How to Design Impactful Voter Education Materials

April 2024
Contents

If you’re reading this, you likely play a crucial role in your community, creating materials that invite civic participation. This toolkit supports community-based and voter advocacy groups to create engaging, accessible, and action-oriented voter education materials.

Whether you are a team of 1 or 200, you will find something valuable to take your materials to the next level. You can use the recommendations in this book to create a wide array of print or digital materials that fit your budget and staff capacity.

This toolkit will help you:

• Create accessible and digestible voter education content
• Use information design for effective audience engagement
• Easily create materials for your multilingual audiences

In this toolkit, you will find:

Bite-snack-meal content framework
Communications strategy planning document and customizable messaging for your voter education materials.
Page 4

Starter templates
Canva templates for GOTV materials in the Bite-Snack-Meal framework.
page 6

Design recommendations
13 recommendations that show you how to incorporate information design into your materials to create the most impact.
page 10

• Content page 12
• Digital access and barriers page 18
• Imagery page 22
• Color page 28
Research goals

This toolkit was developed based on research we conducted in Ohio during 2023 and 2024.

Our goal for this study was to understand how to design impactful and culturally responsive voter materials that encourage participation from voters from diverse communities in Ohio. We aimed to support voter advocacy groups in their GOTV communication efforts during an active election.

With many changes and misunderstandings in Ohio’s recent election laws, which could potentially cause disenfranchisement among voters, we explored 3 main areas:

- We looked into how members of communities that are more likely to face barriers to voting perceived design elements in GOTV materials.
- We examined how color and imagery impacted different communication materials’ effectiveness, attractiveness, desirability, and usability.
- We tested how tailoring voter materials to be more or less culturally responsive fostered trust within communities.
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Research behind the toolkit

Research methods

To achieve these goals, we conducted:

• **In-depth semi-structured key expert interviews** with Steering Committee Members of the Ohio Voters Rights Coalition (OVRC) to learn about their existing process of creating materials and communications ecosystem.

• **Listening sessions** with our 5 partnering community-based advocacy organizations to understand their existing voter efforts and challenges.

• **A design audit and analysis** of partnering organizations’ existing voting materials used during the 2023 election season.

• **In-person usability testing sessions** with 61 participants across three cities (Cleveland, Akron, and Columbus) in the lead-up to Ohio's August 2023 Special Election and the November 2023 General Election. We tested materials in English, Spanish, and Nepali.

View all Center for Civic Design (CCD) research reports on our website.
Bite-Snack-Meal Content Framework
Bite-snack-meal content framework

What is bite-snack-meal?

As a community organization, you play a crucial role in helping people get involved in their community and vote with confidence. Using content strategies, you can make your voter education materials more effective and reach a wide range of people.

Bite-Snack-Meal is the voter-centered content framework we use at CCD to think about organizing and presenting information to voters. CCD has adapted this framework from the original strategy by Leslie O’Flavahan.

At its core, bite-snack-meal divides a large amount of information into different scales.

A content framework is a repeatable, structured blueprint for creating, organizing, and distributing information in formats that allow the audience to understand and navigate topics effectively.

Bite

The “Bite” is the smallest information that tells voters the critical steps to take action.

Snack

The “Snack” adds more context around that smallest essential piece of information. A “Snack” is usually enough for most voters.

Meal

The “Meal” has everything, including information about particular cases/circumstances that only apply to some. It’s usually a website or a written voter guide.
Bite

What’s on your ballot for the November 5 election? Look up your sample ballot on the website

VoteOhio.gov

This “Bite” template is for a social media post that tells voters they can look up who is on their ballot in the November 5 election online. The template includes sample alt text and post text.

Canva template: Bite

Other examples:
- Social media posts
- Stickers
- Postcards
- Mobile messages
- Website copy
- Memes

Snack

Ohio’s next election is November 5, 2024

In Ohio, we have 5 ways to vote!

- Vote in person at a polling place.
- Vote by mail.
- Vote early in person before Election Day.
- Vote by absentee ballot.
- Vote by provisional ballot.

This “Snack” template is a handout covering the critical information most voters need to vote. It covers 3 ways to vote, voter registration deadlines, who to contact if you’re having an issue, voter ID requirements, and specifics for voters with accessibility issues or felony convictions.

Canva template: Snack

Other examples:
- Flyers
- Short videos
- Email
- Website copy

Meal

What’s on your ballot for the November 5, 2024 election in Ohio?

¿Quién hay en su papeleta para las elecciones del 5 de noviembre de 2024 en Ohio?

This “Meal” template is for a multi-page booklet about the positions on Ohioans’ ballots for the November 5 election. It includes elected official position descriptions and some information about how to vote.

Canva template: Meal

Other examples:
- Voter guide or booklets
- Long videos
- Website copy
Why use bite-snack-meal?

It helps voters take action.
 Participating in elections as an informed voter requires a lot of small and large tasks. From registering to vote to researching ballot items to finding your polling station, you can use bite-snack-meal to deliver information at every phase of the voter journey to make the voter experience less overwhelming.

It makes your job easier.
 Voter education starts long before election day. Making information easy to find and understand encourages potential voters to engage in the political process. By presenting information in appropriately sized chunks with bite-snack-meal framework, you can guarantee that voters are receiving precisely what they need when they need it.

It simplifies complex topics.
 The bite-snack-meal framework helps voters navigate complex topics by presenting information in a digestible, logical, and intuitive way. Each piece of the framework builds on the one before it, creating an easy-to-follow flow of information with increasing levels of detail at each level.

It’s adaptable and accessible.
 Most voters will use information from various sources to learn about an election. Whether your audience prefers print or digital materials, you can use the bite-snack-meal method across all formats. This approach allows diverse audiences to access information in the best way for them.

It ensures voters get timely, relevant information.
 Most voters gather information about elections from different sources. Whether printed materials or online resources, the bite-snack-meal method works well across all platforms, making it easier for diverse groups of people to access the information they need in a way that suits them best.

Voter education materials are crucial at all phases of the voting process. Understanding the journey of American voters can help you brainstorm the most helpful applications of the bite-snack-meal framework for your audience.

Read more about The Epic Journey of American Voters.
Planning your content with bite-snack-meal

How to begin planning content

The variety of ways voters search for information about elections is as diverse as the U.S. electorate. Some prefer information on paper, and some want to click a link for a digital experience. One thing all voters have in common is that they hope to find the correct information in their favorite format at the right time in their voter journey.

This is why it’s important to plan:

• The goals and objectives of your key message.
• The differing needs of diverse voter populations.
• How much information to shared at a given point in the voter journey.
• And which format is the most effective for this amount of information.
• Answering these questions will require identifying the diverse needs of your audience(s) and building a strategy around their preferred methods of receiving information.

For more tips on communicating with voters, visit the CCD website:

Field Guide Vol. 5: Choosing How to Communicate with Voters.

This communications strategy planning document allows you and your team to create targeted voter education communications strategies for diverse voter populations.

The link to this document and other planning resources can be found on the next page.
Tools and templates to support your voter education content creation using bite-snack-meal

**Plan**

- **Find Here**
  - e.g., Ohio Primary Voter Education Campaign

- **Read Here and Directions**
  - What are the project’s overall goals and objectives?

**Understand Your Voter Populations and Needs**

- Delivering voter engagement content using bite, snack, and meal materials is crucial. We’ve drafted a customizable starter language kit for you to answer commonly asked questions in the Bite-Snack-Meal format.

- Get the communications strategy template here.

**Write**

- **Can I vote?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bite</td>
<td>To vote in the 2020 General Election, you must register to vote. Voter Registration Deadline: Check your voter registration or register to vote at vote.org.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snack</td>
<td>Check your voter registration or register to vote at vote.org. To register to vote, you must provide the following: Your Ohio driver’s license number or Social Security number.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Ready-to-use GOTV starter templates**
  - This toolkit’s starter bite, snack, and meal templates are built in Canva.
  - [Canva Template: Bite](#)
  - [Canva Template: Snack](#)
  - [Canva Template: Meal](#)

- If you need help using Canva, learn more online at [A Beginner’s Guide to Canva](#).

**Design**

- **Ohio’s next election is November 5, 2024**

  - In Ohio, we have 3 ways to vote!
  - All registered voters can choose to vote early, on Election Day, or by mail.

  - **Vote in person on Election Day, November 5**
    - Polls are open from 8:00am - 7:00pm.
    - Visit vote.org to find your polling place.
    - To vote in person, you must show a photo ID.

  - **Vote early in person from October 8 - November 3**
    - You can vote early in person at your local Board of Elections or Early Vote Center.
    - Visit vote.org to find your early voting location and hours.

- How To Design Impactful Materials | April 2024 | 9
Recommendations

Simple design techniques to engage your audience
Recommendations to put it all together

Introduction
Now that you have your content prepared, we’ll explore how to incorporate visual and information design into your materials to create the most impact. Written and visual communication work together to communicate concepts effectively. Design elements, such as a balanced layout, intentional use of color, a clear information hierarchy, and informative and concise content, work together to create “professional-looking” materials.

Throughout our research, we repeatedly heard the word “professional” to describe designs that voters trusted. In this toolkit section, we will demystify some easy-to-implement design techniques that will make voters think you have an in-house design team!

In this section
Some aspects of design that we'll cover in the following recommendations are:

- **Content**: How to write and structure information for your voter education materials on page 12

- **Digital access & barriers**: Considerations to ensure that voter education information is accessible to all people, regardless of digital literacy and access on page 18

- **Imagery**: How to use photos, icons, and illustrations to enhance your message in your voter education materials on page 22

- **Color**: Tips on how color can be used as a tool to support navigation of voter education materials on page 28

At CCD, we call this information design: The process of making the information you want to share clear, engaging, accessible, and usable. Design is about more than just making things look pretty. Accurate information, written in plain language, and well-designed materials lead to trust.
Recommendations

Content
1. Write a general invitation as the top-line header message on voter education materials.

About this recommendation

The first thing readers look for on your voter education materials should be a general invitation to vote that includes the election day and type of election. Starting with general information gets readers the information they need first.

Some examples of top-line header messages that work are:

- Ohio’s next election is November 5, 2024!
- Are you ready to vote in Ohio’s primary election on March 19, 2023?
- Vote on issues that will impact your community in Ohio’s election on November 5, 2024!

Why follow this recommendation?

Answering questions quickly and easily appeals to all potential voters. When tailoring your communication to specific community groups, including cultural language or ballot issues at the top of GOTV materials can have the opposite of the intended effect, including making voters feel targeted and singled out instead of included. It can also be perceived as biased or skewed, which can discourage or alienate people and potentially cause distrust.

Include the date of the upcoming election and registration reminders, which are both important pieces of information for everyone including new and avid voters.
Considerations

**Are you making voter education materials or advocacy materials?**

Voter education materials should focus primarily on what voters need to be able to vote. Avoid using ballot issues as the header on GOTV education materials. While voters must understand what issues are on the ballot, listing ballot issues in the header can be perceived as issue lobbying. Voters want to feel free of being influenced to vote in one direction or another.

- Instead, explain ballot issues further down in the content in smaller text and link to other trusted, nonpartisan resources that give detailed information about ballot issues.

**Avoid using culturally specific terms in top-line header messages, which can make voters feel targeted and singled out instead of included.**

During our testing, we learned that using culturally specific terms in headlines to encourage certain groups to participate in the voting process, like “Cleveland Boricuas” were not well received. These headlines were perceived as divisive and led to questions about how people identified themselves.
2. On snack and meal-sized voter education, start with general how-to-vote information, then add subheader callouts for voters with specific information needs.

About this recommendation

Start general

Start with general information about when, why, and how to vote that applies to everyone. Then, address voters directly with critical information that applies to them.

Use headers and subheaders to:

- Highlight critical information
  Use headers and subheaders so people can find the information they’re looking for.

- Highlight unique circumstances
  Consider including specifics for:
  - Voters with accessibility needs
  - Language access needs
  - New voters
  - College students
  - Returning citizens/those with felony convictions

Why follow this recommendation?

Subheaders and callouts that highlight specific information needed by different populations have the potential to make non-voters feel included.

Are you registered to vote in Ohio’s next election?

You have 3 ways to vote!

All registered voters can choose to vote early, on Election Day, or by mail.

In person on Election Day, November 7

- Polls are open from 6:30am – 7:30pm
- Scan the QR code to look up your polling place online at VoteOhio.gov
- To vote in person, you must show a photo ID

Vote early in person from Oct 11 – Nov 5

- You can vote early in person at your local Board of Elections or Early Vote Center.
- Scan the QR code to find your early voting location and hours at: ohio.gov/elections/voters/toolkit/early-voting
- To vote in person, you must show a photo ID

Vote by mail

- Request a mail ballot by October 31. You can request it as early as today. Don’t delay!
  - Send your completed ballot to your county election board.
- Return your application in person or by mail.
- Track your ballot at VoteOhio.gov

Have in-person accessibility needs?

If you have a disability and can’t physically enter a polling place, you must be allowed to vote.

Have a felony conviction?

You can vote if you are...
- In jail for a non-felony offense.
- Previously convicted of a felony and are no longer incarcerated.

Are you a college student?

Out of state students in Ohio have the right to vote in Ohio elections. You can:
- Register at your Ohio address
- Vote in person using your passport or military ID
- Or, vote by mail using the last 4 digits of your SSN

Have questions? Find your local Board of Elections at VoteOhio.gov
Need a photo ID? Get free voter ID support from voteriders.org/ohio
Experiencing a problem? Contact Election Protection at 866ourvote.org or 866-687-8683

About this recommendation
A side-by-side bilingual layout is especially helpful for bilingual voters with varying fluency levels in both languages.

This layout style provides learning opportunities for voters with varying fluency to learn specific election terminology. If they don’t recognize the word in one language, they might recognize it in the other!

Additional suggestions for supporting audiences with low English proficiency
• Tell people if the election office supports their language.
• Direct people to resources in the language they speak wherever possible. For example, use the in-language phone number for Vote411 phone support.

Why follow this recommendation?
Using bilingual layouts support multilingual voters by making it easy to compare the text in each language.

What do my local elected officials do? ¿Qué hacen los funcionarios electos de mi localidad?

**Common Pleas Court Judge**
Each county in Ohio has a Court of Common Pleas. Judges serve six-year terms. What they do:
- Hear and decide on civil and criminal court cases.

**Juez del Tribunal de Causas Comunes**
Cada condado de Ohio tiene un Tribunal de Causas Comunes. Los jueces tienen mandatos de 6 años. Lo qué hacen:
- Escuchar y decidir sobre casos judiciales civiles y penales.

**Prosecutor**
Prosecutors serve a four-year term. What they do:
- Guide victims of crime through the criminal justice process.
- Represent the U.S. government in court for local criminal cases by recommending sentencing, initiating further investigations, and presenting cases against a suspected lawbreaker.

**Fiscal**
Los fiscales tienen un mandato de 4 años. Lo qué hacen:
- Guiar a las víctimas de delitos a través del proceso de justicia penal.
- Representar al gobierno de EE.UU. ante los tribunales en casos penales locales recomendando sentencias, iniciar investigaciones adicionales, y presentar casos contra un presunto infractor de la ley.
4. Design voter education materials in multiple mediums, including in print and online.

About this recommendation

To serve everyone’s overlapping preferences and accessibility needs, make information available in multiple places in different formats.

Making materials available in one format that works for everyone is nearly impossible because people have different accessibility needs and media consumption preferences.

Making information available in multiple formats will increase the likelihood of meeting your voters with the right format at the right time. For example, to help non-English speakers engage with online materials only available in English, have multilingual staff or volunteers support with in-person translation.

Increasing accessibility to invite participation

Once you understand where your audience goes for information, you can choose your means of communication. When making your decisions, consider the following:

What languages and dialects does your audience speak?
- Check Design translated and bilingual materials.
- For digital materials that are not translated, provide live translation support.
- Add translated captions or voice overs to videos.

Are your print voter education materials accessible to those with visual impairments?
- Make sure that your colors have enough contrast to be accessible by using mostly dark text on light-colored backgrounds.
- Use a large enough text size. 11-12 pts for body copy.

Are your digital voter education materials (websites and social media contents) accessible to those with visual and audio impairments?
- Add alt text to images.
- Make sure that critical information is included in both the image and the text of a post.

What are the digital needs of your audience?
- Design your website mobile-first for those who do not have access to a desktop or laptop. (See Recommendations 6 + 7.)
- Provide in-person support for your audience members with limited tech literacy.
Recommendations

Digital Access & Barriers
5. Provide support for voters who need digital literacy assistance.

About this recommendation

Today, a lot of election information can be accessed online. To support voters with accessing digital information across various touchpoints, it’s important to include multiple ways to access digital content from printed voter education materials.

Election offices have also built a lot of digital tools to share information that voters really want to know like:

- Voter Registration Status
- Sample Ballot (which can only be accessed online in Ohio)
- Tracking a mail ballot

Why follow this recommendation?
People have different information access abilities, habits, and preferences. Include multiple ways of accessing additional information and support to meet everyone’s needs.

Digital literacy is people’s ability to access, understand, and communicate with digital media.
5. Provide support for voters who need digital literacy assistance. (Continued)

When adding website links to printed voter education:

- Add the word ‘website’ before the link, for people who are unfamiliar with how URLs are written.
- Include the full website address (URL).
- Include a QR code that links to the website.
- Include phone numbers for people without Internet access, or who have further questions and need support.

**Vote in person on Election Day, November 5**
- Polls are open from 6:30am - 7:30pm
- Scan the QR code to look up your polling place on the website VoteOhio.gov
- To vote in person, you must show a photo ID

Short website links that are easier for people to type, such as Bitly. Ideally, try to use meaningful words, not random strings of letters and numbers. For example website.gov/register could be an easier to remember short link for a voter registration page. Advocate for election offices to do the same.
6. Create in-person opportunities to use digital tools for voters who lack access to technology.

About this recommendation

The digital divide refers to the gap between those with access to technology and digital literacy training and those without. Factors influencing the digital divide include geographic location, socioeconomic status, age, and physical disabilities.

Creating live opportunities for people who don’t have technology at home to use online tools can reduce the voter information gap. You can do this by:

- Training community organizers to provide digital information in person.
- Hosting in-person tabling to support people who struggle with technology to access information that is only available online:
- Transitioning voter registration tabling to tabling for sample ballots and resources about what’s on their ballot.
- Creating “Digital Translator Programs” that collaborate with libraries and community centers that already do digital access work for their communities.

Why follow this recommendation?

The seniors and new citizen voters we spoke to in our research are not moving from print to digital voter education. Some seniors and new citizen voters may be unfamiliar with QR codes and written website URL links on printed voter education materials.
Imagery
7. Use imagery that shows the voting process.

About this recommendation

Information design uses imagery intentionally to complement the main message. In good information design, imagery is used intentionally to complement the main message. Use images to supplement but not replace written information. You can help familiarize voters with election materials before engaging with them in real life by using illustrations, icons, and photos of items related to the voting process, such as:

- Voter ballots
- Vote-by-mail envelopes
- And ballot drop boxes.

Similarly, using imagery that shows voters’ actions throughout the civic engagement process can help potential voters visualize themselves participating in elections.

Imagery can also be a navigation element to break up and guide people through the information.

This flyer uses illustrations of a ballot box, a calendar, and vote by mail envelope to support messages detailing 3 methods of voting.
Considerations

When deciding where and how to use imagery, consider the following:

• Voters with disabilities may use screen readers to access digital content. Add alt text explaining how the image related to the text or message so they can “see the images with their ears.”
• Adding images will take up more space on your materials. You may need to make a trade off to include less text in order to include images, but the positive impacts make it worth it!

Why follow this recommendation?

Most voters we spoke with found illustrations and images of the voting process helpful in understanding the different voting methods available. Imagery helped voters to understand topics immediately and effectively.

This flyer uses illustrations to offer examples of people voting using 3 methods: in-person voting, early voting, and vote by mail.
8. Use imagery of diverse groups of people participating in democracy.

About this recommendation

American voters want to see themselves reflected in the big picture of U.S. elections. When using photographs in your materials, aim to show diverse groups that reflect a small snapshot of the diversity across the country to invoke a sense of unity and belonging.

Use imagery that genuinely represents your community and depicts diverse groups. When choosing imagery of diverse groups, make sure to go beyond simply checking off boxes to show that every identity is represented. A superficial gesture of inclusion without understanding the community represented can be perceived as tokenism, which harms underrepresented communities. Don’t try to show all aspects of diversity in a single image, as this may come across as inauthentic box-checking.

Why follow this recommendation?

Across communities people desire to see themselves and their community represented in voting communication materials. The majority of our research participants preferred images of racially and ethnically diverse groups of people, as it is usually a more accurate representation of their community and makes the information feel more credible.

In our research, this image of a racially and ethnically diverse group of younger voters evoked a sense of welcome. But, participants noticed the lack of age diversity in the image. We heard that images like this one represented unity and made them feel more united on the issues.
Considerations

When choosing images for your voter education materials, consider the following:

**What is your relationship with your audience?**
Are you and your outreach volunteers and staff representative of your audience?

- For BIPOC-led organizations working in BIPOC communities that have a relationship with their community whose outreach focus is for underrepresented communities, the use of imagery of diverse communities can be seen as an invitation and create a sense of belonging.

- For white-led organizations working in BIPOC communities, the use of images that only include singular racial or ethnic communities could be perceived as tokenism.

**What might the viewer’s perspective and potential emotional reaction be?**
Personal biases, cultural backgrounds, age, and individual experiences influence how images impact us.

**How are elements arranged in the photo?**
Photo composition can affect how people respond to images. Use imagery with people facing the camera to invoke a sense of welcome.

*It’s often easier and faster to find illustrations of people engaged in the voting process than to find photos of real people.*
Due to various laws regarding photography and voting around polls, it is more difficult to find images of people engaged in the act of voting. Graphic illustrations of people also allow for some flexibility in the interpretation of who is represented. They can represent various ethnicities and races and give people “a place to put themselves” in the imagery.
9. When using cultural imagery to engage specific audiences, assess your relationship with your audience first.

About this recommendation

Assess your organization’s relationship with your audience.

1. **Understand who you are.** Are you and your outreach volunteers and staff representative of your audience?

2. **Understand who your audience is.** The impact of culturally significant imagery depends on who is sharing the information.
   - If your organizer group has different identities than your audience, using cultural imagery to engage specific audiences can make voters feel targeted and singled out, instead of included.
   - Avoid using imagery that you don’t have a cultural understanding of.

3. **Show your materials to people from your audience, and ask them for feedback.** You never know what imagery might mean to different members of your audience. Do research into the context of imagery you’re selecting and adding to your voter education materials.

Recommendation: Imagery

Why follow this recommendation? The use of the Puerto Rican flag on GOTV materials evoked a strong sense of pride and identity for Puerto Rican research participants. But, it also made them suspicious of why Puerto Ricans were singled out, instead of the larger Latino population in Ohio.
Recommendations

Color
10. Use color as a tool to direct the viewer’s attention while they navigate complex information.

About this recommendation

Color and white space work together in designs to capture and focus people’s attention. White space (the absence of color and text) helps information stand out by giving it space.

Color is an effective technique to visually support the structure, hierarchy, or importance of information.

Why follow this recommendation?

Our findings reveal that participants overwhelmingly preferred colorful flyers over black and white ones, as an excessive amount of text tended to be overwhelming. Color, combined with good information design, aids in focusing on essential information, allowing them to skim the material quickly. The use of color blocks highlights information and supports the readability and comprehension of information.

Importance: Color can highlight key information that you want to call out (ex. Date of election)

Hierarchy: Color can group like information (ex. 3 ways to vote)

Structure: Color can separate chunks of information (ex. callouts)
10. Use color as a tool to direct the viewer’s attention while they navigate complex information. (Continued)

About this recommendation

Never rely on color as the only way to communicate because not everyone can see color the same way or at all. Instead, use color to support, not replace, written or verbal information.

When you use color to communicate meaning, combine it with text, shape, imagery, and/or weight for added emphasis.

Considerations

• Pay attention to the balance of color on your voter education materials.
  ° When using bright colors, use them sparingly in small color blocks or for callouts.
  ° Too much color can be perceived as untrustworthy and risk being interpreted as an advertisement or propaganda material.

• Avoid large areas of color as they can be overwhelming for readers.

• There are many different types of color blindness experienced by an estimated 13 million people in the United States. Every person experiences color in slightly different ways.

In addition to color, these layouts use divider lines, bold text, and icons to help readers navigate hierarchy and structure.

Without color, readers can still navigate the information using other visual cues, like the illustrations.
11. Research the cultural context of color before choosing color combinations to use.

About this recommendation

Color choices on voter education materials play a huge part in representing the seriousness and importance of voting while balancing being visually appealing and accessible to all.

Across cultures colors carry different meaning and symbolism. It’s important to do research on colors and color combinations you use in your voter education materials because they may have different historical contexts.

Since misuse can be offensive, avoid using culturally significant color palettes without understanding their cultural impact.

For example, the colors red, green and black have historically been used together by the Pan-African movement to represent the unity of people of African descent worldwide. Using these colors on voter education materials without this context, puts you at risk of being perceived as co-opting or appropriating culture.
11. Research the cultural context of color before choosing color combinations to use. *(Continued)*

**Considerations**

**What is your relationship with your audience?**
The impact of a culturally significant color palette depends on who is sharing the information. For example, if the source is a familiar organization that primarily works with Black or Latino communities, using a Red/Green/Black Pan-African flag, or Black Liberation, color palette could foster a sense of community. But, if the source is a wider government office or non-Black led organization, people may be more skeptical and distrustful of its color choice.

1. **Understand who you are.**

2. **Understand who your audience is.** Assess your relationship with your audience. Are you and your outreach volunteers and staff representative of your audience? The impact of culturally significant color palettes depends on who is sharing the information.

   ° If your organizer group has different identities than your audience, using cultural color palettes to engage specific audiences could make voters feel targeted and singled out, instead of included.

3. **Show your materials to people from your audience, and ask them for feedback.** You never know what imagery might mean to different members of your audience. Do research into the context of imagery you’re selecting and adding to your voter education materials.

**What is your audience’s age?**
Overly political imagery and traditional red, white, and blue colors can be intimidating for younger college students and voters who are new to politics. Instead, use bright and colorful schemes.

**Why follow this recommendation?**
In addition to being visually appealing, our relationship to color is connected to our cultural and social contexts. The perception of color palettes and cultural significance depends on who is sharing the information. In our research, participants recalled instances of cultural imagery and color palettes being culturally appropriated and co-opted in marketing and product sales. As a result, people were skeptical of who put out the information as it felt untrustworthy.
Recommendations

Bonus
12. Design separate voter education materials about Vote By Mail processes.

About this recommendation

Voting by mail (called absentee voting in Ohio) adds terminology and steps that have to be explained to voters.

Trying to summarize vote by mail information on the same handout as other voter education means critical details get left out. Design voter education materials that focus on vote by mail for people who want to vote using that method.

Why follow this recommendation?

Our research participants experience vote by mail information gaps including:

• Not being aware of the option to vote by mail
• Believing that vote by mail was only reserved under special circumstances
• Missing vote by mail deadlines
• Many participants, some of whom are avid voters, did not know what a Ballot Dropbox was. They conflate Dropbox with mailbox.
13. Get feedback on your materials to understand your audience better

About this recommendation

Understanding the needs of your audience is crucial. As a community-based organization (CBO), you hold a unique position of trust and authority within your community. When presenting voter education information to your audience, it's important to remember that mindsets around voting and motivations to vote are not always what you see on the surface.

It's important to continuously get feedback from your community on the materials you create, even if you identify as a part of the community you are designing for. The insights may surprise you!

Conduct usability testing within your community. At its essence, usability testing is a simple technique: watch and listen to people as they use a design as they usually would. Then, use those insights to improve your design.

Methods of Usability Testing

- **Testing in the office**: quick usability feedback from colleagues. If you're in the early stages of designing your materials, this approach is a fast way to get a second opinion.
- **Testing out of the office**: catch real users in the field. If you have drafts or prototypes that are close to complete, use this approach to test how people use them.
- **Testing in the conference room**: thorough, structured testing with real users. If you have solid, revised materials, this approach allows you to run a structured test with real users who you've scheduled ahead of time.
- **Testing by video conference**: thorough, structured testing—remotely. Use this instead of testing in the conference room if you want to include real users from across your jurisdiction or make it easier for them to participate.

How do I begin?

- Center for Civic Design: Usability Testing
- How to adapt usability testing to fit the needs of your project

**Usability testing** is a tool for learning where people interacting with a design – such as a voter education toolkit – encounter frustration and translate what they see and hear to make a better design that will eliminate those frustrations. Just like designing, you don't need to be a researcher to do testing!
Thank you!
For questions and to learn more find us:
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Civic Designing
Practical tips and civic design research

Civic Design Irregulars
News for friends interested in civic design

Find all resources listed in this toolkit at:
bit.ly/CCDOhioToolkit