

# Best Practices for Official Voter Guides

## How to Use Voter Guides to Close the Civic Literacy Gap



### Webinar 3

Live webcast: Friday May 1, 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...

## 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

# Civic literacy

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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

## 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.



# 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?

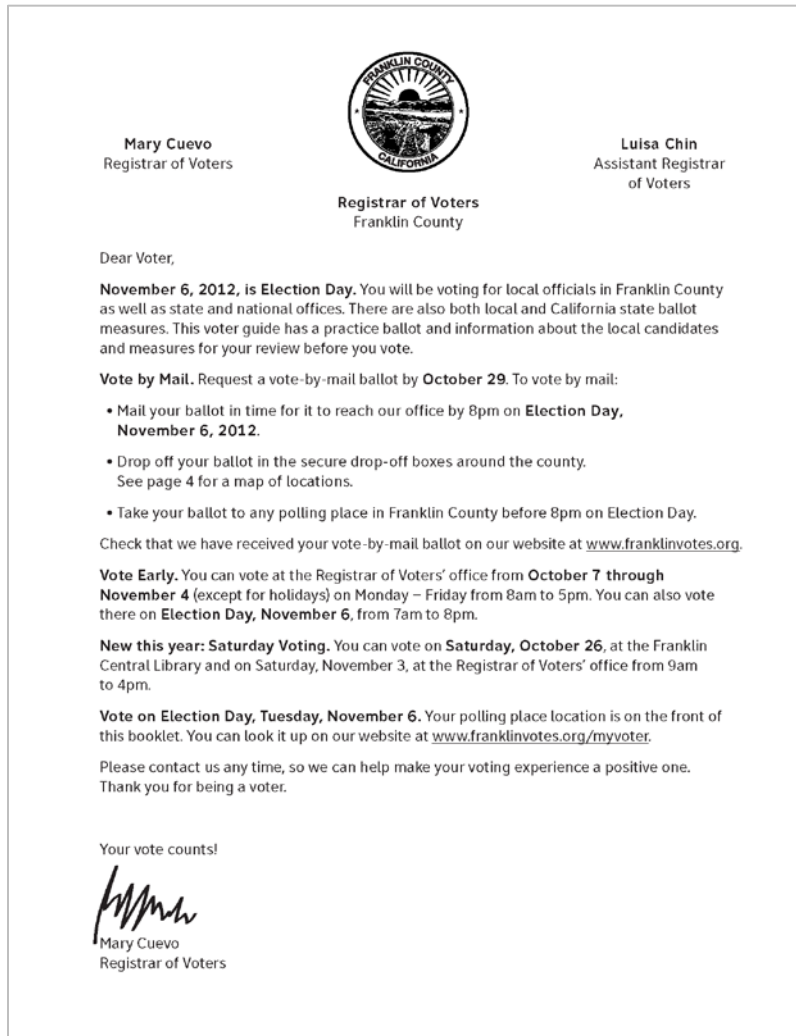
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# Be (helpfully) official

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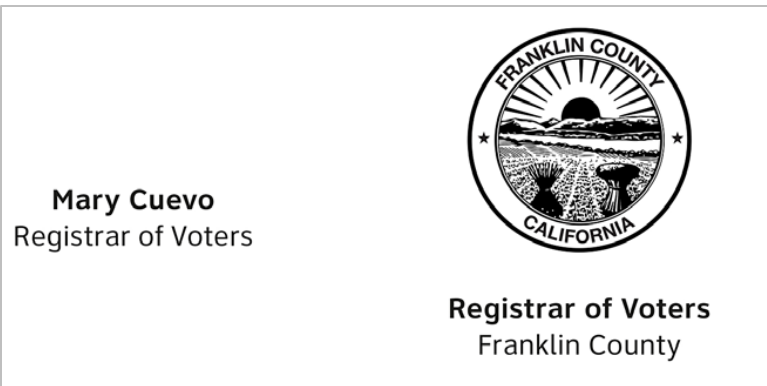
Voters wanted to know the source  
of information

# 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.

# 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!

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mary Cuevo'.

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 College District for  
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

## 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
  - » not in prison or on parole
  - » registered 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.



On the web at: [www.sos.ca.gov](http://www.sos.ca.gov)



By phone at: (800)345-8683



By email at: [sos.info@california.gov](mailto: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

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



# 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?


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# Personalize information

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Let voters know when the guide is just for them, and when it's general information

# Put the polling place right up front



**Franklin County Voter Information Guide**

**General Election**  
**Tuesday, November 6, 2012**  
Polls open from 7am to 8pm

You are registered to vote in Franklin County, California.

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Registered voter name: Your Name	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Is this polling place accessible: Yes
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Your polling place address: 1234 Terrace Avenue Suite 201 Franklin, CA 99939	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Languages available: English, español, 中文

Franklin County Elections Department  
4321 Franklin Avenue  
Franklin, CA 99999

CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED

U.S.  
Postage  
PAID  
No. 4293

OFFICIAL  
ELECTION MAIL  
Authorized by the U.S. Postal Service

Deliver to voter:  
Your Name  
17 Highland Terrace  
Franklin, CA 99999

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"



## 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.)

(Front)

**Official Ballot**  
Consolidated Statewide General Election  
Franklin County, California  
Tuesday, November 06, 2012

**Boleta Oficial**  
Consolidado Estatal Elección General  
Condado de Franklin, California  
Martes, 06 de noviembre 2012

**Instructions to voters**

- Use only the marking pen provided or a ball point pen with black ink.
- To vote for a candidate, completely connect the arrow to the right of the name, as shown in the illustration. Where two or more candidates for the same office are to be elected, completely connect the arrow to the right of each of your choices.
- To vote on a measure, completely connect the arrow next to YES or NO.
- To vote for a candidate whose name is not on the ballot, print the name on the blank line for that office labeled "write in," and connect the arrow for that candidate.
- If you make a mistake, damage your ballot, or you want to change a vote, take your ballot to an election worker and get another. All distinguishing marks are forbidden and void the ballot.

**Instrucciones a los votantes**

- Utilice sólo el lápiz de marcar provisto o un bolígrafo con tinta negra.
- Para votar por un candidato, conectar completamente la flecha a la derecha del nombre, como se muestra en la ilustración. Cuando dos o más candidatos para el mismo cargo se elegirán, conecte completamente la flecha a la derecha de cada una de sus opciones.
- Para votar por una medida, conectar completamente la flecha junto a SI o NO.
- Para votar por un candidato cuyo nombre no aparece en la boleta electoral, imprimir el nombre en la línea en blanco para que la oficina de la etiqueta "escriba"; y conecte la flecha por ese candidato.
- Si usted comete un error, dañar su boleta, o si desea cambiar un voto, tome su papeleta a un trabajador electoral y conseguir otro. Todos los signos distintivos están prohibidos y anular la boleta.

**President and Vice-President of the United States**  
Presidente y Vicepresidentes de los Estados Unidos

Vote for 1 pair  
Vote por 1 par

Republican Mitt Romney President / Presidente  
Paul Ryan Vice-President / Vicepresidentes

Libertarian Gary Johnson President / Presidente  
James P. Gray Vice-President / Vicepresidentes

Peace and Freedom Roseanne Barr President / Presidente  
Cindy Sheehan Vice-President / Vicepresidentes

Democratic Barack Obama President / Presidente  
Joseph Biden Vice-President / Vicepresidentes

**U.S. Senator**  
Senador de EEUU

Vote for 1  
Vote por 1

Republican Elizabeth Enkin  
Elizabeth Enkin

Democratic Diane Feinstein  
Diane Feinstein

or write-in

**U.S. Representative**  
Representante de EEUU

Vote for 1  
Vote por 1

Democratic Randy Loflin

**Member of the Assembly, 4th District**  
Miembro de la Asamblea, Distrito 4

Vote for 1  
Vote por 1

Republican John Munn  
John Munn

Democratic Markko Yamada  
Markko Yamada

or write-in

**Member of the Board of Supervisors**  
Miembro de la Junta de Supervisores

- Tell voters how to use it to prepare to vote.
- Be clear whether it's the exact ballot (personalized), or just an example.

# 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.



LEAGUE OF  
WOMEN VOTERS®  
OF CALIFORNIA  
EDUCATION FUND

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

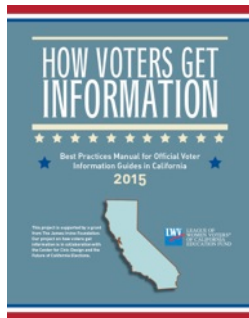
[cavotes.org](http://cavotes.org) | [easyvoterguide.org](http://easyvoterguide.org) | [smartvoter.org](http://smartvoter.org)



## 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>