

Report

How voters get information: Moving voters through the engagement continuum through voter information

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How voters get information: Moving voters through the engagement continuum

For our project for the Future of California Elections with the League of Women Voters of California, we've been exploring what challenges there might be in getting understandable, useful information to people who are eligible to vote but don't.

So we went out into the field, where we interviewed 53 people in 5 cities over 3 weeks. At our workshop in Los Angeles on May 6, Whitney reported on our progress.

Among the outcomes of those interviews, we've gleaned a few archetype voters and non-voters. We call these "personas." In developing the personas, we realized that they fell on a continuum of participation in elections. The conventional thinking has been to get people who don't vote to be avid voters. But based on our interviews for this study and others, we think it's more of a step-wise process. It will be rare that someone goes from zero to avid (although it does happen, especially with first-time voters).



Figure 1 Whitney Quesenbery reporting on research progress so far, demonstrating intercepting people on the street to interview

Figure 2 The workshop group gathered around a table at the California Community Foundation offices



As we began to analyze the interview data, we struck on this question: *What would it take to get people on the lower end of participation to move just one step forward, and where does voter information figure into that?* Although we have some ideas, we wanted to tap the experience and brains in an expanded stakeholder group. These are advocates and activists, as well as local election officials -- people who are close to voters and non-voters. (Attendees are listed starting on page 13.)

The game is on

With 16 people gathered together in the lovely offices of the generous California Community Foundation in Los Angeles, we made a game of it. We split into small groups, reviewed the personas as players in the game, and asked each group to construct a 'Chutes and Ladders' type of path that showed what voters needed to do or what we needed to do as voter support to move each of the personas up a level or forward another square.

You've met the personas before, but here they are again:

| Persona | Tagline |
|-------------|--|
| Alejandra | "No one in my family votes." |
| Mr & Mrs Li | "It's hard to know what to do." |
| Rakheem | "I'll vote when I have an opinion." |
| Justin | "I guess I'll vote... if I get to it." |
| Rosa | "Voting is the right thing to do." |
| Ari | "Of course I vote... everyone should." |
| Kim | "The right to vote should be honored." |
| Steve | "I'm part of the process!" |

Figure 3 Astrid Garcia, Leila Pedersen, and Michelle Romero



We worked the groups hard for about an hour. And then, each team presented their game board. The first game board was by Astrid Garcia of FOCE, Leila Pedersen of Common Cause, and Michelle Romero of Greenlining with Dana Chisnell of Center for Civic Design. Michelle spoke for her group:

"It's almost like learning to dance... Some ... messages that worked for the new voters are going to continue to work on

moving them on another step, as well. In addition, these people because they are in [registered], are going to show up in election official data and so we need to make sure they have the information to tell them how to vote, and that we're communicating that it is easy and they can do it.

"We're teaching them it matters; it's easy they can do it... Meanwhile we need to work on making [voting] easier. Getting [voters] information about how the issues will connect to their daily life, translating the candidate statements to daily life and being able to use the information in an easier way. This is the information design piece. When [the information] comes to [voters], it needs to be inspiring...

"And it's a conversation... A theme for us was not to broadcast but communicate back and forth, and to meet them where they're at so they'll continue to vote. Now they have the rhythm of the dance and are starting to add their own flavor. "

Figure 4 Ready, Set, Go! from Astrid, Leila, and Michelle



Barbara Carr, from the San Francisco Elections Department, Caroline Bruister from California Forward, and Ethan Newby of Center for Civic Design envisioned two tracks in which people cross a chasm by gaining understanding of the logistics of the voting process. As Caroline explained as she presented their game board:

“We saw voters on two different tracks. First there’s the basic civic literacy, Elections 101. If you don’t understand that, then it’s going to be really hard and you’re voting very infrequently if you’re voting at all.

“Then there’s awareness of the issues. You can... take the step forward to at least being aware that elections are going on and that there may be something that is important to you. But [you have to] understand the logistics of the voting process, crossing the barrier to casting the vote... This is the funnel we saw.

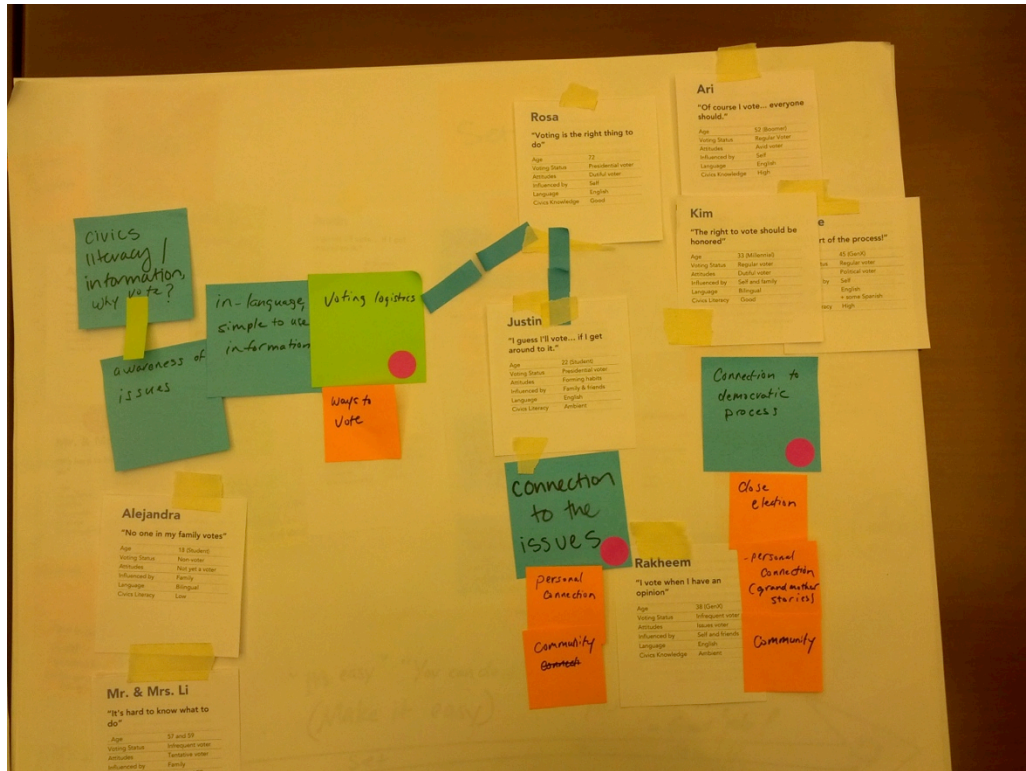
Figure 5 Barbara Carr and Caroline Bruister



“[The second track is about] continued connection to the issues or continued and deepening connection to the democratic process. So we talked about some ways you could connect to those issues. You might know someone who is running for something. You might want potholes fixed down the street from you. That might be a way to connect on an issue level.

“There’s one bucket we saw in the middle: You’re aware of issues, but you’re not always voting. So that’s why we had a connection to the entire democratic process. Because once you’ve crossed that barrier, you don’t just need a presidential candidate that you maybe want to go out to lunch with to get you to the ballot box.”

Figure 6 Crossing the voting chasm by Barbara, Caroline, and Ethan Newby



Jenn Pae, of League of Women Voters, Stefani Jimenez of FOCE, Ofelia Medina of NALEO (with Drew Davies of Oxide Design and Center for Civic Design) walked us through their six-step process.

“The first is Alejandra, who hasn’t registered to vote yet. The things we identified were how to register to vote, perhaps in language for her family as well as ... so what we decided was that we separate [Mr and Mrs Li from Alejandra].

“Seems like Mr and Mrs Li already have the Why should we vote, but it’s actually very difficult for them to actually vote. For them, it’s a step above, but they could also easily go a step down. And so they needed to be reminded that it was important to vote. And even just how to vote. It sounded confusing for some folks who aren’t as familiar with the process.

“Even Rosa, who needs some voting options, even learning that there’s a vote by mail option.

“So going up the ladder to steps 5 and 6 it seems the folks who are most engaged. So all of them need some sort of simple and clear information about issues and candidates but to different levels. Folks at the far end, step 5 and 6, probably want everything.

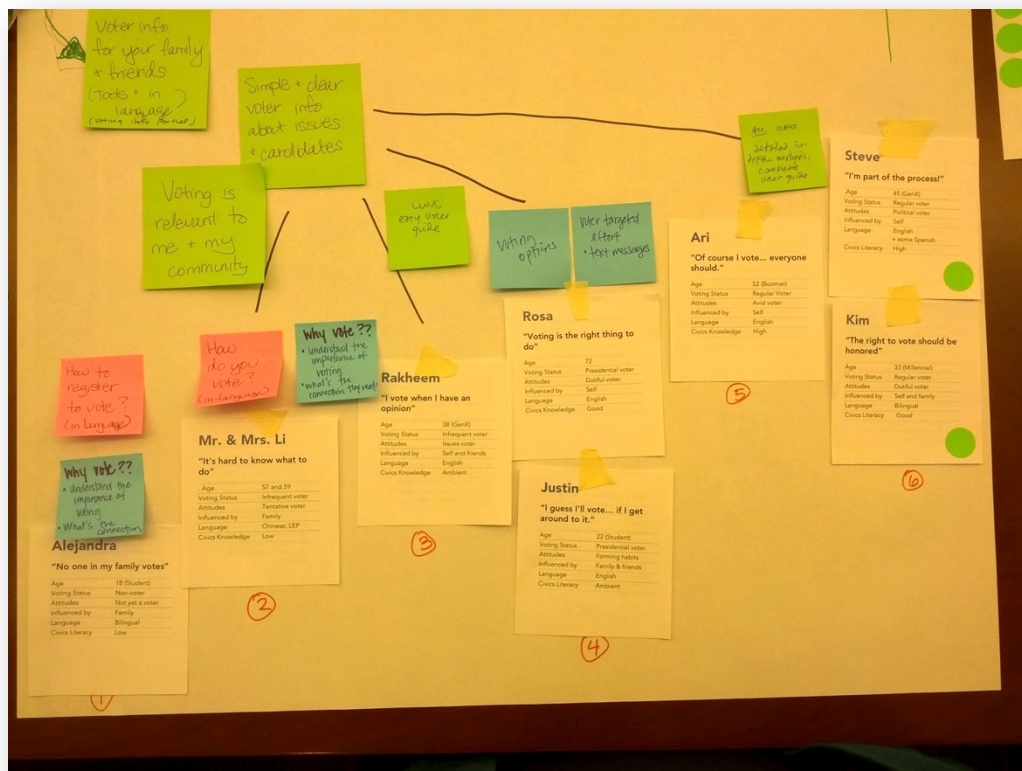
“The folks down here [at 1 and 2] probably want something short and to the point. Especially someone like Justin, who is a student, is busy doesn’t want to be studying for a test, probably wants it in a fun visual format.

Figure 7 Ofelia Medina, Jenn Pae, and Stefani Jimenez (behind the poster)



“[We know from] the NALEO report that the messenger is as important as the message. We gave Steve and Kim green stickers because the hope is that they end up becoming the messengers, the family and friends who will transfer this information to family and friends and continue sharing information to everyone else. The hope is that it will become a cycle of sorts. Then as people come in, Alejandra will one day be able to offer what Steve and Kim know.”

Figure 8 Six Steps to Voting Nirvana by Ofelia, Jenn, and Stefani



Alberto Avalos of NALEO and Jeff Klein from the LA County Clerk's office, with Melissa Breach of the League of Women Voters of California and Whitney Quesenbery from Center for Civic Design created the "yellow brick road" of voting. Jeff did most of the presenting:

"Reminders are a great use. Leveraging technology can really help people who are at the lower end bump up to the next level. Because that's someone who might need to... have reminders to find out where to go vote. They're not necessarily going to go that extra mile on their own, but if you make it easier to get the information, that will really help that individual.

"How [do] you get someone like Rakheem to make voting a habit? He knows that voting is a good thing, but we want it to be an automatic thing to raise him to the next level.

"And for folks like Mr and Mrs Li, it's hard to know what to do. It may be the case that the material may be poorly translated. Pictures could help. Proper translation is a big step forward. And what materials are available in what languages? That's another really important thing that doesn't get advertised enough. If

you're saying something is available, and you only put that in English, how is someone even going to get to that point where they can request those items?

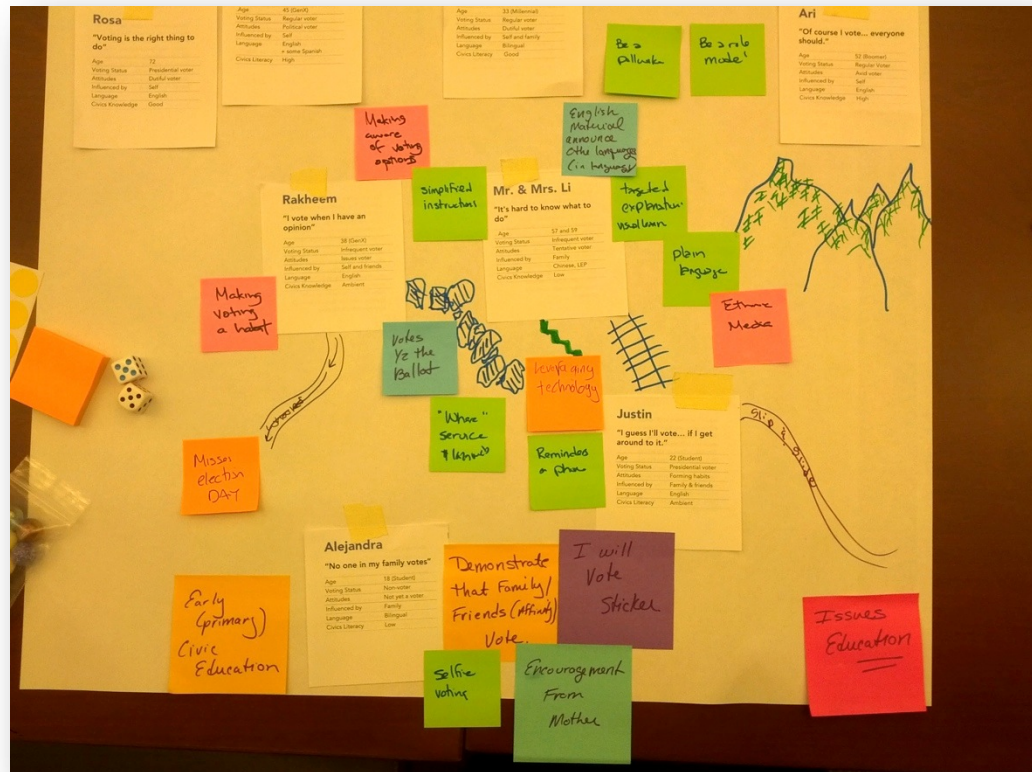
Figure 9 Alberto Avalos and Jeff Klein



"So as we get up to the top, our brick road goes up to Rosa, Steve, Kim, Ari. What more can we do with regular voters? If you get someone to be a poll worker or a role model, they're going to be ambassadors in the election process [who]... remind people to come out to their polling place and remind people more than maybe they normally would.

"And then at the end, because you're following the yellow brick road, you end up with courage, a brain, and a heart. But don't pay attention to the man behind the curtain."

Figure 10 The Yellow Brick Road to Voting by Alberto, Jeff, and Melissa



Themes

Though there are 8 personas, the game designers in the workshop often rolled them up into some basic behaviors: not voting, voting sometimes, and voting avidly. Through the personas, we saw some themes revealed that might work to help people move forward in the voting continuum. The key is a feeling of *connection*.

- People who are not voting or are voting very infrequently need to see how voting connects to their communities.
- People who vote sometimes need information that helps them understand how the issues and candidates connect to their daily lives so they can see what will be different when the election is over.
- People who are voting avidly want evidence that they're connected to the democratic process.

Figure 11: Visualization of the continuum

Behaviors, themes, and information needs

| Not voting | | Voting sometimes | | | Voting avidly | | |
|--|-------------|--|--------|------|--|-----|-------|
| Connect to community | | Connect daily life to issues and candidates | | | Connect to the democratic process | | |
| Alejandra | Mr & Mrs Li | Rakheem | Justin | Rosa | Ari | Kim | Steve |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Civics literacy • Demystify the act and logistics of voting • Justify the value of voting: "Your vote means a voice for your community" • Plain language • In-language materials | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simple and clear information about candidates and issues • Options for voting | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete voter guide • Information about becoming a poll worker • Encouragement to be a role model | | |

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People who are not voting need to connect to the community.
(Alejandra and Mr. & Mrs. Li)

- Civics literacy
- Demystifying the act and logistics of voting
- Justifying the value of voting
- Plain language
- In-language materials

People who are voting sometimes need to connect daily life to issues and candidates.
(Rakheem, Justin, Rosa)

- Simple and clear information about candidates and issues
- Options for voting

Avid voters need to connect to the democratic process.
(Ari, Kim, Steve)

- Complete information
- Information about working the polls
- Encouragement to be role models

It was a fun and productive day. This idea of connection might go beyond what a typical county voter guide might do. But connection can happen in outreach by counties and advocacy groups. Some of the content can be addressed in the larger ecosystem through social media, town hall meetings, and materials from advocacy, activist, and campaign groups. One of the best outcomes of the workshop is some great direction for our main audience, and some bonus ideas for voters who are already engaged.

Attendees

Thank you, everyone for being present and bringing your ideas, energy, and experiences.

Astrid Garcia, FOCE

Stefani Jimenez, FOCE

Melissa Breach, LWV CA

Jenn Pae, LWV CA

Dana Chisnell, Center for Civic Design

Drew Davies, Oxide Design and Center for Civic Design

Ethan Newby, Center for Civic Design

Whitney Quesenbery, Center for Civic Design

Jeff Klein, LA RR/CC

Barbara Carr, San Francisco

Michelle Romero, Greenlining

Alberto Avalos, Greenlining

Liela Pedersen, Common Cause

Ofelia Medina, NALEO

Caroline Bruister, California Forward

Thea Brodtkin, LWV Santa Monica

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