FPCA and FWAB forms -- Periodic Review

Center for Civic Design, May 5, 2021

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the FPCA and FWAB forms that help servicemembers and overseas citizens participate in elections. The Center for Civic Design is a Maryland-based nonprofit organization that focuses on democracy as a design problem. We work with elections offices and advocates across the county to improve the forms, processes, information, and ballots that are critical parts of the voter experience.

Overall, the design of these forms does a lot to help voters

- **All forms use clear headers to organize information,** which helps voters quickly understand the sections and what they can do with each form.
- **Headings are written as questions.** We know people read election materials looking for answers. Good questions also show that there is an understanding of what voters need.
- **Bullets and numbers** break up the page and help voters find the information they need.
- **Illustrations** help explain the process of how to return a ballot.
- **Field labels are in the right place.** We know that field labels above or before the field ensure that voters fill out the form correctly.

Based on our research, we recommend a few overall changes that apply to both forms

- **Replace ALL CAPS with mixed-case,** as we know it presents legibility difficulties for many readers. This only occurs in a few locations on each form.
- **Consider another color other than red.** Our testing has indicated that red doesn't motivate voters to pay more attention. In the worst case, it can cause panic for voters with cognitive disabilities.

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- **Use sub-headings on all forms.** The FPCA form already does this well. We recommend doing the same on the FWAB form, as we know this helps voters understand each section.
- **Put the signature line in a box and separate the x.** We've found this helps voters know where to sign and makes processing the forms faster.

> **Voter's signature or mark**
>
> X

- **Replace "Section 6 requirements" with the text "if you live in Vermont or Puerto Rico."** This will allow voters who don't to skip this section and save time.

> • **Section 6 Requirements:** Puerto
> and father's first name. If registeri
> acknowledge the following by writi
> affirm that I have taken the Vermo
> state instructions can be found at

Based on our research, we recommend a few specific changes to each form

Federal Write-in Absentee Ballot

- **Include a note that this ballot is not for local races.** Help voters understand this ballot is for Federal races only.
- **Test the instructions for folding and placing the ballot in the envelope**. While the illustrations help, we still had questions. Watching someone who is unfamiliar with this form fill it out will help clarify if any changes need to be made.
- **Question:** is it necessary to tell voters not to write the SSN or DLN on the form if there is not space to write one anyway?
- **Move the information for voters who have already requested ballots** or can sign up for a permanent list to the first page instead.

> **Have you already registered and requested an absentee ballot?**
> Some states allow you to use this form to register and request ballots for future elections. Visit FVAP.gov for more details.
>
> d Services or Merchant Marine.

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Federal Post Card Application

- **Replace "but they vary on email and fax"** with "Some states accept this form by email and fax."

- **Reorder section 3.**
  - 3. Return your ballot. You can find the address for your election office at FVAP.gov
    - Remove the adhesive liner from….
    - Some states accept this form by email and fax. See your states….