

Alternatives to Signature Verification

ESRA 2025



Will Cavecche

Research & Policy Coordinator
King County Elections

Steve Lund

Technical Product Manager
U.S. Digital Response

**Signatures don't work for
everyone**



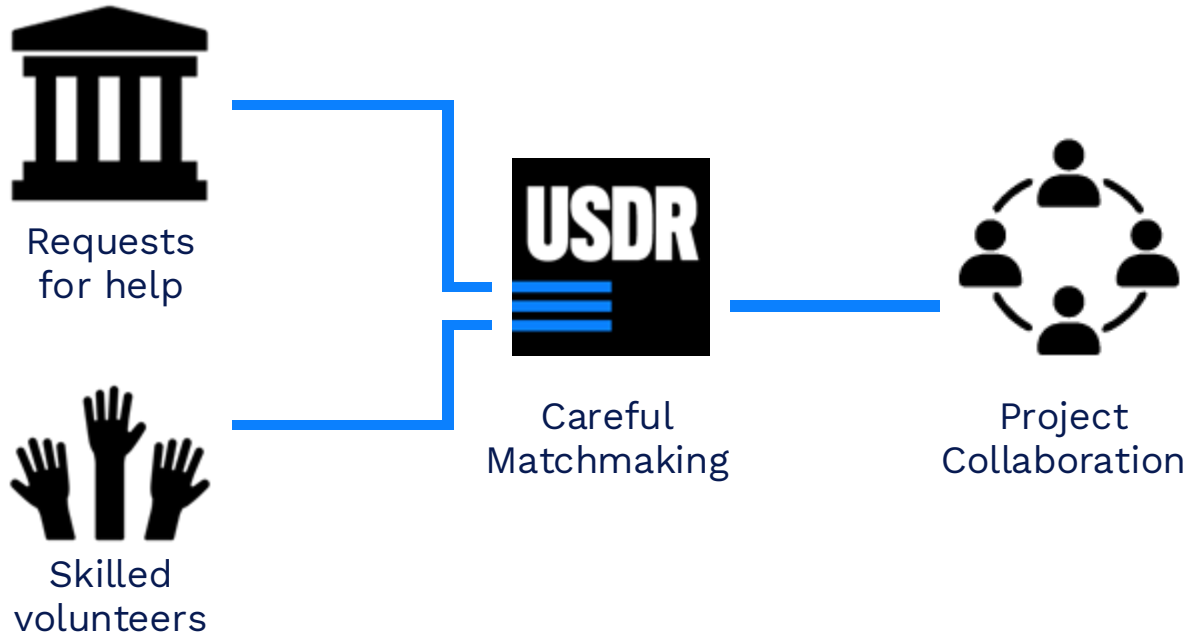
U.S. Digital Response

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Our experienced volunteer technologists **work alongside public servants** to deliver digital services and build capacity, quickly.

U.S. Digital Response



USDR created a voter research plan and guide

- Recruited 28 active registered voters in King County with a focus on
 - Voters with varying abilities, disabled voters (4)
 - Young voters with inconsistent or no set signature (5)
 - Older voters (3)
 - Immigrant communities for whom signatures are not common (3) and/or voters for whom English is a second language (4)
 - Voters who had previously had their ballots challenged (5)
- King County handled recruitment, conducted the research sessions (in-person and over Zoom), and took notes to analyze along with USDR

Interviews and paper prototyping



The research assessed perceived difficulty and voter's confidence in four potential alternatives

- Unique ballot PIN
- State ID number
- Selfie with ID and ballot
- Knowledge based authentication (e.g., pick out a previous address)

Read the declaration: I do solemnly swear or affirm under penalty of perjury that I am: a citizen of the United States; a resident of the state of Washington and meet the requirements for voting mandated by state law; at least 18 years old on election day; voting only once in this election; not under the authority of the Department of Corrections for a Washington felony conviction; not disqualified from voting due to a court order; and not voting in any other jurisdiction in the United States for this election.


It is illegal to forge a signature or cast another person's ballot. Attempting to vote when not qualified, attempting to vote more than once, or falsely signing this declaration is a felony punishable by a maximum imprisonment of five years, a maximum fine of \$10,000, or both.

Sign and date: You are signing that you have read the declaration.
Power of attorney cannot be used to sign a ballot for someone else.

	
signature of voter in ink	date

email or phone number (optional)

OR



NEW for 2022!
Instead of signing this envelope,
you may certify your ballot online.

Scan the QR code or visit
elections.kingcounty.gov
and enter Ballot ID
8909487368980264

Research-based recommendations

Based on a combination of voter feedback, statutory requirements, and technical feasibility, USDR recommended one of two alternatives:

- **State ID (e.g. driver's license number)**
- **One-time password sent to previously registered phone number**

Validated but not recommended:

- Knowledge based authentication (viable and usable, but bigger risk of databases that drive the questions going out of date)

Research-based recommendations (continued)

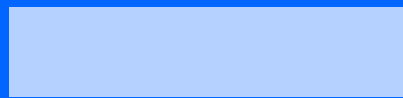


USDR did **not** recommend the following options:

- Biometric authentication (selfie/facial recognition, voice recognition)
 - Voter perception as insecure and concerns around discriminatory uses
 - More risk and difficulty to implement securely
- Voter-chosen PIN
 - Lack of empirical success from IRS eFile PIN system
 - More difficult to securely send to a voter
- Voter-chosen security questions ("make and model of your first car?")
 - More likely to fail when voters don't remember their exact answers
 - Security concerns with implementation and availability of answers leaked from other sites



USDR reduced friction with

Just enough voter research to help King County accelerate advocacy, then move quickly and confidently into implementation



Alternative Verification Pilot

- In 2024 the Washington State Legislature passed SB 6269, which established the Alternative Verification Options Pilot Project
- Allowed counties to test alternative to signature verification during spring Special Elections through 2028
- Any method as long as it met certain baseline criteria and was approved by Secretary of State

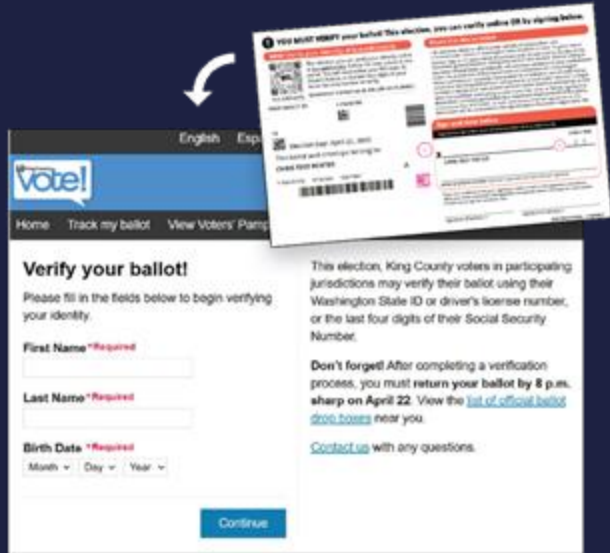


Optional

Accessible

Didn't disrupt processing

Alternative Verification Pilot



The image shows a screenshot of a web form titled "Verify your ballot!" on the "Vote!" website. The form asks for the voter's First Name, Last Name, and Birth Date (Month, Day, Year). A "Continue" button is at the bottom. To the right of the form, there is a QR code on a ballot return envelope. An arrow points from the QR code to the form. The envelope text includes: "YOUR BALLOT SAYS! Verify your ballot! This election, you can verify online OR by signing below." and "Don't forget! After completing a verification process, you must return your ballot by 8 p.m. sharp on April 22. View the [list of official ballot drop boxes](#) near you. [Contact us](#) with any questions."

- Developed online tool with DemocracyLive
- Voters could access tool by scanning a QR code on their ballot return envelope
- Direct API connection between tool and VoteWA, which allowed tool to verify accuracy of information securely and in real time

Alternative Verification Pilot

- 10,936 voters “pre-verified” their ballots during 2025 April Election
- 9,752 of those ballots were returned on time and counted
 - 2.67% of ballots for the election
 - Almost 60% of UOCAVA voters returning electronically “pre-verified”
- Final signature challenge rate of 0.45%
 - Second lowest in more than a decade
- 91.52% of surveyed voters said they’d do this process again in a future election