



Language Access Barriers in Election Administration: Voter Information

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Obtaining Voter Information in Language



What Works

- Being able to indicate language preference on registration card
- Mailing out preferred voter guides before an election
- Being able to call in to request info in language
- Having extras at the polls

What Doesn't

- Limiting language preference choices
- Mailing voter guides in other languages and formats too late
- Having to call in because preference was not mailed
- Not capturing preference data from hotline calls to update records
- Voters not knowing material in their language is available; not showing up as a result

Recommendations

- **Voter Registration Card:** Allow write-in language preferences & add a preference question for format.
 - **Mailing Voter Information:** Apply all statutory deadlines for mailing materials also to materials in other languages and formats.
 - **Hotline Calls:** Develop a system to better track and update language preferences.
 - **Raising Awareness:** Promote the availability of materials in other languages through ethnic media and community groups serving language minority populations.
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Obtaining voter information in plain language



History of Plain Language

- **1970** | Nixon orders Federal Registrar to be written in “layman’s terms.”
 - **1978** | Carter ordered federal agencies to make government regulations easy to understand.
 - **1998** | Clinton ordered federal employees to write regulations in “plain language.”
 - **2010** | Obama signs Federal Plain Writing Act to “promote clear government communication that the public can understand and use.”
 - **2014** | Presidential Commission on Election Administration recommends jurisdictions “test all election materials for plain language and usability.”
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Implementing Plain Language

- **1 – Contract a plain language vendor**

Some counties have used Transcend Translations or another vendor who can translate written text into plain English for them.

- **2 – Develop in-house expertise**

Marin County enrolled several key staff in plain language trainings to learn the art and science of plain language writing.

- **3 – Use the Flesch-Kincaid Reading Grade Level Test**

Santa Cruz County tries to follow plain language principles as best as possible when drafting their own materials, and uses the Flesch-Kincaid tool to check their work.

Aim for 8th grade and keep it below 10th!

Before & After

Voter Instructions Before

If you wrongly mark, tear or deface any portion of your ballot sheet, replace the sheet in the secrecy folder and return it to the Precinct Board Member and obtain another ballot.

The location of your polling place is shown on the back cover of this sample ballot.

Voter Instructions After

If you make a mistake or damage your ballot, ask a poll worker for another ballot.

See back cover to find out where to vote.

Implications for Translated Material

Let's recap...

- **Collect & maintain quality data on voter preferences.**
- **Apply the same statutory deadlines for disseminating voting material in English, to voting material in all languages.**
- **Promote the availability of materials through ethnic media and other groups serving limited-English populations.**
- **Produce quality writing that is in “plain language.”**





For more information

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