Designing an Improved Voter Guide

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Future of CALIFORNIA ELECTIONS

Oxide Design Co.

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Agenda

Who are we? Who are you?

Exploring the voter guide

Top tips for creating voter information

- Bridge the civic literacy gaps

- Use design to make information easy to read

- Write in language voters understand

Introducing the best practices manual

Introductions

Who is here today?

Creating a best practices manual

About this project

League of Women Voters of California Education Fund

Goal: 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 more inviting

- Provide trainings, webinars, and other technical assistance in implementing the recommendations

- Identify impediments to adopt best practices including regulatory, legislative, and financial barriers

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Goal: Research to learn:

- How Californians find information about elections

- Information needs of voters, people who register but do not vote, and eligible potential voters

- How to design to make voting easier for voters with literacy, language, or reading challenges?

Qualitative research

1 year

14 locations

38+ partners

58 counties

100 research participants

- Voters, non voters, infrequent voters
- Young, new citizens, low literacy, people with disabilities, language minorities
- Close match to California demographics

Research process

- Stakeholder input
- Landscape analysis
- Research with voters and non-voters

- Created a prototype voter guide
- Wrote recommendations

Recommendations to:

- Organize voter guides to help voters find their way to the information they need

- Present information so it is easy to recognize and identify

- Write information so it is easy to read and understand

- Personalize information for voters appropriately

- Close civic literacy gaps through structure and content

Let's try it out

Portraits of voters

Prototype voter guide

Questions voters ask

Try using the prototype voter guide to answer voters' five top questions

Use the voter portrait as your "character."

Think about what they know and what they need to know.

Take notes on how hard the information is to find.

And whether the information answers their questions.

1. What's on the ballot?

2. Where do I go vote?

3. How do I vote (mark and cast my ballot)?

4. What are my options for voting?

5. How do I vote by mail?

How did that go?

Voter question	Easy to find?	Hard to find?	What kind of problems?
What's on the ballot?			
Where do I go vote?			
How do I vote (mark the ballot)?			
What are my options?			
How do I vote by mail?			

Questions are phrased in many ways

Question	# Asking	Variations of the question
What's on the ballot?	39	• What's on the ballot? • Who do I support or vote for? • Who is running? • Who will I be voting for? • Who are the candidates? • Who supports the candidates? • What are the candidates' positions on [specific issue]? • What are the ballot measures? • What are the pros and cons for the measures? • Does this measure mean a tax increase? • How does the official guide compare to the TV ads? • Who is in office right now?

Three big insights

Civic literacy is a huge challenge

Layout and visual presentation are important for comprehension

Plain language can't be overemphasized

Civic literacy

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

Voters – especially new voters – want

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

Not yet voting

Connect to the community

- Demystify the act of voting
- Justify the value of voting
- In-language and plain language materials

Voting sometimes

Connect daily life to issues

- Simple, clear information about candidates and issues
- Explanations of options for voting

Avid voters

Connect to the democratic process

- Complete information
- Encouragement to be role models
- Information about being a poll worker

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.

Show the structure of election info

- Make options clear by showing them side by side
- Connect the state and local booklets

Put the most important information on the cover
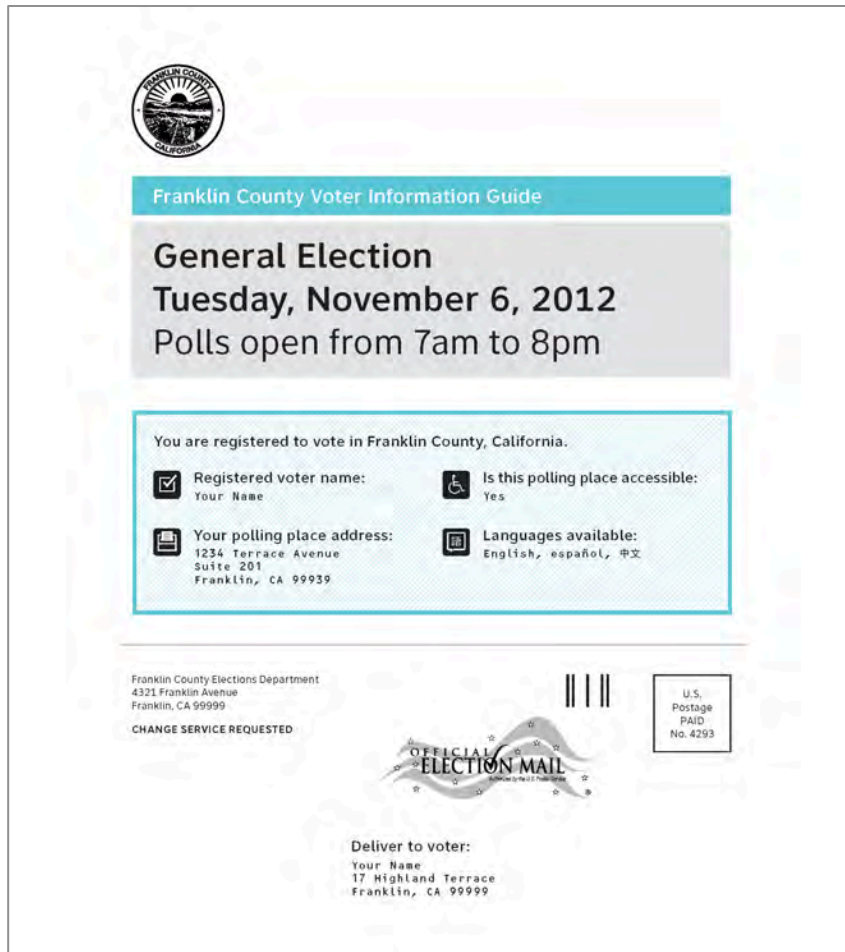
- Name or type of the election
- Date and time of the election
- The voter's polling place
- Languages offered
- How to contact the election office

Layout and design

Making information easy to recognize and identify

Be consistent

- Year-to-year consistency builds familiarity and trust

- Consistency in layout and use of design elements assists in ease-of-use and clarity

Use layout to convey content
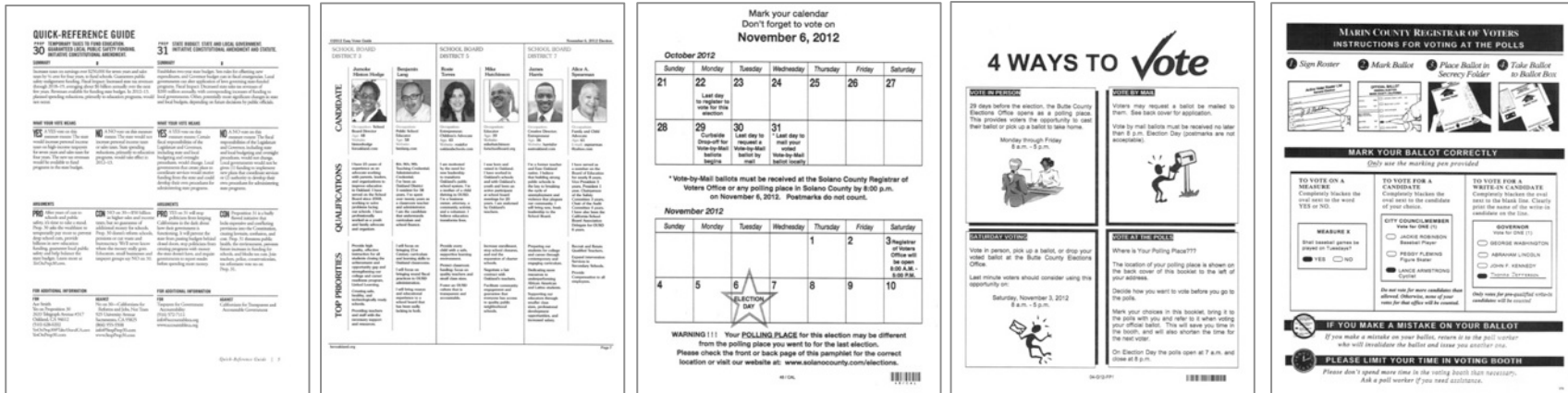
- Layout can communicate the type of content on a page

- Layout can differentiate page types from one another

Help readers find their way

What's in this guide?

General Election · Franklin County · Tuesday, November 8, 2013

- A clear and concise table of contents acts as a roadmap for the guide
- Organize information in an easy-to-follow path
- Use a clear, easy-to-read heading for each page
- Use running headings to connect parts of a section

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Use design to guide the voter

Make the information visual

- Visual elements help guide readers through the content
- Useful images and icons are precise and relevant to the content, not decorative
- Icons or other images signal the type of content next to them
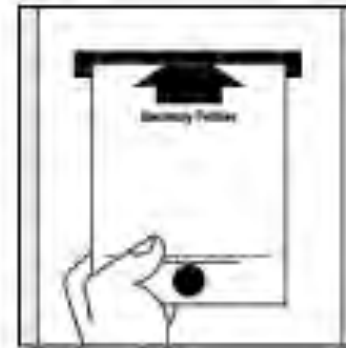
Use accurate instructional illustrations

1. Sign roster
2. Mark ballot
3. Place ballot in secrecy folder.
4. Take ballot to ballot box

- Visual instructions help low-literacy *and* general-population voters
- Illustrations must be accurate in their details to avoid misleading voters
- Photo images are not recommended

Make the text big enough

- Pages with small, tightly packed text are difficult to read

- Readers are more likely to read sections in larger type, and read the text more accurately

- In print, try to make the text size at least 12 points

Use upper- and lowercase letters

- Lowercase letters are more legible than all capital letters because they are easier to recognize

Avoid centered type

- Left-aligned type is more legible than centered type, which forces the eye to stop reading in order to find the start of the next line

Pick one sans-serif font

- Switching between fonts can require the eye to stop reading and adjust, or can unintentionally imply a change in content

- Sans-serif fonts are easier to read for shorter-length content like a voter information guide

- The prototype guide uses ClearView ADA from Terminal Design

Include a practice ballot
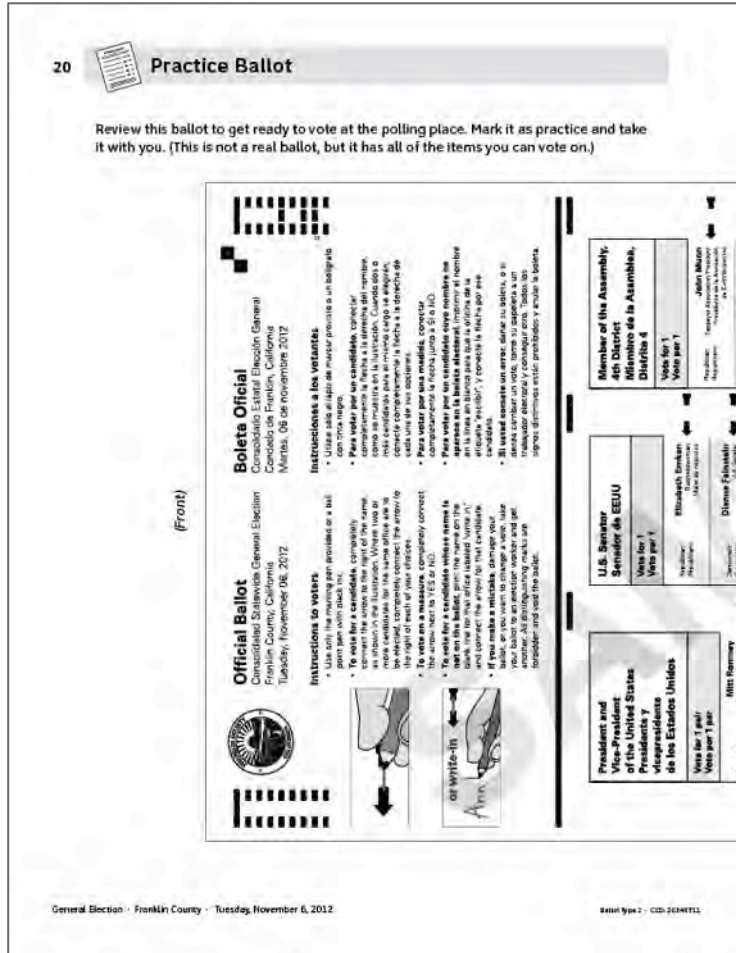
- Present a sample ballot in a way that voters easily understand what it is and how to use it

Plain language

Clear information helps bridge the civic literacy gap

Define election terms

3 ways to vote
3

Vote by mail
Request a vote-by-mail ballot by **October 29**.

Return it by mail, drop it off at one of the secure ballot drop-off locations, or deliver it on **November 6** to any polling place.

Vote-by-mail ballots must be received at the elections office or a polling place by 8pm on **November 6**.

For more details, **see Page 4**.

Vote early in person
You may vote early at the elections office, or at the voting centers listed on page 5.

October 7 until November 5
Monday – Friday, 8am to 5pm

Franklin County Elections Department
4321 Franklin Avenue
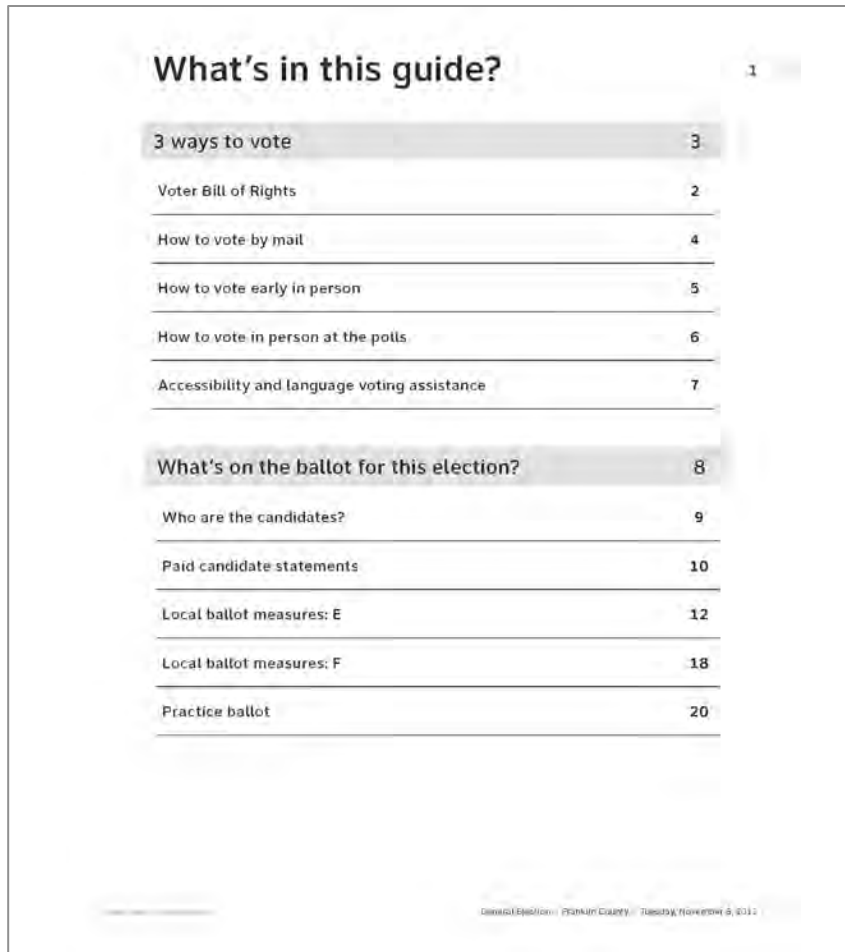Franklin, CA

For more details, **see Page 5**.

Vote at the polls in person
Polls are open on Election Day:
November 6, from 7am to 8pm

The location of your polling place is printed on the back cover of this guide.

Or, you can look up your polling place:

• On the web: www.franklinvotes.org

• Using the automated phone service: 1-222-555-1216

For more details, **see Page 6**.

General Election · Franklin County · Tuesday, November 6, 2012

What is the difference between:

- vote by mail
- early voting
- vote at the polls

Help people answer *their* questions

- Anticipate and answer voters' questions.
- A table of contents acts as a roadmap.

One page: One topic

- All of the information for one topic on one page
- Only one topic per page

Include both overview and details

Level	Where in the Guide	Example
Bite	Cover	General Election Tuesday, November 4, 2014 Polls are open from 7am to 8pm
Snack	Three ways to vote page	**Vote in person at the polls** Polls are open on Election Day, November 4, from 7am to 8pm The location of your polling place is printed on the front cover of this guide. Or, you can look up your polling place: • On the web: www.franklinvotes.org • Using the automated phone service: 1-222-555-1216
Meal	Detailed instructions on page 6	**How to vote in person at the polls** [instructions on the voting process and how to mark the ballot]

Write headings to support action

Heading Style	Example
Question	What is the last day to request a vote-by-mail-ballot?
Quasi-Question	How to request a vote-by-mail ballot
Instruction	Request a vote-by-mail ballot by October 29

Simplify and define election terms

- Sample Ballot or Practice Ballot

- Top Two Primary

- Explain offices, especially local offices

- Test words like polling place, absentee

The Best Practices Manual for Official Voter Guides

HOW VOTERS GET INFORMATION

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

★ Best Practices Manual for Official Voter Information Guides in California ★

2015

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KEY COMMUNICATION TACTICS

- Creating culturally specific graphic illustrations of the voting process
- Teaching tips for how to prepare to vote, including how to sort out conflicting opinions and how to use the sample ballot
- Making connections to community values
- Highlighting ways in which accessible voting options, in addition to language access, can help new voters and others vote more effectively
- Connecting the impact of measures to specific communities

Use the checklist

Ask yourself the right questions, so your voter guide 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?

Thank you.

Last questions?

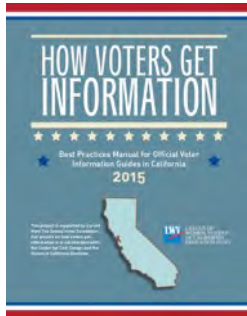## League of Women Voters of California Education Fund

cavotes.org | easyvoterguide.org | smartvoter.org

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civicdesign.org/projects/how-voters-get-information/

How Voters Get Information

Best Practices Manual for Official Voter Information Guides in California