Ballot design that voters can really use

Whitney Quesenbery
Center for Civic Design
civicdesign.org

NCSL Legislative Summit 2019
Top Topics in Elections
Democracy is a design problem
We have best practices for ballot design

Field Guides to Ensuring Voter Intent, Vol 01 Designing Usable Ballots (2012)
Anywhere Ballot (2013)
Design best practice makes marking a ballot easier

https://www.rankedchoicevoting.org/
Why don’t all ballots use the EAC best practices?

- Typography
- Ballot layout
- Marking mechanisms
- Instructions and messages
Ballot design can fool voters

Even if they think they know the rules
The layout can hide contests right on the ballot.
Layout can make two contests look like one
Layout can make one contest look like two

2016 Primary
How do we fix this?

Better ballot design skills
Ballot standards and layout tools
Review ballots for usability, not just compliance
Design printed ballots so everyone can verify them

Optical scan encoding

Summary of selections / non-selections
Ballot standards that include design best practice

https://civicdesign.org/showcase/updated-ballot-standards-for-virginia/
INSTRUCTIONS TO VOTERS:
Use a blue or black ballpoint pen to mark your ballot.
Connect the arrow pointing to your choice, like this.
To vote for a qualified write-in candidate, clearly print the name on the line provided and connect the arrow.
If you make a mistake, or want to change your vote, ask an Election Official for a new ballot.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party-Nominated Offices</th>
<th>Voter-Nominated and Nonpartisan Offices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Only voters who disclosed a preference upon registering to vote for the same party as the candidate seeking the nomination of any party for the Presidency or election to any party committee may vote for that candidate at the primary election, unless the party has adopted a rule to permit non-party voters to vote in its primary elections.</td>
<td>A member, regardless of the party affiliation, may vote for any candidate for a non-partisan office. It does not imply that the candidate is nominated or endorsed by the party or that the party approves of the candidate. The party may for its members in any office a candidate for a non-partisan office does not appear on the ballot.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Election code shouldn’t require bad design or confusing language
Ballot questions

Voters struggle to understand what they are being asked to vote on.
43% of adults in the US read at basic or below basic levels

- 14%: 30 Million
- 29%: 63 Million
- 44%: 95 Million
- 13%: 28 Million

What will this question do?

Should the County Vehicle Abatement Program and vehicle registration fees (one dollar per vehicle and an additional two dollars for certain commercial vehicles payable upon registration of a vehicle) be renewed for a ten-year term beginning July 1, 2013, for the abatement and removal of abandoned, wrecked, dismantled, or inoperative vehicles?
What will this question do?

This constitutional amendment would provide that the method of selection and appointment of certain municipal court judges would be set by statute, rather than be provided for in the Constitution. These judges may include judges of joint municipal courts and judges of central municipal courts with jurisdiction extending to the territorial boundaries of a county.
Democracy is a design problem

Elections work better when ballots are usable, accessible, and clear.

For everyone!
Whitney Quesenbery
whitneyq@civicdesign.org  |  @whitneyq

Center for Civic Design
civicdesign.org  |  @civicdesign

Field Guides To Ensuring Voter Intent
civicdesign.org/fieldguides/

We’ll send you a set of Field Guides. Just write to:
hello@civicdesign.org