Vol. 06
Designing voter education booklets and flyers

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
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 the research behind this Field Guide
Whitney Quesenbery and Dana Chisnell interviewed 16 new voters, asking them to look at examples of good printed voter education materials. Most of them were young and had voted for the first time in 2008 or 2012. They were men and women, black, white, and Hispanic. They included new citizens from Bolivia, Algeria, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, and Eritrea.

The Center for Civic Design is indebted to the Brennan Center, Kathryn Summers and Megan McKeever at University of Baltimore, and User Works for their help in providing space for the research sessions and help recruiting participants.

About this Field Guide
With each election, voters receive flyers and booklets to help them understand the election process, register, find their polling places, and learn what’s on ballot for each election. But do they find the information they need?

The 10 guidelines in this Field Guide come from research with young voters and new citizens, trying to find answers in a collection of real brochures from the 2012 election.

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

What voter education did we use for this research?
Printed voter education materials range from small tri-fold general information flyers to 20-page booklets with detailed election information.

We chose five that followed many best practices, to learn how to make them even better.

VOTE! flyer – League of Women Voters
Voters Guide – San Francisco Department of Elections
Maryland Votes – Maryland Board of Elections
Voting in Oregon – State of Oregon
Official Election Guide – Leon County, Florida
• Identify the elections or years the booklet covers.
• Use simple design elements to make it authoritative but approachable.
• Say who takes responsibility for the information.
• Provide contact information (including social media).

No. 01

Use space on the cover for useful information.

Make it easy to find out what’s inside the booklet, what elections it covers, who wrote it, and who it is for.

No. 02

Be specific about dates and deadlines.

Voters want to know the actual dates to help them make sense of all the steps in an election.

Show real dates for the current election, not just formulas.

Example

2012 Presidential Election
October 27–November 3, 2012
Early voting centers open 10am to 8pm
November 6, 2012
Election Day

Example

2012 Presidential Election

<table>
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Early voting
Election Day
**Field Guides To Ensuring Voter Intent**

Give voters a choice of how to contact you:
- phone numbers
- mailing or street address
- website
- email
- social media

**No. 03**

**Provide real contact information, not just a website.**

People who may not have web access or email are especially likely to use printed booklets or flyers for election information.

**Designing voter education booklets and flyers**

No. 04

**Start with a roadmap.**

An overview helps voters understand the scope of the information in the booklet. Without a table of contents or other roadmap, people get lost in the details.
Keep the message simple:
• Use illustrations, maps, and diagrams that focus on one piece of information at a time.
• Eliminate unnecessary details to highlight the most important points.
• Ask and answer questions clearly.

No. 05
Don’t make voting look complicated (even if it is).

Having one topic per page makes it easier to scan through the booklet for specific topics.
Information doesn’t get buried at the end of the page.
Impatient readers miss details.
Lower literacy readers skip when they get confused.

No. 06
1 page: 1 topic. (Really!)

Have good headings, in a consistent location, on every page.
Across our studies, people had the same questions:

- What’s on the ballot?
- How do you vote if not on Election Day?
- How do you get an absentee ballot?
- When is your absentee ballot due?
- Where do you go to vote?
- How do you actually vote?
- Can you get a sample of the ballot?
- Are you eligible to vote?
- How do you register to vote?
- What’s the deadline for registering?
- Do you need to show your ID?

Write headings as questions.

People read election booklets looking for answers, so it’s easy for them to recognize their questions. Good questions show that the elections office understands what information voters need.
Use visual design to support meaning:

- Have a consistent style.
- Choose one style of icons.
- One idea per bullet.
- Make sure colored boxes have enough contrast to be easy to read.

No. 09
Make sure that important information stands out.

Use icons, colored boxes, and callouts to highlight critical information that affects the ability to vote.

Illustrations of forms or actions voters must take are helpful.

No. 10
Include information on how to vote.

New voters need instructions for how to mark and cast their ballot.

Current voters benefit from having the process confirmed and reinforced.
Tip
Check that the booklet or flyer helps voters plan for voting.

Can voters find:
- what’s on the ballot?
- options for in-person, early, and absentee voting?
- dates for important deadlines, such as when to register?
- how to get an absentee ballot and when it is due back?
- how to get a sample ballot?
- where to vote?
- how to contact your office?
- who created the booklet or flyer?
Who made this Guide possible?

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