Field Guides
To Ensuring Voter Intent

Vol. 05

Choosing how to communicate with voters

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

Election officials have more ways to communicate with voters than ever before, from traditional printed booklets, to the web, radio and TV, and social media. During Superstorm Sandy, officials even used emergency service announcements to let voters know that the election would go on.

This Field Guide gives an overview of how to use each communications channel effectively. These tips are intended to help you think about how to coordinate election information across many different media.

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

About the research behind this Field Guide

All of the other Field Guides have tips for one kind of election information: ballots, web sites, poll worker manuals, instructions.

This Field Guide looks at how you use all the options available to communicate with voters effectively. Be sure to read four related Field Guides:

Vol. 02:
Writing instructions voters understand

Vol. 06:
Designing voter education booklets and flyers

Vol. 07:
Designing election department websites

Vol. 08:
Guiding voters through the polling place

Communicating with voters

Voters don't have a strategy for how they will get information about elections. They hope that it will be available in their favorite format, from printed material to social media.

They want to know when, where, and how they will vote, from finding their polling place to being reminded of how the voting system works. And they want this information in language they understand.

Most of all, they want the right information in the right format at the right time.

Plan to use:

- printed booklets to help voters plan
- your website to help voters take action
- radio/tv to help voters' awareness of elections or changes
- social media to keep the conversation going with voters before, during, and after elections

No. 01

Use the appropriate medium.

Tailor the level of detail to the delivery channel.

Before

How do I affiliate with a political party?
Voters may register with any of the state's recognized political parties. Choosing not to register with a party, means that the voter is "unaffiliated." Unaffiliated voters may not vote in primary elections, but may be able to vote in any nonpartisan primary election held in your jurisdiction, such as a primary election to select nominees for the board of education, and any general election.

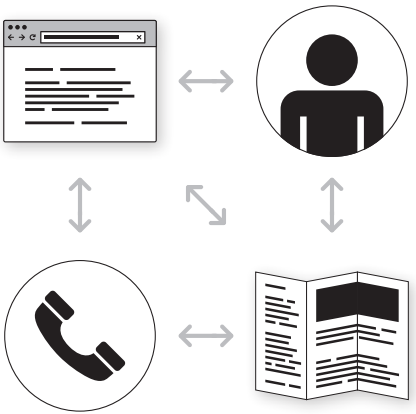
After

Why should I choose a political party when I register to vote?
The main reason to register with a political party rather than choosing "unaffiliated," is to vote in party-based primary elections.

No. 02

Treat all communication as a conversation.

- Choose a tone and voice.
- Be polite, personable, and positive – just like you are in person.
- Use personal pronouns, like "you" and "we."
- Use the same voice across all media.

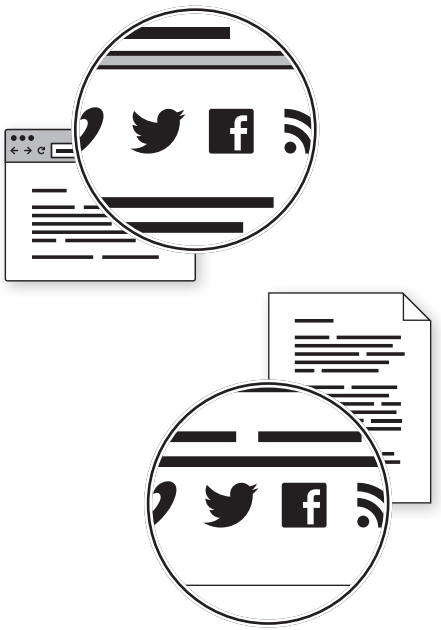


No. 03

Help voters move among media easily to get more information or take action.

Most voters will use information from various sources to learn about an election.

Consider the voter context and the timing within the election cycle for when you will deliver the message.



No. 04

Show off your social media connections (but don't rely on them).

Voters who use social media will enjoy engaging in the online conversation with you.

Voters who don't use social media like to see that your department uses them because it shows you're up to date.

Voters' top questions are:

- what's on the ballot
- options for where and how to vote
- how to get a sample ballot
- key dates
- contact information
- preview of what happens at the polling place

Note: A sample ballot helps voters decide whether to vote, and who and what to vote for, making it easier for them to mark their ballot on Election Day.

No. 05

Answer voters' top questions first.

Voters come to you when they're ready to learn and ready to do.

Answer their questions in the order they ask them. After that, you can add information they didn't know they needed.

Good sample tweets:

- Last day to register for the Nov 2 election is Sept 30! Register online at vote.yourcountyco.st.gov
- Early voting starts on October 15. Find where to vote at vote.yourcounty.st.gov

No. 06

Update your information early and often.

The web and social media are excellent for getting the word out on everything from changes in polling places to how long lines are at early voting locations.

Carefully highlight major changes in print materials.

Before

Are materials and assistance available in languages other than English?

➜ Yes!

➜ 是的

➜ ¡Sí!

After

➜ Voter information in English

➜ 在中國的選民信息

➜ Información electoral en español

Write links to information in other languages in those languages.

No. 07

Make additional languages easy to find.

If you offer materials in languages in addition to English, make sure they are easy to spot and recognize.

Put links to other languages on all materials, even if they are small.

- Develop a common look and feel that works across all the media you publish in.
- Choose illustrations that are relevant and useful.
- Consider starting with design templates from *Effective Designs for the Administration of Federal Elections* (you can download them from the EAC website: http://tinyurl.com/eacdesigns).

No. 08

Use visual design to build trust and show professionalism.

Choose a visual design that is somewhere between boring and cheesy, that conveys the authority and (friendly) voice you want your department to have.

An example of good, complete contact information includes:

- organization name
- mailing address
- general email address
- website URL
- main phone number

plus:

- specific office / title
- full name
- direct phone number
- direct email address

No. 09

Show who is responsible for the information.

Voters like to know who the people are behind the election. This helps them know who the authorities are. Include names, position titles, and contact information.

- Printed materials should show when they were published and the period they're good for.
- Websites should show when the information was updated.
- Social media will show relative dates (such as "updated 5 days ago").

No. 10

Put a date on it.

Some of what makes information authoritative is whether it is current. Everything you publish should show a date.

Showing dates is more helpful to voters than just putting a "new!" badge on it.

Tip

Check that you're speaking with the same voice and tone across all channels.

Have you:

- ☐ thought about how you will use all of the communications methods in a coordinated way?
- ☐ established a conversational but authoritative voice?
- ☐ put the right level of detail in each medium?
- ☐ provided a way for voters to get more information when they need it?
- ☐ focused on helping voters take action?

Notes

Notes

Who made this Guide possible?

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Order more

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