Step-By-Step Instructions: Create a Google Map of Voting Locations

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Why Create a Google Map?

Creating Google Maps of your vote centers, early voting sites, and/or ballot drop-off locations is a best practice for election officials. It is an excellent standard in order to provide an interactive, at-a-glance and convenient web-based tool that voters can use to plan their trip to cast a ballot.

By creating and sharing a Google Map of your locations, instead of just a static map (.pdf) or a long list of locations, your voters can engage with the map, zoom in and out, click on a location that interests them and obtain dates of service, hours and an address. Moreover, voters can also generate walking, driving, public transportation, and biking directions directly in the map.

Once you have created your first map, you will find that it’s easy to create a new map for various needs and elections. Your maps will be hosted by Google, but managed and edited by you.

You can use Google Maps in a variety of ways.

- **Embed the map on your Elections website** on your ‘Voting Locations’ or ‘Where to Vote’ web page. Then, actively promote the link for this web page, and watch your visits rise!

- **Proactively share the link on social media**, perhaps with a screen capture of the map as your image/graphic.

- **Send the link to candidates, issue committees and community partners**, so that they can help to educate voters. Or better yet, share the ‘embed code’ with any other community partners who are willing to embed the map on their websites for voter information. (Note: They will not be able to edit the map; they will simply have the necessary code for the Google map to appear on their website.)

- **Target a neighborhood or jurisdiction**. Zoom in on your Google Map and take a screenshot of a neighborhood. Post the image on social media with the message, such as “Hey [Neighborhood] voters, did you know that there are 5 drop boxes in your neighborhood? They are open 10/26-11/3. Find them all at [link].”

- **Call out the ease of access on popular public transportation routes**. Take screenshots to show proximity to bus stops or train/light rail trains.

Following are some examples of jurisdictions around the nation that are using Google Maps to enhance their online elections information:
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Vote In Person in Baltimore City

Vote in Person at convenient vote centers all over Baltimore City. If you are registered to vote in Baltimore City, you can go to any of the following locations. You can also do Same Day Registration at any vote center.

- Purple Squares are Early Voting Centers open Oct 26-Nov 2 from 7am-8pm
- Yellow Checks are Election Day Vote Centers open Nov 3 from 7am-8pm

https://www.baltimorevotes.org/vote-centers
Step 1: Prepare a List of Voting Locations

Create a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet of your voting locations, if you do not already have one. Save the file as a Microsoft Excel workbook (.xls or .xlsx).

The spreadsheet should include separate columns with headers for the following fields, and should include complete data for each voting location across the rows:

- Location Name
- Street Address
- City
- State
- Zip Code
- Dates of Operation
- Hours of Operation

Please ensure accurate spelling and consistent formatting. The content that you enter into the spreadsheet will transfer to your map. *Tip: Limit punctuation for best map readability.*

If you don’t have time for this effort, recruit a community volunteer or pollworker to assist you.

Here is a sample spreadsheet for reference:
Next you will need to save your spreadsheet as a *comma delimited file*. Click File (or the Windows icon), then **Save As**, then click **Other Formats**.

The **Save As** pop-up box will appear. Click next to **Save as type:** to open the list of file types. Select **CSV (comma delimited)**. Click **Save**.
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If the following pop-up box appears, click **OK**.

![Microsoft Office Excel warning]

If the following pop-up box appears, click **Yes**.

![Microsoft Office Excel warning]

Click **Yes** in the following pop-up box.

![Microsoft Office Excel warning]

**Close** the Excel file.
Step 2: Create a Google Account

Create a Google account at https://accounts.google.com, if you do not already have one. This is essential to ensure that you can save maps under your account and make future edits, if necessary. You can opt to create a new Gmail address, or choose to use your professional email address.

Step 3: Create a New Google Map

While you are still logged in to your Google account, open your web browser to Google My Maps at https://mymaps.google.com. Click Get Started. Click Create a New Map.
Step 4: Give Your Map a Title and Description

On the left-hand side, click on the words *Untitled map*.

In the pop-up box titled *Edit map title and description*, type a concise title (3-4 words are ideal) and description for your map. Click *Save*. 

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**Example: Sample County Vote Centers**

- Description: Vote Centers in Sample County for the 2020 General Election

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Image: Google Maps interface with the pop-up box for editing the map title and description.
Step 5: Import Your List of Voting Locations

In this step, you will ‘bring in’ your list of voting locations from the spreadsheet that you created.

On the left-hand side of your map, beneath *Untitled Layer*, click on **Import**.

Click **Select a file from your device**.
In the ‘Open’ pop-up box, browse to where you have saved your spreadsheet of voting locations. **Select the .CSV file** (Microsoft Excel Comma Separated Values File). **Click Open**.
Step 6: Identify the Fields in Your List of Locations

A pop-up box will appear titled *Choose columns to position your placemarks*. This is asking you to identify which columns in your spreadsheet have ‘address’ data that must be mapped.

Check the boxes titled

- Street Address
- City
- State
- Zip Code

Click **Continue**.

Another pop-up box will appear titled *Choose a column to title your markers*. This is asking you to identify which column in your spreadsheet has the name for each voting location.

Check the box titled:

- Location Name

Click **Finish**. Wait a few moments while your new map is created!
Step 7 (Optional): Change the Icons on the Map

The map will automatically populate all locations with a blue upside-down teardrop. You may want to modify these icons with different colors or shapes to differentiate between phases or types of voting locations.

For example, here’s how to differentiate voting locations that open on different dates:

On the left-hand side of the map, click on the words **Uniform style**. Click the drop-down menu to ‘Group Places by’. Then, select **Dates**.

The map will automatically update the teardrops with a unique color for each phase of voting.
To change the shape and color of icons:

If you don’t like the color scheme, on the left-hand side of the map, hover over the colored teardrops on the legend. You’ll see a paint can symbol. Click on the paint can to choose a new color or icon shape from a wide menu. (You’ll also see an option to upload a custom icon, which you could create with design software.)
Step 8 (Optional): Rename the Map Layer

You may want to change the name of the layer, which will automatically populate with the name of your .CSV file. On the left-hand side, click on the vertical ellipses ⋮ next to the name of your .csv file. Then click Rename this layer.

In the pop-up box type a new name, such as Voting Locations by Date. Click Save.
Step 9: Preview the Map

Before sharing the map publicly, you may want to preview to see how it will appear to the public. On the left-hand side, click Preview. It will open in a new tab in your web browser in preview-mode only.
Step 10: Share the Map Publicly

On the left-hand side, click **Share**.

In the pop-up box, click on the box titled **Get Link**. On the drop-down, change the sharing mode to **Anyone with the Link**. Click **Done**. This will make your map publicly available.
Step 11: Embed the Map on Your Website

You must follow Step 9: Share the Map Publicly (above) to make the map public, before you can embed the map on your website.

On the left-hand side, click the top vertical ellipsis ⋮. On the drop-down menu, click **Embed on my site**.

![Map Embed Menu](image)

**Edit the Code:**

A pop-up box will appear with the iframe source code (in HTML) for your Google map.

Inside the text box, you will see width="640". Please **delete 640** and **type 100%**

![Embed Code](image)

(Do not delete the quote marks.) This change will ensure that the map will always fill the width of a web page for maximum readability, whether viewed on a desktop computer or mobile device, and will not exceed the device width.
Copy the Code:
Highlight the code and hit **CTRL+C** to copy. Click **OK**.

Embed the Code on Your Web Page:

Open your jurisdiction’s website management system. Navigate to the web page on which the map should appear, such as your ‘Vote Centers’ or ‘Where to Vote’ web page.

Ensure that you are editing the HTML (source code) of your web page, and not the text-view of your web page. Usually there is an option to toggle between views, such as a button that reads `<Source>`.

Click **CTRL+P** to paste the code into the correct location on the HTML version of your web page. (You may need assistance from your web master or IT staff if you are not familiar with HTML.)

Save the page. Be sure to preview the web page before publishing, to ensure that the map renders correctly.
Making Changes to Your Map

You can make changes to your map at any time after it has been shared. Simply log in to your Google account, go to https://www.google.com/maps/about/mymaps/ and navigate to your map. You can change the name, icons, colors and other elements.

To make changes to your list of voting locations, click on the lower vertical ellipses ⋮ and click Open Data Table. You can make text changes to the list of voting locations, add a location to the table, or delete a location from the list.

Any changes will automatically be implemented by Google maps. Even though you change the list of locations or content of the map, the URL and source code will NOT change. You do not need to re-share or re-embed the source code in order for changes to take effect.