Oregon Libraries and Ballot Drop Off Sites

Given recent concerns about the timeliness of mail delivery of ballots for the November 3, 2020 election, now is a good time to review the role of libraries as ballot drop off sites and in promoting non-mail options for returning ballots.

There is a perception that all public libraries in Oregon serve as ballot drop off sites. Even Oregon Senator Jeff Merkley was recently quoted saying "We're going to have to encourage people to drop off their ballots in the boxes at their library or at their county voting election headquarters." (KATU, August 19, 2020)

While many Oregon libraries do serve as drop sites, it is not necessarily standard practice across the state. Each county determines the location of ballot drop boxes and uses criteria provided by the Oregon Secretary of State's Election Office to locate them.

Here is the criteria used to determine ballot drop sites (Vote by Mail Manual, March 2020, p. 12)

- Each county must have at least two locations. These are usually located at county offices and/or the county courthouse.
- There must be one location for every 30,000 active registered users
- A dropsite must be located within 4 miles of a public university or community college if the campus is located within the local election district boundaries.
- County election officials are also encouraged to consider concentrations of population, geographic areas, security and available funding when determining a dropsite location other than the county elections office or the county courthouse.
- Location should also be secure, convenient for voters, accessible to those with physical disabilities, have adequate parking, and are perceived by the public to be secure.
- Assure a ballot drop box is secure and only accessible to authorized personnel. For a more detailed explanation of security measures, see the Vote by Mail Manual, p. 10.

FAQ

Question: How can I find out where the ballot drop sites are located in my area?

Answer: Ballot drop sites can be located using the State Election Office's [DropBox Locator](#), which will become available on October 14, 2020. Your [local county elections office](#) may also have information about the location of sites in their county.

Question: My library is not currently a ballot drop site. How do we become one?

Answer: Contact your [county elections office](#) to determine if your library might be eligible for designation. You should do this well before October 2, 2020, which is the deadline for counties to file their drop site plan with the State Elections Office.

Question: What if someone knows that I work at the library and asks me to drop off their ballot? Is that okay?

Answer: Yes, but please be aware that according to [ORS 254.470(6)(d)](#), a person asked to return a ballot must deposit it in a designated drop site within 2 days of receipt.

Question: What should we do if someone returns a ballot in the library's book drop instead of the official ballot box?

Answer: After ballots have been mailed, it is a good idea to place signage near your book drop indicating where ballots should be returned.

If you do find ballots in your book drop, your library should have a written procedure for handling them. The State Election Office suggests making sure more than one staff member knows that a ballot has been received, and have two staff members walk the ballots to the designated site together. This will provide sufficient documentation if questions arise.

Your local [county elections office](#) may have other suggestions for best practices for handling misdirected ballots. For example, Multnomah County Libraries worked with their county elections office to have book drops designated as ballot drop off boxes while the buildings were closed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Other Actions to Consider

- If your library is not a ballot drop site, consider making signage for your book drop and other building entrances that shows the location of the nearest site.

- Keep your community informed about the location of ballot drop sites through social media and other promotional activities.

- Get more tips for engaging with local officials and your community with the resources listed below.

Resources

Learn how the Jackson County Library district got a new ballot drop box located outside of the main library in Medford. Medford gets a new ballot box (Medford Mail Tribune, August 27, 2020)

Multnomah County Libraries recently had their book drops designated as ballot drops by their county elections office. No turning back in the state that pioneered voting by mail (AP News, August 25, 2020)

Washington County election officials are working with libraries to have ballot drop sites located in covered areas outside of buildings. Washington County officials urge to vote early, expect long lines (Regal Courier, September 9, 2020)

The Oregon Secretary of State Elections Office web site is a good place to find current information about the November 3 election in Oregon, but make sure to also check your county elections office!

ALA's Libraries and Voter Engagement website includes a great tip sheet, voter engagement guide, and other resources for libraries to promote National Voter Registration Day on September 22.

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