Field Guides
To Ensuring Voter Intent

Vol. 06

Designing voter education booklets and flyers

Field-researched, critical election design techniques to help ensure that every vote is cast as voters intend

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First edition, 2013

About the Field Guide series

There have been excellent ballot design guidelines around since mid-2007 when the U.S. Election Assistance Commission published AIGA Design For Democracy's work in its report, *Effective Designs for the Administration of Federal Elections*. Everyone involved in that project quickly figured out that, as juicy as the design specs were in that report, they needed to be boiled down to essentials that local election officials could easily act on within the constraints they had. *Field Guides To Ensuring Voter Intent* were inspired by that need.

— Dana Chisnell, *Field Guides Editor*

About this Field Guide

With each election, voters receive flyers and booklets to help them understand the election process, register, find their polling places, and learn what's on ballot for each election. But do they find the information they need?

The 10 guidelines in this Field Guide come from research with young voters and new citizens, trying to find answers in a collection of real brochures from the 2012 election.

To learn more about the research behind this guide and download examples, go to civicdesigning.org.

About the research behind this Field Guide

Whitney Quesenbery and Dana Chisnell interviewed 16 new voters, asking them to look at examples of good printed voter education materials. Most of them were young and had voted for the first time in 2008 or 2012. They were men and women, black, white and Hispanic. They included new citizens from Bolivia, Algeria, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, and Eritrea.

Chad Butterfly and civicdesigning.org are indebted to the Brennan Center, Kathryn Summers and Megan McKeever at University of Baltimore, and User Works for their help in providing space for the research sessions and help recruiting participants.

What voter education did we use for this research?

Printed voter education materials range from small tri-fold general information flyers to 20-page booklets with detailed election information.

We chose five that followed many best practices, to learn how to make them even better.

VOTE! flyer – League of Women Voters

Voters Guide – San Francisco Department of Elections

Maryland Votes – Maryland Board of Elections

Voting in Oregon – State of Oregon

Official Election Guide – Leon County, Florida

- Identify the elections or years the booklet covers.
- Simple design elements make it authoritative but approachable.
- Say who takes responsibility for the information.
- Provide contact information (including social media).

No. 01

Use space on the cover for useful information.

Make it easy to find out what's inside the booklet, what elections it covers, who wrote it, and who it is for.

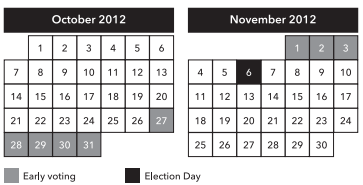
Show dates and deadlines in a list, in chronological order. Or display dates in a calendar format.

Example **2012 Presidential Election**

October 27–November 3, 2012
Early voting centers open 10am to 8pm

November 6, 2012
Election Day

Example **2012 Presidential Election**



No. 02

Be specific about dates and deadlines.

Voters want to know the actual dates to help them make sense of all the steps in an election.

Show real dates for the current election, not just formulas.

Give voters a choice of how to contact you:

- phone numbers
- mailing or street address
- website
- email
- social media

No. 03

Provide real contact information, not just a website.

People who may not have web access or email are especially likely to use printed booklets or flyers for election information.

- Help voters know what to expect: whether they vote at a polling place, a vote center or by absentee ballot.
- When voters see “Three ways to vote,” they make sure they find information about all of them.
- A table of contents also works as a map to the voting process.

No. 04

Start with a roadmap.

An overview helps voters understand the scope of the information in the booklet. Without a table of contents or other roadmap, people got lost in the details.

Keep the message simple:

- Use illustrations, maps, and diagrams that focus on one piece of information at a time.
- Eliminate unnecessary details to highlight the most important points.
- Ask and answer questions clearly.

No. 05

Don’t make voting look complicated (even if it is).

Show the most important or most common options first, then explain exceptions.

Have good headings, in a consistent location, on every page.

No. 06

1 page: 1 topic. (really!)

Having one topic per page makes it easier to scan through the booklet for specific topics.

Information doesn't get buried at the end of the page.

Impatient readers miss details.

Lower literacy readers skip when they get confused.

Before

Voter Registration

Eligibility

Am I eligible to register to vote?

Can I register to vote if I am in the military or live overseas?

Can I register to vote if I have been convicted of a crime?

How can I determine if I qualify to have my voting rights restored following a felony conviction?

Process

When may I apply to register to vote?

After

Voter Registration

Am I eligible to register to vote?

If you are in the military or live overseas

If you have been convicted of a crime

How and when do I register to vote?

No. 07

1 topic: 1 heading.

Good headings make the booklet easy to scan quickly.

It is possible to have too many headings.

Don't put more than one topic in one heading.

Across our studies, people had the same questions:

- Where do you go to vote?
- How do you actually vote?
- How do you get an absentee ballot?
- When is your absentee ballot due?
- What's on the ballot?
- Can you get a sample of the ballot?
- How do you register to vote?
- Are you eligible to vote?
- What's the deadline for registering?
- How do you vote if not on Election Day?
- Do you need to show your ID?

No. 08

Write headings as questions.

People read election booklets looking for answers, so it's easy for them to recognize their questions.

Good questions show that the elections office understands what information voters need.

Use visual design to support meaning:

- Have a consistent style.
- Choose one style of icons.
- One idea per bullet.
- Make sure colored boxes have enough contrast to be easy to read.

No. 09

Make sure that important information stands out.

Use icons, colored boxes, and callouts to highlight critical information that affects the ability to vote.

Illustrations of forms or actions voters must take are helpful.

Help voters know what to expect, whether they vote at a polling place, a vote center or by absentee ballot.

Be sure to cover:

- signing in and the poll book
- marking the ballot
- using the voting system or scanner
- returning absentee ballots

No. 10

Include information on how to vote.

New voters need instructions for how to mark and cast their ballot.

Current voters benefit from having the process confirmed and reinforced.

Tip

Check that the booklet or flyer helps voters plan for voting.

Can voters find:

- ☐ where to vote?
- ☐ options for in-person, early, and absentee voting?
- ☐ dates for important deadlines, such as when to register?
- ☐ what's on the ballot?
- ☐ how to get a sample ballot?
- ☐ how to get an absentee ballot and when it is due back?
- ☐ how to contact your office?
- ☐ who created the booklet or flyer?

Notes

Notes

Who made this Guide possible?

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Order more

Order more or download PDFs of this Field Guide and the other guides in the series at: civicdesigning.org/fieldguides

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Chad Butterfly says thank you!

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