

Wisconsin Tribal Leaders Guide

How to Request an Alternate Voting Location on Your Tribal Lands



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A publication by the Native American Rights Fund

Native Americans living on reservations in Wisconsin **face obstacles** to registering and casting their ballots that other Wisconsin do not. These include:

Distance. Native people living on tribal lands in Wisconsin may face long journeys to their nearest elections office or polling location.

Unreliable Mail Service. Postal service to and from reservations can be slow and unreliable, making vote-by-mail an inadequate alternative to voting in person or depositing one's ballot in a drop box. This problem is compounded where voters lack standard residential addresses.

Lack of Opportunities to Register. In Wisconsin, voters may register by mail, in person, online, or via same-day registration during early voting or on Election Day. Despite these options, Native voters may be less able to use these methods due to lack of Internet access, long trips to the nearest registration office, and other barriers.

Language Barriers. Many Native people in towns and villages across Wisconsin have limited English proficiency and are able to vote only when voting materials and assistance in their primary, indigenous language is available.

As a tribal leader, there are important steps you can take to improve your community's access to registration and voting opportunities. You can:

- (1) **Work with your locality (city, town, or village) government to establish additional polling places and early voting locations on your reservation.**
When polling places and early voting locations are in trusted, familiar facilities on tribal lands, more Native people in the surrounding communities register and turn out to vote. Simply put, everyone is more likely to participate in elections when they can do so close to home and in a place where they feel comfortable. **Look to page 3 of this Guide for more information.**
- (2) **Provide tribal members with alternative proof of address documents to enable them to register. Look to page 5 of this guide.**
- (3) **Organize and advertise a voter registration drive in your community.**
Go to https://www.fairelectionscenter.org/_files/ugd/85cfb4_bcff9490673d4e8cb797721857ccadf4.pdf for more information on how to conduct a successful voter registration drive under Wisconsin law.
- (4) **Encourage tribal members to serve as poll workers on Election Day.**
Anyone who is eligible to vote in the county (not necessarily the specific town, city, or village) where the polling place is located and speaks and writes fluent English can become a poll worker. Those interested in becoming poll workers should their local clerk or apply at <https://myvote.wi.gov/en-us/Become-PollWorker>
- (5) **Help ensure voters in your community know how, when, and where to vote.**
NARF and NCAI's Wisconsin Native Voters' Guide is available at vote.narf.org.

If you would like more information or need assistance with any voting- or election-related matter, please contact us at vote@narf.org or neswood@narf.org. Any assistance NARF provides will be

ESTABLISHING IN-PERSON VOTING OPPORTUNITIES ON YOUR TRIBAL LANDS

There are two ways Wisconsin voters may cast an in-person ballot. They may either:

- Visit their polling place on Election Day OR
- Visit their early voting or in-person absentee voting location.

Both Election Day polling places and in-person absentee voting locations offer same-day registration, meaning that voters can register or update their registration and cast a ballot in the same visit.

(Any Wisconsin voter is also permitted to vote by mail, without providing an excuse or explanation. But many Native voters prefer to vote in person, whether due to unreliable mail delivery, inconsistent access to their mail, a preference for voting on Election Day, or some other reason.)

Below, you will find some general advice on how to request in-person voter services in your community. However, additional support is available. **If you have questions not addressed here or would like help with or advice in making such a request, please contact vote@narf.org or delisle@narf.org.**

WHO DECIDES WHAT VOTER SERVICES ARE AVAILABLE IN MY COMMUNITY?

The governing body of each locality (city, town, or village) decides **where** Election Day polling places and early voting sites will be located, and **when** early voting will be offered. Under Wisconsin law, counties may decide to offer early voting as early as two weeks before Election Day, but many choose to provide far less. Your locality's Clerk bears primary responsibility for election administration and will also take part in this decision.

HOW DO I KNOW WHETHER NATIVE VOTERS WITHIN MY RESERVATION HAVE THE ACCESS TO VOTER SERVICES THEY NEED?

Often, the best way to know what's needed is to talk with community members and organizers who have served as poll workers or worked on get-out-the-vote efforts in previous years.

You will also want to find out what voter services your locality has provided in the past and/or what it plans to offer in the upcoming election. This information may be posted on your locality's website. However, localities often change their election plans from one year to the next and may not post updated locations and schedules until after the deadline to finalize that year's election plans. Your best source of information about what services your city, town, or village intends to offer in the upcoming election is your local Clerk.

WHAT CAN I DO IF MY LOCALITY HAS NOT OFFERED, OR DOES NOT PLAN TO OFFER, ADEQUATE IN-PERSON VOTER SERVICES FOR VOTERS IN MY COMMUNITY?

Wisconsin does not have a specific procedure for tribes to follow to request voting locations and early voting services on tribal lands. Instead, **you will need to work with the governing body of your city, town, or village to establish the services your community needs.**

The most effective strategy for opening this discussion may depend on your location, and your tribe's relationship to local government officials. You may wish to raise the issue directly with your locality's Clerk or a member of its board or council. You might make a more formal request to your locality's board or council during a public meeting. Or you may choose to submit a demand letter outlining your request and the locality's obligation to provide equal access to all its residents.

HOW SHOULD I PREPARE TO REQUEST ADDITIONAL VOTER SERVICES FROM MY LOCALITY?

(1) **Pick an on-reservation building for your polling place and/or early voting location.**

The facility you choose **MUST** be located in the same municipality (city, town, village) as voters it intends to serve.

It should also be...

- A public building, rather than one that is privately owned. Good options include your tribal headquarters, a community center, a senior center, or a school.
- Large enough to accommodate 2-3 voting booths.
- Accessible to individuals with disabilities.

(2) **Identify appropriate points of contact at your Tribe with whom your local clerk should communicate in arranging for your chosen facility to serve as a voting location.**

Ideally, this would include...

- Someone within your Tribal government or on your Tribal council and
- Someone with access to and control over the building you have selected as a proposed alternate voting location (such as a facilities manager).

(3) **Determine what hours and days you'd like early voting to be available at your proposed location.**

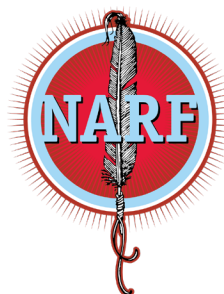
Although you should not hesitate to ask for as many days of early voting services as you think your tribe could use, your city, town, or village may not be able to provide services at your alternate voting site every day of the early voting period. In proposing a schedule for an early voting location, you might consider questions like:

- Are voters in your community more likely to utilize weekend or weekday voting?
- Do voters in your community generally vote on or close to Election Day, or would a broader range of dates be more helpful?

(4) **Bring your request to your local government as soon as possible.**

The deadline for localities to set polling places is 30 days before each election.

- For the August 9 primaries, polling places and early voting schedules will be finalized no later than **Friday, July 8**.
- For the November 8 general election, polling places and early voting schedules will be finalized no later than **Friday, October 7**.



PROVIDING ALTERNATIVE PROOF-OF-ADDRESS DOCUMENTS

Under Wisconsin law, each person must provide some official document that lists their name and place of residence in order to register to vote. Many Wisconsin voters use their Wisconsin driver's license, or a recent utility bill or paycheck in their name and sent to their residential address.

But this proof-of-address requirement can be very difficult for some Native voters to meet. Those without a valid in-state license, and who either have their mail delivered to a PO box rather than their homes or live in large households where bills are in another adult's name, will not have access to the more common proof-of-address documents. For these individuals, Wisconsin does offer one more alternative: any "other document issued by a unit of government" bearing the person's name and current address. **This means that a letter printed on Tribal letterhead that lists the person's name and address will satisfy Wisconsin's proof-of-address requirements and enable the tribal member to register to vote.**

Because voters may not be aware of the proof-of-address requirement until they have already arrived at the polls for same-day registration – at which point it will be too late to assist – you might consider how best to educate tribal members about voting requirements and advertise this option in advance of the election. **As with all other topics covered in this Guide, NARF is available to assist with planning, implementation, and any other questions you may have.**