



DESIGN COUNTS IN ELECTIONS

EAC Roundtable Discussion

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EAC Offices
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Washington, DC
Live webcast at www.eac.gov
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Premise

Election officials share the goal of providing a positive voting experience that will give voters confidence that their votes were cast and counted as they intended. Implementing best practices in ballot and polling place design contributes to a voter's positive experience and ensures that the process is accessible and convenient to the widest possible audience.

Goal

To take the guess work out of designing ballots and polling place signs. Incorporating simple design principles come with few costs yet yield huge benefits for the American electorate.

Agenda

9:00 – 10:30 a.m.	The Role of Design in Elections
10:30 – 10:45 a.m.	Morning Break
10:45 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.	Implementing Best Design Practices
12:00 – 1:00 p.m.	Lunch Break
1:00 – 3:00 p.m.	Good Design Can Remove Barriers
3:00 – 3:15 p.m.	Afternoon Break

3:15 – 4:30 p.m. Election Design Strategies & Stories

4:30 – 5:00 p.m. Conclusion

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

I. The Role of Design in Elections

Clear communication and better experiences build trust and increase participation in elections. The role of design in elections came to the attention of the general public after the 2000 presidential election. We learned about election concepts and terms such as hanging and dimpled chads and butterfly ballots. We heard first-hand accounts from voters who found ballots confusing and hard to navigate. Ballot and polling place design continue to be important issues to election officials, even as we move to new and different types of voting equipment. Regardless of how ballots are presented to voters, there are basic good design principles we can implement to ensure voters have a successful experience when casting their votes.

One of the EAC's major projects was to study the impact of design in elections and to gather a collection of best practices from election officials and usability and accessibility experts. The result was the EAC's 2007 *Effective Designs for the Administration of Federal Elections* report, which covers ballots for a variety of voting systems and voter information materials in English and other languages. This report is available at EAC.gov and camera ready images are also available to election officials by sending a request to EAC. Go to the page about today's meeting for instructions.

Today we will discuss the role of design in elections, the importance of plain language, the legislative landscape in the states, and how to make sure election materials are accessible to all voters, including those with disabilities and those living overseas or away from home serving in the military.

Whitney Quesenbery of WQUsability will deliver presentation about the evolution of design in elections and best practices in design.

Discussion Questions

- a. Do you think we've solved the problem of poorly designed ballots?
- b. Are ballot design issues technology driven? Do paper and optical scan ballot design issues differ from touch screen issues?
- c. How do you account for generational perspectives in ballot design? Do cultural issues impact ballot design?
- d. Can you tell us about how fonts, colors and word alignment may impact voters?
- e. Do state laws play a major role in how ballots are designed? Are there emerging trends in election reform legislation at the state level that indicate a growing awareness of ballot design issues?

- f. Are there resources for improving ballot that state and local election officials can access?
- g. What are the behavioral or operational indicators that there could be an issue regarding ballot design in an election?

Chairperson of the Plain Language Action and Information Network Amy Bunk will provide an overview of plain language use in government communications. She is also the director of Legal Affairs and Policy for the Office of the Federal Register, United States National Archives and Records Administration.

- h. I don't think most people associate "plain language" with the federal government, but I understand that recently there's been official action to reduce the amount of bureaucratic language. Can you tell us about that?
- i. What role does plain language play in ballot and polling place design?
- j. How can election officials incorporate plain language principles when so much of wording of the ballot is dictated by law? Are there initiatives to inform and guide state legislatures of the impact of convoluted (and sometimes confusing) ballot language?
- k. What do voters want? Is this different that what is needed?
- l. Cognitive disabilities have become an important consideration in accessibility discussions. How can plain language initiatives improve accessibility for voters with cognitive disabilities?
- m. Are there separate strategies for improving the accuracy of language in ballot content vs. ancillary voting materials (voter instructions, signage, etc.)?
- n. Many jurisdictions have minority language requirements. What are the issues associated with improving ballot language in a multi-language environment?
- o. Are there metrics or measures that can be used to assess the efficacy of language in applications like ballots? Would this be useful?
- p. How can jurisdictions balance the need for clarity in language with the need for legal accuracy? Are these mutually exclusive?
- q. What resources are available to state and local election officials regarding improvements in the accuracy of language in ballots and voting materials?

II. Implementing Best Design Practices

Long Beach City Clerk Larry Herrera will discuss his experience redesigning ballots.

Discussion Questions

- a. For election officials: did you encounter a challenge internally regarding the redesign of your ballot?
- b. Is there a different approach to designing in-person voting materials versus vote- by-mail materials?
- c. What resources did you have to assist with the redesign? Did you have access to usability or plain language experts, for example?
- d. What role does design play if you have to issue a correction to a printed ballot? What about polling place or ballot by mail announcements?
- e. What design principles do you apply to voter registration materials?

- f. To what extent do vendors impact ballot design? In your experience are they producing systems with sufficient functionality and flexibility to produce “good” ballots?
- g. Good technology is often transferrable from one application environment to another. Are there examples of good design practices in other industries that election officials can learn from?
- h. What resources exist for state and local election officials regarding ballot design?

III. Good Design Can Remove Barriers

EAC Board of Advisors and U.S. Access Board Member Ron Gardner will deliver presentation about how effective design can remove barriers for voters, including people with disabilities.

EAC Computer Engineer Josh Franklin will join the panel to answer questions about ballot designs for military and overseas voters.

- a. What are the best practices in design for people who have low vision or are deaf, and how should those practices be incorporated into ballot design?
- b. How can effective design help voters with cognitive disabilities?
- c. What design principles are so universal that implementing them in elections would benefit all voters?
- d. Are there best practices applicable to specific voting systems that benefit voters with disabilities?
- e. There are no universally accepted printer parameters. So how do we make sure that blank election materials that are sent to military and overseas voters are printed correctly?
- f. Are there challenges associated with fonts or characters when our ballots are sent overseas?
- g. With more election jurisdictions moving to paper-based systems, is there something that can be implemented regarding design that would benefit people with disabilities?

IV. Strategies and Stories

- a. How much did it cost to implement a redesign of your ballot?
- b. How much work was involved? How many staffers?
- c. How did you integrate the new designs into the election process?
- d. How did you introduce the new designs to voters?
- e. For an election official viewing this roundtable, what is your advice on how to get started improving their jurisdiction’s ballot design? What is the first step?