

# Best Practices for Official Voter Guides

# How to Use Plain Language in Voter Guides



## Webinar 4

Live webcast: Friday, May 1, 2015

Jennifer Pae and Melissa Breach, League of Women Voters of California Education Fund

Whitney Quesenbery, Center for Civic Design

Drew Davies, Oxide Design Co.

# 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...

What are the plain language principles

How to present the right information at the right level of detail.

How to organize information an in easy to follow path.

# Plain language basics

---

Clear information helps bridge the civic literacy gap

# What is plain language?

Information in plain language helps people

- find what they need
- understand what they find
- and use it to participate in elections

Plain language speaks to the readers, using words they understand.

# Plain language helps...

- People who don't read English well
- People with cognitive disabilities
- People who with low literacy

44% of Americans read at basic or below-basic level.

National Assessment of Adult Literacy

- Plain language is also easier to translate.

# Follow these plain language principles

- Write in short sentences
- Use short, simple, everyday words
- Write in active voice
- Keep the message positive
- Keep paragraphs short
- Separate paragraphs with a space, so each one stands out on the page
- Use text that is large enough – 12 pts



# Write directly to the readers

**Vote Early** – The Registrar of Voters office is open as a polling place for the November 5, 2013 Election, beginning on Monday, October 7, 2013 through Tuesday, November 5, 2013. You may vote a vote-by-mail ballot at the Registrar of Voters office.



## **Vote early in person**

You may vote early at Registrar of Voters office, or at the voting centers listed on page 5.

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

Registrar of Voters  
4321 Franklin Avenue  
.

# Write headings as questions or active instructions

Heading Style	Example	Why it works
<b>Question</b>	What is the last day to request a vote-by-mail ballot?	Suggests a question that voters ask
<b>Quasi-Question</b>	How to request a vote-by-mail ballot	Suggests what the question the text will answer
<b>Instruction</b>	Request a vote-by-mail ballot by October 29	Provides the answer to an implicit question

# Help people ask the right questions and find the answers

Question	# Asking	Variations of the question
What's on the ballot?	39	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What's on the ballot?</li><li>• Who do I support or vote for?</li><li>• Who is running?</li><li>• Who will I be voting for?</li><li>• Who are the candidates?</li><li>• Who supports the candidates?</li><li>• What are the candidates' positions on [specific issue]?</li><li>• What are the ballot measures?</li><li>• What are the pros and cons for the measures?</li><li>• Does this measure mean a tax increase?</li><li>• How does the official guide compare to the TV ads?</li><li>• Who is in office right now?</li></ul>

# Simplify and define election terms

## Confusing words

- Top Two Primary
- Endorsement
- Sample Ballot
- Partisan contest
- Split your vote
- Rebuttal
- Redistricting
- Polls

# Describe election terms

## 3 ways to vote



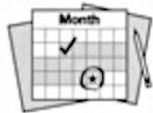
### Vote by mail

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](http://www.franklinvotes.org)
- Using the automated phone service: 1-222-555-1216

For more details, [see Page 6](#).

What is the difference between:

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

Voting Option	Before Election Day	On Election Day
Vote by mail	Yes from home	Yes drop off ballot
Early voting	Yes in person	No
Vote at the polls	No	Yes In person

# Questions?

---

# Organization

---

Creating a good path through the information

# Provide a table of contents

<b>What's in this guide?</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>3 ways to vote</b>	<b>3</b>
Voter Bill of Rights	2
How to vote by mail	4
How to vote early in person	5
How to vote in person at the polls	6
Accessibility and language voting assistance	7
<b>What's on the ballot for this election?</b>	<b>8</b>
Who are the candidates?	9
Paid candidate statements	10
Local ballot measures: E	12
Local ballot measures: F	18
Practice ballot	20

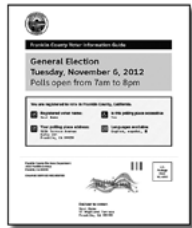
- Anticipate and answer voters' questions.
- A table of contents acts as a roadmap.
- Clearly separate how to vote from information about the ballot



# Connect the state and county guides

## What's on the ballot for this election?

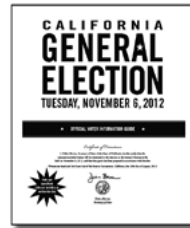
You will receive two voter information guides for this election:



### Franklin County Guide (*this guide*)

Local and county races and measures are in this guide.

---




### California State Guide

U.S. national races, and state races and state propositions are in the guide from the state.

Help voters understand how the two guides work together, and recognize them when they arrive.

# Organize information by activity or task

4  **How to vote by mail**


**You can vote by mail before Election Day**

To vote by mail, you have to request a ballot. Then you can mark the ballot and send it back or drop it off at any polling place.


**How to get your vote-by-mail ballot**

You can request a vote-by-mail ballot starting on **October 7**.  
You must request a vote-by-mail ballot by **October 29**.

You can:

-  Go to [www.franklinvotes.org](http://www.franklinvotes.org) and request a vote-by-mail ballot.

-OR-


-  Send a letter with your signature that includes your address and where to send the vote-by-mail ballot:  
**Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk**  
**4321 Franklin Avenue, Franklin, CA 99999**

After you apply to vote by mail, you will receive your ballot within ten business days.


**How to return your vote-by-mail ballot**

Place your ballot in the official envelope, following the instructions on the vote-by-mail packet. Your ballot must be at the Elections Office or a polling place by 8pm on Election Day, November 6, to be counted.


You can:

-  Send it by mail to:  
**Franklin County Elections Dept.**  
**123 Main Street, Franklin, CA**

-OR-

-  Drop it off at the secure ballot drop-off location, from October 7 to November 6  
**Franklin County Elections Department**  
**123 Main Street, Franklin, CA**

-OR-

-  Drop it off at any polling place on Election Day, November 6, from 7am to 8pm


General Election - Franklin County - Tuesday, November 6, 2012 Ballot Type 2 - CCD-20140111

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

# Use the page layout to make different information look different

**Accessibility and language voting assistance** 7

**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 system**


You can use the AutoMark electronic ballot-marking device to cast a secret ballot without assistance. This voting option includes:

- An audio option that reads the ballot to you
- A keypad and a "sip and puff" feature
- A printer that marks the ballot for you

**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县选民登记处依法规定提供中文和西班牙文版本的选举材料

Ballot Type 2 CCD-201349713 General Election - Franklin County - Tuesday, November 6, 2012

8 **What's on the ballot for this election?**

You will receive two voter information guides for this election:



**Franklin County Guide (this guide)**

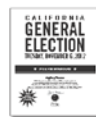
Local and county races and measures are in this guide.

**Offices (see pages 12-15)**

Member of the State Assembly  
Member of the Board of Supervisors

**Local Measures (see pages 16-22)**

E. Community College District Bond  
F. Renewal of the Abandoned Vehicle Abatement Program



**California State Guide**

U.S. national races, and state races and state propositions are in the guide from the state.

**Offices**

President and Vice President  
United States Senator

**State Propositions**

**30** Temporary Taxes to Fund Education, Guaranteed Local Public Safety Funding, Initiative Constitutional Amendment.

**31** State Budget, State and Local Government, Initiative Constitutional Amendment and Statute.

**32** Political Contributions by Payroll Deduction, Contributions to Candidates, Initiative Statute.

**33** Auto Insurance Companies, Prices Based on Driver's History of Insurance Coverage, Initiative Statute.

**34** Death Penalty, Initiative Statute.

**35** Human Trafficking, Penalties, Initiative Statute.

**36** Three Strikes Law, Repeat Felony Offenders, Penalties, Initiative Statute.

**37** Genetically Engineered Foods, Labeling, Initiative Statute.

**38** Tax to Fund Education and Early Childhood Programs, Initiative Statute.

**39** Tax Treatment for Multistate Businesses, Clean Energy and Energy Efficiency Funding, Initiative Statute.

**40** Redistricting, State Senate Districts, Referendum.

General Election - Franklin County - Tuesday, November 6, 2012 Ballot Type 2 CCD-201349713

# Help voters find their way through the candidate and measures pages

**Who is running for office?**

**Member of the Assembly, 4th District**  
The person elected Member of the Assembly will represent you in the state government to make laws and set the budget for the state of California.

**John Munn**  
Republican  
Taxpayer Association President  
JohnMunn@gmail.com

**Marikyo Yamada**  
Democratic  
California State Assemblyman  
www.yamadaforca.org

**Karen Mitchoff**  
County Supervisor  
Karen.Mitchoff@gmail.com

**Member of the Board of Supervisors**  
The person elected represents you in County government and makes decisions on the county budget.

**Local ballot measures: E**

**E Measure E Franklin Community College**

**Summary**  
To upgrade educational facilities at Diablo Valley, Franklin, and Los Medanos Brentwood centers, and help prepare students for jobs and college training, and building facilities for health, medical, science, and technology training, and accessibility, and infrastructure improvements, shall the Franklin County Board of Supervisors, acting by and through the Board of Education, issue bonds at legal interest rates with independent oversight, audits, and a

**What your vote means**

YES	NO
-----	----

**Local ballot measures: F**

**F Measure F Franklin County Vehicle Abatement**

**Summary**  
Should the Franklin County Vehicle Abatement Program and vehicle registration fee be increased by an additional two dollars for certain commercial vehicles payable upon registration for a ten-year term beginning July 1, 2013, for the abatement and removal of abandoned and inoperative vehicles?

**What your vote means**

<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
A "yes" vote on this measure continues the current program for 10 years and the county will continue to	A "no" vote means the program will end June 30, 2013.

**Paid candidate statements**

Candidate statements are provided by the candidate and printed at their expense.

**State Assembly, 4th District**

**Statement of John Munn**  
Preference: Republican  
Occupation: Taxpayer Association President

For over twelve years, I have served the central coast, first as a school board member and now as a county supervisor and coastal commissioner.

School Board Member: As an educator, I know that California's future depends on top quality education at all levels. I have worked with teachers, parents, students and administrators to achieve measurable improvement. That work has earned me support from dozens of local school board members, teachers and parents.

**Declaración de John Munn**  
Preferencia de Partido: Republicano  
Ocupación: Presidente de la Junta Escolar de los Contribuyentes

Durante más de doce años he servido a la costa central primero como miembro del consejo escolar y ahora como supervisor y comisionado costero.

Miembro de la Junta Escolar: Como educador, sé que el futuro de California depende de la calidad de educación en todos los niveles. He trabajado con maestros, padres, estudiantes y administradores para lograr una mejora medible. Ese trabajo me ha ganado el apoyo de decenas de miembros del consejo escolar local, maestros y padres.

**Local ballot measures: E**

<b>Argument in favor of Measure E</b>	<b>Argument against Measure E</b>
Diablo Valley College, Franklin College, Los Medanos College, and the San Ramon and Brentwood education centers are essential safety nets providing affordable education and job training to over 55,000 students locally - many of whom cannot afford four year colleges and universities. YES on E ensures OUR local students have the opportunity to continue their education and be ready to compete in today's competitive job market!	Bonds are an expensive form of debt. Like a mortgage, bonds are repaid with interest over time. Since 2002, District voters have repaid \$406.5 million that will cost tax payers an additional BILLION DOLLARS.
Local community college students are the backbone of our Franklin County workforce. YES on E updates classrooms and labs to maintain high quality career training programs in fields including healthcare, sciences, technology, and public safety.	Now the District is asking for \$50 million in NEW DEBT that will cost tax payers an additional BILLION DOLLARS. This bond is TOO BIG, TOO EXPENSIVE, especially given the current taxpayer burdens.
YES on E improves our colleges, helping students prepare for 21st century jobs and careers or transfer to 4-year universities.	Residents OPPOSE this bond because: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Many people are unemployed or financially stretched and cannot afford TO PAY MORE.</li> <li>As compensation for District voters who have grown, resources for care</li> </ul>

# Questions?


---

# The right information

---

Include the right information at the appropriate level of detail

# Maximize the value of the front cover



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

- Show that it's an official guide (county name and seal)
- Name or type of election
- Date of election day
- Times the polls are open
- Polling place information
- How to contact the election office
- Languages offered

# Organize information into a bite-snack-meal

Franklin County Voter Information Guide

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

Go to the polls! Your polling place location is on the back cover.




### 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.



### How to vote by mail

#### You can vote by mail before Election Day

To vote by mail, you have to request a ballot. Then you can mark the ballot and send it back or drop it off at any polling place.

#### How to get your vote-by-mail ballot

You can request a vote-by-mail ballot starting on October 7. You must request a vote-by-mail ballot by **October 29**.

Apply by doing one of the following:

- Tear off and mail back the application on the back cover page of this booklet.
- Visit [www.franklinvotes.org](http://www.franklinvotes.org) and submit a request.
- Send a letter signed by the voter that includes your address and where to send the vote-by-mail ballot:  
Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk  
4321 Franklin Avenue, Franklin, CA 99999

After you apply to vote by mail, you will receive your ballot within ten business days.

#### How to return your vote-by-mail ballot

Place your ballot in the official envelope, following the instructions on the vote-by-mail packet.

Then, you can:

- Send it by mail to:


The official term is "progressive disclosure"



# Include both overview and details

Level	Where in the Guide	Example
<b>Bite</b>	Cover	General Election Tuesday, November 4, 2014 Polls are open from 7am to 8pm
<b>Snack</b>	Three ways to vote page	<b>Vote in person at the polls</b> 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: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• On the web: <a href="http://www.franklinvotes.org">www.franklinvotes.org</a></li><li>• Using the automated phone service: 1-222-555-1216</li></ul>
<b>Meal</b>	Detailed instructions on page 6	<b>How to vote in person at the polls</b> [ instructions on the voting process and how to mark the ballot ]

# Make it easy to compare candidates

 <b>Who is running for office?</b>						
9						
<b>Member of the Assembly, 4th District</b> The person elected Member of the Assembly will represent you in the state government to make laws and set the budget for the state of California.		<b>Member of the Board of Supervisors</b> The person elected to the Board of Supervisors represents you in city / county government. The Supervisors make laws and set policy for the city/ county government, and set and oversee the city/ county budget.				
<b>CANDIDATE</b>	<b>John Munn</b> Republican Taxpayer Association President <a href="mailto:JohnMunn@gmail.com">JohnMunn@gmail.com</a>	<b>Marikyo Yamada</b> Democratic California State Assemblyman <a href="http://www.yamadaforca.org">www.yamadaforca.org</a>	<b>Karen Mitchoff</b> County Supervisor <a href="mailto:Karen.Mitchoff@gmail.com">Karen.Mitchoff@gmail.com</a>			
	<b>Robert Jones</b> Business executive <a href="http://www.RobertJones-for-Franklin.com">www.RobertJones-for-Franklin.com</a>	<b>PERSONAL STATEMENT</b>	As a business owner, public official, and a single father who raised two sons in Franklin County, I understand the issues that matter most to Franklin County families. I treasure our democracy and pledge to put our common good above partisanship and special interests.	I have served our community as a public school teacher and Franklin County Supervisor, and California State Assemblymember. I am running for re-election to build on my record of legislative results, and to continue working as a strong advocate for our residents, families, and small business owners.	My focus during my first term has been to maintain and then improve our county financial structure in order to provide vital, quality public and safety net programs for our vulnerable citizens (pre-school; after school tutoring; computer literacy classes; funding a Veterans Services Representative).	Customer service to citizens is my top priority. I possess the qualifications, leadership, and high ethical standards required to serve the citizens of Franklin County, continuing my work to manage and protect taxpayers' dollars. I would be honored to earn your continued trust and support.
	<b>TOP PRIORITIES</b>		Improve our economy and restore fiscal discipline. Secure our borders and forge a humane immigration policy. Improve healthcare and protect Social Security.	Give school districts more control of their budget. Make college more affordable for middle class families and provide funding for training technology. Create jobs in high unemployment areas hurt by the economic downturn.	Provide fire protection and emergency medical response with reduced fiscal resources. Provide protection from elder and child abuse; containment of communicable disease; protection to ensure water and food safety.	Ensure property tax refunds are promptly issued when assessed values are reduced. Establish sound fiscal policies for the county.
<i>This candidate has a paid statement. <a href="#">see page 13</a></i>			<i>This candidate has a paid statement. <a href="#">see page 14</a></i>	<i>This candidate has a paid statement. <a href="#">see page 14</a></i>		

- Something to consider:
- Voters want to know about candidates in a way that helps them compare their choices.
  - Structured information was easier to scan and compare.

# Help voters understand measures



## Local ballot measures: E

### E Measure E Franklin Community College District

#### Summary

To upgrade educational facilities at Diablo Valley, Franklin, and Los Medanos Colleges, and the San Ramon and Brentwood centers, and help prepare students for jobs and college transfer by modernizing classrooms and labs, building facilities for health, medical, science, and technology training, and implementing earthquake safety, accessibility, and infrastructure improvements, shall the Franklin Community College District issue \$450 million of bonds at legal interest rates with independent oversight, audits, and all funds spent on local sites?

#### What your vote means

YES	NO
A "yes" vote on this measure authorizes the issuance of the bonds and the levy of taxes as estimated in the Tax Rate Statement to repay the bonds. Fifty-five percent (55%) of those voting on the ballot measure must approve the measure for it to pass.	A "no" vote on this measure disapproves the issuance of the bonds and the levy of taxes.

#### For and against Measure E

FOR	AGAINST
<p>YES on E updates classrooms and labs to maintain high quality career training programs in fields including healthcare, sciences, technology, and public safety.</p> <p><b>Linda Best,</b> Fmr. CEO, East Bay Leadership Council (Retired)</p> <p><b>J. Dale Hudson,</b> Former Chair, Franklin Community College District Independent Citizens' Oversight Committee</p> <p><b>Cynthia Egan,</b> 2013 Franklin County Teacher of the Year (San Ramon Valley USD)</p> <p><b>Jim Russey,</b> Fmr. Local Fire Captain (Retired)</p> <p><b>Kitty Gupthill,</b> Healthcare Executive</p>	<p>This bond is too large, this debt is too expensive, especially given today's taxpayer burdens. We cannot afford to pay more.</p> <p><b>Alex Aliferis,</b> Executive Director, Franklin Taxpayers Association</p>

- Break measures information into a structured summary, followed by details, arguments, and full text.

# Voters preferred structured information

When we asked about their preferences, most wanted short, easier to scan information.

"Simpler. Takes time to read."

"Clear headings. More space. Less of a pitch and more facts."

"I just want to focus on the priorities, not so much about who they are."

"Less words, more info per page."

"Good layout vs. blocks of text."

"Easy to read. Names and information are separated so you can read each one."

# But some wanted as much information as possible

Even if they might not read it, they wanted to know the information was available.

"[The summary] is good because if I don't want to read, I can just ignore all that, but other people can go to the detail."

"It's good to have choices about what to read. Full text is important so you can compare the arguments."

"Put the extra in the back, so you have a way to answer your questions."

"Not many people will look at it, but if it's in the book more might."

# Questions?

---

# Resources

---

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

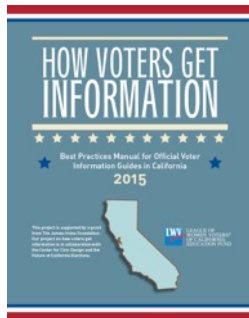
[cavotes.org](http://cavotes.org) | [easyvoterguide.org](http://easyvoterguide.org) | [smartvoter.org](http://smartvoter.org)



## 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>