Vol. 05

Choosing how to communicate with voters

Field-researched, critical election design techniques to help ensure that every vote is cast as voters intend.

The Field Guides are online at civicdesign.org/fieldguides

Fourth edition, 2018
About the Field Guide series

If you could do just a few things that would make a big difference in the experiences voters and poll workers (and even candidates) have, what would those be? That’s the question we tried to answer in each of the Field Guides To Ensuring Voter Intent.

Every guideline and example is based in research and practice. The guidelines come from sources ranging from the Election Assistance Commission, to the National Institute of Standards and Technology, to lots of our own research conducted alongside county and state election officials. We’ve tried to make each one easy to follow. You should be able to implement most of the guidelines independent of election laws or voting system technology.

— Dana Chisnell, Field Guides Editor

About this Field Guide

Election officials have more ways to communicate with voters than ever before, from traditional printed booklets, to the web, radio and TV, and social media. During Superstorm Sandy, officials even used emergency service announcements to let voters know that the election would go on.

This Field Guide gives an overview of how to use each communications channel effectively. These tips are intended to help you think about how to coordinate election information across many different media.

To learn more about the research behind this guide and download examples, go to civicdesign.org.

Communicating with voters

Voters don’t have a strategy for how they will get information about elections. They hope that it will be available in their favorite format, from printed material to social media.

They want to know when, where, and how they will vote, from finding their polling place to being reminded of how the voting system works. And they want this information in language they understand.

Most of all, they want the right information in the right format at the right time.

About this Field Guide

Election officials have more ways to communicate with voters than ever before, from traditional printed booklets, to the web, radio and TV, and social media. During Superstorm Sandy, officials even used emergency service announcements to let voters know that the election would go on.

This Field Guide gives an overview of how to use each communications channel effectively. These tips are intended to help you think about how to coordinate election information across many different media.

To learn more about the research behind this guide and download examples, go to civicdesign.org.

Communicating with voters

Voters don’t have a strategy for how they will get information about elections. They hope that it will be available in their favorite format, from printed material to social media.

They want to know when, where, and how they will vote, from finding their polling place to being reminded of how the voting system works. And they want this information in language they understand.

Most of all, they want the right information in the right format at the right time.

Choosing how to communicate with voters

Voters don’t have a strategy for how they will get information about elections. They hope that it will be available in their favorite format, from printed material to social media.

They want to know when, where, and how they will vote, from finding their polling place to being reminded of how the voting system works. And they want this information in language they understand.

Most of all, they want the right information in the right format at the right time.
Plan to use:

- printed booklets to help voters plan
- your website to help voters take action
- radio/tv to help voters' awareness of elections or changes
- social media to keep the conversation going with voters before, during, and after elections

No. 01
Use the appropriate medium.
Tailor the level of detail to the delivery channel.

No. 02
Treat all communication as a conversation.

- Choose a tone and voice.
- Be polite, personable, and positive — just like you are in person.
- Use personal pronouns, like "you" and "we."
- Use the same voice across all media.

Before
How do I affiliate with a political party?
Voters may register with any of the state’s recognized political parties. Choosing not to register with a party, means that the voter is “unaffiliated.” Unaffiliated voters may not vote in primary elections, but may be able to vote in any nonpartisan primary election held in your jurisdiction, such as a primary election to select nominees for the board of education, and any general election.

After
Why should I choose a political party when I register to vote?
The main reason to register with a political party rather than choosing "unaffiliated," is to vote in party-based primary elections.
Field Guides To Ensuring Voter Intent

No. 03

Help voters move among media easily to get more information or take action.

Most voters will use information from various sources to learn about an election.

Consider the voter context and the timing within the election cycle for when you will deliver the message.

No. 04

Show off your social media connections (but don’t rely on them).

Voters who use social media will enjoy engaging in the online conversation with you.

Voters who don’t use social media like to see that your department uses them because it shows you’re up to date.
Voters’ top questions are:

- what’s on the ballot
- options for where and how to vote
- how to get a sample ballot
- key dates
- contact information
- preview of what happens at the polling place

Note: A sample ballot helps voters decide whether to vote, and who and what to vote for, making it easier for them to mark their ballot on Election Day.

Good sample tweets:

- Last day to register for the Nov 2 election is Sept 30! Register online at vote.yourcounty.st.gov
- Early voting starts on October 15. Find where to vote at vote.yourcounty.st.gov

No. 05

Answer voters’ top questions first.

Voters come to you when they’re ready to learn and ready to do.

Answer their questions in the order they ask them. After that, you can add information they didn’t know they needed.

No. 06

Update your information early and often.

The web and social media are excellent for getting the word out on everything from changes in polling places to how long lines are at early voting locations.

Carefully highlight major changes in print materials.
• Develop a common look and feel that works across all the media you publish in.
• Choose illustrations that are relevant and useful.
• Consider starting with design templates from Effective Designs for the Administration of Federal Elections (you can download them from the EAC website: civicd.link/eacdesigns).

No. 08
Use visual design to build trust and show professionalism.

Choose a visual design that is somewhere between boring and cheesy, that conveys the authority and (friendly) voice you want your department to have.

Before
Are materials and assistance available in languages other than English?
→ Yes!
→ 是的
→ ¡Sí!

After
→ Voter information in English
→ 在中国的选民信息
→ Información electoral en español

Write links to information in other languages in those languages.
No. 09
Show who is responsible for the information.

Voters like to know who the people are behind the election. This helps them know who the authorities are. Include names, position titles, and contact information.

No. 10
Put a date on it.

Some of what makes information authoritative is whether it is current. Everything you publish should show a date.

Showing dates is more helpful to voters than just putting a “new!” badge on it.

An example of good, complete contact information includes:
- organization name
- mailing address
- general email address
- website URL
- main phone number

plus:
- specific office / title
- full name
- direct phone number
- direct email address
Tip
Check that you’re speaking with the same voice and tone across all channels.

Have you:
☐ thought about how you will use all of the communications methods in a coordinated way?
☐ established a conversational but authoritative voice?
☐ put the right level of detail in each medium?
☐ provided a way for voters to get more information when they need it?
☐ focused on helping voters take action?
Who made this Guide possible?

Kickstarter contributors, including:
Alec Perkins
Stephanie Rewis
Jess McMillan
Alec Bash
Jonathan Knoll
Lori Landesman
Jennifer Pahlka
Jascha Franklin-Hodge
Ginny Redish
Jason Putorti
Nicco Mele
Tantek Çelik
Karen Bachmann
Sarah Swierenga
David Fiorito
James Craig
Caroline Jarrett
Richard Soley

Pamela Ecker
Ivan Wilson, Jr.
Whitney Hess
Scott Berkun
Suzanne Stasavitch
James Spool
Livia Labate
Mark Eberman
Josh Clark
Joe Sokohl
Bolt | Peters
TangibleUX
Keith Instone
EightShapes
Nick Finck
Stewart Bloom

With extra help from:
Sean Carmichael, videographer
Adam Connor, illustrator
Michelle Gray, PR
Boon Sheridan, strategist
Jared Spool, advisor

Special thanks

There was an amazing team behind this project:
Dana Chisnell, writer and researcher
Whitney Quesenbery, writer and researcher
Drew Davies, book designer and researcher

Advisors

Janice C. “Ginny” Redish
Joseph Lorenzo Hall
Doug Chapin
And the many state and county election officials who have helped us understand how elections really work.

Supported by

MacArthur Foundation
macfound.org
democracyfund.org
democracyfund.org

Field Guides To Ensuring Voter Intent

More ways to read the Field Guides

Read the Field Guides on your laptop or mobile phone, in an accessible and responsive format. Or you can print from the site or download PDFs: civicdesign.org/fieldguides

Order more copies by writing to:
hello@civicdesign.org

More ways to read
the Field Guides

Choosing how to communicate with voters

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons license (CC BY-NC-ND 3.0). You are free to share, copy, distribute and transmit the work for noncommercial purposes.

Field Guides designed by Oxide Design Co. · oxidizedesign.com
Get more Field Guides

The Field Guides are online at civicdesign.org/fieldguides, where you can:

· Read them on your computer or mobile
· Download a PDF
· Order printed copies

Get in touch

hello@civicdesign.org
Twitter: @civicdesign
civicdesign.org

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons license (CC BY-NC-ND 3.0). You are free to share, copy, distribute and transmit the work for noncommercial purposes.

Field Guides To Ensuring Voter Intent are produced by Center for Civic Design and designed by Oxide Design Co.