



*NOVEMBER 3, 2020  
ELECTION  
ADMINISTRATION PLAN*



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# *November 3, 2020 Presidential General Election*

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## INTRODUCTION

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Merced County was established April 19, 1855. Merced is located in the heart of California's Central Valley, the agricultural hub of the state. As of July 29, 2020, the voter registration was 108,493.

In 2002 state law was amended to allow voters to register as permanent vote-by-mail. Since then the number of vote-by-mail (VBM) has steadily grown and is currently 75.40% of the County's registered active voters.

In 2016, Senate Bill 450 created the Voter's Choice Act (VCA). The VCA model provides that every voter receives a VBM ballot and vote centers replace traditional polling locations. While we had anticipated moving to the VCA model following the November 2020 Presidential General Election, current concerns surrounding COVID-19 have necessitated that we plan to administer the November election as an All-Mail election.

Merced County has developed an Election Administration Plan for the November 3, 2020 Presidential General Election. This plan, implementing the directives found in Executive Orders N-64-20 and N-67-20, includes the mailing of a ballot to every active registered voter. Further, the plan includes a list and schedule of in-person voting locations, budget and strategy for outreach and media, health and safety measures to be taken, and strategies to engage voters with limited-English proficiency and those with disabilities.

Merced County ROV will deploy the EVS Voting System from Election Systems and Services for the November 3, 2020 Presidential General Election. The deployment will include Election Systems & Software (ES&S) ExpressVote accessible ballot marking devices, and ES&S Balotar Ballot Printing System. Merced County will also provide access to DemocracyLive Remote Accessible Vote-by-Mail System (RAVMB) for those who request an accessible VBM ballot.

Voting Assistance Centers will be equipped with laptops that will be linked to the County's Election Information Management System (EIMS) through a secure connection.

## VOTE BY MAIL

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All registered voters will be mailed a ballot approximately 29 days before the election. Voters will also receive a ballot return envelope with pre-paid postage.

Merced County will make available, Ballotrax, a ballot tracking program that will allow voters to receive updates on the delivery status of their ballot as it progresses through the mail and through processing by the County Elections office.

To increase the transparency for the entire VBM process, Merced County will be using Intelligent Mail Barcodes (IMb). It is a 65-bar USPS barcode that is used to sort and track mail. It can be used to track individual mail pieces through its journey in the mail system. The IMb is printed on the envelope and helps ensure mailings make it to mailboxes. IMb provides higher levels of customer service while enhancing security.

## VOTING LOCATIONS AND HOURS

At least one in-person voting location is required for every 10,000 registered voters beginning E-4 for a projected total of 11 Voting Assistance Centers (VAC) for the November 3, 2020 Election. The VAC's will operate 8 hours per day on the Saturday, Sunday and Monday before Election Day. VAC's will be open on Election Day from 7:00am to 8:00pm.

Considerations evaluated in choosing locations for Voting Assistance Centers and ballot drop boxes included availability of public transportation, population centers, low-income communities, language minority populations and accessibility. We used our knowledge of the areas to choose the best locations for our Voting Assistance Centers and drop boxes. While any one location may not meet all of the criteria, we have made good faith efforts to include as many considerations as possible. Some of the locations have been used as polling places before and are familiar to our voters.

Voting Assistance Centers will have more services available than traditional polling places had offered. A Merced County voter will be able to go to any Voting Assistance Center in the county and receive services. A voter will be able to get a replacement Vote By Mail ballot and ballot return envelope, drop off a voted Vote By Mail (VBM) ballot, receive language assistance, mark a ballot using an ADA accessible device, register to vote and vote, or vote a provisional ballot.

Voting Assistance Center staff will have real-time access to VoteCal, the statewide voter registration database and the County's Election Management System which will allow them to see and update the status of each voter. Secure communication links will be provided by Merced County Elections. Each Voting Assistance Center will have at least three ES&S ExpressVote accessible ballot marking machines as well as a number of voting booths available. There will be at least one Ballot on Demand printer at each location ensuring that we can provide the proper ballot to each voter.

Security will be ensured through set protocols including secure storage, tamper-evident seals, and strict chain of custody tracking.

Election staff will be trained to assist voters. The county will make a good faith effort to recruit election workers who will provide language assistance in Spanish, Punjabi, Hmong, Chinese and Mien. (Elec Code §14201). All VAC locations will be supplied with appropriate signage and facsimile ballots in Punjabi, Hmong, Chinese and Mien. All voting materials and ballots are in both English and Spanish as per Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act. Additionally, and as detailed below, each center will be supplied with a Multilingual Virtual Poll Worker (MVP).

A complete list of the proposed Voting Assistance Centers is included in Exhibit-A. (Voting Assistance Center locations subject to change.) The public comment period took place August 7, 2020 through August 17, 2020.

## DROP BOX LOCATIONS AND HOURS

At least 1 drop box is required for every 15,000 registered voters in the County for a projected total of 9 required Ballot Drop Boxes for the November 3, 2020 Election. All of these drop boxes will be available no less than 29 days before Election Day and open during regular business hours. These boxes will be secure, accessible, and be easy to identify. Both a drive-up and a walk-up Ballot Drop Box will be secured outside the Merced County Administration Building, 2222 M Street, Merced, CA and will be available 24 hours a day. Additionally, a walk-up Ballot Drop Box will be available at the Los Banos Community Center, 645 7<sup>th</sup> Street, Los Banos, CA.

Voters will be able to deposit their signed envelope into one of the many secure drop boxes available throughout the county. Two Merced County Ballot Retrievers will collect the ballots from the boxes on a mandated schedule.

A complete list of the proposed Drop Box locations is included in Exhibit-B. (Drop Box locations subject to change) The public comment period took place August 7, 2020 through August 17, 2020.

## PUBLIC OUTREACH STRATEGIES & MEDIA PLANS

Merced County is committed to providing extensive voter education and outreach. We will continue to participate in events that have been attended in the past as well as develop effective ways of communicating with our voters. At Merced Elections, we have worked to increase our presence and visibility in the community. We continue to establish and maintain partnerships and meet with committees and organizations as well as with our Language Accessibility Advisory and Voting Accessibility Advisory Committees (LAAC/VAAC). Our goal is to work with our community partners and provide them with resources and information that they can share with their larger networks.

Information regarding Vote by Mail and for obtaining an accessible ballot will be disseminated using the following outlets and methods:

- Public Service Announcements**
- Print Messages**
- Social Media and Internet Presence**
- Department Website ([mercedelections.org](http://mercedelections.org))**
- Merced County Website**
- Voting Accessibility Advisory Committee Meetings**
- Language Accessibility Advisory Committee Meetings**
- Community Partners**
- High Schools, Merced Community College and UC Merced**
- Materials in other languages**
- Language Assistance at Voting Assistance Centers**
- Community Outreach Events**
- Direct Contact with Voters**
- Newspapers**
- Radio**

Merced has a growing population of college students at Merced Community College and UC Merced. Efforts in voter education to these populations are on-going.

## BUDGET FOR OUTREACH AND MEDIA

Merced County's ultimate goal is to inform and educate voters and potential voters about registration requirements, Vote By Mail, and Voting Assistance Centers. To achieve this goal, extensive voter education and outreach will be required. The budget includes advertisements, media, participation in events, as well as printing and postage costs for mailings to registered voters. Items that have been considered and budgeted for include outreach, mailings, Voting Assistance Center support, overtime for extra help and full time employees, IT support, signage and promotional items.

## PLANS TO MAKE VOTING LOCATIONS SAFE/HEALTHY

When Voting Assistance Centers are not in operation, the site and equipment will be secured through established security protocols and secure storage facilities. All election equipment goes through extensive Logic & Accuracy Testing to ensure each piece of equipment is in proper working order. All equipment is transported by two-person election teams via an appropriate sized vehicle with lift gates. Election equipment is equipped with back up batteries that have a 4 hour life and replacement equipment will be available from County Rover Teams. Information Technology staff is on-site and on call to assist with any technological issues. All Voting Assistance Centers will have a complete list of VAC's so that voters can be referred to the nearest VAC or County Elections Office if needed.

Merced County is sensitive to the COVID-19 pandemic. With the safety of staff and voters as well as social distancing guidelines the following will be available to Voting Assistance Center staff:

**Hand sanitizers**  
**Disinfecting Wipes**  
**Disposable Gloves**  
**Face coverings**  
**Protective Shields**

Additional precautions for voters are being developed including plans to regularly disinfect high-touch surfaces, maintain social distancing at VAC facilities, one-time use devices for voters to use at the accessible voting equipment and possibly masks for voters who do not provide their own. All plans and guidelines have been, and are continuing to be, reviewed with Merced County Public Health officials.

The Sheriff, District Attorney, California Highway Patrol and Police Departments in the cities of Atwater, Dos Palos, Gustine, Livingston, Los Banos and Merced will be furnished with a list of all Voting Assistance Center and ballot drop box locations. It is requested that should an issue arise, the agency contact the Merced County Registrar of Voters or the Assistant Registrar of Voters immediately to provide information on the disruption. Voting Assistance Center staff will contact the Election office call center to inform them of any disturbance encountered. The call center will provide direction and dispatch a field team member to assist as needed.

In the event of a major emergency, the Merced County Registrar of Voters will be in contact with the Secretary of State's Office to make sure that media updates are provided to the public. If a natural disaster occurs that affects a Voting Assistance Center or causes it to need to close, the VAC staff will follow end of day closing procedures to secure all equipment in accordance with state law. If the location is no longer able to be used, notifications and signage will be posted to direct voters to an

alternate location. If a ballot drop-off location is affected, signage and notifications will be posted to direct voters to an alternate location.

## ENSURING ACCESS TO VBM AND VOTING LOCATIONS

Merced County is committed to providing and improving accessibility in the electoral process. All VAC's will be equipped with accessible marking devices (ExpressVote) to provide disabled voters the ability to vote privately and independently. Each Voting Assistance Center will have bilingual staff as well as a Multilingual Virtual Poll Worker (MVP). Merced County Registrar of Voters office was a recipient of a 2019 Clearinghouse "Clearie" Award for improving accessibility for Voters. We received the award for utilizing the MVP to assist voters who are deaf and hard of hearing by providing a direct iPad-based connection to American Sign Language Interpreters. The MVP may also be used to provide interpreters for over 200 languages.

Any voter may also opt to go online, through the Remote Accessible Vote-by-Mail (RAVMB) system, to request a downloadable ballot. The RAVBM system was created to securely deliver ballots to voters with disabilities, military and overseas voters. The RAVMB provides voters with the ability to request a VBM ballot be delivered electronically to the voter from an authorized website. The electronic ballot can be downloaded to the voter's computer, marked privately and independently, and then printed. The ballot can then be returned to the Elections Office to be counted. In accordance with legislation pertaining to the November 2020 election, RAVBM will be available to all voters.

Information regarding Vote Centers, the toll-free voter phonenumber and voting options (including how to sign up for RAVBM) will be distributed to the all voters, including those who may have accessibility challenges, through the following mediums:

Newspapers

Radio

Social Media

Departmental Website

Workshops/presentations – coordinated with members or representatives of disability community voters

Public Service Announcements broadly distributed through county agencies and other outlets

Merced Registrar of Voters will work with local agencies and groups that support and provide services for persons with disabilities to determine the best and most effective methods to deliver this information to the affected groups.

The Voting Accessibility Advisory Committee (VAAC) was established in 2017 and meets quarterly. It is an all-volunteer committee established to advise on issues related to voting accessibility for elections and elections materials. The VAAC advises and assists with implementation of federal and state laws relating to access to the electoral process by voters with disabilities so that all persons eligible to vote can participate in the voting process. It also provides recommendations identifying and prioritizing activities, programs, and policies to ensure every voter has equal access to the ballot. The committee members can also assist with outreach in their communities.

The Language Accessibility Advisory Committee (LAAC) was also established in 2017 and meets quarterly. The LAAC is an all-volunteer committee established to provide advice on issues related to

language accessibility for voters with limited-English proficiency, so that all persons eligible to vote can understand and participate in the voting process. Additionally, the committee can assist with outreach in the communities.

## TOLL-FREE VOTER ASSISTANCE

Information promoting the voter toll-free assistance hotline will be provided on all pre-election mailings sent out to voters, including but not limited to address confirmation mailings and voter information packets.

## FISCAL IMPACT

The total fiscal impact on Merced County for the necessary transition to an All-Mail election is unknown at this time. Counties that had already transitioned to the all-mail, Vote Center model found that there was an increase in one-time costs and an increase in election specific administration costs.

Merced County will require one-time costs to acquire necessary equipment for the Voting Assistance Centers including Ballot on Demand units, lap top computers, MVP's and signage. However, because Merced County Elections had previously augmented polling places by providing some VAC's, some of the one-time costs had already been expended.

It is anticipated that costs involved in the delivery and retrieval of election equipment (to/from VAC's) will be less than costs previously expended. It is not yet known what costs for facility rentals or secure connections will be incurred. Staffing for the VAC's, field (rover) teams, delivery teams, vote by mail processing staff and office staff, to augment full time staff, will be hired primarily through the County Poll Worker Program and the Extra Help program. It is hoped that we can continue to have County employees, through the County Employee Poll Worker program, augment our VAC staffing on Election Day.

Training costs for the various Extra Help employees will be incurred through hourly wages. Although some updates will be necessary, much of the training has already been developed based upon our previous preparation and use of VAC's.

Additional costs will be incurred to provide Personal Protective Equipment for employees and all Extra Help workers. Costs will also be incurred to provide for a ballot tracking program that is to be available to all voters.

Costs for equipment, and possibly for some other expenses, will be reimbursed to Merced County. The amount of COVID-19 state and federal funding allocated to Merced County Registrar of Voters is \$332,137 General Funding which includes increased costs to all aspects of voting by mail, equipment needs for processing increased voting requirements, permanent and temporary staffing, additional security, specialized training of staff and election workers, cleaning and disinfection, personal protective equipment, and polling locations and election facilities. In addition to general funding \$60,815 has been allocated for Outreach and Communication. There is no county match requirement and these funds are to be used for costs that are in addition to normal elections costs.

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# *EXHIBIT A*

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## VOTING ASSISTANCE CENTER (VAC) LOCATIONS AND HOURS

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### **Voting Assistance Centers**

The following locations will be open three days prior to the election and on Election Day for early voting:

Department of Child Support Services  
3368 N Hwy 59  
Merced, CA 95348

Los Banos Community Center  
645 7<sup>th</sup> Street  
Los Banos, CA 93635

Scripps Building  
1815 Scripps Drive  
Los Banos, CA 93635

Merced County Fairgrounds, Pavilion  
900 MLK Jr Way  
Merced, CA 95340

Atwater Community Center  
760 Bellevue Rd  
Atwater, CA 95301

Del Hale Hall  
931 Center Avenue  
Dos Palos, CA 93620

Livingston Veteran's Hall  
1605 7<sup>th</sup> Street  
Livingston, CA 95334

Al Goman Center  
745 Linden Avenue  
Gustine, CA 95322

Merced Community College, Theatre  
3600 M Street  
Merced, CA 95348



Snelling Community Center  
3351 E. Merced Falls Rd.  
Snelling, CA 95369

Planada Community Center  
9167 E Stanford Avenue  
Planada, CA 95365

Hilmar Grange  
8188 Lander Avenue  
Hilmar, CA 95324

Delhi Veteran's Hall  
9799 Stephens Street  
Delhi, CA 95315

Each location will be open for voting on the following dates and times: (Locations subject to change)

Saturday, October 31, 2020 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Sunday, November 1, 2020 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Monday, November 2, 2020 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Tuesday, November 3, 2020 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.

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# *EXHIBIT B*

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## DROP BOX LOCATIONS AND HOURS

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You may drop off your VBM to any of the following locations prior to Election Day during regular business hours:

City of Atwater	650 Bellevue Road	Atwater, CA 95301
City of Dos Palos	2174 Blossom Street	Dos Palos, CA 93620
City of Gustine	352 Fifth Street	Gustine, CA 95322
City of Livingston	1416 C Street	Livingston, CA 95334
City of Los Banos	520 J Street	Los Banos, CA 93635
City of Merced	678 West 18 <sup>th</sup> Street	Merced, CA 95340
Elections Office	2222 M Street	Merced, CA 9534

Exterior Drop boxes will be available at the following locations beginning 29 days before, and through, Election Day: (Locations subject to change)

Merced County Administration Building 2222 M Street, Merced, CA 95340 - walk up  
Merced County Administration Building 2222 M Street, Merced, CA 95340 - drive up