Field Guides
To Ensuring Voter Intent

Vol. 09

Creating accessible online information

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

The Field Guides
are online at
civicdesign.org/fieldguides

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Fourth edition, 2018

About the Field Guide series

If you could do just a few things that would make a big difference in the experiences voters and poll workers (and even candidates) have, what would those be? That's the question we tried to answer in each of the *Field Guides To Ensuring Voter Intent*.

Every guideline and example is based in research and practice. The guidelines come from sources ranging from the Election Assistance Commission, to the National Institute of Standards and Technology, to lots of our own research conducted alongside county and state election officials. We've tried to make each one easy to follow. You should be able to implement most of the guidelines independent of election laws or voting system technology.

— Dana Chisnell, *Field Guides Editor*

About this Field Guide

Local election websites are important sources of information for voters who cannot read print, or any voter looking for answers online. This Field Guide picks up from Vol. 07, Designing Election Websites, showing how to support good web design for voters with disabilities.

These guidelines are first steps, addressing some of the most common accessibility problems in election websites. With the coding techniques introduced in this Field Guide, assistive technology from screen readers to specialized keyboards can "read" the page.

You might also want to read these related Field Guides:

> Vol. 05: Choosing how to communicate with voters
>
> Vol. 06: Designing voter education booklets and flyers
>
> Vol. 03: Testing ballots for usability

About web accessibility

The people who come to your website have a wide range of needs. When we talk about making websites and other materials accessible, the focus is usually on making them work for people who use assistive technology. They might use screen readers or ZoomText to read visual materials, use special keyboards or pointers to navigate and type, or rely on captions and transcripts for audio.

The same techniques for designing accessible websites also help people who may not think of themselves as having a disability. When we design websites to be flexible and accessible, people with low literacy or limited English skills, aging eyes, or a temporary injury can all use websites more easily.

Resources behind this Field Guide

This Field Guide is based on a substantial body of knowledge on creating accessible websites, including our own research watching voters with disabilities try to use local election department websites.

We found two reports helpful in understanding barriers that voters with disabilities experience.

> **Access Denied: Barriers to Online Voter Registration for Citizens with Disabilities**
>
> **Understanding Voting Experiences of People with Disabilities**

A few more resources to help you make elections accessible include:

> **The EAC Quick Start Election Management Guide to Accessibility**
>
> **How People with Disabilities Use the Web** at the W3C Web Accessibility Initiative
>
> **Web Accessibility in Mind (WebAIM)** online articles and technical resources
>
> **A Web for Everyone: Designing Accessible User Experiences** by Sarah Horton and Whitney Quesenbery

語 Language Support
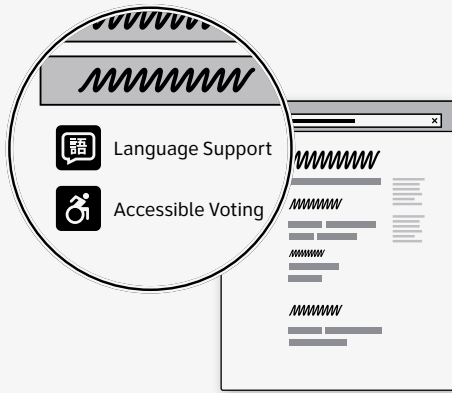
♿ Accessible Voting

No. 01

Make sure information about accessible voting is easy to find.

Don't make voters hunt through your site for information about access to polling places or how the accessible voting system works.

Avoid

AAA   AAA

Use

AAA   AAA

The EAC voting system guidelines recommend high contrast (10:1) for text. You can check the contrast with free tools like the WebAIM contrast checker (webaim.org/resources/contrastchecker/)
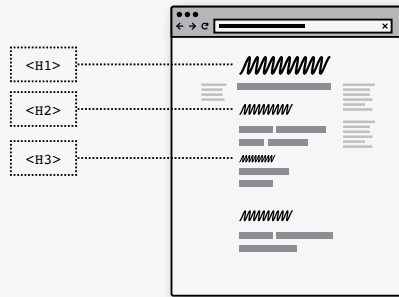
See also:
Vol. 01.03: Use big enough type.
Vol. 08.09: Use icons to reinforce instructions

No. 02

Make information easy to read.

Start with large enough text, a clear sans-serif font, and good contrast.

Make it easy for voters to adjust the appearance to their own preferences and needs.

No. 03

Structure the content with headings.

Support the visual presentation by using styles for formatting.

Heading styles should be visually distinct and use correct HTML coding. This helps people using assistive technology (from screen readers to specialized keyboards) read the page.

See also:
Vol. 07.10: Help voters see at a glance what each chunk of information is about.

Avoid: **Using the same words for many different links**

- Read more
- Click here
- Continue...

Use: **Text that says where link leads**

- Find your polling place
- Register to vote
- How to vote by mail

See also:

Vol. 07.06: Write links that use words voters use and that help voters know where they will end up.

Vol. 07.09: Use words that voters use in links, headings, and graphics.

No. 04

Write helpful, meaningful links.

Avoid repeating the same words (like "learn more") for a series of links.

Listen to what it sounds like when you read it aloud. Use enough of the right words in links so they make sense and stand alone.

```
<main role="main"><H1>Page Title</H1>
```
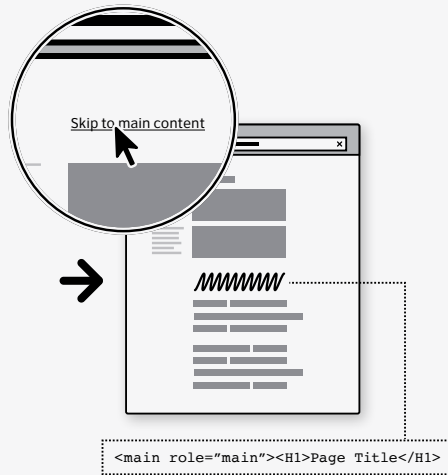
See also:
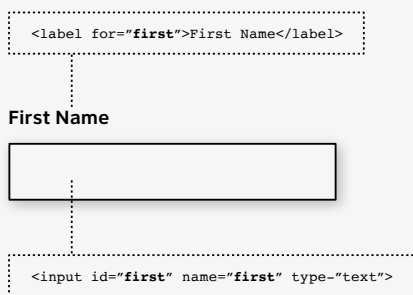
Vol 01.05: Support process and navigation.

Vol. 07.07: Put the most important information in
the main menu or the center section of the page.

No. 05

Make it easy to jump to the main content on the page.

Create links to skip over banners and menus that are repeated on each page.

Or identify different types of content in the code.

```
<label for="first">First Name</label>
```

First Name

```
<input id="first" name="first" type-"text">
```

For more on coding accessible forms:
webaim.org/techniques/forms/

No. 06

Code forms so they are accessible.

Make sure everyone can use voter registration forms, absentee ballot requests, and "My Voter Information" features.

A few simple coding techniques make forms accessible. Connect each label or prompt to its field.

Transcript
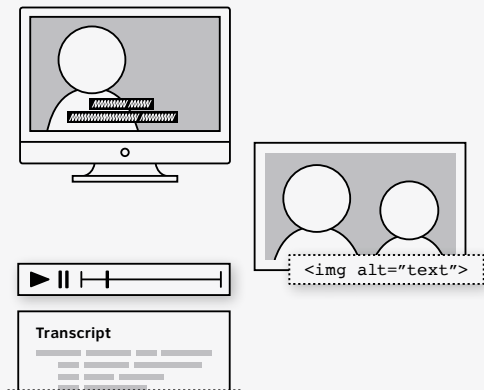
For more:

WebAIM information about captions
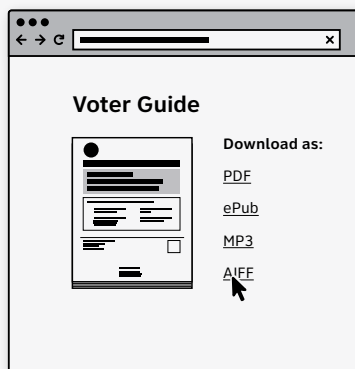webaim.org/techniques/captions/

Writing great alt text
civicd.link/FG0907

<img alt="text">

No. 07

Provide alternatives for images, audio, and video.

For all images and multimedia, you need a text alternative for people who cannot see or hear it. This means:
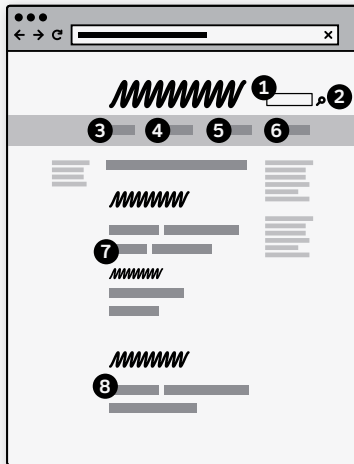
- descriptions of images
- transcripts for audio
- captions for video

Voter Guide

Download as:

PDF

ePub

MP3

AIFF

No. 08

Keep alternative formats together so voters can choose.

When you post a document or media file, put links to different files together so it's easier for voters to choose the format that works best for them.

Logical order for tab and
arrow keys.

No. 09

Make sure everything works with a keyboard.

People using assistive technology often do not use a mouse. Check your site by using it without a mouse. Instead, try to move through it with the tab and arrow keys. Check to make sure the cursor moves through the page in a logical order.

Be sure to check the website for different settings and interaction styles used by people with different disabilities:

- Text size, color and contrast with browser settings
- ZoomText
- Keyboard only
- Screen readers – both JAWS and VoiceOver
- Large and small screens
- Without audio

See also:

Vol. 03: Testing ballots for usability

No. 10

Test the website with voters with disabilities.

There's nothing like seeing real voters try to use your website to find information to learn how to improve it. Use the same techniques as for testing ballots.

Tip

Check that the website allows voters with disabilities to use it easily to prepare for voting.

Can voters with different disabilities find, read, and use:

- [ ] all the content on the website?
- [ ] their sample ballot?
- [ ] their own voter registration status and preferences?
- [ ] information about accessible voting systems?
- [ ] requests for absentee ballots?
- [ ] early voting locations and hours?
- [ ] the location of their polling place?
- [ ] online voter registration forms?

Notes

Notes

Who made this Guide possible?

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More ways to read the Field Guides

Read the Field Guides on your laptop or mobile phone, in an accessible and responsive format. Or you can print from the site or download PDFs: civicdesign.org/fieldguides

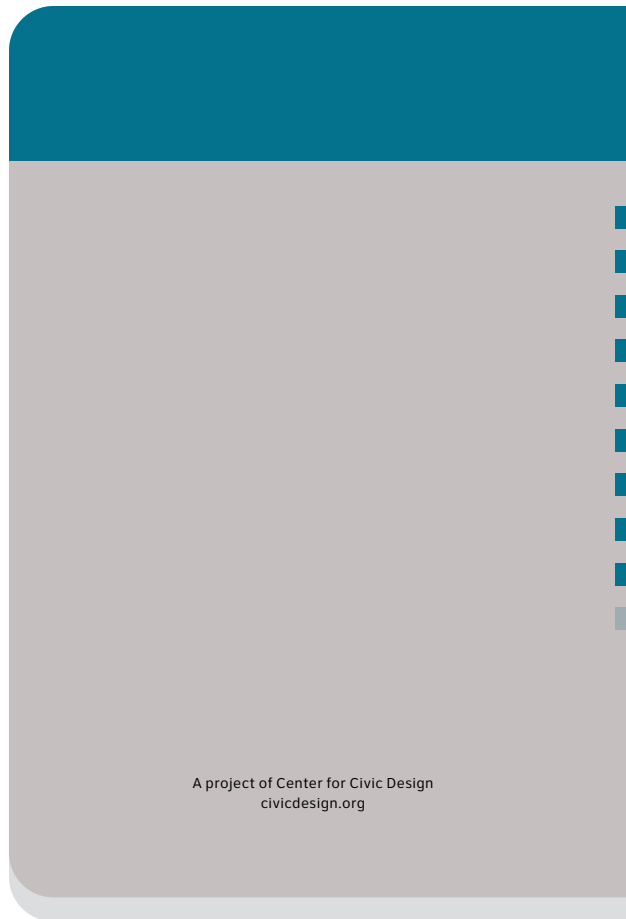Order more copies by writing to:
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