

Frequently Asked Questions

Voting and Minority Languages

Sacramento County, March 2012

Why is Sacramento County now required to print voting materials in other languages?

In September 2002 and October 2011, the Director of the Bureau of the Census determined that Sacramento County was subject to the minority language requirements of Section 203 of the Federal Voting Rights Act, based on responses to census surveys. As a result of these determinations, Sacramento now provides voting material in Spanish and Chinese.

In past years, this information was collected every ten years in the Federal census. This information is now being collected every five years in the American Community Survey.

This determination is a combination of both the number of people in a single minority language group having limited or no English skills and the number of these individuals who are of voting age. The County is required to provide voting materials in that language when that number reaches at least 10,000 or 5% of that language group.

Voting Rights Act

What is the Voting Rights Act?

The Voting Rights Act is a federal law enacted in 1965 to combat discrimination against African Americans and break down barriers to vote (e.g., poll tax, literacy test). In 1975 the Act was amended to include language minority groups. In 2006, Congress renewed the Voting Rights Act for 25 years.

What is a language minority group?

A language minority group is defined as American Indian, Asian American, Alaskan Natives, and people of Spanish heritage.

Why is the Voting Rights Act important?

Voting is a fundamental right in a democratic society. The Voting Rights Act is intended to ensure that voting age citizens have an equal opportunity to participate and vote in the electoral process, regardless of their language abilities.

How does the Voting Rights Act help me if I am part of a language minority group?

All voting materials at each polling place will be available in English, Spanish and Chinese. Precinct officers at designated polling sites will be available to assist voters in these three languages.

Section 208 of the Voting Rights Act and California Law allow voters to bring an individual of their choice (other than a representative of their employer or union) to the polls to assist them in voting. If voters want help, but did not bring anyone with them, a Precinct Officer can assist the voters with marking their ballot.

What does voting material mean?

According to the Department of Justice, *“all election information that is available in English must also be available in the minority language so that all citizens will have an effective opportunity to register, learn the details of the elections, and cast a free and effective ballot.”*

This means that registration forms, voting notices, voting instructions, ballots, sample ballots, polling place notices (including posters), voter information pamphlets, and any other written materials related to the voting process must be translated accurately into the covered languages, and distributed and available to people who need the information.

Does the Voting Rights Act apply to Sacramento?

Yes. Sacramento has at least 10,000 or five percent voting-age citizens who are members of a single language minority group who have limited or no English skills. Determinations for language groups are made every five years according to the American Community Survey. Sacramento has language requirements for both Chinese and Spanish.

Is Sacramento the only county required to have translated voting materials in Chinese and Spanish?

No. Several other counties in California (Alameda, Los Angeles, Orange, San Diego, San Francisco, San Mateo and Santa Clara) and other states that have at least 10,000 or 5% of the total voting age citizens who have limited or no English skills and who are members of a minority language group are required by law to have translated voting materials.

What is Sacramento County doing to assist limited and non-English speaking voters at the polls?

Sacramento County Voter Registration and Elections has been providing voting materials and language assistance in Spanish since 2002 and is currently working with community organizations and ethnic media on all aspects of implementing Chinese language voting material and assistance – education, outreach, translation, and bilingual precinct officers.

Bilingual precinct officers will have language tags in English, Chinese, or Spanish to let limited and non-English speaking voters know who to approach for assistance on Election Day.

Is there a hotline with a translator in Spanish or Chinese (Cantonese / Mandarin) that I can call if I have questions about the voting material and assistance before the election?

Yes, Sacramento County Voter Registration and Elections has dedicated phone lines for voter assistance in these languages.

For assistance in Chinese (Cantonese / Mandarin) call 876-8402.

For assistance in Spanish, call 876-6688.

Voting Materials and Language Assistance in Chinese (Cantonese / Mandarin) and Spanish

How do I get voting materials in Chinese or Spanish?

Before the election, fill out a Voter Registration form, check the box next to your preferred language. If you are already registered and now want your materials in Chinese or Spanish, contact our office and request the change to your voter registration file.

You can call us at (916) 875-6451, email us at voterinfo@saccounty.net, or send us a written request at Sacramento County Voter Registration and Elections, 7000 65th Street, Sacramento, CA 95823.

If you need an interpreter, say the language you speak (Cantonese, Mandarin, or Spanish) so staff can get an interpreter in person or on the phone. This may take a minute. Please be patient and do not leave.

On election day at the polling place, look for precinct officers with language name tags. If there are no bilingual precinct officers in Cantonese, Mandarin or Spanish, ask for assistance. Say the language you speak. You will be given the hotline phone number to the Voter Registration and Elections office where translation help will be available.

Why are voting materials available in Chinese and Spanish but not other Asian languages?

Chinese and Spanish are the only languages in Sacramento County that meet the requirements set by the Voting Rights Act at this time. The American Community Survey will conduct its next survey in five years at which time Sacramento may have other languages that meet this requirement.

How do I get help if I do not speak English?

Call (916) 875-6451 now. Sacramento County Voter Registration and Elections has the ability to get a translator on the phone if you request one. Don't hang up. Be patient and wait a minute for the interpreter to come on the line. For assistance in Chinese (Cantonese / Mandarin), call 876-8402 and for assistance in Spanish, call 876-6688.

Be a Part of the Process Now

Sacramento County Voter Registration and Elections values the rights of every voter. To help us provide the best service, please do the following:

Register in time for the election.

We want you to be able to vote, so be sure you are registered correctly.

Select the right language when you register.

This helps us schedule the right bilingual precinct officers to help at the right polling places.

Sign up to be a precinct officer.

This is an easy way to help other voters, especially if you speak one of the required languages.

Contact us when you have questions about elections or the voting process.

We want to make sure you have the information you need to vote on election day.

Let us know when you see problems.

Help us improve our process by telling us where you see problems on election day or in our voting materials.

You can call us at (916) 875-6451, email us at voterinfo@saccounty.net, or write to us at Sacramento County Voter Registration and Elections, 7000 65th Street, Sacramento, CA 95823.

References Accessed March 2012:

<http://www.justice.gov/crt/voting> Department of Justice - A Federal agency that oversees the Voting Rights Act

http://www.justice.gov/crt/about/vot/sec_203/2011_notice.pdf Department of Justice - An alternate website for Voting Rights Act information specific to minority language requirements.

www.census.gov Census - A Federal agency with information on the census.

www.2010.census.gov Census - An alternate website for census information specific to the 2010 census.

www.eac.gov Election Assistance Commission - A Federal agency with resources for voters and voter guides in various languages.

www.sos.ca.gov Secretary of State - A state agency with information for California voters.

www.election.saccounty.net Sacramento County's Voter Registration and Elections webpage.

Strengthening Democratic Participation, Asian Law Caucus and Asian Law Alliance, April 2011.

A report on voting access by limited English speaking Asian Americans in various California Counties, available on line at www.asianlawalliance.org