Designing an Improved Voter Guide

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Agenda

Who are we? Who are you?
Exploring the voter guide
Top tips for creating voter information
  ▪ Bridge the civic literacy gaps
  ▪ Use design to make information easy to read
  ▪ Write in language voters understand

Introducing the best practices manual
Introductions

Who is here today?
Creating a best practices manual

About this project
League of Women Voters of California Education Fund

**Goal:** To better serve California’s diverse voters, voter information must be more accessible in design and delivery.

- Aim to make voter information more effective and more inviting
- Provide trainings, webinars, and other technical assistance in implementing the recommendations
- Identify impediments to adopt best practices including regulatory, legislative, and financial barriers
Center for Civic Design

**Goal:** Research to learn:
- How Californians find information about elections
- Information needs of voters, people who register but do not vote, and eligible potential voters
- How to design to make voting easier for voters with literacy, language, or reading challenges?
Qualitative research

1 year
14 locations
38+ partners
58 counties
100 research participants
  - Voters, non voters, infrequent voters
  - Young, new citizens, low literacy, people with disabilities, language minorities
  - Close match to California demographics
Research process

- Stakeholder input
- Landscape analysis
- Research with voters and non-voters

- Created a prototype voter guide
- Wrote recommendations
Recommendations to:

- Organize voter guides to help voters find their way to the information they need
- Present information so it is easy to recognize and identify
- Write information so it is easy to read and understand
- Personalize information for voters appropriately
- Close civic literacy gaps through structure and content
Let’s try it out

Portraits of voters
Prototype voter guide
Questions voters ask
Try using the prototype voter guide to answer voters' five top questions

1. What's on the ballot?
2. Where do I go vote?
3. How do I vote (mark and cast my ballot)?
4. What are my options for voting?
5. How do I vote by mail?

Use the voter portrait as your "character."

Think about what they know and what they need to know.

Take notes on how hard the information is to find.

And whether the information answers their questions.
# How did that go?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Voter question</th>
<th>Easy to find?</th>
<th>Hard to find?</th>
<th>What kind of problems?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What's on the ballot?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where do I go vote?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do I vote (mark the ballot)?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are my options?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do I vote by mail?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Questions are phrased in many ways

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th># Asking</th>
<th>Variations of the question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What’s on the ballot?</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>• What’s on the ballot?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Who do I support or vote for?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Who is running?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Who will I be voting for?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Who are the candidates?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Who supports the candidates?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• What are the candidates’ positions on [specific issue]?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• What are the ballot measures?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• What are the pros and cons for the measures?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Does this measure mean a tax increase?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• How does the official guide compare to the TV ads?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Who is in office right now?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Three big insights

Civic literacy is a huge challenge

Layout and visual presentation are important for comprehension

Plain language can't be overemphasized
Civic literacy

Elections are not intuitive, so voter guides have to bridge knowledge gaps
Voters – especially new voters – want

Information that will help them:

- **Understand their choices** about how, when, and where to vote

- Learn about **what is on the ballot** for each election, so they can make decisions

- Identify non-partisan official **information they can trust**
### Different voters, different needs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not yet voting</th>
<th>Voting sometimes</th>
<th>Avid voters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Connect to the community</td>
<td>Connect daily life to issues</td>
<td>Connect to the democratic process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Demystify the act of voting</td>
<td>- Simple, clear information about candidates and issues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Justify the value of voting</td>
<td>- Explanations of options for voting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- In-language and plain language materials</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Complete information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Encouragement to be role models</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Information about being a poll worker</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
New voters have knowledge gaps. They didn't know:

- You need to register to vote, in advance.
- You don't have to vote on everything on the ballot.
- You can get help from a poll worker.
- You can't vote after Election Day.
- You can vote by mail.
- You don't have to have an appointment to vote.
- Registering to vote doesn't sign you up for jury duty.
- Election materials may be in some languages.
- You don't need an ID to vote in California.
Show the structure of election info

- Make options clear by showing them side by side
- Connect the state and local booklets
Put the most important information on the cover

- Name or type of the election
- Date and time of the election
- The voter's polling place
- Languages offered
- How to contact the election office
Layout and design

Making information easy to recognize and identify
Be consistent

- Year-to-year consistency builds familiarity and trust

- Consistency in layout and use of design elements assists in ease-of-use and clarity
Use layout to convey content

- Layout can communicate the type of content on a page
- Layout can differentiate page types from one another
Help readers find their way

- A clear and concise table of contents acts as a roadmap for the guide
- Organize information in an easy-to-follow path
- Use a clear, easy-to-read heading for each page
- Use running headings to connect parts of a section
Use design to guide the voter
Make the information visual

- Visual elements help guide readers through the content
- Useful images and icons are precise and relevant to the content, not decorative
- Icons or other images signal the type of content next to them
Use accurate instructional illustrations

- Visual instructions help low-literacy \textit{and} general-population voters
- Illustrations must be accurate in their details to avoid misleading voters
- Photo images are not recommended
Make the text big enough

- Pages with small, tightly packed text are difficult to read

- Readers are more likely to read sections in larger type, and read the text more accurately

- In print, try to make the text size at least 12 points
Use upper- and lowercase letters

- Lowercase letters are more legible than all capital letters because they are easier to recognize.
Avoid centered type

- Left-aligned type is more legible than centered type, which forces the eye to stop reading in order to find the start of the next line
Pick one sans-serif font

- Switching between fonts can require the eye to stop reading and adjust, or can unintentionally imply a change in content

- Sans-serif fonts are easier to read for shorter-length content like a voter information guide

- The prototype guide uses ClearView ADA from Terminal Design
Include a practice ballot

- Present a sample ballot in a way that voters easily understand what it is and how to use it
Plain language

Clear information helps bridge the civic literacy gap
Define election terms

What is the difference between:
- vote by mail
- early voting
- vote at the polls
Help people answer *their* questions

- Anticipate and answer voters' questions.
- A table of contents acts as a roadmap.
How to vote by mail

You can vote by mail before Election Day.

To vote by mail, you have to request a ballot. Then you can mark the ballot and send it back or drop it off at any polling place.

How to get your vote-by-mail ballot
You can request a vote-by-mail ballot starting on October 7.
You must request a vote-by-mail ballot by October 29.

You can:
- Go to vote.ca.gov and request a vote-by-mail ballot.
- OR-
- Send a letter with your signature that includes your address and where to send the vote-by-mail ballot.
  Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk
  4031 Franklin Avenue, Franklin, CA 90501

After you apply to vote by mail, you will receive your ballot within ten business days.

How to return your vote-by-mail ballot
Place your ballot in the official envelope, following the instructions on the vote-by-mail packet. Your ballot must be at the Elections Office or a polling place by 8:00 AM on Election Day, November 8, to be counted.

You can:
- Send it by mail to:
  Franklin County Elections Dept.
  123 Main Street, Franklin, CA
  - OR-
- Drop it off at the secure ballot drop-off location, from October 7 to November 6
  Franklin County Elections Department
  123 Main Street, Franklin, CA
  - OR-
- Drop it off at any polling place on Election Day, November 8, from 7:00 AM to 8:00 PM.
## Include both overview and details

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Where in the Guide</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Bite  | Cover              | General Election  
Tuesday, November 4, 2014  
Polls are open from 7am to 8pm |
| Snack | Three ways to vote page | **Vote in person at the polls**  
Polls are open on Election Day, November 4, from 7am to 8pm  
The location of your polling place is printed on the front cover of this guide.  
Or, you can look up your polling place:  
• On the web: www.franklinvotes.org  
• Using the automated phone service: 1-222-555-1216 |
| Meal  | Detailed instructions on page 6 | **How to vote in person at the polls**  
[ instructions on the voting process and how to mark the ballot ] |
## Write headings to support action

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Heading Style</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Question</strong></td>
<td>What is the last day to request a vote-by-mail-ballot?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quasi-Question</strong></td>
<td>How to request a vote-by-mail ballot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instruction</strong></td>
<td>Request a vote-by-mail ballot by October 29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Simplify and define election terms

- Sample Ballot or Practice Ballot
- Top Two Primary
- Explain offices, especially local offices
- Test words like polling place, absentee
The Best Practices Manual for Official Voter Guides
Creating culturally specific graphic illustrations of the voting process

Teaching tips for how to prepare to vote, including how to sort out conflicting opinions and how to use the sample ballot

Highlighting ways in which accessible voting options, in addition to language access, can help new voters and others vote more effectively

Connecting the impact of measures to specific communities

Making connections to community values

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Use the checklist

Ask yourself the right questions, so your voter guide has the answers voters need.
Thank you.

Last questions?
League of Women Voters of California Education Fund
cavotes.org | easyvoterguide.org | smartvoter.org

Center for Civic Design
civicdesign.org | @civicdesign
civicdesign.org/projects/how-voters-get-information/

How Voters Get Information
Best Practices Manual for Official Voter Information Guides in California