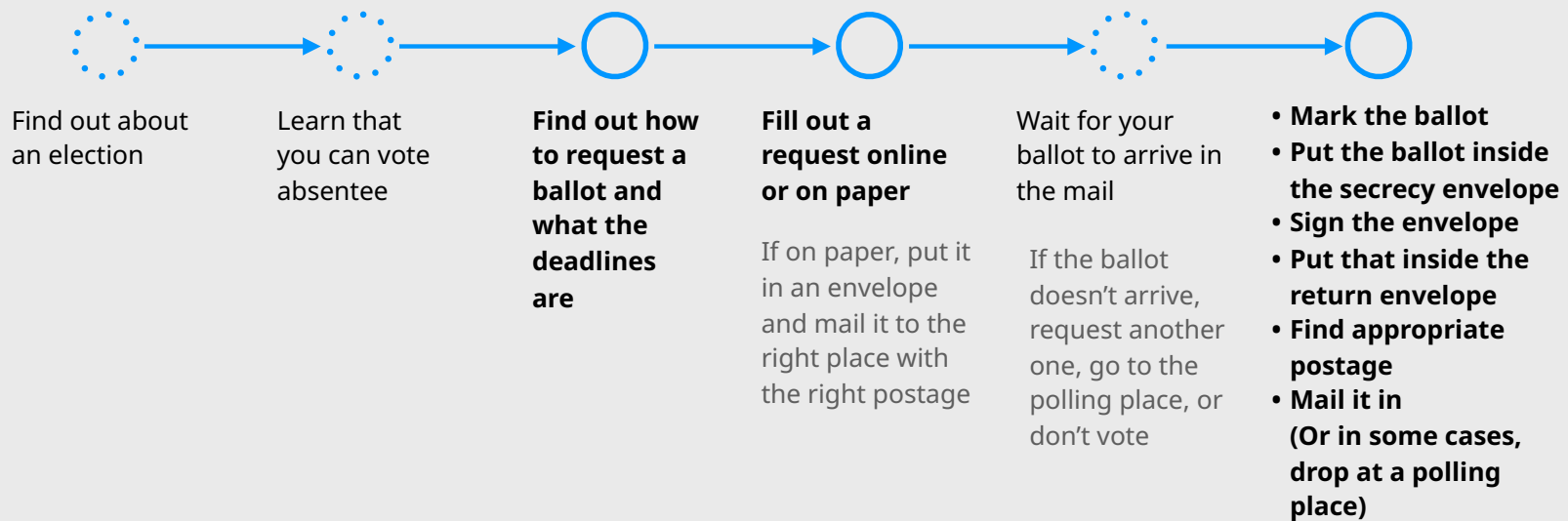
Downstream administration issues

**Going from a state with little vote by mail
to a lot presents complications**

- Do you count at precincts or centrally?
- When can you start processing ballots (not counting them)?
- When can you start counting?
- Who does the counting and where does that happen?
- How do you ensure that precincts know whether someone has already voted absentee?
- What if voters don't remember that they requested an absentee ballot?

Vote by mail is awesome for many voters

- Convenient — the ballot comes to you

- No need to take time off or reschedule things around going to the polls

- No waiting in lines

- Plenty of time to research candidates and issues

It is not free of effort

Find out about an election

Learn that you can vote absentee

Find out how to request a ballot and what the deadlines are

Fill out a request online or on paper

If on paper, put it in an envelope and mail it to the right place with the right postage

Wait for your ballot to arrive in the mail

If the ballot doesn't arrive, request another one, go to the polling place, or don't vote

- **Mark the ballot**
- **Put the ballot inside the secrecy envelope**
- **Sign the envelope**
- **Put that inside the return envelope**
- **Find appropriate postage**
- **Mail it in (Or in some cases, drop at a polling place)**

Vote-by-mail is not great for all voters

- It's not accessible for many people with disabilities

- People who have low literacy and low English proficiency struggle with instructions and affidavits

- Challenging for people who are homeless or who have university addresses

For students and others

- If someone has requested an absentee ballot but it hasn't been mailed yet, contact the election office

- If you've requested an absentee ballot and ballots have been mailed, you'll probably have to fill out a form saying you didn't get the old one and you want a new one

- If you decide you want to vote "at the polls," you are likely to have to vote "curbside"

Vote-by-mail landscape

VOTE at HOME

NCSL

All-Mail Elections (aka Vote-By-Mail)

3/24/2020

Introduction

Five states currently conduct all elections entirely by mail: Colorado, Hawaii, Oregon, Washington and Utah. At least 21 other states have laws that allow certain smaller elections, such as school board contests, to be conducted by mail. For these elections, all

democracy fund

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FROM THE BLOG

2017 Lessons Can Improve the Vote-By-Mail Experience

Center for Civic Design

civicdesign.org

Vote at Home Status by State – March 2020

States with blended policies in the Step 3 – 4 – 5 range.

UT 100% VAH in 2019
HI 100% in 2020
CA targeting 2022/24
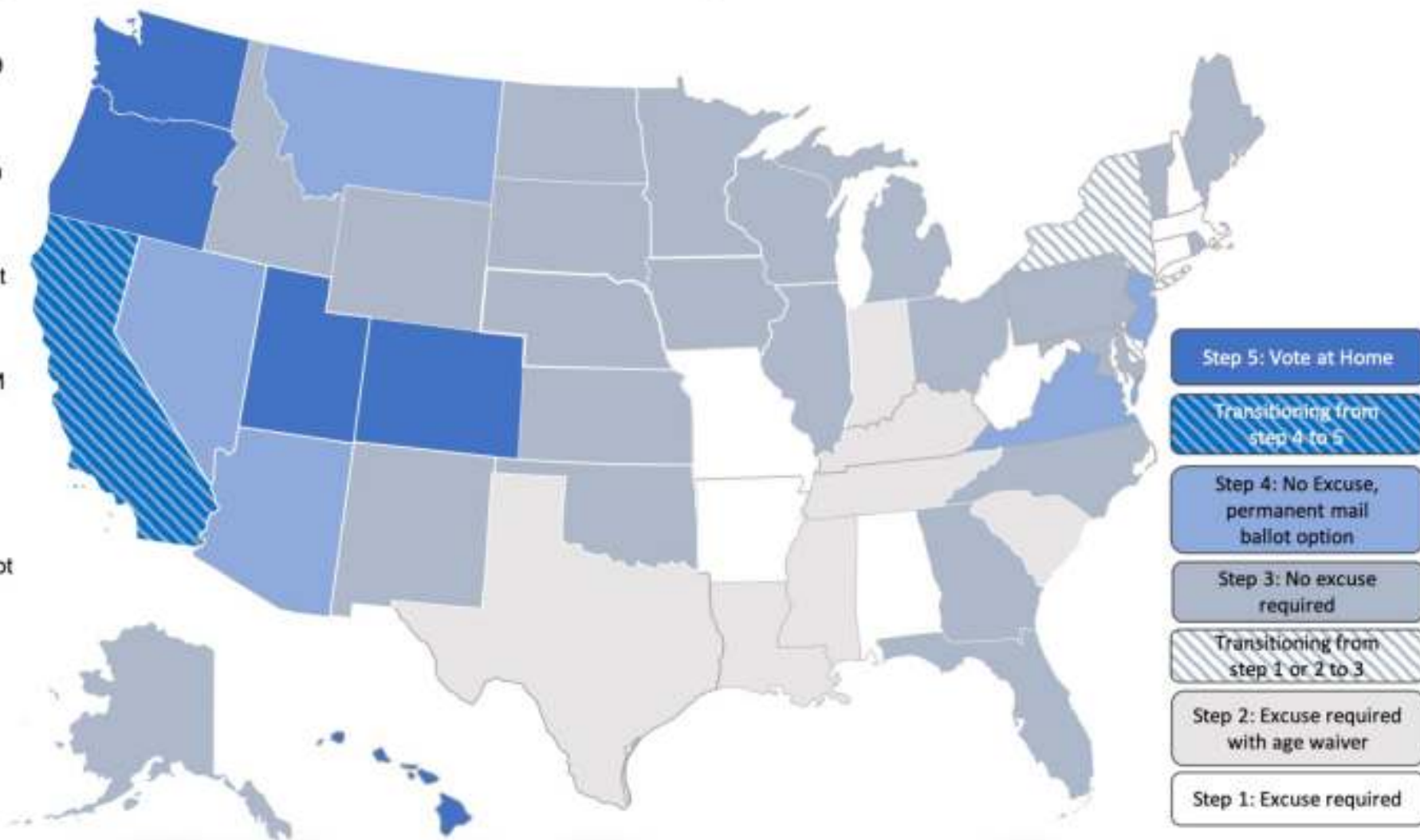
NE has 11 counties on 100% VAH for 2020

ND has 30 counties using 100% mailed-out ballot voting

OH sends absentee request forms to all 8M voters, for some elections

MI, MN & PA have a permanent absentee list, but periodically send request forms, not ballots, to voters

AL, KS, & WI offer permanent absentee status to voters with disabilities

DC offers Step 4 to its voters

Step 5: Vote at Home

Transitioning from step 4 to 5

Step 4: No Excuse, permanent mail ballot option

Step 3: No excuse required

Transitioning from step 1 or 2 to 3

Step 2: Excuse required with age waiver

Step 1: Excuse required

Communicating with voters

Answer voters' questions

- Dates and deadlines — be specific

- Signatures — present and matching

- Rules — who can return your ballot

- Tracking — how to follow your ballot through the process

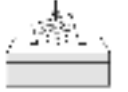
Ways to vote

By mail as an absentee voter
Every active registered voter was mailed a request for an absentee ballot. To get a ballot, return the request by mail, before **October 15.**
Return your ballot by mail, deliver it to the voter registration office, or drop it at your polling place on Election Day.

In person before Election Day
You may qualify to vote early at the voter registration office. Learn more at countyelections.org. Early voting period: **September 21 – November 3.**

At the polls on Election Day
On Election Day, **November 3, 7:00 a.m. – 7:00 p.m.**, you will vote curbside.

Look up your polling place
• Online at rxcountyelections.org
• By calling the State Department of Elections at 555-555-5555

Set expectations

- New voters don't know where to start

- People new to a process don't know what to expect

- Help people know what to do if there's a problem or they make a mistake

Be careful about how you talk about change

- Not everyone knows what the old way was

- People who do know the old way now are new voters

Communicating with voters

Tailor the level of detail to the delivery channel

- printed booklets to help voters plan
- your website to help voters take action
- radio/tv to help voters' awareness of elections or changes
- social media to keep the conversation going with voters before, during, and after elections

Treat communication as a conversation

- choose a tone and voice
- be polite, personable, and positive — just like you are in person
- use personal pronouns, like "you" and "we"
- use the same voice across all media.

Make sure that important information stands out

Use visual design to support meaning:
- have a consistent style
- choose one style of icons
- one idea per bullet

Resources

- National Vote at Home Institute (voteathome.org)

- National Conference on State Legislatures (ncsl.org)

- MIT Election Data + Science Lab (electionlab.mit.edu/)

- Brennan Center for Justice (brennan.org)

- Democracy Fund (democracyfund.org)

- Center for Civic Design (civicdesign.org)

- Center for Technology and Civic Life (techandciviclife.org/)

Questions?

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