

# Best Practices for Official Voter Guides

## What are the Best Practices for Creating Voter Guides?



### Webinar 1

Live webcast: Monday, April 27, 2015

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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...

How we conducted the research behind the best practices

- California voter guides today

- Research with voters

Top recommendations and insights

- Civic literacy

- Layout and visual presentation,

- Plain language

Resources for developing voter guides

- The Best Practices Manual

- Checklist of questions to ask

- And more

# California Voter Guides

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Analysis of voter guides from all 58 counties and the state for the June 2014 primary

# How we analyzed the voter guides

Documented 60 features or information

- What are the common elements?
- What is most often left out?

We found room for improvement

- Both consistency for many elements of the guides, and wide variability.
- Few elements were included in every county guide.
- Potentially important information was missing from some or most of the guides.

# Most answered the top questions

Voter Questions	# of Counties	Voter Guides Content
What's the deadline to apply for a vote by mail ballot? When it due? What do I have to do to get it?	55	Included information about voting by mail and early voting
What's on the ballot?	54	Had a sample ballot that was an exact copy of the actual ballot
How do you vote (using voting system)?	53	
Where do I go to vote?	48	Out of 58 counties, one was an all mail election.
How do you register to vote?	11	

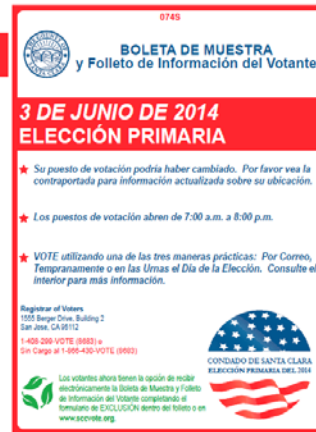
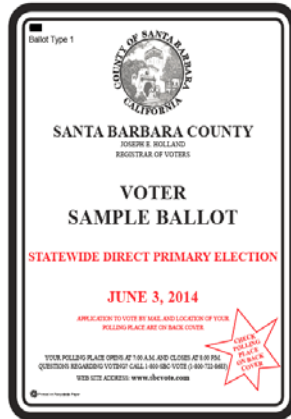
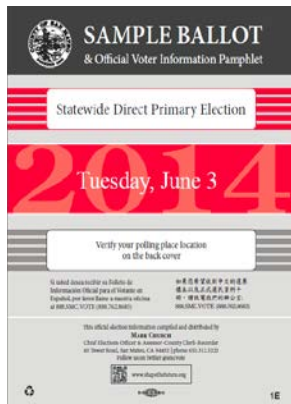
# There were some surprising gaps

Up to a third of the guides were missing information such as:

- Accessibility options for voters with disabilities
- Address of the polling place (or how to find it)
- Deadlines for voting by mail
- In-language support at the polls

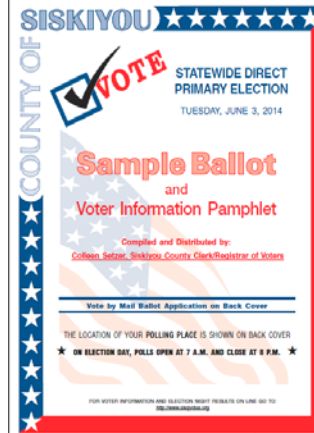
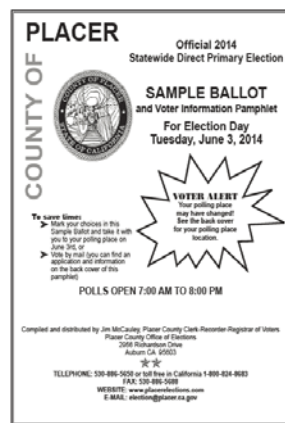
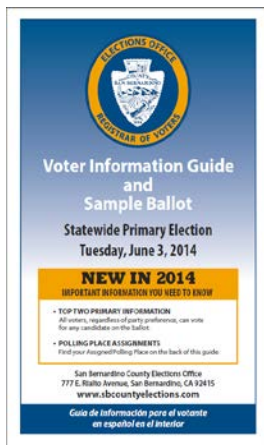


# The guides that answered the most questions



Generally larger, more affluent counties, possibly because they have more resources

- San Mateo
- Santa Barbara
- Santa Clara
- San Bernadino
- Placer
- Siskiyou  
(most complete small county)



# How can we improve voter guides?

Close the gaps with best practices to:

- Make the guides more consistent
- Make information easier to find and read
- Support new and infrequent voters better

The analysis report and the collection of voter guides is online:  
<http://civicdesign.org/projects/how-voters-get-information/>

# About the research

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How we developed the  
recommendations for the best  
practices manual

# 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

1

## Stakeholder input

Election officials, advocates, good government groups

2

## Landscape analysis

Sample of guides from across the state  
Collected guides from all 58 counties

3

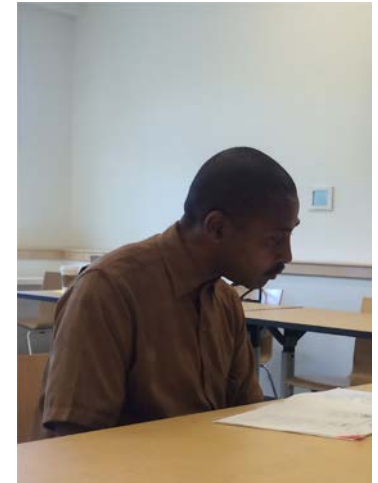
## Research with voters and non-voters

- 53 people: sources and formats for information
- 45 people: finding information in a prototype guide

# Research locations across the state

Oakland	Berkeley	San Jose	Modesto	Los Angeles
Laney College Fruitvale Temescal	Ed Roberts Campus Berkeley Public Library – West Branch	Public Library at San Jose State College Billy DeFrank Lesbian & Gay Community Center	Public Library Maddux Youth Center	Cerritos Shopping Center  Focus Plaza  Sty John the Baptist Churs, Baldwin Park  CAUSE, Pasadena  County Clerk's Office, Norwalk

# The 98 participants were diverse



Age	Range	%
Silent	69+	5%
Boomers	50 to 68	12%
Gen X	34 to 49	29%
Millennial	24 to 33	29%
Student	18-23	26%

Race/Ethnicity	CA %	%
Hispanic	38%	39%
Asian	13%	18%
Black	6%	12%
White	40%	17%
Mixed/Other	N/A	13%

# We found a range of voting habits

Voting Habits	Last Election	%
Regular voters	2013	23%
Presidential voters	2012	21%
Infrequent voters	2011 or earlier	24%
Non-voters	Don't know/never voted	30%

Registered?	CA %	%
Yes	73%	72%
No	27%	26%
Don't Know		2%

The right to vote should be honored.

I vote when I have an opinion.

No one in my family votes.

Voting is the right thing to do.

I guess I'll vote...if I get to it.



# California voter guides are long

- The size of the guides roughly correlated to the size of the county.
- Reading them can feel like an overwhelming task.
- Think about the "20-second test"

# Top recommendations

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The top insights about how voter guides can support voters more effectively

# Three big insights

- Civic literacy is a huge challenge
- Layout and visual presentation are important for comprehension
- Plain language can't be overemphasized

# Top recommendations

- 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

# Key communication tactics



- Create culturally specific graphic illustrations of the voting process.
- Teach how to prepare to vote, including how to sort out conflicting opinions and how to use the sample ballot
- Highlight ways in which accessible voting options, in addition to language access can help others vote effectively.
- Connect the impact of measures to specific communities.
- Make connections to community values.

# The three insights

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Civic literacy

Layout and design

Plain language

# Civic literacy is a big challenge

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

New and infrequent voters don't know where to start.

# 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**

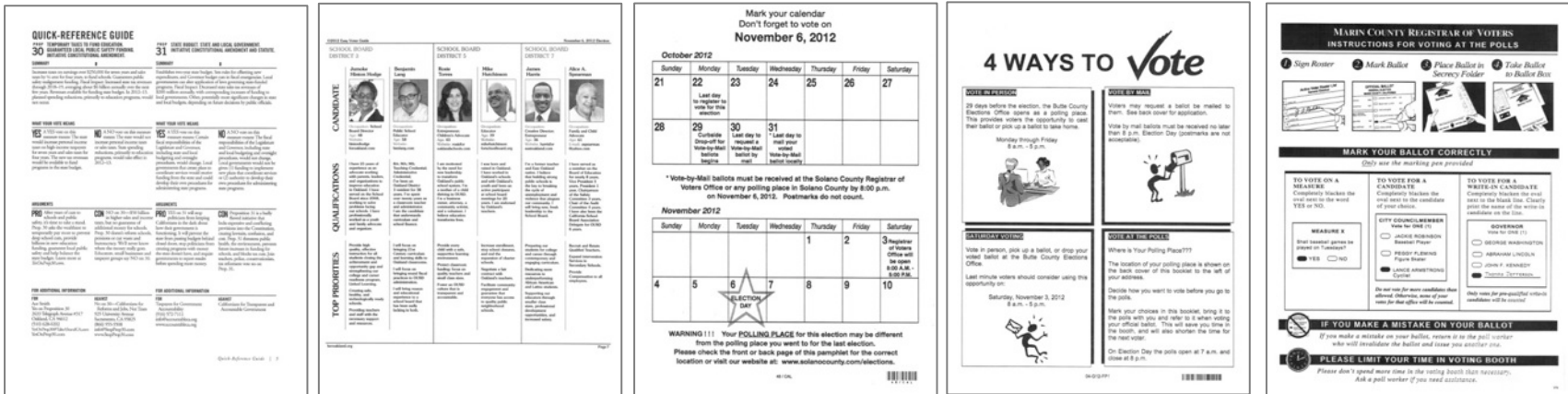


# Layout and design

Voters want a roadmap to the booklet...and the elections process.

They liked pages that used visual layout effectively and were easy to scan.

# The top five pages in current guides



- Use layout and design to communicate the type of content on a page
- Make it easy to differentiate types of pages

# Plain languages

The importance of plain language to bridge the civic literacy gap cannot be overstated.

# Election terms are confusing

## People didn't know many common election terms

- Primary
- Endorsement
- Rebuttal
- Redistricting
- Top Two Primary

## Or understand what other words mean in the context of an election

- Early voting
- Split your vote
- Sample ballot
- Measure

# The Voter Bill of Rights was valuable but hard to read

## Voter Bill of Rights – recommended language

### You have a right to...

**cast a ballot if you are a registered voter.** You can register to vote if you are

- a U.S. citizen
- at least 18 years old
- have been living in the state for x days
- not in prison or on parole
- registered to vote where you currently live.

**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.

If you believe you have been denied any of these rights, or see something that might be a crime, call the Secretary of State's confidential toll-free Voter Hotline at (800) 345-8683

## Voter Bill of Rights – current language

1. You have the right to cast a ballot if you are a valid registered voter. A valid registered voter means a United States citizen who is a resident in this state, who is at least 18 years of age and not in prison or on parole for conviction of a felony, and who is registered to vote at his or her current residence address.
2. You have the right to cast a provisional ballot if your name is not listed on the voting rolls.
3. You have the right to cast a ballot if you are present and in line at the polling place prior to the close of the polls.
4. You have the right to cast a secret ballot free from intimidation.
5. You have the right to receive a new ballot if, prior to casting your ballot, you believe you made a mistake. If at any time before you finally cast your ballot, you feel you have made a mistake, you have the right to exchange the spoiled ballot for a new ballot. Vote-by-mail voters may also request and receive a new ballot if they return their spoiled ballot to an elections official prior to the closing of the polls on Election Day.
6. You have the right to receive assistance in casting your ballot, if you are unable to vote without assistance.
7. You have the right to return a completed vote-by-mail ballot to any precinct in the county.
8. You have the right to election materials in another language, if there are sufficient residents in your precinct to warrant production.
9. You have the right to ask questions about election procedures and observe the election process. You have the right to ask questions of the precinct board and elections officials regarding election procedures and to receive an answer or be directed to the appropriate official for an answer. However, if persistent questioning disrupts the execution of their duties, the board or election officials may discontinue responding to questions.
10. You have the right to report any illegal or fraudulent activity to a local elections official or to the Secretary of State's office.

If you believe you have been denied any of these rights or you are aware of any election fraud or misconduct, please call the Secretary of State's confidential toll-free Voter Hotline at (800) 345-8683

Read it online: <http://civicdesign.org/projects/how-voters-get-information/>

# Questions?

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# Resources

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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/>



# HOW VOTERS GET INFORMATION



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

2015

This project is supported by a grant from The James Irvine Foundation. Our project on how voters get information is in collaboration with the Center for Civic Design and the Future of California Elections.



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EDUCATION FUND

**Download the  
manual from**  
[https://cavotes.org/  
download-best-  
practices-manual](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

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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?
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# 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

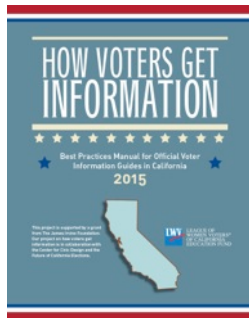
[cavotes.org](http://cavotes.org) | [easyvoterguide.org](http://easyvoterguide.org) | [smartvoter.org](http://smartvoter.org)



## Center for Civic Design

[civicdesign.org](http://civicdesign.org) | @civicdesign

[civicdesign.org/projects/how-voters-get-information/](http://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>