Recommendations for California voter guides

This is a checklist of the recommendations for improving voter guides in California, from a project for the Future of California Elections to understand how voters get information.

Visit the project website for more information and detailed explanations of each recommendation:

civicdesign.org/projects/how-voters-get-information/

The guidelines for improving voter guides are organized in 5 groups, based on the needs of the broad California voter audience.

Include the right information at the appropriate level of detail

- ✓ Organize information by activity or task

- ✓ Make the cover a useful part of the guide

- ✓ Connect the county and state guides so voters know where to find information

- ✓ Write headings as questions or active instructions

- ✓ Use plain language

- ✓ Write for low literacy and people reading English as a second language

- ✓ Define elections terms

Organize information for progressive disclosure

- ✓ Make it easy to find both information about the ballot and about how, when, and where to vote

- ✓ Include a table of contents

- ✓ Start with the overview or key details, then link to more details or exceptions

- ✓ Make each page a single clear topic

- ✓ Use visual elements to make sections easy to see

- ✓ Organize the booklet to help voters see both overview and details

Present information so it is easy to read and understand

- ✓ Make the text big enough
- ✓ Design the pages for visual orientation and differentiation
- ✓ Make the information visual
- ✓ Be consistent
- ✓ Present sample ballots so voters understand what they are

Personalize information for the voter

- ✓ Be clear when information is for the whole county and when it is personalized
- ✓ Make the availability of languages visible in all versions
- ✓ Put the polling place on the front cover
- ✓ Be clear when the sample ballot is an exact sample, and when it's just "similar"
- ✓ Make any update or registration form look official

Close civic literacy gaps through structure and content

- ✓ Add a "signature" so voters know the source
- ✓ Tell voters their rights
- ✓ Make it easy to learn about and compare candidates
- ✓ Help voters know how ballot measures will affect them
- ✓ Include explanations of the type of election