

# Polling Place Signage Toolkit

Nonpartisan guidelines and templates  
for creating effective signage.

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## Who is this toolkit for?

These guidelines and ready-to-use templates are for election offices of all sizes. Use them to create new bilingual signage for your polling places, or improve existing signage.

## Why follow these guidelines?

At the Center for Civic Design, we know that bad signage can be confusing, frustrating, and ineffective. Effective signage can reduce confusion, answer questions, and save time for both voters and poll workers. Guiding voters through the process makes them feel welcome and removes barriers to voting.

## What is this toolkit based on?

The guidelines and templates in this toolkit are based on information design best practices, our research of what works for voters, our work with elections offices across the country, and collaboration with election experts in the U.S. Alliance for Election Excellence.

→ Visit [civicedesign.org](https://civicedesign.org) to read more about our research.

The information and resources in this toolkit are aligned with the U.S. Alliance for Election Excellence values and standards. These voluntary, nonpartisan standards define excellence in U.S. election administration for local election departments across the country.

→ Visit [electionexcellence.org](https://electionexcellence.org) to read more about the standards.

### Look out for information boxes:

Throughout the toolkit we include links to related tools, resources, and skills.

These callouts highlight additional publicly available resources, questions to consider, and accessibility notes.



Additional  
resources



Questions to  
consider



Accessibility  
notes



# What's in this toolkit?

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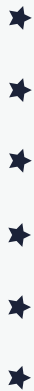
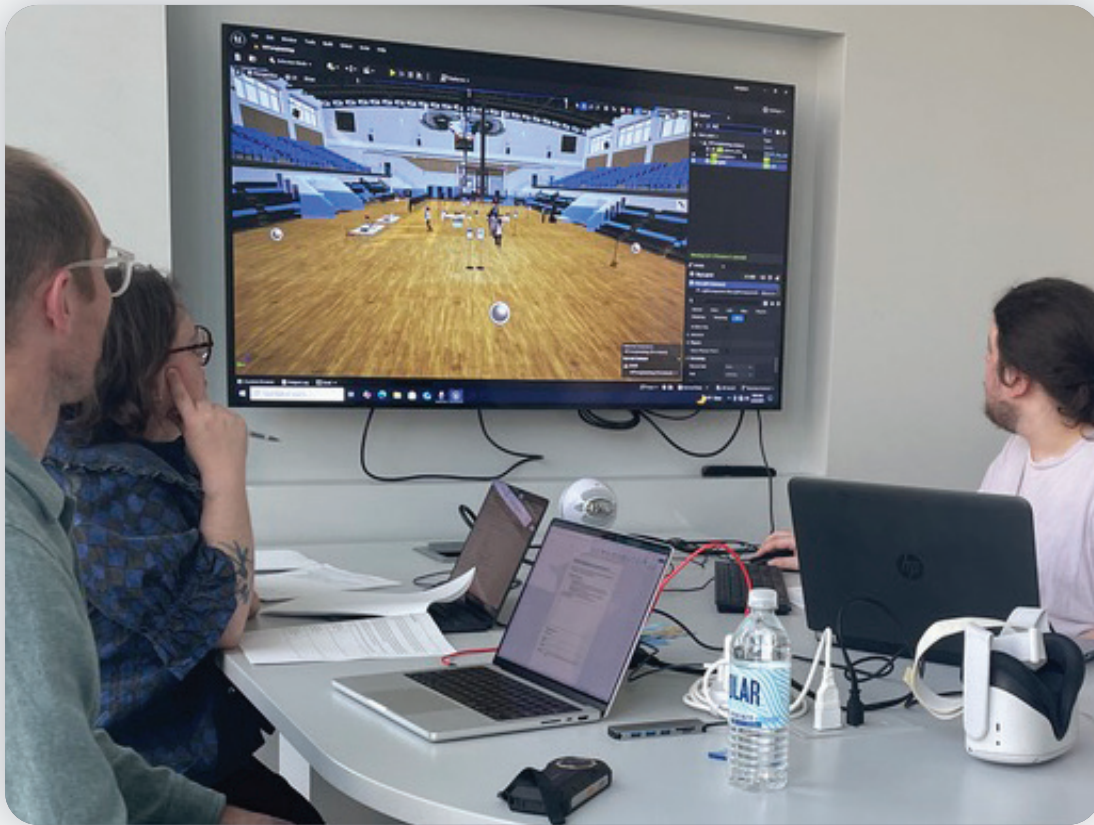
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# How to plan your signs

Effective signage provides information where it's needed.

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This section covers essential considerations for creating new or revising existing signage plans.

# Put signs to help voters find where to vote

## Imagine being a new voter

Anything you want people to know, you need to tell them.  
Think about a person entering a polling place for the first time:

- Where do they start?
- How do they get to the specific room?
- Do they have to go to multiple tables?
- Do some people start in different places?
- Where is the accessible voting system?

Signs help voters find where to go and understand what to do.

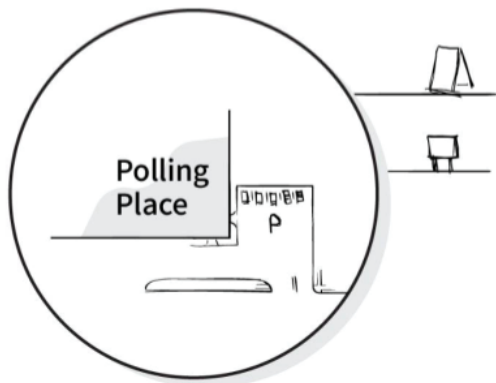


Read more about planning accessible polling places in the [Election Management Guidelines](#) on the U.S. Election Assistance Commission website.

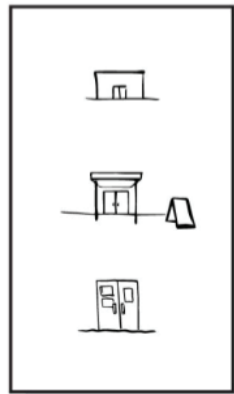
## Wayfinding starts with arrival

In a polling place, people are here to vote.

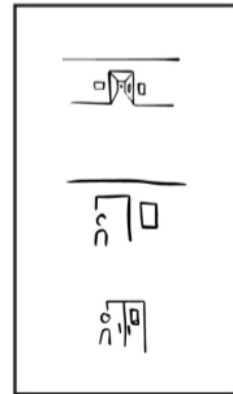
This means signs need to help voters find the polling place and navigate the voting process.



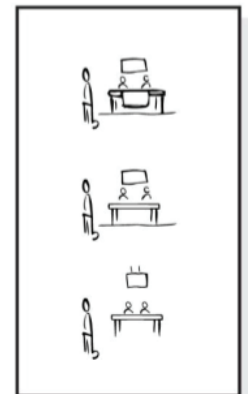
1. Find the building



2. Find the entrance



3. Find the room



4. Navigate the process



# Put signs where decisions must be made

## To plan polling place signage:

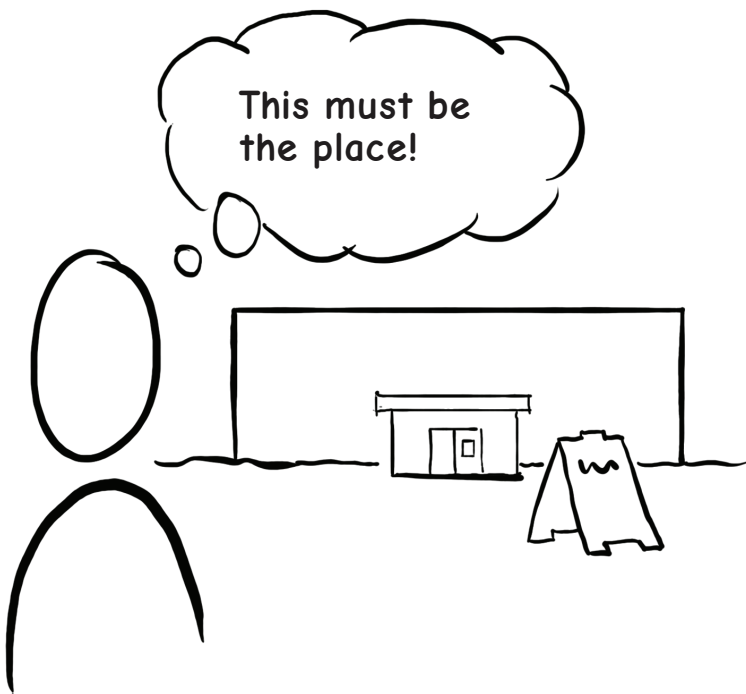
1. You need to understand both the physical space of the polling place and the specific steps of the voting process
2. Then you combine, or map, where the steps happen in the physical place and how people must navigate the process
3. Anywhere a voter must decide where to go or what to do, a poll worker or sign should be there to help them



Read more about [guiding voters through the polling place](#) in the field guide on our website.

## Identify all decision points

When signs are clearly visible at each decision point from start to finish, it helps voters feel welcome and navigate the voting process with more confidence.



# Plan signs to help voters navigate the voting process

## Each step in the voting process is a decision point.

Once the voter has found the right place, then signs shift to helping them navigate the voting process.

Plan signs to guide voters from entry to exit.

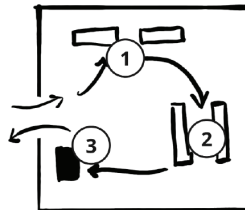


The Engineering for Democracy Institute has created [diagram tools](#) to help map out your polling place.

## First, map out essential steps

Start by listing out the steps that every voter will take at your polling place. Each jurisdiction is unique, but some steps are universal:

1. Get your ballot
2. Mark your ballot
3. Cast your ballot

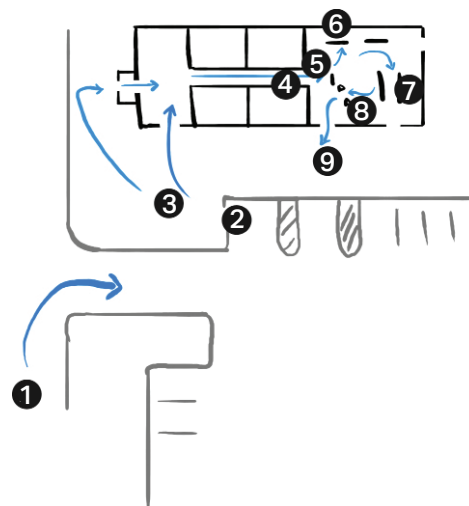


## Then, add any other specific steps

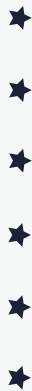
Each step in the voting process is a decision point.

Plan signs to guide voters through each step, from entry to exit:

1. Find the building
2. Find the parking
3. Find the entrance
4. Find the room
5. Check in
6. Get your ballot
7. Mark your ballot
8. Cast your ballot
9. Find the exit







# How to design a signage set

Effective signage is cohesive, intuitive, continuous, and visible.

---

This section covers the parts of individual signs and how to make a uniform set of signage that is easy to see, understand, and follow.

# What are the 2 functions of signs?

## Directional and informational

So far, we've been talking about **directional signage**, also called wayfinding. In addition to helping voters navigate a space, one of the main purposes of signage is to provide information.

**Informational signage** can provide specific instructions or other information to support understanding and confidence at decision points:

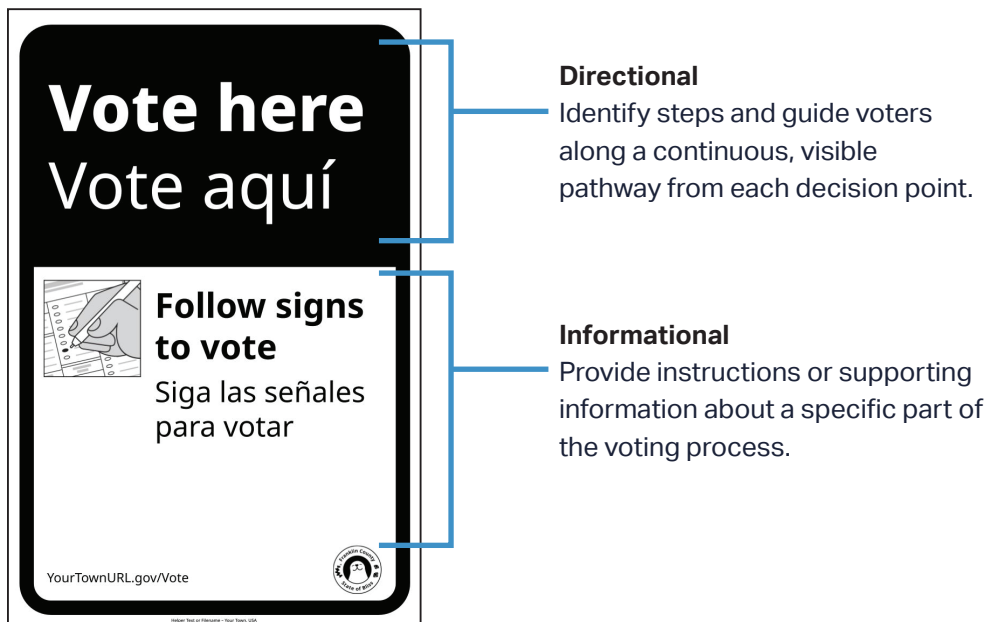
- To help voters understand a specific process, or prepare for the next step
- To help poll workers save time by answering questions before they come up and reinforcing their authority when they do



What common questions come up in your polling places?

How else could informational signage be helpful?

We designed this layout to do both



# What are the parts of a sign?

## Heading text

Write a strong brief headline using plain language that voters understand.

- 1 to 2 words
- Larger text to be readable from a distance

## Supporting graphic

Use icons or illustrations to support the message or reinforce the instructions.

## Office information

Use a short URL, QR code, contact information, or other ways for voters to learn more.

**Vote here**  
**Vote aquí**



**Follow signs**  
**to vote**

**Siga las señales**  
**para votar**

YourTownURL.gov/Vote



Helper Text or Filename - Your Town, USA

## Supporting text

Make instructions as clear and simple as possible.

- 1 to 2 sentences
- Smaller text to be readable up close

## Official graphic

Use your seal or logo to establish familiarity, trust, and authority.

## Version text

Include file name or helper text to keep track of signs.



## Ready-to-use, customizable templates

Templates can be used as-is or customized to match your office's brand:

→ [Bilingual polling place signage toolkit](#) from the Center for Civic Design



# Make signs specific to each decision point

Each sign should be designed based on the information a voter needs and where it needs to be displayed.

## Choosing a layout

When designing each sign it's important to think about:

- How much text must be included?
- How will the sign be displayed?
- How far away will the sign need to be readable?

As you know now, directional signage uses less text and needs to be displayed larger, while informational signage often needs more text for explanation and sometimes supporting graphics.

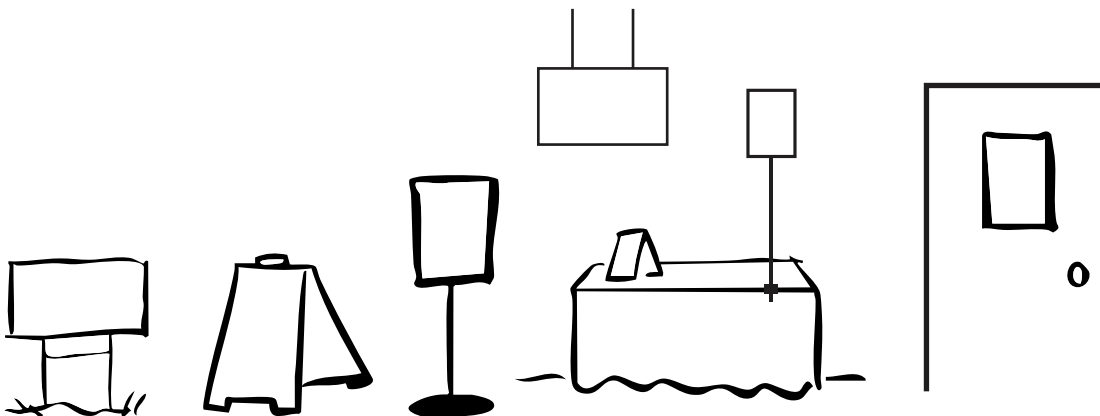


There are many reasons you may want to customize your signs.

For example if there is a thick dark frame on your sign holder, maybe the signs don't also need a printed border?

## Some layouts work better for certain display methods

Whether you are printing signs in your office or doing large format printing with a sign shop, certain signs may need to be horizontal or vertical to fit standard proportions.



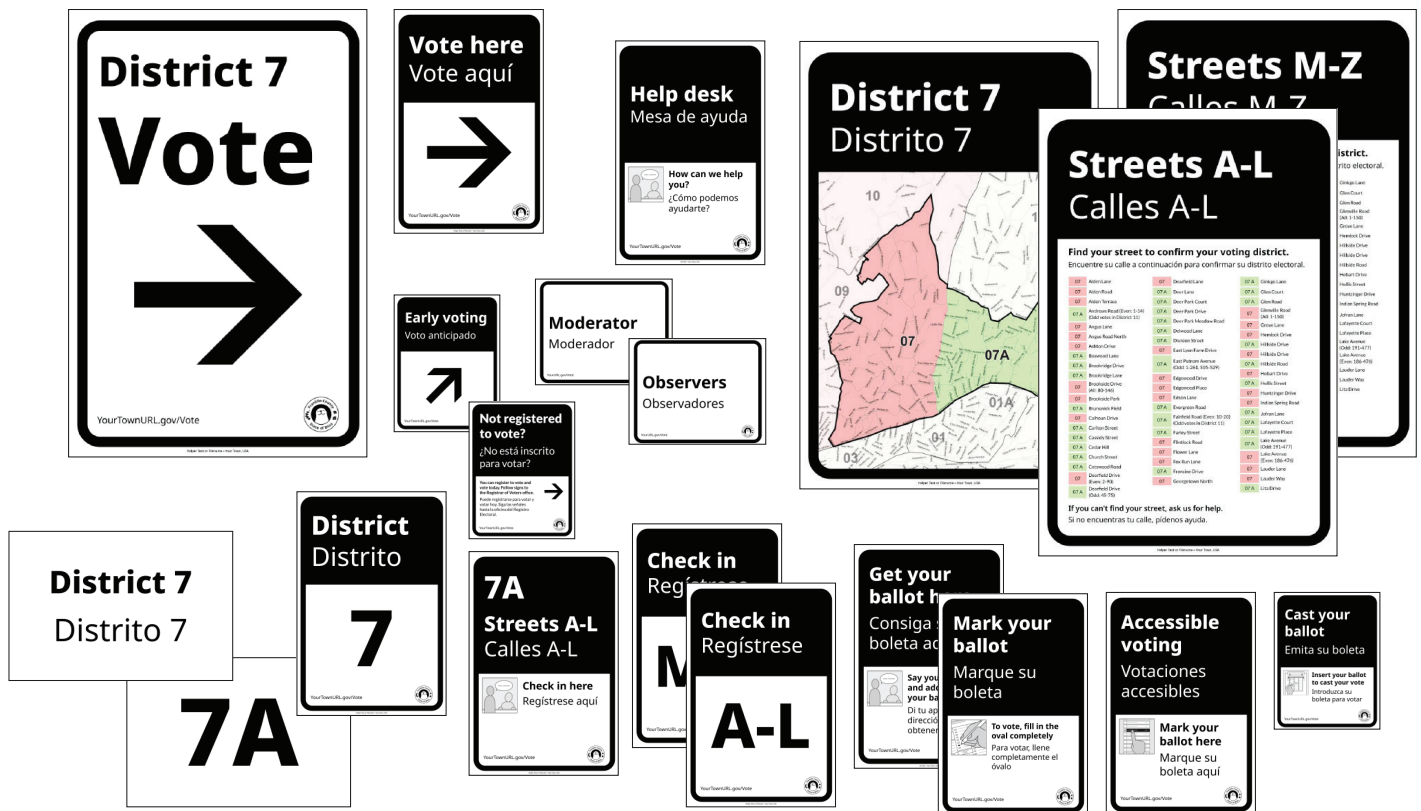
# Make signs consistent, recognizable, and familiar

## Make your signs consistent

Use consistent colors, fonts, and graphic styles to make a cohesive set.

This gives your signage a professional look and creates a more reassuring experience for the voters.

The consistent use of a simple border, heading, and font family make it so all of these different sign variations look like a matching signage set.

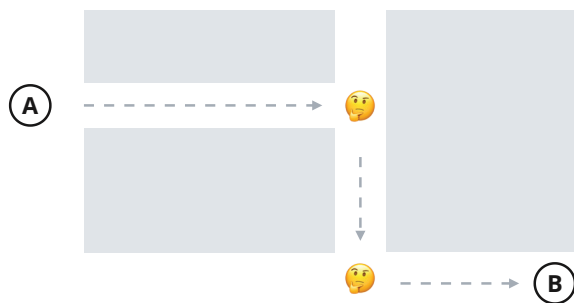


# Use signs to create a continuous pathway between decision points

Repeating signs can add emphasis to an important message, increase the likelihood they will be seen, or create a continuous pathway.

## If there is no clear line of sight, use additional signs

If you cannot see from one decision point to the next, use additional signs to guide voters along the correct path.



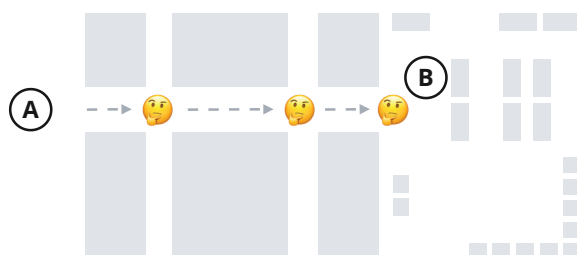
In our [VR polling place research](#) with the Engineering for Democracy Institute we found that signs are easiest to follow when they are:

- Close enough
- Large enough
- Not obstructed

## If there is a long distance, use additional signs

Even without turns, longer distances may require additional signs.

Voters can be distracted, have limited vision, or begin to doubt that they are on the correct path.



# Make text large enough to read

## Use a font size of 16pt per foot

Choosing a font size depends on where the sign is. The farther away the sign is placed, the larger the font must be for the text to be readable.

Reading distance in feet	Font size in Noto Sans	Font height in inches
100 ft	1600 pt	16 in
50 ft	800 pt	8 in
21 ft	336 pt	3.5 in
15 ft	240 pt	2.5 in
6 ft	96 pt	1 in
5 ft	80 pt	0.8 in
3 ft	48 pt	0.48 in
2 ft	32 pt	0.32 in
1 ft	16 pt	0.16 in

Our recommendation is based on the font Noto Sans that we use in our templates. 16pt per foot equals approximately 0.16 inches per foot, based on the "capital i".

Height varies between different fonts. If you use a different font, make sure your letters are large enough.



Noto Sans is available through [Google Fonts](#). It has excellent language support.



### Why 16pt/ft?

16pt per foot is readable for people with a visual acuity of 20/200. That means that anyone whose visual acuity is better than the legal blindness threshold in the U.S. should be able to read it.

Our recommendation is larger than [ADA Accessibility Standards](#), which is about 14pt per foot. (Although ADA doesn't have a constant ratio.)

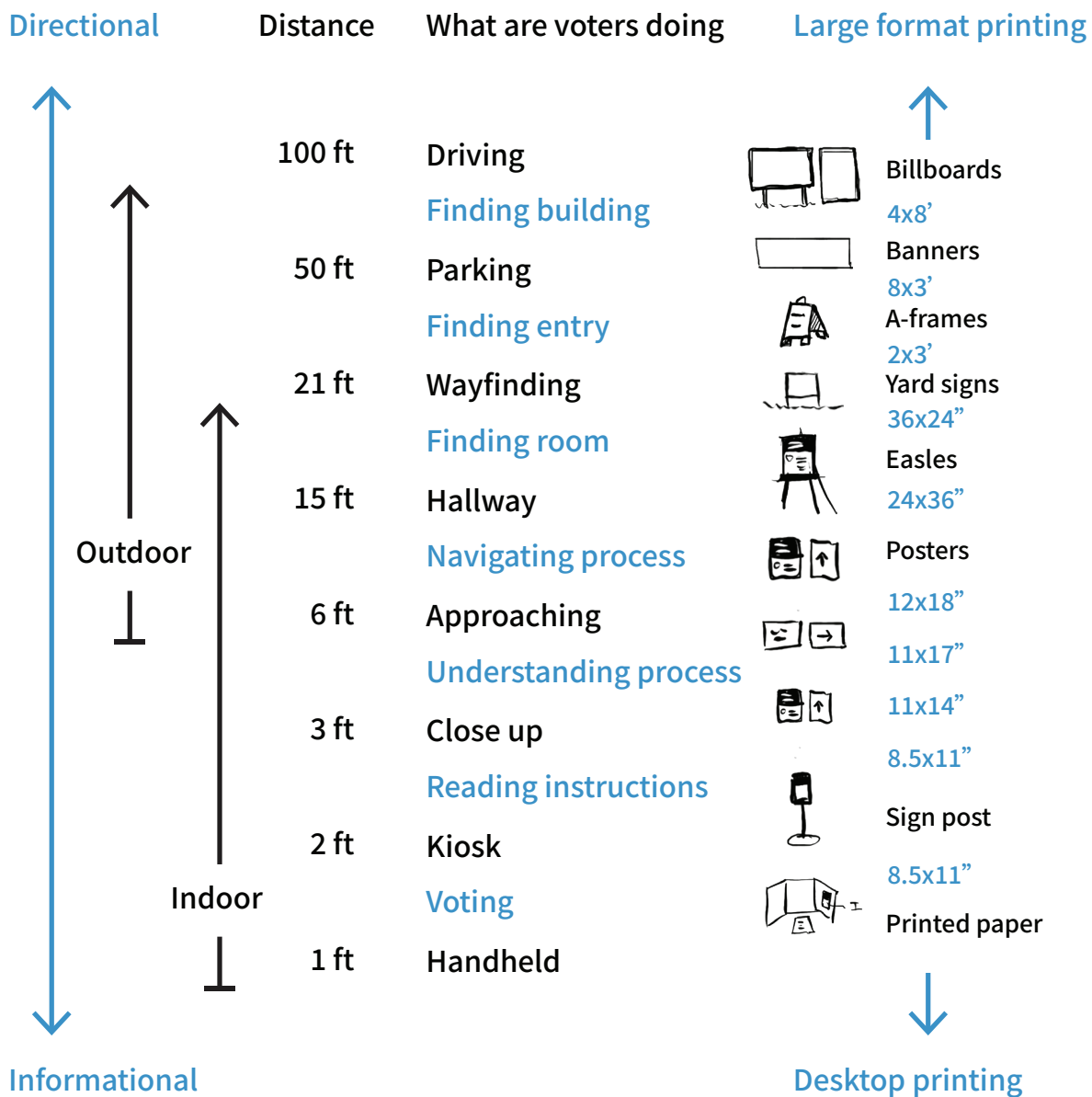


# Design signs so voters can read information where it's needed

Voters should be able to read all essential text from a natural pathway, without stopping or stepping closer.

## Consider where a voter is and what they're doing

It's important to know where along the pathway the voter is and what they are doing when they are interacting with your signage.



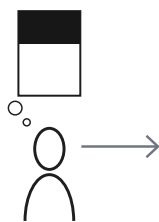


# Make signs larger if needed

## Think about how far people will be from the signs

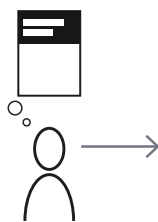
The farther away signs are, the larger the text needs to be so people can read it.

Strong consistent design elements make it possible to recognize and follow signs even before the text is readable.



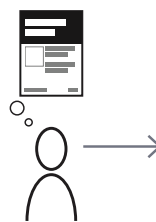
**First people recognize the style**

They know they can follow signs



**Then people can read directional text**

1-2 words



**Then people can read informational text**

1-2 sentences

## If you can't put a sign closer, make it larger

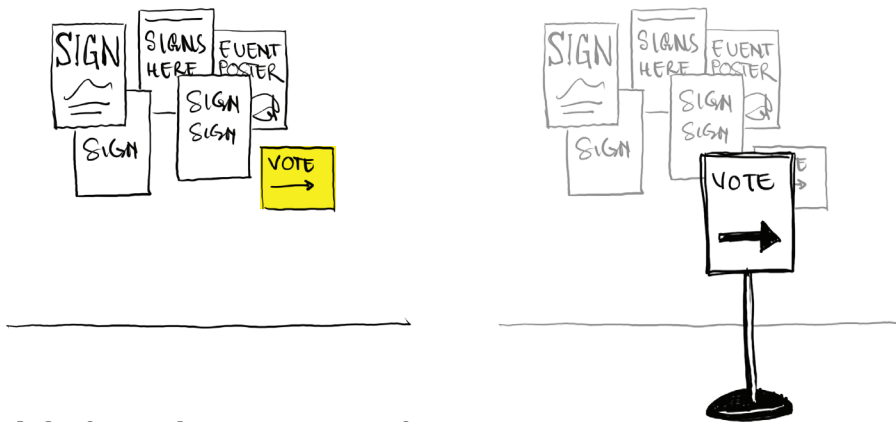
If the font is not large to be read where it is needed printing a larger sign can increase the readable distance.



In our research with voters with disabilities, we hear that voters don't want to feel singled out. Printing larger is one way to make signs work for everyone.



# Make sure signs are visible



## Make signs stand out

Other signs and posters in the space can compete for voters' attention. Using larger signs, bright colors, or free standing sign displays all help increase polling place signage visibility.

## Plan ahead for visibility

Anticipate where people will be and consider using different sign formats and placement methods.

Signs on tables are often obstructed and impossible to see if lines of people stand in front of them.

## Spread your information out

Even your own signs can be a challenge. Too many signs in one place can be overwhelming and a voter may not have enough time to understand **any** of the information.

Consider spreading the information out to multiple points along the pathway so voters have more time to read each smaller message as they move through the space.

Put information where it is needed most.



For signs viewed from 6 feet away, [place signs at eye height](#).

Signs displayed between 48-67 inches from the ground work well for a wide range of standing voters as well as those in wheelchairs.



# Craft a clear message

## Only include what's necessary

This makes text easier to read and allows text to be larger.

- Keep headings and paragraphs short
- Use simple words and phrases

## Make instructions clear

- Be clear about what actions voters must take
- Provide clear information about behavior in the polling place
- Use numbers on step-by-step instructions
- Say "if" before "then"

## Use words that voters understand

Write in plain language so they can find what they need, understand what they find, and use the information.

- Use positive language
- Use active voice
- Use words consistently



Read more about [writing instructions voters understand](#) on our website.



Read more about how to use [plain language](#) on our website.



# Make your signs easy to read in all languages

## Our template has room for 2 languages: English + 1 more

We used Spanish as the second language, but you can swap it out to meet your voters' needs.

## Write in plain language for both languages

Writing in plain language makes it easier to create accurate translations.

## Check your translations with a trusted translator

Even better, test your materials with real voters. This makes voters of both languages feel welcome.

## Make each language easy to find on all signs

Put the languages in the same order on every sign. If both languages use latin characters, use bold for one of them.

Otherwise, use similar design treatments like the same font size, font, and color. If you do need to make one language slightly smaller than the other, make sure it is still large enough to read from the anticipated viewing distance.



Election offices tell us that putting both languages on a single sign makes it easier for poll workers who only speak English to place the signs properly.



Get started with [multilingual usability testing](#) using the our workbook.



Find more [language access resources](#) on our website.



# Use graphics to support meaning

## Use icons or illustrations to help people understand signs quickly

People process images 60,000 times faster than written text.

Graphics help voters understand signage faster, especially if they're in a rush or if the sign is not in the language they're most comfortable speaking.

## Use icons to draw attention to important ideas or actions to take



Icons are simple graphics or pictograms of an idea, object, or activity.

## Use illustrations to help tell a story or explain a concept



Illustrations are more complex visual representation of multiple ideas.



### Free icons and illustrations

There are many resources for free icons to download and use on your signage.

[Civic icons and images library](#) is a collection of free, adaptable icons specifically designed for election materials.

[Google's icon library](#) is a huge collection of icons covering a range of topics.

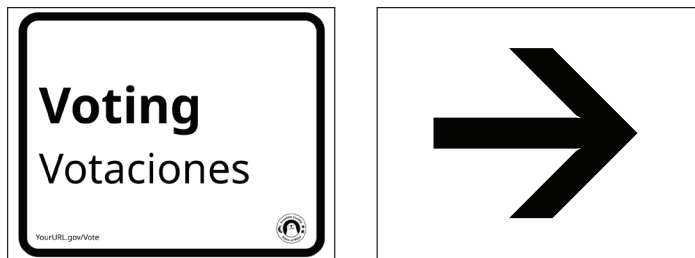


# Use arrows to show where to go

Arrows can be used on their own or in support of other signs to show voters which direction they need to go.

## Use arrows as a standalone sign

Arrows on their own signs provide poll workers flexibility to position or change the direction. It also allows for the arrows to be larger, which increases visibility from farther distances.



In our [VR polling place research](#) with the Engineering for Democracy Institute, we found that arrows are one of the most intuitive ways to guide people along a path.



To help people navigate intuitively, place arrows on the same side as they point. This is especially important for emergency exits.

## Use arrows as the supporting graphic on a sign

If you know which way the arrows should point, this is a good option. If not, you'll need to print extra signs with arrows pointing in different directions so poll workers can pick the right one for their space.



Straight and left

Left

Right

Right up diagonal



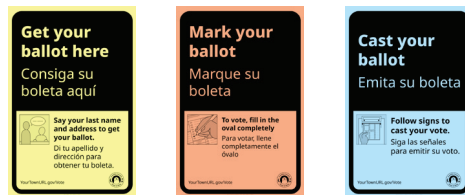
# Use color strategically

Color can help quickly identify the content and purpose of signs.

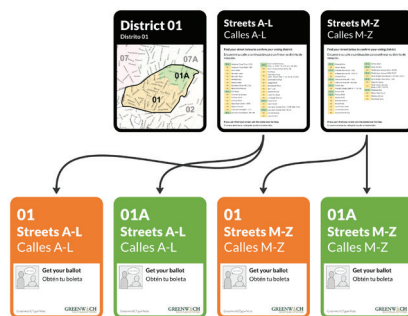
Using color for too many different ways at once is confusing.  
Choose a single strategy that works best for your voters.

## Use color to support navigation

In this strategy, different colors for each step of the voting process:



In this strategy, different colors for a specific step, I like to help split lines for different districts:



## Use color to support meaning

In this strategy, blue means accessibility and red means warning signs.



What works best for your office?

You can print in color on white paper or you can print in black and white on colored paper.



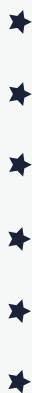
Always use another visual indicator, like text or icons, to support the understanding of your color choice.

People perceive color differently, so we can't rely on color alone to emphasize important information.



Read more about [using color effectively](#) on our website.





# Get started with our templates

These bilingual signs can be customized or used as-is in your polling places.

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This section covers how to edit the templates and how to choose the right layout for your polling places.



# Add your office branding

## Use design elements that your voters are familiar with

If your office has a recognizable visual identity, this is a strong way to help your voters find, recognize, and follow your signs in the variety of community spaces that polling places temporarily occupy.

Use words that your jurisdiction uses (for example, poll worker instead of inspector).

Make sure all graphics have a similar style.

Add a website link, QR code, or contact information, for voters to learn more.

If your website is too long, work with your IT team to create a URL that is simple and easy to remember.



Use fonts and styles that are consistent with your office branding.

Consider using colors your voters are familiar with.

Make sure there's enough contrast to be accessible.

Add your seal or logo.



# Choose your template

## Use templates that fit the needs of each decision point

Consider the information, distance, and size of each sign.

For versatility, these templates are designed to fit directional text in the heading area as well as informational text along with a supporting graphic.



Read more about template layout in the [How to design a signage set](#) section of this toolkit.

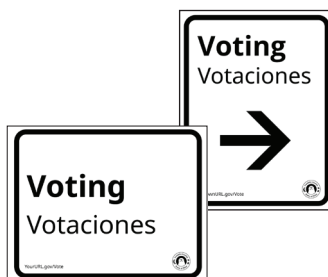


*Header template, larger size*

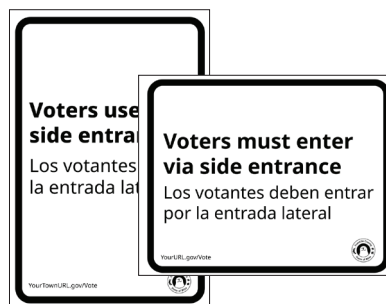


*Header template, letter size*

For flexibility, these simpler layouts can be used to produce either directional or informational signs.



*Border template, directional  
letter size horizontal and vertical*



*Border template, informational  
larger vertical, letter horizontal*



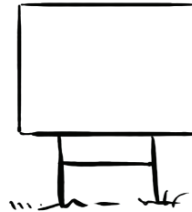
# Choose your print size

## Letter size templates

The letter sized templates are designed for desktop printing at 8.5 x 11 inches. They can also be printed larger for yard signs and other signs with similar proportions.



Letter at 100%  
8.5 x 11in



If these templates are printed larger the effective font size will also be larger. For example, an 80pt font printed at 300% will be 240pt.

## Larger size templates

The larger sized templates are 8 x 12 inches. They are designed to be printed at 12 x 18 or 24 x 36in for common poster sizes and other standard signs like A-frames. They can also be adapted for 11x14 and 11x17in.



Larger at 150%  
12 x 18 in



Larger at 300%  
24 x 36 in



On this page the templates are shown at an equally reduced scale to show relatively how large the signs and text can be, depending on which size you choose.



# Update your other signs to match

If you use other signs in addition to the templates, use the same cohesive styles wherever possible so voters know they are part of the same signage set.

## Make all of the signs in the polling place consistent

Signs should use the same:

- Logos
- Colors
- Fonts
- Graphic styles
- Layout elements, like border weight
- Sizes
- Display methods



In our research with voters on [ballot cure forms](#), we heard that adding your official graphics makes your materials more trustworthy.



Find more templates for the [post-election process](#) on the U.S. Election Assistance Commission website.

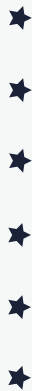


Find more templates for [audit signage](#) on our website.



Find more templates for [gun safety signage and instructions](#) on the Brennan Center website.





# Resources

This guide is just the start of your signage design journey.

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We've compiled a list of publicly available resources to help support your signage updates. You can also see the research behind this guide.

# Helpful resources

## Signage templates and tools

- [Center for Civic Design - Bilingual Polling Place Signage Toolkit](#)
- [U.S. Election Assistance Commission - Communicating Election and Post-Election Processes Toolkit](#)
- [Center for Civic Design - Public audit sign templates](#)
- [Engineering for Democracy Institute - Polling Location Diagrams](#)

## Standards and planning

- [U.S. Alliance for Election Excellence - Standards for Excellence](#)
- [U.S. Access Board - Americans with Disabilities Act, Accessibility Standards](#)
- [Center for Civic Design - Field Guide Vol. 8 Guiding voters through the polling place](#)

## Research and design

- [U.S. Election Assistance Commission - Designing Polling Place Materials](#)
- [Center for Civic Design - Civic Design Core Skills](#)
- [Center for Civic Design - Designing ballot cure forms that invite voters to act](#)
- [Center for Civic Design - Voter guides: Using color effectively](#)

## Crafting your message

- [plainlanguage.gov - Federal plain language guidelines](#)
- [Center for Civic Design - Field Guide Vol. 2 Writing instructions voters understand](#)
- [Center for Civic Design - Plain language](#)

## Writing in other languages

- [U.S. Election Assistance Commission - Glossaries of Election Terminology](#)
- [Center for Civic Design - Language access](#)
- [Center for Civic Design - Conducting multilingual usability testing](#)

## Graphics and fonts

- [U.S. Alliance for Election Excellence - Civic icons and images library](#)
- [Google Fonts - Icon library](#)
- [Google Fonts - Noto Sans](#)



# Research behind the guide

This resource, like our earlier **Field Guide Vol. 8 Guiding voters through the polling place**, is based on a substantial body of knowledge on creating printed materials to help voters navigate the voting process. The following research and projects were especially important:

## Designing polling place materials: Voter information materials (2007)

The U.S. Election Assistance Commission toolkit on designing polling place materials was the first design system for polling place and vote processing signage. It was developed by AIGA Design for Democracy, with participation by pre-CCD team members. This project developed the sign style used here. Field Guide Vol. 8 is based on this work.

## Communicating election and post-election processes toolkit (2022)

We partnered with the U.S. Election Assistance Commission on a set of signs and related materials for post-election processing. Research included a survey and usability testing with current and former election officials. During the project, we developed the sign style used in this toolkit.

## Developing multilingual signs in partnership with 2 election jurisdictions (2024)

We partnered with 2 election jurisdictions in different states to create signs for their in-person voting processes. The signs were refined over multiple election cycles based on feedback from poll workers and office staff.

## Voting in VR: Polling place signage in an interactive environment (2025)

This research helped to strengthen our theory on directional and informational signs. It was done in partnership with the Engineering for Democracy Institute at the University of Rhode Island College of Engineering.





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