

Voter-Facing Ballot Tracking: How and Where It's Happening Across the US

October 9, 2020

With greater reliance on absentee ballots in light of COVID-19, states and voters are increasingly turning to ballot tracking tools—especially more advanced commercial options— to provide greater confidence in mail ballots. This memo provides an overview of how ballot tracking works, and provides a comprehensive table cataloging the different ballot tracking alternatives available to voters.

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I. How Ballot Tracking Works

With concerns over USPS delays and mail ballot reliability, many states and counties are turning to ballot tracking technologies to give voters greater confidence and control over their mail ballots, and to give local elections officials greater visibility into the mailstream and more communication touchpoints with voters.

Most states have long-run online trackers that allow voters some insight into the status of their absentee ballot. Most of these trackers—typically hosted on Secretaries of States' websites—are fairly rudimentary, and reveal only that a given ballot was sent out or received by local officials (though some don't even do that and just indicate that a ballot has been received by the clerk). Some more advanced state trackers allow voters to view whether their vote was accepted for tabulation, or to discover the

reason for a ballot's rejection. Regardless, voters gain access to this information by entering some basic voter information (e.g. name, address, date of birth, last four of SSN, etc.) into the state-run portal. While certainly useful, these resources provide something more akin to a status update than a full-blown tracker, as they generally do not follow a ballot through the mail. Instead, they provide visibility—albeit quite limited for the more basic tools—into a jurisdiction's contact with voters' ballots. Importantly, these state resources generally do not proactively alert voters about their ballots' whereabouts or potential tabulation problems; voters must visit the relevant state or county web page each time they wish to check on their ballot.

Two main providers have stepped in to offer more sophisticated, automated tracking services: [BallotTrax](#) (a for-profit company that was spun out of a ballot-tracking product called [BallotTRACE](#), which now only serves Denver voters and was originally developed by elections officials in partnership with software firm i3logix), and [Ballot Scout](#) (a project of the nonprofit Democracy Works). Though both providers have been around for a number of years, adoption has picked up considerably this year. At present, BallotTrax and Ballot Scout which are both multiple statewide tracking partnerships (e.g. BallotTrax with California, Colorado, Nevada, Georgia, and North Carolina; Ballot Scout with Michigan and Virginia) also have contracts with individual counties—and even cities and townships—across the country. While the administrator-facing interface often looks similar for election officials regardless of where they're located, the actual services that tracking companies provide are shaped by local needs. Officials, according to those needs, can customize the language and timing of ballot tracking alerts, and—depending on the product—target certain voters (based on zip code, etc.) for reminders or other notifications.

Although BallotTrax and Ballot Scout offer some different functionalities, their tracking services provide a relatively similar experience for voters. Voters in jurisdictions that have contracted with BallotTrax or Ballot Scout can sign up for text, email, or audio voice alerts (customized by local elections officials) in order to easily learn where their ballot is—just as they would an [Amazon package](#). This real-time tracking is largely powered by [Intelligent Mail Barcodes \(IMbs\)](#) on ballot envelopes. IMbs are made up of 65 long and short bars which encode, among other things, information about the parcel's point of origin and destination. By pairing this information with data from the voter file (which is maintained and provided to the tracking companies by local elections officials), tracking services such as BallotTrax and Ballot Scout can provide ballot location and ballot status updates for individual voters. In particular, they give voters a heads-up at various stages of the ballot's inbound and outbound journey. Though it varies slightly between products, voters can generally see (and be notified, if they so choose) when their ballot is printed, when it is mailed out to them, where and when it is scanned, when it reaches them, when it is returned, when it arrives at the elections office, and when

it is counted. Voters can also expect a notification if officials were *unable* to process the ballot as received. Though a ballot's location is tracked using USPS data from the envelope's barcode, it is data pulled from the voter file (and originally logged by election officials) that allows tracking services to provide updates to voters about ballot processing.

For voters anxious about their ballot's whereabouts, these alerts can offer confidence and comfort that their ballot is on track to reach election officials in time for tabulation. In states that allow voters to cure errors on the ballot envelope (such as missing signatures, or mismatched signatures), receiving notifications about a ballot's rejection is particularly helpful: Voters can immediately take steps to fix the error and ensure their vote counts. While tracking services may reveal ballot rejection from ballot envelope errors, no service can access or report on how a voter actually voted.

Importantly, advanced ballot tracking doesn't just benefit voters. By using the customizable dashboard interfaces offered by the commercial tracking companies, election officials can communicate pertinent information directly with voters (in the case of BallotTrax, in up to 14 languages) and identify [systemic delays or missing parcels](#). Analyzing the IMb data also helps election officials determine ballot timeliness: In many jurisdictions, a ballot must be received by a certain time (e.g. 8pm on Election Day) in order to be tabulated. Where postmarks are missing or receipt is otherwise contested, IMbs can give local officials more detailed information about the date and time of the ballot's receipt, enabling them to accept or reject the ballot for tabulation. It's important to note that jurisdictions can use and benefit from IMb labeling without also contracting with a ballot tracking company; many states—e.g. [California](#), [Iowa](#), [Virginia](#)—have adopted rules requiring that election mail carry IMb tracking labels. Layering on commercial ballot tracking in addition to IMb labeling is what enables voters to access the data generated by IMb tracking (and supplemented by information by the voter file) and is what empowers election officials to more systematically keep tabs on the election mainstream.

II. Sample Commercial Tracking Tools

Below are examples of BallotTrax and Ballot Scout's voter-facing tracking interfaces. Using these tools, voters can sign up to receive notifications about their ballot's location and processing status.

Sample BallotTrax Sign-up Website

Georgia

georgia.ballottrax.net/voter/

ballottrax Georgia

SECURE THE VOTE

Securely Track Your Absentee Ballot

Track the status of your mail-in ballot, from mailed to accepted.

GET STARTED

Note: This system does not change or update your voter registration.

You must have a valid absentee request on file with your county board of elections to see your absentee ballot status in Georgia BallotTrax. If you have not requested your absentee ballot, please visit our [online request portal](#).

FIRST NAME
e.g. 'John'

First name required exactly as it appears on your voter registration.

LAST NAME
e.g. 'Adams'

DATE OF BIRTH
e.g. 'MM-DD-YYYY' '07-20-1969'

ZIP CODE
e.g. '80238'

☐ I'm not a robot

REGISTER / LOG IN

To contact the Georgia Secretary of State Elections Division, please visit <https://sos.ga.gov/cgi-bin/email/elections.asp>

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Sample BallotTrax Tracking Tool Interface (voter-facing)



2020 GENERAL

Ballot Outbound

10/05/2020

Your ballot has been mailed! Your ballot is at the Post Office and is making its way to you. Look for your ballot in your mailbox soon!

Details ^

Ballot Printed

10/04/2020



Your ballot has been printed! Your county elections office has printed your ballot and is preparing to send it to you.

Ballot Outbound

10/05/2020



Your ballot has been mailed! Your ballot is at the Post Office and is making its way to you. Look for your ballot in your mailbox soon!

Ballot Inbound



Your ballot is on the way to your county elections office! The Postal Service has indicated to us that they have your ballot, and it is being returned to your county elections office.

Ballot Received



Your ballot has been received! Your ballot has been received by the county election office.


Ballot Accepted



Your ballot has been accepted! Your ballot was received by your county elections office and will be counted.


Sample BallotTrax User Notification Module

Contact Preferences

 OPT-IN EMAIL ☐


EMAIL
e.g. test@sample.com

You will NOT receive ballot updates via Email

 OPT-IN TEXT ☒


TEXT NUMBER
41*****70

You will receive ballot updates via Text Message
Please note that standard messaging fees will apply

 OPT-IN VOICE ☐

PHONE NUMBER
e.g. (303) 333-3333

You will NOT receive ballot updates via Voice Call


 LIMIT NOTIFICATION HOURS ☒

8:00 AM

 TO

8:00 PM

You will only be contacted between the hours of 08:00 AM & 08:00 PM

 PREFERRED LANGUAGE

English

RESET FORM

UPDATE

Sample Ballot Scout Sign-up Interface



The Commonwealth of Virginia

Please enter your name and ballot mailing address
in the form below to track your ballot for the 2020
November General Election

Name

Ballot Mailing Address

Questions? To contact The Commonwealth of Virginia,
call 1-800-552-9745.

Submit 

BALLOT SCOUT
powered by **Democracy Works**









Sample Ballot Scout Tracking Tool Interface (voter-facing)

Your Ballot Has Been Located

Your ballot is traveling through the mail on its way to the election office. It was last scanned in SANDSTON, VA.

Last updated: September 24, 8:13 AM EDT

	1. Mailed to voter	✓
	2. In transit to voter	✓
	3. Delivered	✓
	4. Mailed back to office	✓
	5. In transit to office	✓
	6. Received	...

Please Be Advised: Ballot tracking relies on USPS properly scanning the ballot envelope at each stage of the delivery process. If USPS fails to scan the ballot envelope at any point, gaps in ballot tracking may occur.

Questions? To contact The Commonwealth of Virginia, call 1-800-552-9745.

BALLOT SCOUT
powered by Democracy Works



III. State-by-State Adoption of Ballot Tracking Tools

One challenge voters may face is figuring out what tracking services are available to them. The below table addresses this information gap by providing an overview of the different tracking services—both state-run and commercial—available to voters across the county. NOTE: *The information provided in this table was compiled by scouring state election resources and contacting BallotTrax and Ballot Scout spokespeople. Though it reflects the information available at the time of publication, tracking services are expanding rapidly at the local and state level. HEP will update the table after publication to reflect new developments.*

State-by-State Ballot Tracking Tools for Voters				
State	Tracking service available statewide?	If so, who provides tracking?	Is tracking statutorily required? (Source: NCSL)	Additional Notes
Alabama	Yes	Alabama's Secretary of State (tool here)	No	
Alaska	Yes	Alaska's Division of Elections (tool here)	No	
Arizona	Yes	Arizona's Secretary of State (tool here). Note that Maricopa and Pima use independent systems. BallotTrax provides additional tracking services in Apache County and Navajo County .	No	
Arkansas	Yes	Arkansas's Secretary of State (tool here)	No	
California	Yes	BallotTrax provides statewide tracking services to all California voters, where its service is branded " Where's My Ballot? "	Yes [Cal. Elect. Code § 3019.7]	BallotTrax previously offered tracking in select California jurisdictions, and launched a statewide partnership this year.

State-by-State Ballot Tracking Tools for Voters				
State	Tracking service available statewide?	If so, who provides tracking?	Is tracking statutorily required? (Source: NCSL)	Additional Notes
Colorado	Yes	BallotTrax provides state-wide tracking services for Colorado voters—except for those in Denver County, who are serviced by BallotTRACE .	Yes [C.R.S.A. § 1-7.5-207]	BallotTrax previously offered tracking in select Colorado jurisdictions, and launched a state-wide partnership this year.
Connecticut	Yes	Connecticut's Department of State (tool here)	No	
Delaware	Yes	Delaware's Department of Elections (tool here)	Yes [15 Del. Code § 5526]	
District of Columbia	Yes	D.C.'s Board of Elections (tool here)	No	BallotTrax says that it provides services in D.C., but we were unable to verify. DC voters should contact their local election officials for more information.
Florida	Yes	Florida's Division of Elections (tool here) BallotTrax provides additional tracking in the following counties: Gulf , Holmes , Marion , Martin , Levy , Osceola , and Seminole . Ballot Scout provides services to Hillsborough County and Pasco County voters.	Yes [F.S.A. § 101.62]	BallotTrax says that it also offers tracking services in Baker, Franklin, and St. Johns counties, but we were unable to verify. Voters in these counties should contact their local election officials for more information.

State-by-State Ballot Tracking Tools for Voters				
State	Tracking service available statewide?	If so, who provides tracking?	Is tracking statutorily required? (Source: NCSL)	Additional Notes
Georgia	Yes	Georgia's Secretary of State (tool here) BallotTrax also provides statewide tracking services to Georgia voters.	No	BallotTrax launched a statewide partnership with Georgia this year.
Hawaii	Yes	Hawaii's Office of Elections (tool here)	No	
Idaho	Yes	Idaho's Secretary of State (tool here)	No	
Illinois	For military and overseas voters only	The Illinois State Board of Elections offers ballot tracking to military and overseas voters pursuant to the MOVE Act, but does not provide a statewide tracking service open to all Illinois voters. However, some jurisdictions have adopted local tracking tools. BallotTrax offers tracking services in the following counties: DuPage , Kane , McHenry , Ogle , and Peoria . Ballot Scout offers tracking services in Macoupin County . Some county clerk's offices provide local tracking tools, as in Cook County and Wills County . Illinois voters should contact their local elections officials to learn more about available services.	No	BallotTrax says it also offers tracking services in Galesburg County and Champaign County but we were unable to verify. Voters in those counties should contact their local election officials for more information.

State-by-State Ballot Tracking Tools for Voters				
State	Tracking service available statewide?	If so, who provides tracking?	Is tracking statutorily required? (Source: NCSL)	Additional Notes
Indiana	Yes	Indiana's Secretary of State (Voter Portal tool here)	No	
Iowa	Yes	Iowa's Secretary of State (tool here)	Yes [I.C.A. § 53.17A]	
Kansas	Yes	Kansas's Secretary of State (tool here) Ballot Scout provides additional tracking services in Douglas County .	No	
Kentucky	Yes	Kentucky's Secretary of State (tool here)	No	
Louisiana	Yes	Louisiana's Secretary of State (link here)	No	
Maine	Yes	Maine's Secretary of State (tool here)	No	Until September 2020, Maine only provided tracking services to overseas and military voters. This tracking system is a recently rolled-out feature for domestic and/or civilian voters. The new system will "show when a ballot has been sent out to a voter, how it was sent and when. Once the ballot is returned, the voter will be able to see when the ballot was received by their local election officials, usually a town or city clerk."

State-by-State Ballot Tracking Tools for Voters				
State	Tracking service available statewide?	If so, who provides tracking?	Is tracking statutorily required? (Source: NCSL)	Additional Notes
Maryland	Yes	Maryland's Board of Elections (tool here)	Yes [COMAR 33.11.06.03]	
Massachusetts	Yes	Massachusetts's Secretary of State (tool here)	No	
Michigan	Yes	<p>Michigan's Secretary of State (tool here)</p> <p>BallotTrax provides additional tracking in the City of Detroit, and Ballot Scout provides services to Delta Township, and select other Michigan counties. MI voters in the following jurisdictions, if their email or phone number is on file with the clerk, can also get ballot location updates via secure link from TrackMIBallot: Cannon Township, Cascade Township, City of Grandville, City of Grand Ledge, City of Grand Rapids, Grand Rapids Township, City of Huntington Woods, City of Lansing, City of East Lansing, Oakfield Township, City of Rockford, City of Troy, and City of Walker.</p> <p>Other MI voters should contact their local election officials for more information.</p>	Yes [M.C.L.A. 168.764c]	Ballot Scout launched a statewide partnership with Michigan this year through which counties can opt in to Ballot Scout services.

State-by-State Ballot Tracking Tools for Voters				
State	Tracking service available statewide?	If so, who provides tracking?	Is tracking statutorily required? (Source: NCSL)	Additional Notes
Minnesota	Yes	Minnesota's Secretary of State (tool here)	Yes [Minnesota Rules, part 8210.0500]	
Mississippi	No	<p>Mississippi's Secretary of State does not provide online ballot tracking services for any voters.</p> <p>However, voters may contact their local elections officials for ballot tracking updates (note that the website provides designated email addresses for military and overseas voters with inquiries about their ballot).</p>	No	
Missouri	For military and overseas voters only	<p>The Missouri Secretary of State provides ballot tracking for military and overseas voters pursuant to the MOVE Act, but does not provide a statewide tracking service open to all Missouri voters.</p> <p>However, at least one jurisdiction has adopted a tracking tool: St. Louis City recently launched a local tracking service. All other voters should contact their local election authority to confirm receipt of their ballot.</p>	Required for military and overseas voters [V.A.M.S. 115.924]	St. Charles County recently engaged a vendor to provide tracking services, but it's unclear whether voters will have tracking services in time for the 2020 general election.

State-by-State Ballot Tracking Tools for Voters				
State	Tracking service available statewide?	If so, who provides tracking?	Is tracking statutorily required? (Source: NCSL)	Additional Notes
Montana	Yes	Montana's Secretary of State (tool here)	No	
Nebraska	Yes	Nebraska's Secretary of State (tool here)	No	
Nevada	Yes	BallotTrax provides statewide tracking services to all Nevada voters.	No	BallotTrax launched a statewide partnership in Nevada this year.
New Hampshire	Yes	New Hampshire's Secretary of State (tool here)	Yes [N.H. Rev. Stat. § 657:26]	
New Jersey	Yes	New Jersey's Division of Elections (tool here)	No	BallotTrax says that it provides services in New Jersey, but we were unable to verify. NJ voters should contact their local election officials for more information.
New Mexico	Yes	New Mexico's Secretary of State (tool here)	Yes [N.M.S.A. § 1-6-9]	
New York	For military and overseas voters only	<p>The New York State Board of Elections provides ballot tracking for military and overseas voters, but not for all New Yorkers.</p> <p>However, voters in New York City can use a municipal ballot tracking tool. All other voters should contact their local election officials for more information.</p>	No	

State-by-State Ballot Tracking Tools for Voters				
State	Tracking service available statewide?	If so, who provides tracking?	Is tracking statutorily required? (Source: NCSL)	Additional Notes
North Carolina	Yes	North Carolina's State Board of Elections (tool here) BallotTrax also provides state-wide tracking services for all North Carolina voters.	Required for military and overseas voters [N.C.G.S.A. § 163A-1348]	BallotTrax launched a state-wide partnership in North Carolina this year.
North Dakota	Yes	North Dakota's Secretary of State (tool here)	Yes [NDCC, 16.1-07-28]	
Ohio	Yes	Ohio's Secretary of State (tool here) BallotTrax provides additional tracking in the following counties: Clinton , Cuyahoga , and Franklin .	No	
Oklahoma	Yes	Oklahoma's State Election Board (tool here)	Yes [26 Okl. St. Ann. § 14-149]	
Oregon	Yes	Oregon's Secretary of State (tool here) BallotTrax provides additional tracking services to the following Oregon counties: Benton , Clackamas , Douglas , Harney , Hood , Jackson , Lane , Lincoln , Linn , Marion , Multnomah , and Yamhill .	No	

State-by-State Ballot Tracking Tools for Voters				
State	Tracking service available statewide?	If so, who provides tracking?	Is tracking statutorily required? (Source: NCSL)	Additional Notes
Pennsylvania	Yes	Pennsylvania's Department of State (tool here)		BallotTrax says they operate in Pennsylvania, but we were unable to verify. PA voters should contact their local election officials for more information.
Rhode Island	Yes	Rhode Island's Secretary of State (tool here)	No	
South Carolina	Yes	South Carolina's Election Commission (tool here) Ballot Scout provides additional tracking services in the following counties: Berkeley , Charleston , and Dorchester .	Yes [S.C. Code §7-15-720]	
South Dakota	Yes	South Dakota's Secretary of State (tool here)	No	
Tennessee	Yes	Tennessee's Secretary of State (tool here) BallotTrax provides additional tracking services to Wilson County voters.	No	

State-by-State Ballot Tracking Tools for Voters

State	Tracking service available statewide?	If so, who provides tracking?	Is tracking statutorily required? (Source: NCSL)	Additional Notes
Texas	For military and overseas voters only	<p>The Texas Secretary of State provides ballot tracking for military and overseas voters pursuant to the MOVE Act, but does not provide a state-wide tracking service open to all Texas voters.</p> <p>However, some jurisdictions have adopted local tracking tools. For example, the Harris County Clerk recently launched a ballot tracking service. Voters in other counties should contact their county clerk for more information.</p>		
Utah	Yes	Utah's Lieutenant Governor (tool here)	Yes [U.C.A. § 20A-3-304.1]	
Vermont	Yes	Vermont's Secretary of State (tool here)	No	
Virginia	Yes	<p>Virginia's Department of Elections (tool here)</p> <p>Ballot Scout provides additional statewide tracking services to all Virginia voters.</p>	Yes [VA Code Ann. § 24.2-711.1]	Ballot Scout launched a statewide partnership with Virginia in 2017.

State-by-State Ballot Tracking Tools for Voters				
State	Tracking service available statewide?	If so, who provides tracking?	Is tracking statutorily required? (Source: NCSL)	Additional Notes
Washington	Yes	Washington's Secretary of State (MyVote tool here) BallotTrax provides additional tracking services to Thurston County .	No	
West Virginia	Yes	West Virginia's Secretary of State (tool here)	No	
Wisconsin	Yes	Wisconsin's Election Commission (tool here)	No	
Wyoming	For military and overseas voters only	Wyoming's Secretary of State provides tracking for military and overseas voters only (resource here) All other voters must contact their county clerk for tracking information.	Required for military and overseas voters [WY Rules and Regulations 002.0005.3 § 12]	

IV. Conclusion

This election season, voters and election officials have more options than ever for tracking absentee ballots, either with state-run portals or state-contracted tools such as BallotTrax and Ballot Scout. These tools may provide greater comfort and confidence for voters wary of USPS delays and may even enable some voters to correct errors on their ballot envelope that would otherwise prevent ballot processing and tabulation. Because tracking options vary by state, voters should consult the chart above to learn about local tools and reach out to their local election officials with questions.