Center for
Civic Design

May 10, 2017

Pedro Nava, Chairman
Little Hoover Commission
925 I Street, Suite 805
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Mr. Nava and the Commission,

Thank you for the opportunity to share our thoughts about voter registration and motivating more people to vote.

We applaud the efforts in California to make sure that eligible voters are able to vote and that their registration stays up to date. Many of the rules for maintaining voter registration do not meet the needs of today's mobile society. Updating the voter registration process is an important modernization to democratic processes in the 21st century.

The problem is simple: you cannot vote if you are not registered. But we know from our research that many people don't think about voting until close to the election.

Recent changes in California make its infrastructure for supporting voter registration one of the best in the country:

- An online voter registration system gives all Californians a single place to go, rather than separate procedures in each county.
- A report by the ACLU said that California's online voter registration was the only one that met all guidelines for accessibility, ensuring that people with disabilities don't encounter technical barriers.
- Pre-registration for 16-year olds will help young voters be ready to vote in the first election for which they are eligible,
- Using data from transactions at the DMV and other agencies strengthens the intent of the National Voting Rights Act and helps keep CalVote data up-to-date and accurate.

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Taken together, they make it easier for citizens to be voters.

Registered voters also receive county Voter Information Guides mailed by the Registrar of Voters. Easy access to this information gives each voter a better chance to learn what is on the ballot in time to make their voice heard.

The official voter guide and sample ballot may be the only opportunity to learn about some local issues before Election Day. In California, we have worked with the counties and state election offices to make voter guides more useful, easier to read, and easier to translate. We also worked with the Secretary of State's office on a plain language version of the California Voter Bill of Rights and an explanation for how primaries work in the state. When election materials are clearly written, it is easier it is for underserved, low-propensity citizens to vote.

An official voter guide and sample ballot may be a voter's only opportunity to learn about local contests that are not widely covered in the media. In a diary study with voters in 6 states, many reported seeing things on their ballot for the first time when they went to vote. These voters were interested, engaged, and had been given access to well-done online voter guides from vote411.org and others. As an example, one participant, an avid voter, said he had done extensive research. But even he was surprised by a local city measure that had not appeared in any of the voter guides he had seen.

Partnering with the Brennan Center for Justice, we have been privileged to work with several states as they update their voter registration options at the Department of Motor Vehicles, starting with Oregon and including California. The one constant is the need to explain the options clearly, in a friendly voice.

In summary, we know that motivating participation in elections is a difficult problem. It is one for which there are no simple answers, and probably no single answer. Minimizing the hurdle of registering to vote can make it easier for citizens to learn how, where, and when to participate.

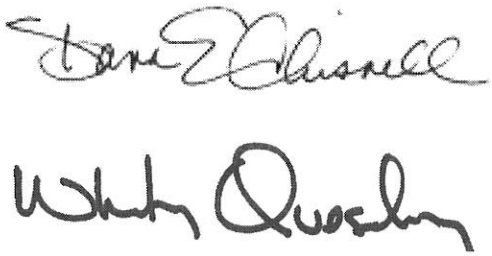
As Kathryn Peters, co-founder of Democracy Works, says:

> "Inviting people, it turns out, is a start. Offering a sincere welcome, one that's rich and personal, clearly resonates more deeply yet. Seeking out that missing electorate and

inviting them in can work, but it's only the start. From there, we still have to make sure people have the information to follow through. We have to find their motivation, keep it burning. We can't just thank them and walk away them after they register, or even after Election Day."

A list of some of the research and experts who have influenced our thinking follows.

We look forward to seeing your report.



Dana Chisnell and Whitney Quesenbery
Co-Directors, Center for Civic Design

Relevant Research

Field Guides to Ensuring Voter Intent - Center for Civic Design
http://civicdesign.org/fieldguides/

You're Invited - Kathryn Peters
http://democracy.works/blog/2017/3/3/youre-invited

Understanding America's Interested Bystander: A Complicated Relationship with Civic Duty - Kate Krontiris, John Webb, Chris Chapman
https://research.google.com/pubs/pub44180.html

Access Denied: Barriers to Online Voter Registration for Citizens with Disabilities - ACLU and the Center for Accessible Technology
https://www.aclu.org/report/access-denied-barriers-online-voter-registration-citizens-disabilities

Usability of County Election Websites - Cyd Harrell, Andrea Fineman, Ethan Newby, Dana Chisnell, Whitney Quesenbery
http://civicdesign.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/HCII2013_V12_LNCS8015_978-3-642-39252-8-Harrell.pdf

Best Practices Manual for Official Voter Information Guides - League of Women Voters Education Fund and Center for Civic Design
https://cavotes.org/announcement/2015/feb/best-practices-manual-official-voter-information-guides-released

Making Voting Accessible: Designing Digital Ballot Marking for People with Low Literacy and Mild Cognitive Disabilities - Kathryn Summers, Dana Chisnell, Drew Davies, Noel Alton, Megan McKeever
https://www.usenix.org/jets/issues/0202

Making Voting by Mail Usable, Accessible, and Inclusive - Kathryn Summers, Whitney Quesenbery, Amy Pointer
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/305026379_Making_Voting_by_Mail_Usable_Accessible_and_Inclusive

Why We Vote: A qualitative investigation of attitudes about participation in elections by young adults -Whitney Quesenbery
http://civicdesign.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/WhyWeVote-Quesenbery-Final.pdf