Helping Voters Register Under Wisconsin Law

*Municipalities in Wisconsin may apply additional/different voter registration drive rules. In addition, on June 30, 2016, Wisconsin transferred state election administration from its Governmental Accountability Board to a new Elections Commission. Many state websites are still under construction and link to former Government Accountability Board guidance. Organizations should check with local election officials regarding applicable procedures.

Important: Voter registration drives in Wisconsin have to follow certain state laws and rules, such as rules related to submission or review of the applicants’ proof of residence. It is important to review all relevant information regarding voter registration drives before beginning a voter registration program.

About this guide: The guide is broken up into five parts: 1) Eligibility, 2) Frequently Asked Eligibility/Residency Questions, 3) Filling out an Application, 4) Voter Registration Deadline, and 5) Voter Registration Drive Rules. Voter Registration Drive laws and rules are often more complicated than the summary table used for quick reference, so, if appropriate, a more detailed explanation is below the table. Sometimes the detailed explanation may not answer all the questions. Therefore, as a best practice, Project Vote recommends that voter registration drive organizers meet with their local election officials before beginning their programs. Election officials may be able to clarify rules and may also have their own interpretation or perspective that you will want to understand when starting your drive.


PART 1: ELIGIBILITY

In Wisconsin, an individual is eligible to register to vote if they:

- Are or will be at least 18 years of age on or before Election Day¹;
- Are a U.S. citizen; and
- Have resided in an election district or ward for 28 consecutive days immediately prior to any election where they offer to vote.

If an individual has moved within the state later than 28 days prior to an election, they may vote at their previous ward or election district if otherwise qualified.²

A person is disqualified from voting if they:

- Are adjudicated mentally incompetent to vote
• Have been convicted of treason, felony or bribery and their right to vote has not been legally restored. Their right to vote is restored when they complete the term of imprisonment (including parole and extended supervision) or probation for the crime that led to the disqualification.4
• Have made or become interested, directly or indirectly, in any bet or wager depending on the result of the election4

PART 2: FREQUENTLY ASKED ELIGIBILITY/RESIDENCY QUESTIONS:

Homeless Applicants: The Wisconsin Government Accountability Board provided that Homeless individuals may designate a fixed location as their residence for voting purposes if it is an identifiable location in the state of Wisconsin which could conceivably serve as a temporary residence. This location may be a homeless shelter, a park bench, or other location where a homeless individual may spend time or return to when absent. A homeless individual may claim a shelter for the homeless as his or her residence for voting purposes, notwithstanding any restriction in the shelter’s rules prohibiting its use as a residence address. “Residence” for voting purposes is distinct from other types of residence.

For the purposes of proof of residence for voting, a homeless individual may provide a letter from a shelter for the homeless or from a private or public social service organization providing services for homeless individuals. According to the GAB’s materials, the letter would identify the individual and describe the location designated as the person’s residence for voting purposes. The identification letter should be on letterhead and signed by a person affiliated with the social services organization.

As noted above, the GAB has been disbanded and the Elections Commission website currently contains former GAB content. Groups should confirm current procedures with election officials.5

Felony Convictions: The right to vote is restored when they complete the term of imprisonment (including parole and extended supervision) or probation for the crime that led to the disqualification. The department or, if the person is sentenced to a county jail or house of correction, the jailer, must inform the person in writing at the time their right to vote is restored.6

College Students: Student status is not a consideration in determining residence for the purpose of establishing voter eligibility.7 The former GAB provided a guide to student residency for voting located at http://www.gab.wi.gov/sites/default/files/memo/20/student_residency_guide_pdf_17893.pdf. As noted above, the GAB has been disbanded and the Elections Commission website currently contains former GAB content. Groups should confirm current procedures with election officials.8

PART 3: FILLING OUT AN APPLICATION

Wisconsin law requires applicants to provide the following information9:

• Name
• Residence location, including street, number and municipality
  o Under state regulation, individuals or organizations conducting voter registration drives that do not utilize special registration deputies to assist in the collection of voter registration application forms must collect a copy of the required forms of proof of residence for first-time voters and submit the copy to the appointing authority with the completed voter registration application form. Copies of the proof of residence may not be retained by those individuals or organizations.11 Note that proof of residence is now required for all voters, even though this
provision in the regulation has not been updated.\textsuperscript{13} Groups should confirm procedures with election officials.

- Location of previous residence immediately prior to current location
- Previous registration address, if any
- Name under which previous registration was made, if applicable, and if different\textsuperscript{12}
- Citizenship
  - If an applicant for voter registration fails to check either or both of the boxes indicating the elector is a U.S. citizen and indicating the elector is or will be at least 18 years old at the time of the next election, the municipal clerk may process the application if the elector has signed the certification on the application form indicating the voter meets or will meet the applicable requirements to vote in the state.\textsuperscript{13}
- Date of Birth/Age
- Number of current and valid WI driver’s license, or if none, State ID, or last 4 digits of the applicant’s Social Security number. If the elector has not been issued a valid and current driver’s license and does not have a Social Security number, the elector must indicated that the person has neither
- Applicant’s signature certifying the person is qualified to vote in Wisconsin and that the information provided is true and correct\textsuperscript{14}
  - The eligibility information includes:
    - That the applicant has resided within the ward or election district for at least 28 consecutive days with no present intent to move
    - That the applicant is not currently serving a sentence including incarceration, parole, probation, or extended supervision for a felony conviction, and is not disqualified on any other ground from voting
    - That the applicant has not voted in the election (if registering on Election Day)
  - Applicants must sign their own names unless the applicant is unable to sign his or her name due to physical disability. In such case, the applicant may authorize another elector to sign the form on his or her behalf. If the applicant so authorizes, the elector signing the form shall attest to a statement that the application is made upon request and by authorization of a named elector who is unable to sign the form due to physical disability.\textsuperscript{15}
- Proof of residence\textsuperscript{16}
  - Applicants (except military or overseas electors) must provide an identifying document that establishes proof of residence. The voter registration application instructs that the applicant “must provide a copy of [the] proof of residence...with [the] application.”
  - An identifying document used to establish proof of residence must contain a current and complete name, including both the given and family name, and, except for qualifying student identification (see below), a current and complete residential address, including a numbered street address, if any, and the name of a municipality.
  - Acceptable documents are limited to one of the following:
    - A current and valid operator’s license
    - A current and valid ID card issued under state statute
    - Any other official identification card or license issued by a Wisconsin governmental body or unit
    - An official identification card or license issued by an employer in the normal course of business that contains a photograph of the cardholder or license holder, but not including a business card.
    - A real property tax bill or receipt for the current year or the year preceding the date of the election.
    - A residential lease, unless the person registered by mail.
    - A university, college, or technical college identification card that contains a photograph of the cardholder together with a fee payment receipt issued to the cardholder by the
PART 4: VOTER REGISTRATION DEADLINE

- Registration applications submitted by drives must be delivered to the office no later than 5 p.m. on the third Wednesday before the election. Mail registrations must be delivered to the municipal clerk or postmarked no later than the 3rd Wednesday before the election. Registration after the close of the registration period may be completed at the office of the municipal clerk or the clerk’s agent until 5 p.m. or the close of business, whichever is later, on the Friday before an election. Qualified persons can vote if they are not yet registered if they complete a registration certificate (and provide the required proof of residence) at the polling place prior to the closing of the polls on Election Day.

PART 5: SUMMARY OF STATE VOTER REGISTRATION DRIVE RULES

<p>| Does the state require organizations conducting voter registration drives to register? | No. However to conduct effective voter registration an organization may want to use Special Registration Deputy (SRD), who are subject to substantial regulations. See question A below for details. |
| Are there restrictions on getting voter registration forms? | No, However organizations and individuals must use form EL-131. |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does the state have any restrictions on using pre-filled voter registration forms or other rules for mailing forms to potential applicants?</td>
<td>Wisconsin law does not address this issue.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the state require any training in order to conduct voter registration drives?</td>
<td>Only if the individual wants to be a SRD. See question B below for details.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the state have restrictions on who may help others register to vote?</td>
<td>There are restrictions on who can be a SRD. See question C below for details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the state have restrictions on paying drive workers, or additional rules related to payment?</td>
<td>Yes. See question D below for details.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are there restrictions on the voter registration drive offering something of value to a person in exchange for completing a voter registration application?</td>
<td>Yes. See question E below for details.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Must the registration drive worker sign their name to the completed voter registration application, and/or must the drive or canvasser place other information on applications?</td>
<td>There are requirements for SRDs. See question F below for details.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the state have a rule requiring a receipt or other tracking information to be provided to the applicant?</td>
<td>No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are voter registration groups prohibited from putting identifying marks on completed voter registration applications or subject to other rules regarding information added to registration applications?</td>
<td>Wisconsin law does not address this issue.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are there restrictions on copying completed voter registration applications prior to submitting them to the election official, or other restrictions on data entry or disclosure?</td>
<td>Yes, certain information cannot be copied. See question G below for details.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is there a time limit for voter registration groups to submit the voter registration applications they collect?</td>
<td>Yes, see question H below for details.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the consequences for failing to submit applications on time?</td>
<td>They vary between municipalities.²³</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If an application is incomplete, may the voter</td>
<td>Wisconsin law does not address this issue.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
State Voter Registration Drive Rules: Detailed Explanations

BEFORE THE DRIVE

A. Does the state require voter registration organizations to register or file other information detailing its voter registration activities?

No, however, individuals or organizations conducting voter registration drives that do not utilize special registration deputies to assist in the collection of voter registration application forms must collect a copy of the required forms of proof of residence and submit the copy to the appointing authority with the completed voter registration application form.25

In Wisconsin, municipalities administer special registration deputy programs. Special registration deputies must meet the qualifications of an eligible elector in the state of Wisconsin and apply to the municipal clerk or board of election commissioners of the municipality in which they seek to serve in order to be appointed a special registration deputy (see below, section C) and complete the required training (see below, Section B). Appointments expire at the end of a registration cycle.26

B. Does the state require any training in order to conduct voter registration drives?

Yes, if the person is a special registration deputy. Special registration deputies are required to attend a training session before being eligible to serve as a registration deputy.27 The requirements of the training are prescribed by regulation, and include knowledge of voter registration eligibility requirements and procedures, penalties, compensation laws, and treatment of confidential voter information, among other things. The regulations state that the board must provide training at times and locations designed to facilitate the participation of those who apply to be deputies.28

After attending a training session conducted by a county or municipal clerk, other municipal clerks may accept the training in lieu of providing their own session (The document relied on for the italic section is no longer available on the web).29

C. Does the state have restrictions on who may help others register to vote?

No, however, regulation requires that individuals or organizations conducting voter registration drives that do not utilize special registration deputies to assist in the collection of voter registration application forms must collect a copy of the required forms of proof of residence for first-time voters and submit the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>registration drive write the missing information on the application with the applicant’s consent?</th>
<th>There are affirmative requirements for SRDs to put certain information on applications, see question F below.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How will an applicant know whether the election official received the application?</td>
<td>By letter or post card mailed within 10 days of receipt of the application if qualified or 5 days if not. See question I below for details.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How may an applicant correct an incomplete application after it has been submitted to election officials?</td>
<td>The Clerk will notify the applicant. See question J below for details.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who investigates and enforces the state rules?</td>
<td>The Election Commission24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
copy to the appointing authority with the completed voter registration application form.\textsuperscript{30} Note that proof of residence is now required for all applications, and not just first-time voters, and this provision in the regulation has not been updated since this requirement changed. Drives who are not utilizing special registration deputies should contact election officials for information regarding the requirements for their canvassers under the new law.

Individuals who are qualified electors of the state of Wisconsin and wish to help others register to vote may apply to the municipal clerk or board of election commissioners to become a special registration deputy.\textsuperscript{31} Appointments expire at the end of a registration cycle.\textsuperscript{32} Under Wisconsin statute, an individual may be appointed by more than one municipal clerk and may serve more than one municipality,\textsuperscript{33} however, the person must apply separately to each municipality they wish to serve. However, there is a regulation which states that individuals may be denied or terminated if they do not meet the qualifications for election officials, which include residing in the ward for which they are appointed.\textsuperscript{34}

According to the state’s 2014 training materials, special registration deputies may only “register[] people that live within the municipality for which they have been appointed an SRD. If they do not live within this municipality, the SRD cannot register them.”\textsuperscript{35} In addition, the materials indicate that drives “may not accept an incomplete form, including acceptable proof of residence.”\textsuperscript{36}

Appointments may be revoked for cause at any time. Appointments may be terminated for other reasons, including if deputies fail to submit completed voter registration application forms in the time and manner prescribed by the appointing authority. Appointments may be denied if the applicant’s appointment has been revoked by a municipality for cause.\textsuperscript{37} State guidance indicates that special registration deputies who repeatedly fail to verify the validity of proof of residence documents or record the required proof of residence information on the state voter registration form (see question F, below) are subject to revocation of their appointments.\textsuperscript{38}

Individuals who apply to become special registration deputies must make an application to each clerk that provides the applicant’s name, address, and contact information, and certifies that the applicant is a qualified elector of the state, and must agree to follow the procedures established by the board and the municipal clerk.\textsuperscript{39} Forms individuals may use to apply to be a registration deputy may contain other affirmations the municipality requires. Each clerk must administer an oath and issue the special registration deputy a certificate listing a unique identifying number that the special registration deputy will write on any voter registration applications they collect for the municipality (see During the Drive, question F, below).\textsuperscript{40}

According to the state forms for application for appointment, special registration deputies must certify that the person:\textsuperscript{41}

- Is a qualified elector of the state meaning that the person:
  - Is a US citizen
  - Is age 18 or older
  - Has lived in Wisconsin for at least 28 consecutive days with no present intent to move
  - Is not otherwise disqualified to vote in Wisconsin.
- Is not in Wisconsin for temporary purposes only (except as permitted by statute)
- Has not been convicted of a felony for which they are not pardoned
- Has not been convicted of a misdemeanor involving a violation of public trust for which they are not pardoned

A special registration deputy’s appointment is suspended outside of open registration times, beginning at 5pm on the 20th day before an election through Election Day.\textsuperscript{42}
D. Does the state have restrictions on paying drive workers?
Yes. Individuals or organizations conducting voter registration drives may not pay any individual collecting voter registration application forms compensation based on the number of registration forms collected. Violators of this provision may be fined not more than $1,000, or imprisoned not more than 6 months or both.

E. Are there restrictions on the voter registration drive offering something of value to a person in exchange for completing a voter registration application?
Federal law states that whoever "pays or offers to pay or accepts payment either for registration to vote or for voting shall be fined not more than $10,000 or imprisoned not more than five years." At least one federal appellate court has interpreted "payment" as "intended to include forms of pecuniary value offered or given directly to an individual voter, and indicated the value should be based on "an assessment of the monetary worth of an item from the perspective of the voter receiving the item." That case held that food vouchers could be "payment." Another example is California’s Secretary of State’s interpretation of the federal law to mean that "[a]ny type of incentive is considered ‘payment,’ even things as seemingly innocent as cookies or admission to an entertainment event.

DURING THE DRIVE

F. Must the registration drive worker sign their name to the completed voter registration application, and/or must the drive or canvasser place other information on applications?
Yes, if the person is a special registration deputy. Each special registration deputy who obtains a registration form from an elector must do the following:

- Print their name on and sign the form, affirming that the deputy has accepted the form.
- List on all voter registration forms collected by the deputy the unique number that the person was issued by the appointing authority. Special registration deputies certified for multiple municipalities must ensure that the appropriate SRD number is listed on the application for the corresponding municipality.
- List on the state form the type of proof of residence, the entity issuing it, and a specific portion of the identifying number, restricted to the last four digits if the full number contains more than six digits, or the last two digits if the full number is six or fewer digits. Special registration deputies are not required to retain the proof of residence document. Applications submitted in person (including to a special registration deputy) will not be processed if the elector has not shown the proof of residence document and the clerk, special registration deputy, or election inspector has not recorded the proof of residence information on the form.

Further, if the applicant is unable to sign the form due to physical disability, the applicant may authorize another elector to sign the form on his or her behalf. If so, the elector signing the form must attest to a statement that the application is made upon request and by authorization of a named elector who is unable to sign the form due to physical disability. The state’s SRD 2014 training materials indicate, “you can assist a voter with filling out the registration form, but you cannot sign the form on their behalf.”
G. Are there restrictions on copying completed voter registration applications prior to submitting them to the registrar, or other restrictions on data entry or disclosure?
Yes. Individuals or organizations conducting voter registration drives may not retain the following voter registration information: the date of birth, driver’s license number, department of transportation identification number, or last four digits of the social security number of an individual completing a voter registration application form. Regulation requires that individuals or organizations conducting voter registration drives that do not utilize special registration deputies to assist in the collection of voter registration application forms must collect a copy of the required forms of proof of residence for first-time voters and submit the copy to the appointing authority with the completed voter registration application form. However, individuals or organizations conducting voter registration drives may not retain a copy of any form of proof of residence collected from an individual.54

H. Is there a time limit for voter registration groups to submit the voter registration applications they collect?
Time limits are set by municipality, and are not specifically addressed by state law.55 The appointment of special registration deputies is suspended outside of open registration times, beginning at 5pm on the 20th day before the election through Election Day.56

The state’s training for special registration deputies indicates that completed applications must be submitted on a weekly basis to the municipal clerk; however, individual municipalities may provide other guidance and/or a shorter period.

I. How will an applicant know whether the election official received the application?
If the application form is sufficient to accomplish registration and the clerk has no reliable information to indicate that the proposed elector is not qualified, the clerk must enter the elector’s name on the registration list and transmit a 1st class letter or postcard to the registrant, specifying the elector’s ward or aldermanic district, or both, if any, and polling place. The letter or postcard must be sent within 10 days of receipt of the form. If the letter or postcard is returned, or if the clerk is informed of a different address than the one specified by the elector, the clerk must change the status of the elector on the list from eligible to ineligible. The letter or postcard must be marked in accordance with postal regulations to ensure that it will be returned to the clerk if the elector does not reside at the address given on the letter or postcard. If the form is insufficient to accomplish registration or the clerk knows or has reliable information that the proposed elector is not qualified, the clerk must notify the proposed elector within five days, if possible, and request that the elector appear at the clerk’s office or other registration center to complete a proper registration or substantiate the information presented.57

J. How may an applicant correct an incomplete application after it has been submitted to election officials?
If information is missing from a voter registration application form, the municipal clerk shall contact the applicant by any means feasible, including in person, by email, facsimile transmission or telephone, to obtain the missing information.58

When a voter registration form is not accompanied by the proof of residence document or does not include the required proof of residence document information, the clerk must contact the elector in writing and require the elector to provide a copy of the proof of residence document to the clerk. If provided in-person, the elector may present the proof of residence document to the clerk who can record the information without retaining the document. The state’s guidance indicates that clerks should advise the elector that, after the open registration period, the proof of residence document can no longer be provided by mail and must be submitted in person.59
To appear on the poll list, applicants who do not submit proof of residence by the close of open registration will be required to submit the information in person and re-sign and date their applications. Otherwise, applicants will be required to re-register on Election Day at the polling place and provide proof of residence at that time.60

WEB PAGE OF STATUTE

http://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/statutes/statutes/6
http://docs-preview.legis.wisconsin.gov/code/admin_code/el/3

For more information, contact:

Project Vote
1420 K Street NW, Suite 700
Washington, D.C. 20005
(888) 546-4173
www.projectvote.org

Last Revised 08/2016

DISCLAIMER

The information contained in this document is for general guidance only. It should not be used as a substitute for consultation with professional legal or other competent advisers. Project Vote is not responsible for any errors or omissions, or for the results obtained from the use of this information.

1 Wis. Stat. Ann. § 6.05
2 Wis. Stat. Ann. § 6.02
4 Wis. Stat. Ann. § 6.03
10 Wis. Admin. Code § EL 3.20
12 Wis. Admin. Code § EL 3.02
13 Wis. Admin Code § EL 3.03(1)
Wis. Stat. Ann. § 6.34


Wis. Gov't Accountability Bd., SRD Training for Municipalities (Final) 2014, Slide 11, on file with Project Vote. It is unknown whether the Elections Commission has adopted or updated similar materials for 2016.


Wis. Admin. Code § EL 3.13


Wis. Admin. Code § EL 3.10


Wis. Admin. Code § EL 3.12

Wis. Admin. Code § EL 3.11


Wis. Stat. Ann. § 12.60(1)(b)

52 U.S.C. § 10307(c)

49 Wis. Admin. Code § EL 3.11(5)
53 Wis. Gov’t Accountability Bd., SRD Common Sense and Common Courtesy, on file with Project Vote. It is unknown whether the Elections Commission has adopted or updated similar materials for 2016.
54 Wis. Admin. Code § EL 3.20
55 See Wis. Admin. Code § EL 3.13(2)(d)
57 Wis. Stat. Ann. § 6.32
58 Wis. Admin. Code § EL 3.03(2)