USAEE: medium election websites project

Website audit report

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Project background and goals

Project background

Through USAEE, we will be working with election offices of more varying sizes than much of CCD's previous work. This is an opportunity to take a look at our past website recommendations, and assess how they might need to change in order to work for offices of different sizes.

The project has 3 phases
- Website audit
- Feedback session with voters
- Conversations with election offices whose websites demonstrate best practices

This report covers phase 1: website audit

Phase 1: Website Audit

Goal

Review 20 websites from small-medium jurisdictions with a small election staff. We focused on user experience and information design.

Site selection process

- **Size of jurisdiction.** Counties with a population between 130,000 and 80,000 with a few outliers. All offices had a small full-time staff.

- **Demographics and geography.** Chosen based on a mix of regions, urban and rural areas, and offices that had Section 203 language designation.

- **Legacy.** Several of the websites were reviewed as part of CCD's 2012 report on minority county websites. We wanted to update information

List of sites audited

Berkeley County, SC

Brunswick County, NC

Boone County, MO

Cass County, MO

Cowlitz, County, WA

Flint, MI

Hartford, CT*

Henderson County, TX*

Johnson County, IW

Laramie County, WY

Litchfield County, CT

Madison, WI *

Monroe County, IN

Pennington County, SD

Richmond, VA*

Robeson County,NC

Rogers County, OK

San Juan County, NM

Santa Cruz County, AZ*

Shasta County, CA

Valencia County, NM

Wyandotte County, KS

*Section 203 designation

Rubric methodology and rating

How we measured the sites

Rubric categories and guidelines

Website evaluation rubric categories and guidelines

Categories

5 categories were created based on information needs and website best practices.

- Site user interface and information architecture
- Findability,trust, and security
- Key for voter tasks and information
- Special voter circumstances
- Seasonal Election Staff

Guidelines

Within each category, were guidelines that served as a baseline metric to help determine the quality of information and user experience.

Rubric categories

Category 1: Site user interface and information architecture

The site's overall user interface and information architecture, including consistency in design, use of plain language, and mobile friendliness.

Category 2: Findability,trust, and security

Measured how easily elections and voting information can be found, the website security, and signs of trustworthiness. Trustworthiness includes site branding and contact information that communicate trust and legitimacy of information.

Category 3: Key information for voter tasks and information

Site's ability to answer important voter questions about deadlines and how to cast a ballot. This includes information about absentee and early voting where applicable.

Rubric categories

Category 4: Special voter circumstances

A review of presence and quality of information for voters with disabilities (including website accessibility), student voters, returning citizens, and voter that are most comfortable voting in a language other than English.

Category 5: Seasonal Election Staff

Quality of information about temporary elections staff opportunities and training. This included information about responsibilities and training information like a handbook or powerpoint.

Website rating

Rating Overview

We used a 4-point scale:

- 0 - Failure
- 1 - Bare minimum
- 2 - Good
- 3 - Excellent

Sites were given a rating on each guideline within a category. Then each category was given a rating.

Finally, the sites was given an overall performance rating, based on the ratings in each category.

Website rating scale

0 - Failure
- Key information missing/information
- Vague/confusing navigation labels
- Site does not reflect modern website best practices
- Information takes excessive clicks to access
- PDFs and links with no context

1 - Bare minimum
- Partial information
- Top voter questions answered, but difficult to find
- Site reflects some modern website best practices

Website rating scale

2 - Good
- Top voter information present
- Reflects some best practices
- Key information can be viewed in 1-4 clicks

3 - Excellent
- Key voter information is visible
- Reflects modern website best practices
- Intuitive navigation
- Interactive maps of voting centers
- Office contact information is visible

Scoring example: Henderson County, TX

Scoring example: Henderson County, TX

The site's strengths included:
- List of deadlines
- Easily identifiable staff with contact information

Elections/Voter Registration

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May 6, 2023 - Local Political Subdivisions Joint General and Special Election

Early Voting April 24-28, May 1-2, 2023

Last Day to Register to Vote for May 6, 2023 Election is APRIL 6, 2023

January 1, 2023 First Day to Apply for Ballot By Mail

Application For Ballot By Mail.
Click here to download application in English
Click here to download application in Spanish

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201 J East Larkin St
Athens, Texas 75751

Scoring example: Henderson County, TX

Areas of improvement included:
- Information about voter registration, polling locations, and how voters can cast their ballots
- Section 203 language access

Elections/Voter Registration

Font Size: ➕ ➖   ➕ Share & Bookmark   Feedback   🖨 Print

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Scoring example: Henderson County, TX

02: Findability, trust, and security:				
Guideline	**Why**	**How it might look**	**Notes for review**	**SCORE: 3**
Secure?	Communicates trust and legitimacy	Lock symbol		3
.Gov url				3
Connects to SOS and other local gov sites		Voters start by looking for information locally. They often search for their town or county name plus "elections," which leads them to a local site.		3
Easy to find election info				1
Contact info		Contact information is easy to find. Voters have a choice of how to contact the office.		3

03: Voter task and info: This information matches top voter questions. The when, where, and what questions				
Guideline	**Why**	**How it might look**	**Notes for review**	**SCORE**
Voter registration		• Steps on how to register to vote • Information about multiple options	• Offers interactive tabs with all voting options	0
List of important election deadlines		• Show dates and deadlines in a list, in chronological order. Or display dates in a calendar format.	The updated list includes 2023 election last days to register and when you can apply by mail	3

Overall ratings

Most sites received a rating of "1" or "1.5", meaning they met basic voter information needs.

Strengths
- Security
- Connection to local and state government
- Maps and GIS polling locations
- Consistent styles, fonts, and color

Areas of improvement
- Plain language
- Navigation
- Information architecture
- Special circumstance voter information

Trends and highlights

What our website review and rated found

Category 1: Site user interface and information architecture

Category 1
Site user interface and information architecture

Average rating: 1

We saw 3 distinct site structures used to present information. SItes had consistency in style and font, but information design and navigation was a noticeable area of improvement.

Strengths

- Uniform fonts and styles
- Consistency in site design

Areas to improve

- Information presented in plain language
- Easy to find, navigate, and scrollable information

Site user interface trends
Sites reviewed fell into one or all three site structures

Single pager
Most of the site's content is on one page.

The mosaic
Key information is present, but divided throughout a few pages.
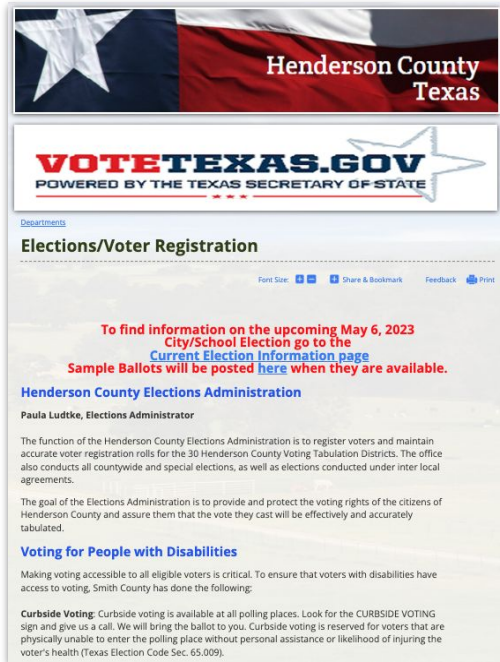
The list linker
Site information is mostly compiled of lists to relevant resources.
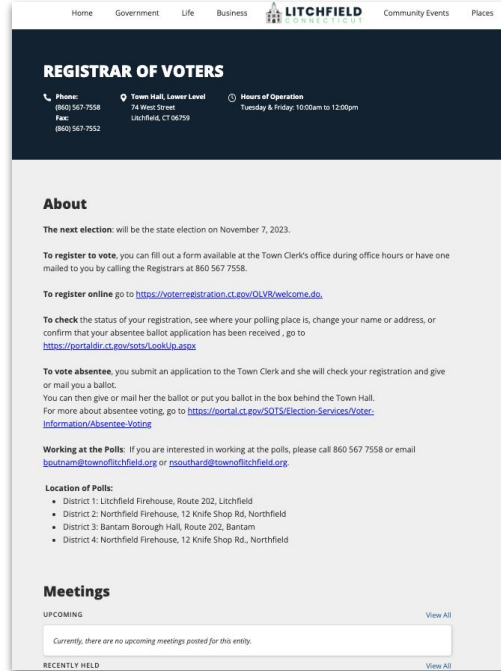
Site user interface trends: single page
Information is on one page, divided by headers

Henderson County, TX
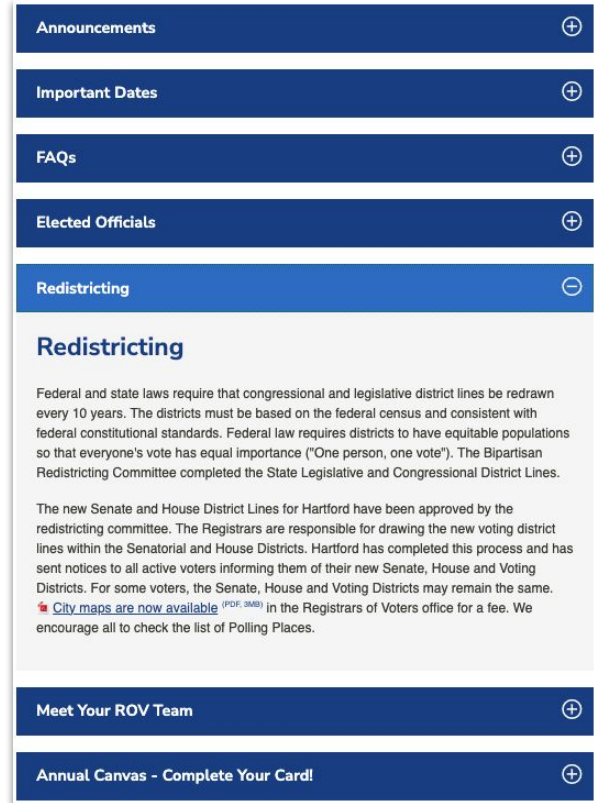
Litchfield, CT

Hartford, CT

Site user interface trends: single page
Dividers included accordions

Hartford, CT is a single page with 7 accordions that expand and collapse.

Site user interface trends: mosaic
Voter information is often distributed throughout different parts of the county's site.

For example, in Monroe County, IN, information about elections is on 2 different parts of the county's website, "Document Center" and "Voter Registration".

Having voting related information on two different sections on the website may confuse voters, or fail to answer their questions.
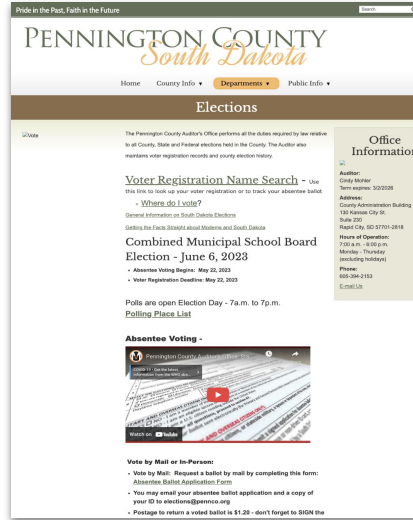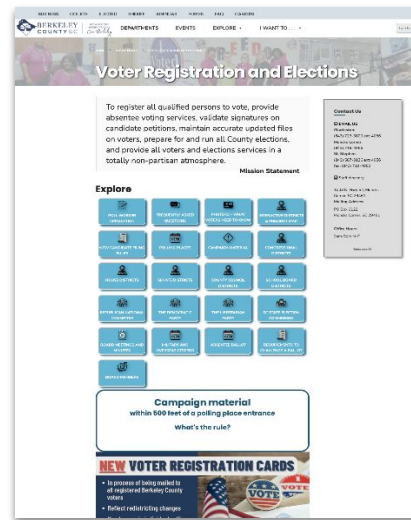
Site user interface trends: list of links
Sites consist of link to external resources or downloads

"List of link" style sites looks different, but have a similar feature; most of the site is compiled of links to external sites.
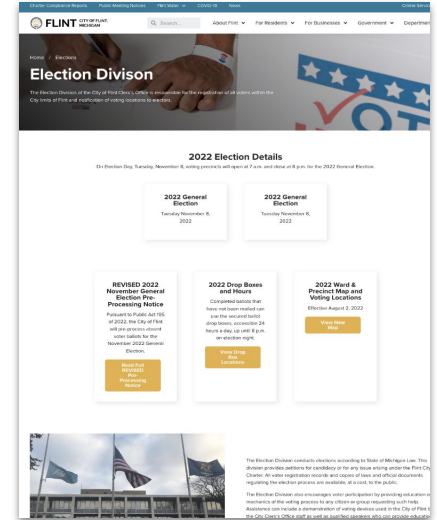
Examples include links to secretary of state absentee voting information, voter registration look ups and applications.

Pennington County, SD

Berkeley County, SC

Flint, MI

Site user interface trends: list of links
Links are often either PDF downloads or redirect users to an external site, like the SOS office.

Many sites used a "point and click" structure. Main navigation menu items opened a pdf or an external link.

Links that do not give context or inform users of a change may confuse site visitors.

Election Information

- Register to vote
- Change address voter registration
- Check your voter information
- Request an absentee ballot
- Authorization to Return Ballot Form
- Polling Places

Site user interface trends: common CMS system
Several county sites often used the same CMS system: CivicPlus

5 counties we reviewed used CivicPlus as their content management system.

The CivicPlus template uses a left and right panel model. Creating a best practices guide for popular CMSs could help offices better present information.

On the right: Valencia County, NM, and Cass County, MO.

Site user interface trends: navigation

Top navigation was key to findability
The name of the office that administers elections varies by state. Some sites used keywords in the description or naming of a section that housed voting related information, making it easier to find.

Compact navigation
Most the sites reviewed used side navigation and accordions to help users find information. The use of sidebar navigation could be, in part, due to the limitation of the jurisdiction's content management template.

Primary, secondary, and all of the above
Several of the websites audited had multiple navigation bars, but no hierarchy of information. The navigation cluttered the page, and sometimes had similar topics but inconsistent information.

Site user interface trends: navigation
Mixed navigation can help users find information

Wyandotte County, Ks is an example of mixed navigation. The site utilized side navigation and accordions to group information and help users navigate the site.

Mixed navigation
- Side navigation leads to topics
- Accordions create subtopics

Here, mixed navigation could help users find general and specific information.

Site user interface trends:navigation
Too many navigation options may confuse voters

Cowlitz County, Wa's elections website is an example of multiple navigation options that may confuse users, and

Mixed navigation
- Top navigation
- Side navigation
- Icon grid
- Tabs navigation

Too many options do not allow users to focus on information.

Read more about design navigation, focus, and cognition
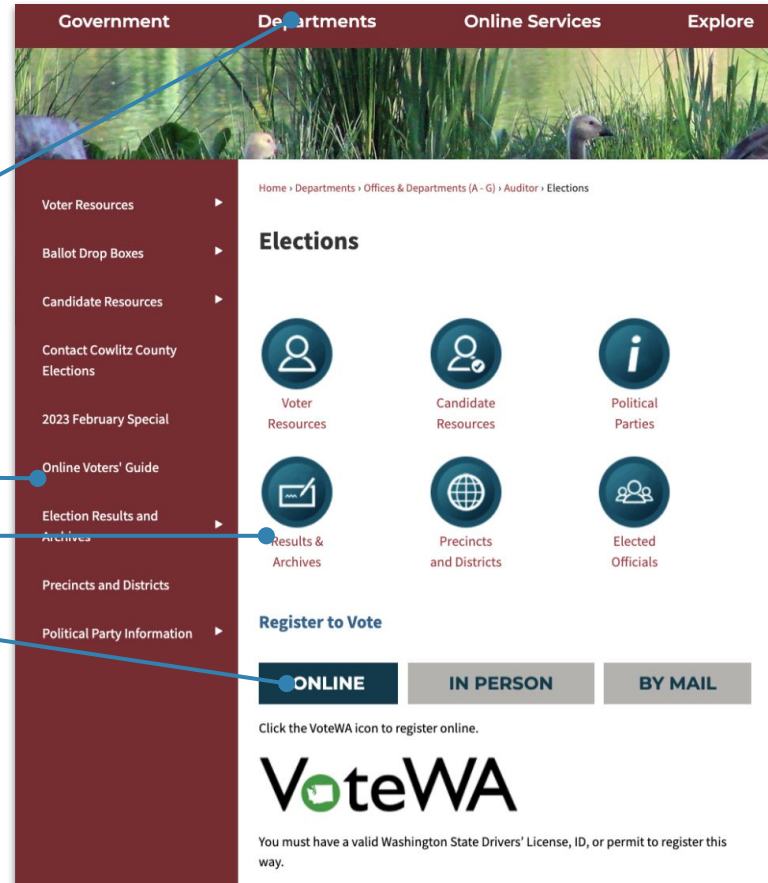
Category 2: Trust and security

Category 2
Trust and security

Average rating: 1.5-2

Sites reviewed had bare minimum to good features that improve trust and security. These features include information that increases legitimacy, and trustworthy information.

Strengths

- SSL certificate lock symbol
- Office and staff contact information

Areas to improve

- Use of .Gov
- Easily findable elections page from city/county website

Trust and security
Most websites had "minimum" or "good" trust indicators

100% of websites audited used a SSL certificate
The lock symbol and related URL containing "https" mean that the connection between a web browser and the website server is encrypted.

Office name, location, staff, and hours clearly displayed
Knowing who to contact and where to find them is an integral part of communicating accessibility and legitimacy. A strong majority of sites displayed this information on their site.

20/22 websites were embedded in local government websites
Voters start by looking for information locally. They often search for their town or county name plus "elections," which leads them to a local elections website. Embedding elections information within a county site help connect voter trust and findability of information.

Trust and security
Many sites received a "0" rated on their domain

Variations of .US,.Com.Org, and .Gov

The majority of websites did not have a .Gov domain. Instead, there were variations of domains with .Us and .Org being the most common. We suggest local election sites use .Gov, because it communicates trust and legitimacy of brand and information.

Boone County, MO is a .Com domain
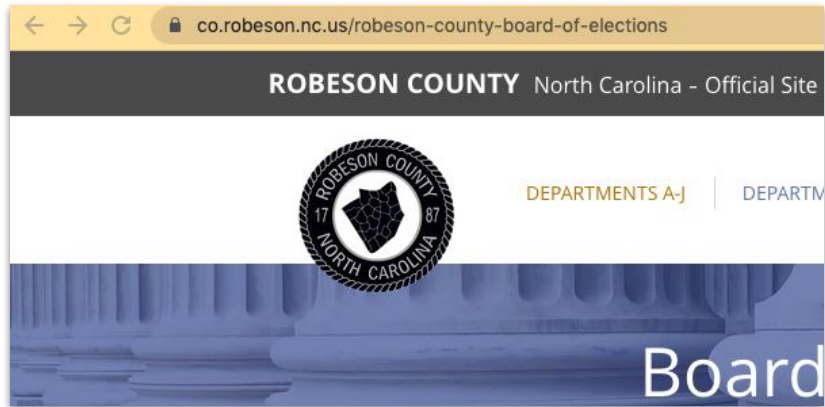
Robeson County, NC uses .US domain

Category 3: Key info for voter tasks and information

Category 3
Key voter tasks and information

Average rating: 1

We found key information about voting on all the sites audited, but presenting the information in a easy to find and understand matter was a challenge.

Strengths

- All sites had information about important deadline.
- Information about method of voting. This includes Early voting, vote my mail, a person information was available.

Areas to improve

- Information presented in plain language.
- Easy to find, navigate, and scrollable information.

Answers to voter questions
Most websites answered top questions, but they were difficult to find

Labels and keywords
Navigation and link labels were integral to a site's ability to answer questions.

Information architecture
Many sites presented key information in a way that was not intuitive, difficult to read, or understand.

Interaction dead ends
Most sites linked users to external sites, however this was not obvious may take users away from their local elections site.

Answers to voter questions
Voters look for words associated with task or question

Keywords and navigation
Voters look for keywords related to tasks like "early voting" or "voting with a disability". Many of the sites reviewed did not use intuitive labeling or keywords, making voting related information easy to find. This includes web pages related to voting, as well as links to information like maps and polling locations.
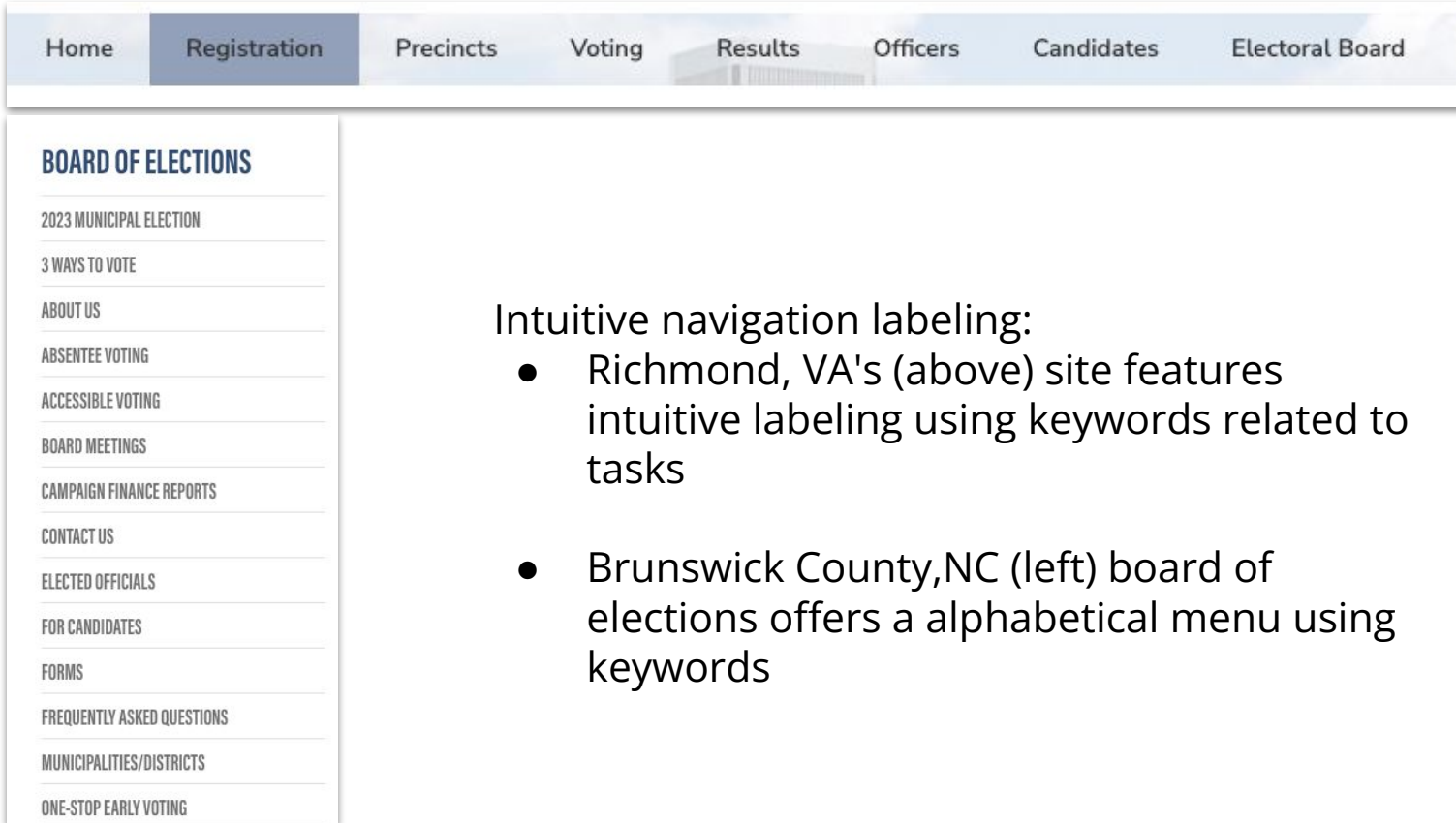
Sites often used words such as:
- Voter registration instead of Voter application
- Elections office instead of Registrar or Clerk
- Early Voting Location instead of Central Operations
- Voter information instead of Voter registration, on a one page websites with information about voting, not just registration exclusively
- Ballot instead of sample ballot

Answers to voter questions
Labeling is key to findability

Intuitive navigation labeling:
- Richmond, VA's (above) site features intuitive labeling using keywords related to tasks

- Brunswick County,NC (left) board of elections offers a alphabetical menu using keywords
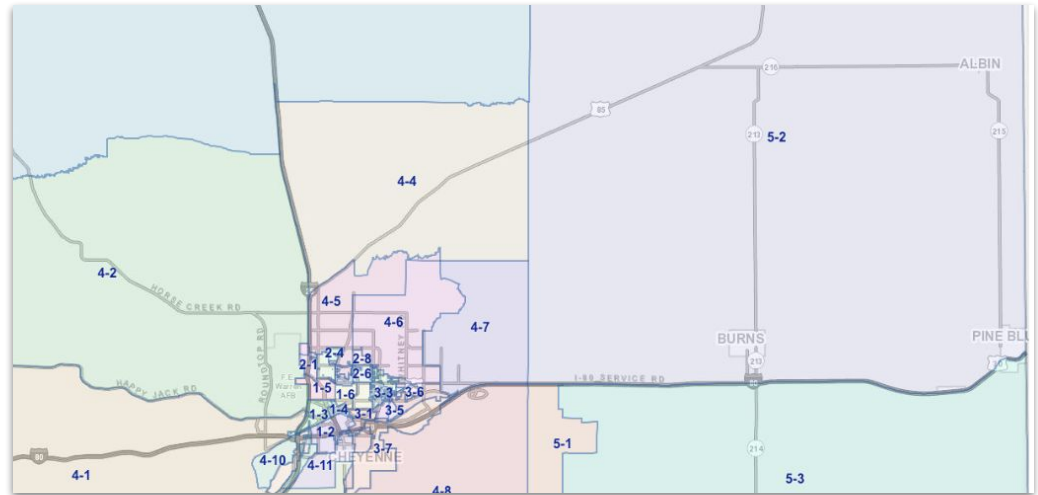
Answers to voter questions
Vague or inaccurate labels confuse voters

Intuitive navigation labeling:

Laramie County, WY's link to view a sample ballot and polling place lead to an interactive map with no sample ballot information

Answers to voter questions
Vague or inaccurate labels confuse voters

Intuitive navigation labeling:

Boone County, MO's "What's on My Ballot" link leads to a tool to look up voter registration or request for sample ballot by email.

Answers to voter questions
FAQ link results may confuse or overwhelm voters

Frequently asked questions should not end a conversation.

Stamford, CT's "More FAQ" button leads to a long page of information about county operations. Users have to remember the name of the election's office and search for answers.

FAQS

How do I register to vote or change party affiliation?

Who are the Elected Officers of the City?

Vacancies in Elective Offices?

Elections?

Voting Districts?

MORE FAQS

Department FAQs

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(All Departments) ▾

Building
Can I convert my basement for habitable use?
Can I make minor alterations to an existing non-conforming structure?
Can you give me your email address for general questions?
Can you provide some guidance on required documents for a swimming pool?
Can you provide some guidance on required documents for WPCA approval?
Do I need a license to work as a General Contractor in Stamford CT?
Do I need a permit if I am doing repairs?
How do I conduct inspections as a Third Party Inspector?
How do I know if I need a building permit for my proposed project?
How do I know if my plans need to be "sealed" by a licensed architect/engineer?
How do I verify if my architect or engineer is licensed in Connecticut?
Is a building permit required for a lawn irrigation system?
Is a CRS number required for electrical service?
My home is owned by an LLC and I am the sole owner of the LLC. Am I allowed to pull a permit as a home owner doing his/her own work per CGS 20-340?
My structure was built in 1928. What building code was it built under?
What are the building code requirements for maintaining construction safety?
What are the license/registration requirements for a contractor?
What are the regulations related to light pollution caused by excessive exterior lighting
What documents are required by other Stamford Departments
What documents are required for obtaining a Final Certificate of Occupancy?

Answers to voter questions
Poor information architecture made answers difficult to find

Information hierarchy and presentation

Many sites did not have a well defined hierarchy of information. Using headers, bullet points or numbers to explain processes, and grouping similar topics, make information easier to find.

Inline information

Date, times, and deadlines are important to voters. However, many sites evaluated received a "minimum" due to presenting deadlines, dates, and location information in paragraph or longer section of text. Voters looking for this information may miss important dates if they do not read carefully, or do not see the section. A list of key dates, as well as inline information could satisfy information needs.

Answers to voter questions

Presenting information using groups and hierarchy contribute to findability

Pennington County, SD's single page layout does not have an identified hierarchy, headers, or grouping of information.

Information about where to vote is split between two section of the page register.

General information about voting and elections are small link at the top of the page that may not catch voter's attention.

Answers to voter questions
Hierarchy can help voters understand processes

Hierarchy and steps simplify processes.

New Brunswick, NC's absentee voting page has a high level overview of the process with deadline information. Each step in the process has a header and relevant information

Answers to voter questions
Links without context impacted information journey

External links without context

Many sites used external links to meet site visitor needs. The most common sites linked to were Secretary of state sites for ballot tracking and vote by mail information. Regardless of destination,most sites did not inform users that links would take them away from their local election site. This may confuse voters, and create a negative user experience.

FAQs

Several sites had FAQ sections on pages with frequently asked questions from other county or city offices. Without clear navigation, users may be confused

Learn more about designing links for a good user experience

Answers to voter questions
Election webpage was hard to find, contact information was easy

From County/City home page
Identifying the webpage of local election offices starting from the county/city website was difficult for several of the sites reviewed. This was due in part to the various names used by election officials in each state.

Office name, location, staff, and hours clearly displayed
All of the websites reviewed received at least a "1" or bare minimum on the "contact information" guidelines. All sites displayed office name, physical locations, at least one staff member, and hours of operation clearly. Several offices offered additional means of communication including email and social media links.

Secretary of state website and resources were used
SOS resources used to help answer key voter questions

Forms, graphs, trackers and lookup
Local election offices used a variety of resources including forms, ballot trackers, and graphs created by the secretary of state.

Meeting the needs of diverse voters
Information created by the Secretary of State's office was also used to answer questions and provide resources to student voter, language access,people with disabilities, and returning citizens. For example, most offices with a section 203 designation used bilingual voter registration forms and ballots.

Category 4: Special voter circumstances

Category 4
Special voters circumstances

Average rating: 1

Overall, information about voting for students, people with disabilities, returning citizens, and voting in a language other than English was an area of improvement.

Strengths

- Several sites had "2" or "good" rating accessible voting information
- High school student voter information

Areas to improve

- Most sites did not have adequate information about special voter circumstances
- English links to language access resources (ex. ballots and voter registration)

Student voter information
Four websites addressed college student voters

Overall, websites did not provide information for college student voters.

The 4 websites that did include student voter information varied in depth. All, 3 sites had specific areas dedicated to student voting that included information about residency and voting. Of the sites audited, 2 put student voter information in their registration section, while the other 2 distinct student voting sections.

Student voter information
Some key questions answered, but not all

Home › Departments › Offices & Departments (A - G) › Auditor › Elections › Voter Resources › University Voters

University Voters

As a student, you probably change your address more frequently than the average voter. Remember to update your voter registration each time you move to ensure you get a ballot!

University and college students may register to vote in Washington if you have lived in the state for at least 30 days and have established a residential address in the state. Please note that Washington State residency requirements for voting are not the same as residency for in-state tuition purposes. You may vote in only one state. If you were previously registered in another state, cancel your registration in that state when you register in Washington.

Cowlitz County's page dedicated to University Voters provides minimal information and is not written in plain language. The page also uses terms and concepts unfamiliar to the intended audience.

Student voter information
Key questions and resources

Madison, Wisconsin's Elections site is an example of excellent student voter information.

The page includes information about registration, how to determine residency, and a downloadable guide for student voters.

Student FAQ

Frequently Asked Questions

I am a student here for 8 months of the year. Where should I register?
You have the option to register in the municipality where you are a student. Alternatively, you may register in your hometown. If you have been previously registered elsewhere, you are required to list your old address in section 7 of the form, so your old registration can be canceled.

If a student leaves for the summer, where do they vote for summer elections?
Students might fall into one of these two groups:

1. Leaving for the summer with intent to return. If they do not intend to establish residency at any place they stay until returning for school in the fall, then they may vote absentee from their school address until they have resided for 28 days at a new school address.

2. Leaving their school address permanently with intent to make permanent residence outside of Wisconsin. They are no longer a Wisconsin resident and may not vote in Wisconsin.

I am leaving to study abroad for a year. Do I lose my right to vote?
No. If your permanent address remains in Wisconsin, you may vote according to that permanent address.

For additional questions about student residency, view the Student Residency Guide _PDF_ ⬓.

High school civic engagement was a common focus
A number of websites had information for youth

Wyandotte County, Kansas's student election worker application

Hartford, Connecticut's elections website features high school voter registration information

Section 203 language access
Most sites did not provide adequate language access

Sites with section 203 designations
Several of the sites reviewed were required to provide elections material in at least one language other than english. However, these sites were not translated, and used link text written in english to direct voters to resources in their preferred language. This produced a weak information scent, and made the information difficult to find.

Translation widgets
Most sites regardless of federal designation used a translation widget. These widgets translate text on a website to the users preferred language. However, the translations are not specific to elections. So, they may provide confusing information.

Section 203 language access
English links to non-english resources were common

Henderson County, TX received a score of "1" due to english language links to Spanish voter information.

Santa Cruz County had one sections of the site translated.

Student voter information
Some key questions answered, but not all

Madison, WI's site included mini sites in three languages.

People with disabilities
Information about accessibility was limited

An area of improvement
Only a third of the sites reviewed explicitly addressed voting with a disability or accessibility. Furthermore, several sites could not be used without a keyboard due to poor information architecture.

Standouts
Several websites had sections of their website dedicated to people with disabilities. These pages and sections included a range of resources including information on how to vote, a list of accessible polling places, and links to state disability advocacy offices.

People with disabilities
Variation in layout and information design

Shasta County, Ca's voting for all page

Santa Cruz County, Az's voter accessibility page

Pennington County, Sd Accessibility resource links to a third party advocate's website

Restoration of rights
Most sites did not have restoration of rights information

The 4 websites that did have information ranged in language and approach. These include:

A letter or page with wording directly from the Secretary of State or court order

This method was the least accessible due to legalease and failure to answer top voter questions.

A link to the state's Secretary of State website with rights restoration information

This method may offer more information depending on the website, but most outlined the legal requirements and did not use plain language.

A page on the county/city website with information about eligibility and registration

This method was the most user friendly because if offered informative and instructional information about rights restoration.

Restoration of rights examples
Official letter or notice

This example from Santa Cruz County, AZ

- Does not use plain language
- Informative, not instructional
- Did not use "voter first" language, and instead used "a person" or "the person"

Suzanne "Suzie" Sainz
SANTA CRUZ COUNTY RECORDER
2150 N. Congress Dr., Nogales, Arizona 85621

RESTORATION OF RIGHT TO VOTE

The Santa Cruz County Recorder's Office receives numerous inquiries concerning a convicted felon's right to vote. The following information is provided as a courtesy only.

Under Arizona law, a person who has been convicted of a felony offense has their civil rights suspended. Those rights include the right to vote or to seek and hold public office, the right to serve on a jury and the right to possess a gun or firearm, among other rights, A.R.S. § 13-904. The Recorder's Office is only providing the following information regarding voter registration. After a felony conviction, a person may have their right to vote restored. The procedures are as follows:

Single Felony Conviction

If the person has been convicted of one single felony offense, regardless of the classification of the offense, the process is easy. Please note that this does not mean only one criminal case number. A person may be convicted of more than one felony offense in a single case number. If a person has only been convicted of a **single felony offense**, the right to vote is automatically restored as soon as the court-imposed sentence has been completed. The person must fully complete the sentence before the automatic restoration of the right to vote applies. For example, if a prison sentence was imposed, the person must also complete the parole or community supervision period before they are eligible. If a fine or restitution was imposed, that fine and/or restitution must be paid in full. When the individual has completed the sentence, in this situation, the only action they need to take to be eligible to vote is to complete and submit a new registration form. In this situation, the person does not have to apply to the court to have the right to vote restored; it is automatic, A.R.S. § 13-912.

Two or More Felony Convictions

If the person was convicted of two or more felony offenses, either in a single criminal case or in separate cases, the individual (or their attorney) must petition the court that sentenced them for restoration of their civil rights, including the right to vote. For example, if a person was sentenced in Maricopa County, they must petition the court in Maricopa County; they may not petition the court in Santa Cruz County.
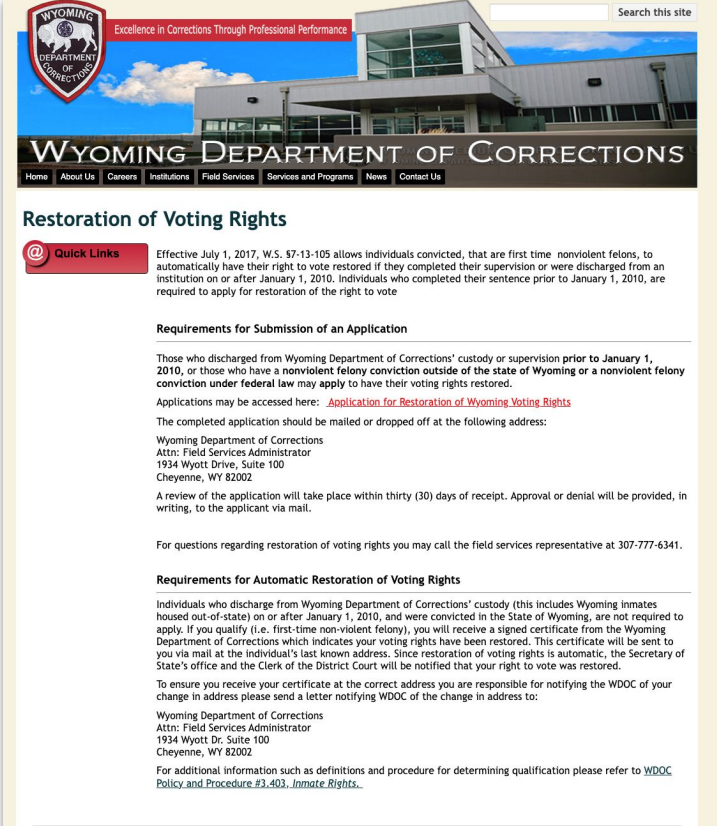
Restoration of rights examples
Link to Secretary of State website

The "Restoration of Rights" link on the Laramie County, Wy Elections website directs users to a Department of Corrections page.

There is no information about who to contact at a local election office for assistance and questions.

Restoration of rights examples
Link to Secretary of State website

Voting	Results	Officers	Candidates	Electoral Board	Media

Anyone convicted of a felony in Virginia automatically loses their civil rights – the right to vote, serve on a jury, run for office, become a public notary, and carry a firearm. The Constitution of Virginia gives the Governor the sole discretion to restore civil rights, not including firearm rights. Individuals seeking restoration of their civil rights are encouraged to contact the Secretary of the Commonwealth's Office.

To be eligible for restoration of civil rights, an individual must be free from any term of incarceration resulting from felony convictions. The Secretary of the Commonwealth's office works with the Department of Corrections to identify individuals who have been released and may be eligible to have their rights restored.

If you have questions, or if you would like to check to see if your civil rights have been restored, please contact the Secretary of the Commonwealth at the following website (www.restore.virginia.gov), or you can call the office at (804) 692-0104.

Richmond, Va's section on rights restoration uses voter first language (ex:To be eligible...), gives a plain language explanations, and offers visitors resources from the Secretary of State.

Category 5: Seasonal Election Staff

Category 5
Seasonal elections staff

Average rating: 1

We saw information about seasonal election staff opportunities on several of the sites audited.

Strengths

- Position applications, compensation, and contact person
- Training videos and handbooks

Areas to improve

- Some sites had no information about seasonal elections staff

Seasonal elections staff
Information about seasonal opportunities varied

Basic information about seasonal election staff
Several, but not all of the sites audited had information about seasonal elections staff opportunities. Sites given a "2" or "Good" rating

Training
Some of the PDF and mapping software produced images and maps that were not easy to understand. This was due to a range of issues including poor color contrast and an inability to distinguish landmarks, borders, and addresses that could help voters locate polling places.

New things we noticed

Some patterns we started to notice that weren't part of the original rubric

Maps

Maps and use of GIS
Offices used a variety of mapping tools to helped voters

Maps
The majority of websites had a map of polling locations or dropboxes if applicable. Many predicted maps for candidate use, instead of the public. The maps ranged in presentation method, with sites using color coded PDFs to interactive GIS platform ARCgis.

Usability
Some of the PDF and mapping software produced images and maps that were not easy to understand. This was due to a range of issues including poor color contrast and an inability to distinguish landmarks, borders, and addresses that could help voters locate polling places.

People with disabilities
Variation in layout and information design
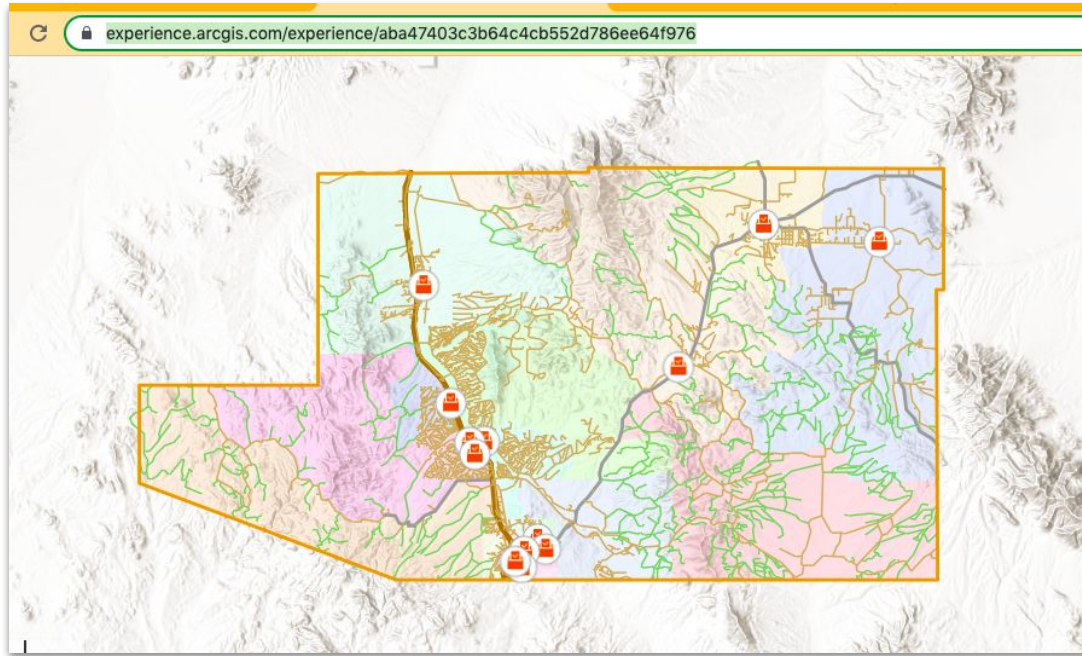
Interactive map from AZ
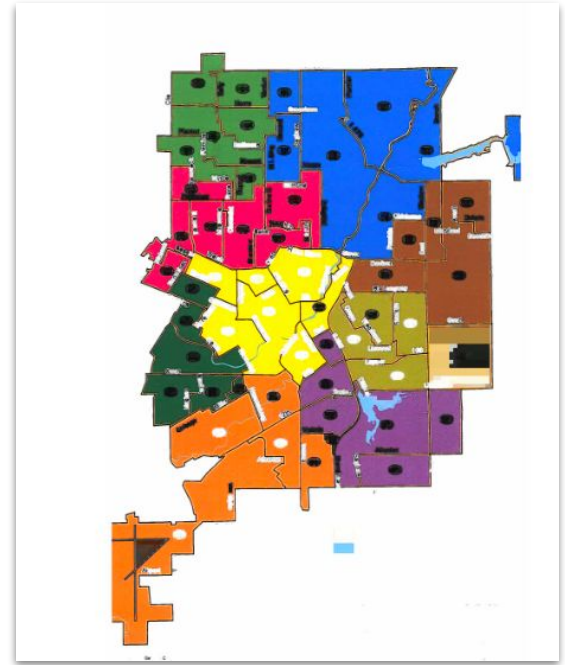
PDF map from Flint, MI

Freedom of information links

Freedom of information requests
Links to FOIA requests were common on elections sites

Prominent feature
Of the sites audited 5 had visible links to request information related to elections through the freedom of information act.

Links to FOIA requests were not common in 2012. The increase in links and requests for election information may have increased since 2012, requiring elections offices to provide this information on their websites.

Recommendations for election offices

Recommendations to improve trust and security

100% of websites audited used a SSL certificate
The lock symbol and related URL containing "https" mean that the connection between a web browser and the website server is encrypted.

Office name, location, staff, and hours clearly displayed
Knowing who to contact and where to find them is an integral part of communicating accessibility and legitimacy. A strong majority of sites displayed this information on their site.

18/20 websites were embedded in local government websites

Voters start by looking for information locally. They often search for their town or county name plus "elections," which leads them to a local elections website. Embedding elections information within a county site help connect voter trust and findability of information.

Recommendations

Navigation
- Use intuitive navigation labels
- Choose one main navigation
- Provide more context to links
- Improve site syntax to improve accessibility and scrollability

Special voter categories
- Create links with a strong information scent for language access
- Provide student voter information in plain language that answers questions for students in a variety of circumstances (ex. a resident of the county who is studying away)
- Provides plain language voter first information that answers top questions for returning citizens, include local contact information

Questions/next steps:

Questions for future research

The audit conducted shed light on strengths and areas of growth, but there are additional areas that need to be explored.

These include:

- The mobile usability experience-testing or auditing the full website user experience from a mobile device
- Candidate information-information about running for local office
- Information elections- this includes information about canvas, count, and audit process
- Results–getting feedback about how best to present and report election results

Next steps

The next step in this project will be conversations with voters in some of the areas we've reviewed. Through exploratory conversations that include reviewing current websites and mock ups, we will learn more about :

- What site structures are most useful to voter?
- What keywords they find helpful when searching for information?
- What is is too much information?

Thank you

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Appendix

Website rating

Websites

Website	Score	Top Strength	Top Area of Growth
[Berkeley County, SC](#)	1	Connection to SOS site	No information hierarchy
[Brunswick County, NC](#)	2	Site style and UI consistency	No voter ID information No sample ballot
[Brunswick County, NC](#)	2	Site style and UI consistency	No voter ID information No sample ballot
[Boone County, MO](#)	1.5	Navigation labels, use of keywords	No sample ballot
[Cass County,MO](#)	1	Easy to find election information, navigation	No clear in person voting information

[A complete score card for all sites is in this folder](#)

Websites

Website	Score	Top Strength	Top Area of Growth
[Cowlitz County, WA](#)	1.5	Easy to find answers to questions in a few clicks	Too many navigation options
[Flint, MI](#)	1	Election document section	No voter registration information
[Hartford, CT](#)	1.5	Information architecture, use of headers and grouping information	Accordions create very long pages,
[Henderson, TX](#)	1	Staff,contact, and office location information	Language access; Spanish
[Johnson County, IW](#)	1	Navigation labels	Too many accordions hide information, makes navigation difficult

[A complete score card for all sites is in this folder](#)

Websites

Website	Score	Top Strength	Top Area of Growth
[Laramie County, WY](#)	1	Accordions, use of headers to organize information	List of key deadlines in an easily accessible place
[Litchfield, CT](#)	1	Accordions, use of headers to organize information	Labeling and navigation to key information
[Madison,WI](#)	2.5	Information for students and returning citizens, language access,	Deadlines need to be more prominent, give date instead of written description
[Monroe County,IN](#)	1	Labeling of links, headers, and grouping of information	No easy to read/ accessible list of deadlines
[Pennington County, SD](#)	1	Absentee voting video	Headers, navigation, information architecture

[A complete score card for all sites is in this folder](#)

Websites

Website	Score	Top Strength	Top Area of Growth
[Richmond,VA](#)	2	Consistency in style, headers and navigation	No student voter information
[Robeson County,NC](#)	1	Headers	No identifiable information structure or hierarchy
[Rogers County, OK](#)	1	Navigation labels	No accessible voting, inaccessible links
[San Juan County,NM](#)	1	Language access, headers, navigation	Voter registration link leads to online only voter registration
[Santa Cruz County, AZ](#)	1	Accessible voting information	Language access;Spanish

[A complete score card for all sites is in this folder](#)

Websites

Website	Score	Top Strength	Top Area of Growth
[Shasta County, CA](#)	1.5	Use of headers, information structure	Too many navigation options
[Valencia County, NM](#)	1	Headers, information grouping	Answer to top voter questions
[Wyandotte County, KS](#)	1.5	Information hierarchy, grouping, and depth of information	Pages are long, require a lot of scrolling

[A complete score card for all sites is in this folder](#)