Best Practices for Official Voter Guides

How to Use Voter Guides to Close the Civic Literacy Gap

Webinar 3
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Welcome

Introduction of Trainers

To better serve California’s diverse voters, voter information must be more accessible in design and delivery.

• Aim to make voter information more effective and inviting.
• Provide trainings, webinars, and other technical assistance in implementing recommendations.
• Identify impediments to adopt best practices including regulatory, legislative, and financial barriers.
"To raise voter confidence and increase participation, we must learn how voters get information and how to implement best practices for voter guides."
In today's webinar...

Civic literacy
Elections are not intuitive, so voter guides have to bridge knowledge gaps

Be (helpfully) official
Voters want to know the source of information

Personalizing voter information
Let voters know when the guide is just for them, and when it's general information
Elections are not intuitive, so voter guides have to bridge knowledge gaps.
Voters – especially new voters – don't know where to start

They need information that will help them:

- **Understand their choices** about how, when, and where to vote
- Learn about **what is on the ballot** for each election, so they can make decisions
- Identify non-partisan official **information** they can trust
## Different voters, different needs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not yet voting</th>
<th>Voting sometimes</th>
<th>Avid voters</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Connect to the community</td>
<td>Connect daily life to issues</td>
<td>Connect to the democratic process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Demystify the act of voting</td>
<td>▪ Simple, clear information about candidates and issues</td>
<td>▪ Complete information</td>
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<tr>
<td>▪ Justify the value of voting</td>
<td>▪ Explanations of options for voting</td>
<td>▪ Encouragement to be role models</td>
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<td>▪ In-language and plain language materials</td>
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<td>▪ Information about being a poll worker</td>
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New voters have knowledge gaps

They didn't know:

- You need to register to vote, in advance.
- You don't have to vote on everything on the ballot.
- You can get help from a poll worker.
- You can't vote after Election Day.
- You can vote by mail.
- You don't have to have an appointment to vote.
- Registering to vote doesn't sign you up for jury duty.
- Election materials may be in some languages.
- You don't need an ID to vote in California.
Explain the type of election

Even educated, avid voters are not always clear about what happens in different types of elections

- Explain the type of election and where it fits in the election cycle.
- Write positively: explain what voters will do, not the history.
Example: why top-two primaries are hard to understand

- Many voters do not understand what a "primary" is.
- Because they don’t understand primaries, they don’t see what is different about a top-two primary.
- They don’t have a strong party affiliation (or don’t understand what this means).
- If they don't understand what a top-two primary is, they struggle to understand how it works.
Questions?
Be (helpfully) official

Voters wanted to know the source of information
Show the people behind the guide

- Voters liked knowing there are "real people"
- Use a welcome letter to summarize the key details about the election.
- Use plain language – short paragraphs, bold, bullets – to make the message easy to scan.

Dear Voter,

November 6, 2012 is Election Day. You will be voting for local officials in Franklin County as well as state and national offices. There are also both local and California state ballot measures. This voter guide has a practice ballot and information about the local candidates and measures for your review before you vote.

Vote by Mail. Request a vote-by-mail ballot by October 29. To vote by mail:
- Mail your ballot in time for it to reach our office by 8pm on Election Day, November 6, 2012.
- Drop off your ballot in the secure drop-off boxes around the county. See page 4 for a map of locations.
- Take your ballot to any polling place in Franklin County before 8pm on Election Day.

Check that we have received your vote-by-mail ballot on our website at www.franklinvotes.org.

Vote Early. You can vote at the Registrar of Voters' office from October 7 through November 4 (except for holidays) on Monday – Friday from 8am to 5pm. You can also vote there on Election Day, November 6, from 7am to 8pm.

New this year: Saturday Voting. You can vote on Saturday, October 27, at the Franklin Community Library and on Saturday, November 3, at the Registrar of Voters' office from 9am to 4pm.

Vote on Election Day, Tuesday, November 6. Your polling place location is on the front of this booklet. You can look it up on our website at www.franklinvotes.org/myvoter.

Please contact us any time, so we can help make your voting experience a positive one. Thank you for being a voter.

Your vote counts!

Mary Cuevo
Registrar of Voters

Luisa Chin
Assistant Registrar of Voters

Franklin County
Make forms and other materials look official

- Voters looked for county seals or postal insignias as indications that this is official information.
Add a signature

Your vote counts!

Mary Cuevo
Registrar of Voters

Tax rate statement for Measure E

Dated: February 26, 2014.

Helen Benjamin, Chancellor
Franklin Community College District

An election will be held in the Franklin Community Coll the sale of up to $450,000,000 in bonds of the District

- Voters liked seeing the name of the person behind the information.
- The title and organization is important, especially in ballot measures
Tell voters their rights

The California Voter Bill of Rights was surprisingly popular as a way for new or infrequent voters to understand elections.

Voter Bill of Rights

You have the right to:

• cast a ballot if you are a registered voter. You can vote if you are:
  * a U.S. citizen
  * at least 18 years old
  * have been living in the state for x days

• vote on a provisional ballot if your name is not on the list of registered voters.

• vote if you are in line when the polls close.

• cast a secret ballot without anyone bothering you or telling you how to vote.

• get a new ballot if you have made a mistake as long as you still have your old ballot. If you are at a polling place, ask an election official for a new ballot. If you vote by mail, you must give your original ballot to an election official before the polls close on Election Day before you can ask for a new ballot.

• get help voting and casting your ballot.

• turn in your completed vote-by-mail ballot at any polling place in the county where you are registered to vote.

• get election materials in a language other than English if enough people in your voting precinct need a ballot in that language.

• ask questions about election procedures and watch the election process. You can ask questions of election officials about procedures. The person you ask must answer your questions or send you to the right person for an answer. Please don’t ask questions while election officers are busy working.

• report anything happening in the polling place that is a crime or if you believe someone is not who they say they are.

  On the web at: www.sos.ca.gov
  By phone at: (800)345-8683
  By email at: sos.info@california.gov

If you believe you have been denied any of these rights, call the Secretary of State's confidential toll-free voter hotline at 800-345-8683.
Give voters tips on how to use the voter guide

Inexperienced voters don't know how to use the voter guide effectively. Think of it as a voter education session in their kitchen.

- Make it self-teaching.
- Help them prepare to go to the polls.
- Suggest that they mark the practice ballot and take it to the polls.
Questions?
Personalize information

Let voters know when the guide is just for them, and when it's general information.
Put the polling place right up front

Make it easy for voters to find their polling place.

- The front cover holds key information
- Make it clear it's personalized to the voter and address
Make it easy to see language options

Accessibility and language voting assistance

At the polling place

To check polling place accessibility, look for the wheelchair symbol on the back cover of this pamphlet. If your polling place does not meet accessibility guidelines, call 1-222-555-1212 for alternative methods of voting.

Ballots are available in Spanish and Chinese.

Las boletas están disponibles en chino e Inglés.

选票是西班牙语和英语。

Voting information

Audio versions of this booklet are available on request.

Call 1-222-555-1212 or toll free 1-866-555-1212.

Registration and voting information are available by TTY communication.

Call 1-222-555-1222.

Franklin County provides materials in Chinese and Spanish, when requested.

El Condado de Franklin ofrece materiales de votación en inglés, chino, y español.

Franklin县选民登记处依法律规定提供中文和西班牙文版本的选举材料

- People easily recognize language they read
- Repeat information in additional languages so voters are aware they are available.
Help voters know how ballot measures will affect them

- Describe in a useful way what it means to vote Yes or vote No (or For or Against).
- Show who provided pro/con statements.
- Create a simplified table format for tax rate implications.
- Introduce pro/con statements with a one-page summary for each measure.
- Write counsel and financial analyses in plain language.
### Call it a "Practice Ballot"

Review this ballot to get ready to vote at the polling place. Mark it as practice and take it with you. (This is not a real ballot, but it has all of the items you can vote on.)

**Tell voters how to use it to prepare to vote.**

**Be clear whether it's the exact ballot (personalized), or just an example.**
Questions?
Resources

To help you create or revise your voter guides
See all the webinars

1. **What are the Best Practices for Developing and Reviewing Voter Guides?**
   Monday, April 27, 11:00am-12:00pm

2. **How to Use Layout and Visual Presentation in Voter Guides**
   Monday, April 27, 1:30pm-2:30pm

3. **How to Use Voter Guides to Close the Civic Literacy Gap**
   Friday, May 1, 11:00am-12:00pm

4. **How to Use Plain Language in Voter Guides**
   Friday, May 1, 1:30pm-2:30pm

Sign up or view the archived webinars: [http://cavotes.org/](http://cavotes.org/)
Download the manual from
https://cavotes.org/download-best-practices-manual
Use the checklist

Ask yourself these questions when creating or revising your voter guide, so it has the answers voters need.

VOTER GUIDE RECOMMENDATION CHECKLIST

Use this checklist of our recommendations when creating or reviewing a voter guide.

Include the right information at the appropriate level of detail

☐ Is the information organized by activity or task?
☐ Does the cover page include the following information?
  - County name and seal (or other official insignia)
  - Name or type of election
  - Date of election day and times the polls are open
  - Polling place information
  - How to contact the election office
  - Languages offered

☐ Is it clear how the county and state guides are different and connected?
☐ Are the headings written as questions or active instructions?
☐ Are the plain language principles incorporated? This includes
  - Writing short sentences
  - Using short, simple, everyday words
  - Writing in active voice and writing in the positive
  - Keeping paragraphs short
  - Separating paragraphs by a space, so that each one stands out on the page

☐ Are there definitions and descriptions for election terms and processes?

Organize information in an easy-to-follow path

☐ Is there a table of contents?
☐ Are there questions, quasi-questions, or instructions as headings?
☐ Does each page have a clear topic?
☐ Are there visual elements to make each section easy to see?
☐ Is the voter information organized to include both an overview and details?
Download additional materials

Report and recommendations
- Sample voter guide pages illustrating the recommendations
- Icons and illustrations from the prototype voter guide

Preliminary reports and presentations
- Landscape analysis from the 2014 primary election

Research protocol materials
- Voter demographic questionnaire forms
- Sample pages and prototypes tested

http://civicdesign.org/projects/how-voters-get-information/
League of Women Voters of California Education Fund
cavotes.org | easyvoterguide.org | smartvoter.org

Center for Civic Design
civicdesign.org | @civicdesign
civicdesign.org/projects/how-voters-get-information/

How Voters Get Information
Best Practices Manual for Official Voter Information Guides in California
https://cavotes.org/download-best-practices-manual