

What is Provisional Voting?

What is a provisional ballot?

A provisional ballot is a “failsafe” or safety net option for voters when there is some confusion or question about their ability to vote. **Federal law requires that anyone who presents to vote be given the opportunity to vote**, and provisional ballots guarantee that every voter is given that chance.

Do provisional ballots count?

Yes! Many provisional ballots do count, and no official election results are final until every provisional ballot is reviewed. In 2016, just under half of all provisional ballots counted entirely or partially (44%). But for voters who cast provisional ballots because they were at the wrong precinct (called “out of precinct” voting), or because they moved within county and did not update their registration, **more than 90% of ballots counted in whole or in part.**

Note: An out-of-precinct voter’s ballot will count in all state- and countywide races, and in many other races at the top of the ticket. But, because an out-of-precinct voter is voting a ballot different from the one at their own precinct, there may be some local races where their vote doesn’t count.

How do voters cast provisional ballots? What happens to them?

1. If a voter gets to the front of the line to vote and the poll worker cannot find their registration, tells them they are at the wrong precinct, or finds some other problem with their voting record, the voter can still vote using a provisional ballot.
2. In the case of out-of-precinct voting, a voter should be offered the choice between voting a provisional ballot at their current polling place, or going to their own precinct where they will be able to vote a regular ballot. In other cases, a provisional ballot is the voter’s only option for casting a ballot that day.
3. The poll worker will direct the voter to the help desk, where a help desk worker will give them a form, called a “provisional ballot application.” After filling out the form, the voter will be given the ballot and vote it.
4. Then, the form and the ballot will be placed in a sealed envelope and sent to the Board of Elections for review after the election. The voter will be given a phone number and PIN they can use to find out if their ballot was counted.
5. Following the election, nonpartisan Board of Elections staff will conduct research to determine whether the voter was properly registered and if the ballot can be counted, in whole or in part.
6. Even for voters whose votes do not ultimately count, casting a provisional ballot will get them registered for the next election.

Still have questions? Call Democracy North Carolina at 888-OUR-VOTE or visit www.ncvoter.org to learn more about voting in North Carolina.