# 2022

# Center for Civic Design
# Annual Report

# Message from our Executive Director

This year has been a difficult one. We witnessed attacks on elections and on election officials, threats to voting integrity, and an increasing number of bans on local elections offices receiving support from non-profits. Through it all, we've stayed true to the vision that's guided our work since CCD was founded 9 years ago: creating solutions that make it easy for everyone to understand the voting process and for everyone's voice to be heard.

We found places where design can have an impact by understanding the needs of voters whose voices have not been heard and by using those research insights to communicate more clearly how to participate in elections. This year, we worked with elections offices to develop materials to support new policies. We partnered with community organizations on voter information that can be shared widely. We explored new ways to make elections more accessible to voters with disabilities, reach voters through expanded language access, and make casting a ballot more transparent so voters have more confidence in elections. And we continued to build a team that can bring diverse perspectives and skills to our work.

As the midterm elections wrapped up, we were encouraged by election officials who rose to another challenging election season, serving on the frontlines of democracy. We've seen that voters want elections to run well. Some people measure success by the amount of press calls they get per year. In November of 2022, our inboxes were nearly empty! Journalists call when they're worried, so we took the silence as a sign that the election ran smoothly.

Looking forward to 2023, we are working to move elections forward by inviting even more people into civic spaces and participation, pushing election offices to higher standards, and ensuring new technology and policies make sense for voters.

Whitney Quesenbery
Executive Director

## Table of Contents

Cover:
Sean and Isabelle tested ballot question explanations with **California** voters for the Easy Voter Guide.

# By the numbers

## In 2022, we worked in 16 states



Legend:
- 2022
- Previous work
- Future work!
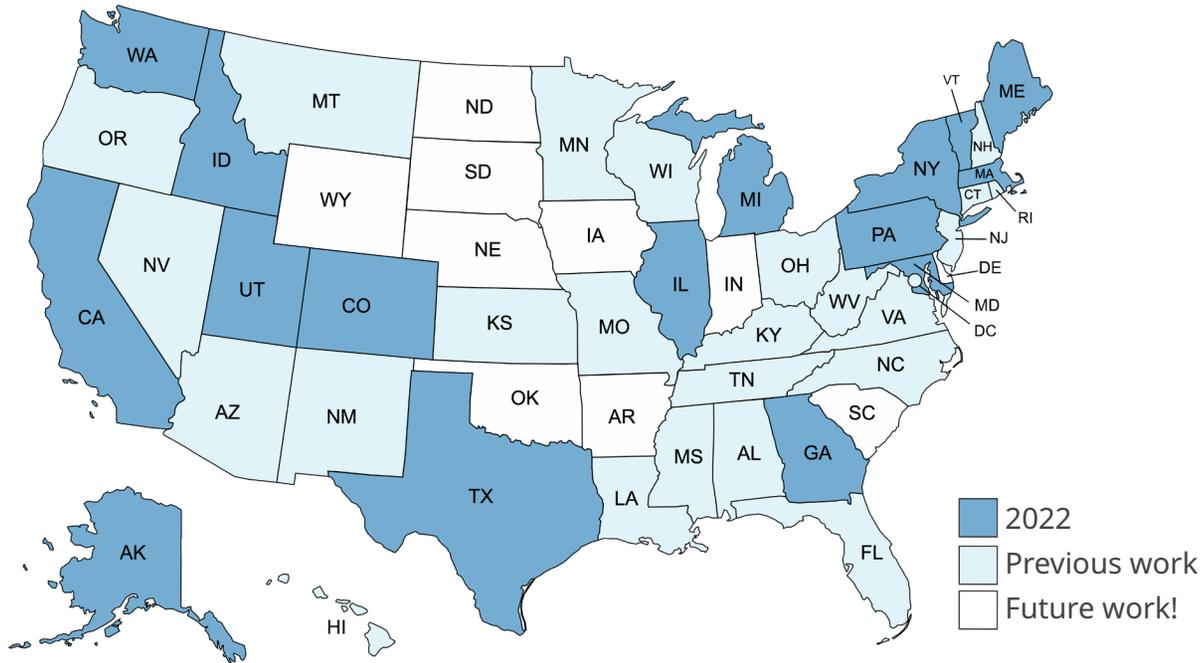
## Our work reached millions of voters

# 53,003,790 voters is

**47.3%**

of overall turnout in the 2022 General Election

**22.4%**

of eligible voters

## We made tools and taught core skills

**6** new or updated tools for election administrators

**6** states where elections staff learned new skills

## We ran 24 research and usability studies

- Remote usability testing
- In-person usability testing
- Intercepts
- Surveys
- Individual listening sessions
- Group listening sessions
- Observations

## We did research with 496 people

- 445 voters
- 39 election administrators
- 12 people in campaigns

# Inviting participation by making elections clear

**Every eligible voter should be able to cast their ballot.**

Creating clear information design for voters is at the heart of our work, whether on a mail-in ballot envelope, form, or a pocket guide. Our goal is always that voters understand what they are voting on, and can vote the way they intend.
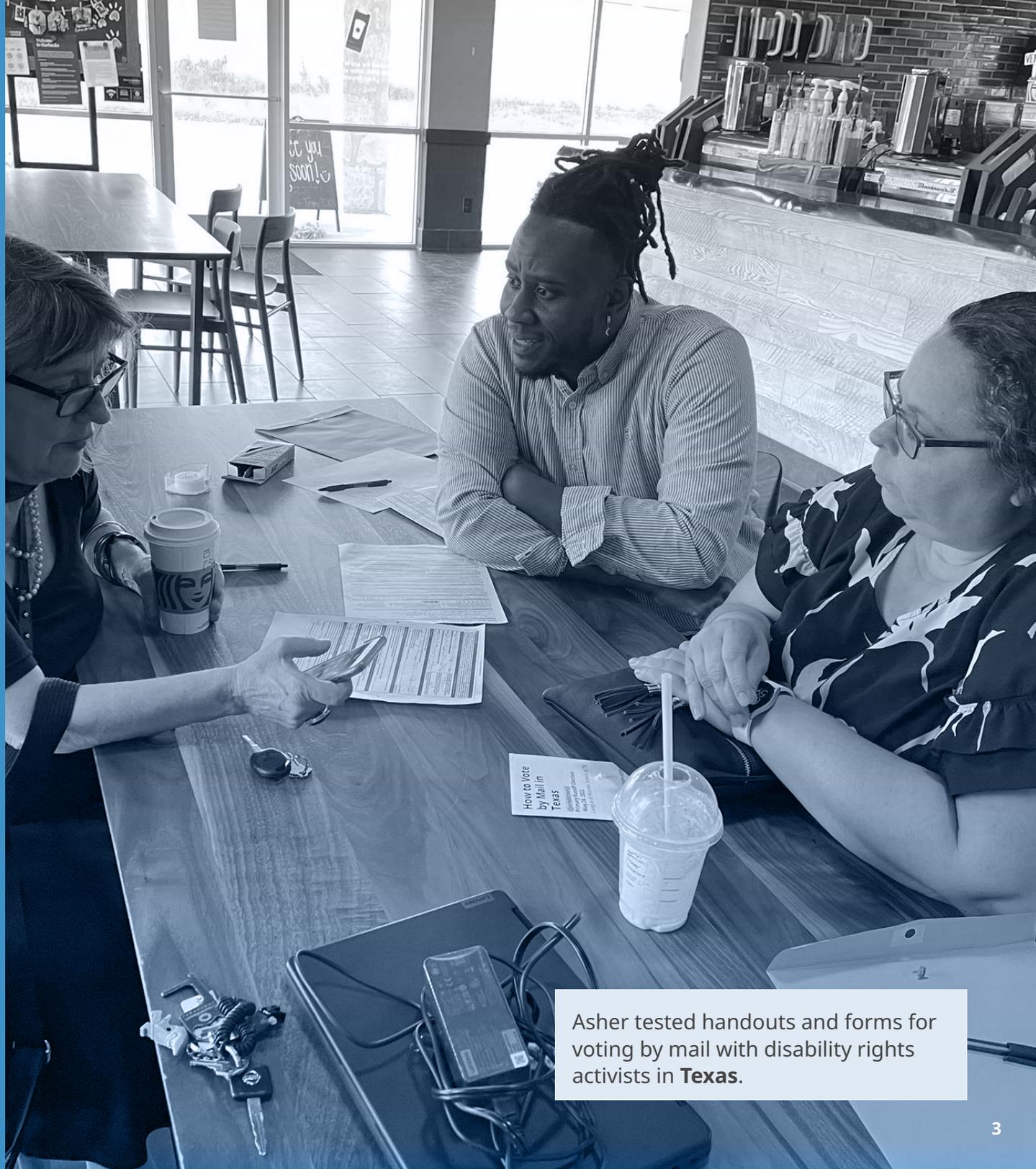


Asher tested handouts and forms for voting by mail with disability rights activists in **Texas**.

## Informing voters to reduce vote by mail rejection rate

In **Texas** we partnered with 13 community organizations to create voter information in Spanish, Vietnamese, and English to help voters understand complicated new vote by mail rules. Conversations with voters and organization leaders affected by this law helped us design forms that serve them better. Materials were distributed in the Dallas-Fort Worth area, San Antonio, Waco, Texarkana, Houston, and Webb County, and were adapted in other parts of the state.

"This focus group provided important data on how voter suppression laws and tactics are impacting Black voters and further underscored that our democracy is at a precipice."

— Abdul Dosunmu, founder and chief strategist of Young Black Lawyers' Organizing Coalition (YBLOC), spotted on **EURWeb.com**

## Making new policies easier for voters

In **Georgia** and **Maryland**, we worked with the state board of elections to update envelopes and forms for new laws.

Pocket guide explaining how to mark and return your ballot in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese

In **Vermont**, we designed envelopes, instructions, and cure postcards for their switch to all vote-by-mail elections.

That design work paid off with a .003% mail ballot rejection rate in Vermont's 2022 General Election compared to a 0.4% rejection rate in 2020.

## Translating complicated new programs into simple explainers

We worked with the **New York State Public Campaign Finance Board** on simplifying their forms, program information, and training handbook. Our focus on design and plain language ensured the material was both easy to read and legally accurate as they launched this new program. We did usability testing with 12 campaign finance experts, community members, and campaign staff members.

"We very much enjoyed the process and learned a lot about making content more usable and relatable to the end user. You have a wonderful team to work with."

— Cheryl Couser, Co-Director of the New York State Public Campaign Finance Board

The header on the inside of the Vermont cure postcard says "We received your ballot. Unfortunately it was missing something."
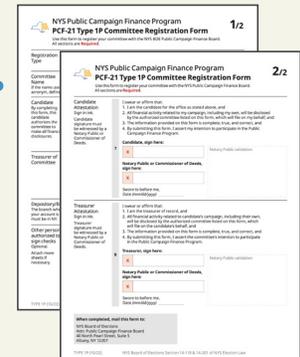
The new New York State Public Campaign Finance Program Application Form in sidewalk form style

# Expanding access by reaching new voters

## Speaking in voters' languages about the issues they face.

Inviting new people into the voting process requires that election offices build relationships with trusted leaders and community groups that can reach out to their communities. Our research and workshops help election offices better support a wide range of voters with language and accessibility needs.
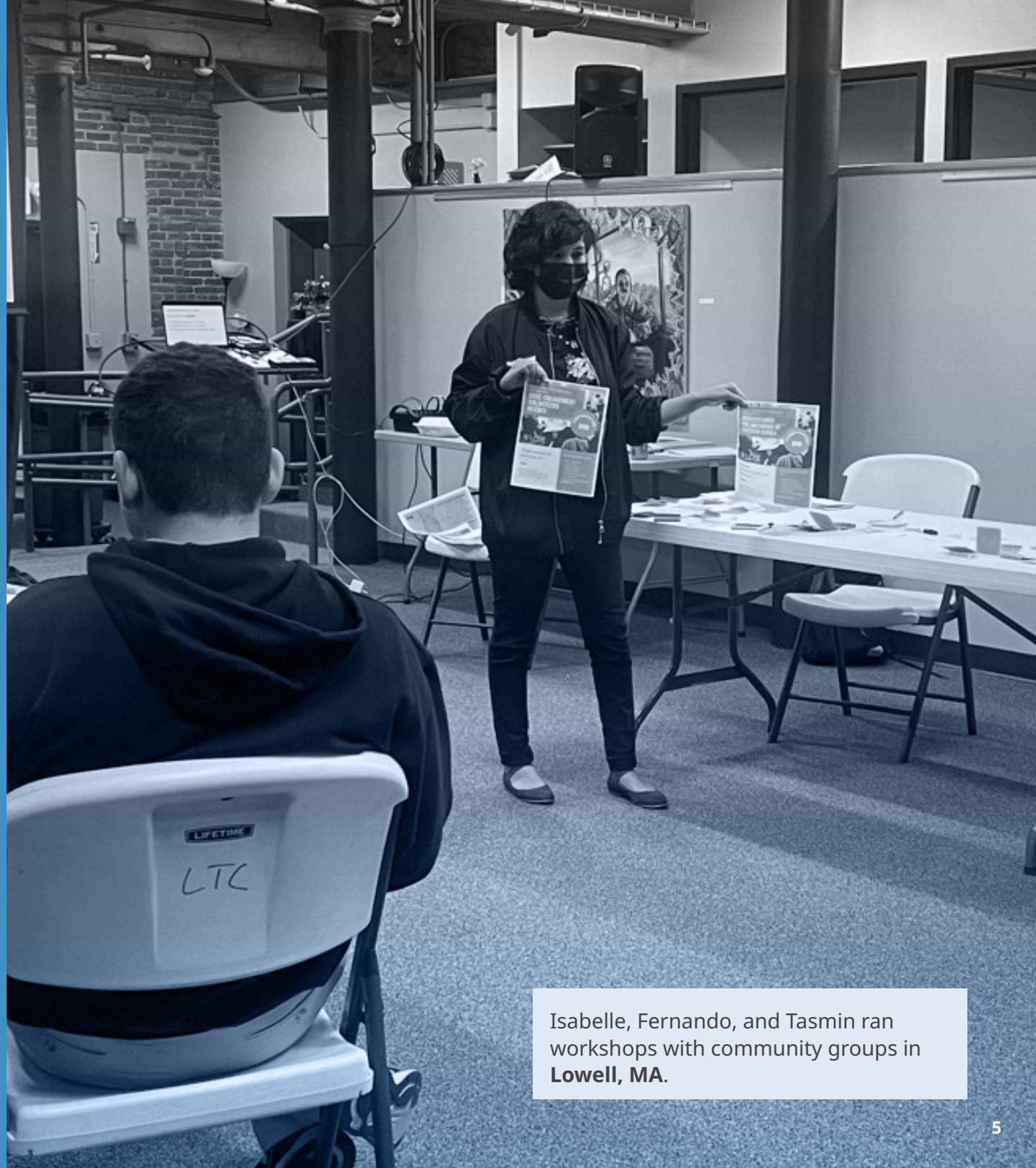
Isabelle, Fernando, and Tasmin ran workshops with community groups in **Lowell, MA**.

**Your Vote Counts**
**A New Citizen's Guide to Voting in the United States**
projectcitizenship.org • (617) 694-5949

PROJECT CITIZENSHIP
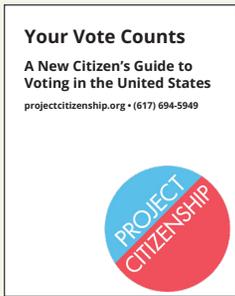
A pocket guide about voting for new citizens

## Demystifying voting for new citizens

As we continued our work in Massachusetts' Gateway Cities, we partnered with **Project Citizenship** to create a guide about the voting process for newly naturalized citizens. This project builds on several years of research around the country to understand new citizens' questions and barriers to voting. Community organizations serve a vital role in voter education, filling gaps in official outreach.

14 new citizens spoke with us about their evolving relationship with civic life in the US.

## Language access: going beyond the Voting Rights Act

Language access was a big focus for us this year. We conducted workshops and supported election offices as they expanded their language access programs in response to new language designations. We were especially excited to work with offices going beyond the basics and expanding support for languages spoken in their community— even if not federally mandated.

This year, we published **3 language access quick guides**

- Hiring a language access coordinator
- Translating for elections
- Working with translation vendors

**Hiring a language access coordinator**

A language access coordinator is one of the most critical roles in your department's language access program.
September 2022

hello@civicdesign.org
civicdesign.org
@civicdesign

**Translating for Elections**

A language access quick guide to translating materials.
September 2022

hello@civicdesign.org
civicdesign.org
@civicdesign

**Working with Translation Vendors in Elections**

A language access quick guide to working with translation vendors, testing and distributing the translations.
September 2022

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🖥 Read the language access quick guides: **civicdesign.org/topics/language**

## Accessible voting: information people with disabilities need

We launched **AccessibleVoting.net** a new nationwide index of accessible voting options in every state, in time for National Disability Voting Rights Week. Every voter in the US has the right to cast their ballot privately and independently, but too often, we've seen this reality fall short. We worked with **Microsoft** and **Coforma.io** to create this resource after hearing from many voters with disabilities about how difficult it can be to dig through states' websites to find the essential information they need on accessible voting.

"It was incredibly exciting to have a partner in the Center for Civic Design who brought the experience and ability to bridge the information gap and build a really elegant and accessible tool. And, the bonus was for me was the rich learning and discussions that were part of the process."

— Rylin Rodgers, Disability Policy Advisor, Microsoft Accessibility

AccessibleVoting

**Find the accessible voting options in your state**

Select your state
Select...

**What is Accessible Voting?**

Accessible Voting helps you find ways to cast your ballot with the options you need for a successful voting experience. This site contains the details of accessible voting in your state, including early voting, voting in-person on Election Day, mail voting, and accessible vote-by-mail tools for people with print disabilities.

Some accessible voting information is only available from your local elections office. Look for links to help you get right to their website for details like the accessibility of early and Election Day polling places.

There is also a checklist to help you make your own voting plan.

You can also learn about accessible voting rights and ways to advocate for voters with disabilities.

AccessibleVoting

State-by-state election basics with details like voting systems for in-person, voting by mail, and other accessible voting options

# Fostering core skills

**Giving administrators tools to implement accessibility, plain language, and usability testing with ease.**

This year, we've taken our years of training, research and running workshops and have begun to create education on the core skills we've found are the most essential for running elections and apply across the areas most relevant to election workers.

CCD taught a full-day class for the **Utah** VOTE state certification program for county clerks and election staff.

## Creating tools for accessible design

This year, we also started taking steps towards raising design skills in election offices. We created an **InDesign template and a webinar** on how to use it so that election officials have tools for designing forms. Accessibility features that optimize the final form for use with screen readers were built in from the start.



Introducing our template for fillable accessible forms

## Introducing our Core Skills

We started 2022 with a visit to **Weber County, Utah**. This was a real two-way exchange. The elections office staff gave CCD's staff a tour of their vote by mail process, and we sat down with them to review a range of materials with an eye towards plain language and information design. On the same trip, we also led a full-day workshop for election officials from across the state on plain language and usability testing.

"Wow - phenomenal, detailed, and very helpful feedback - thank you. We were already excited about this new card [to voters to cure their mail-in ballot envelope], and with your suggestions, we're even more excited. This is a top-notch, easy-to-understand-and-follow document."

— Ricky Hatch, Weber County Clerk/Auditor

## Establishing plain language as the easy choice

With more observers than ever interested in watching ballot counting across the country, we partnered with the **U.S. Elections Assistance Commission** to create **posters, pocket guides, and explainers** about the ballot counting process and the election administration process. A national toolkit that explains electoral processes is a new and radical idea, and we were excited to take part in building it.

Find the toolkit at:
**eac.gov/election-officials/ communicating-election-and-post-election-processes-toolkit**

2 days was all it took for the **Alaska Department of State** to adapt the templates after the EAC launched the toolkit publicly.

## Making usability testing approachable for more people

In 2015, we developed a usability testing toolkit for election officials that lives on **ElectionTools.org**. This year, that toolkit was adapted by the **Department of Homeland Security** for a wider government audience.

Find the toolkit at:
**dhs.gov/cx/dhs-usability-testing-kit**
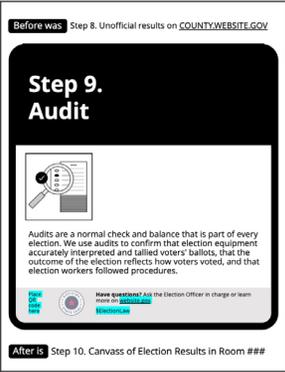


Template for a sign about post election audits



Promoting usability testing for any government office

# Updating voting systems

## Helping voters and election officials introduce new methods of voting.

New ways of voting can often come with new procedures and new voter education needs. Our research and design work supports election offices in ensuring a smooth transition to new systems.
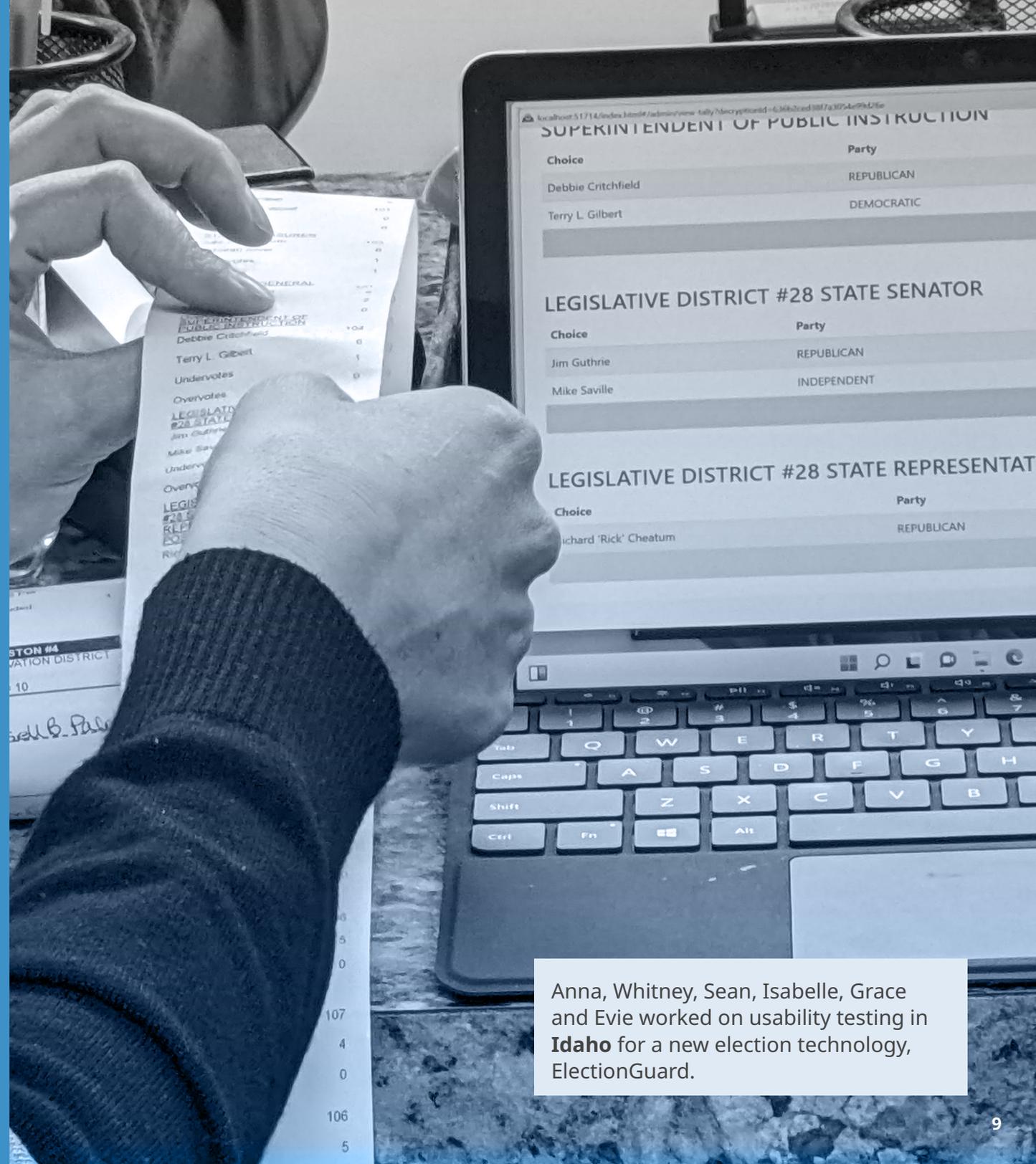
Anna, Whitney, Sean, Isabelle, Grace and Evie worked on usability testing in **Idaho** for a new election technology, ElectionGuard.

## Transitioning to Ranked Choice Voting

We worked with **Alaska** as they transitioned to RCV. We used our information design skills and past RCV research to help make the state's voter education campaign effective. Because RCV was new to voters in Alaska, it was important to give voters clear explanations on how to rank candidates and build their confidence in the new system. The campaign and instructions paid off, with 96.9% of voters having a selection in the final round of the 2022 Senate contest.

This year, we published 3 updated **Ranked Choice Voting best practice guides** about designing RCV:

- Voter Education
- Ballots
- Election Results
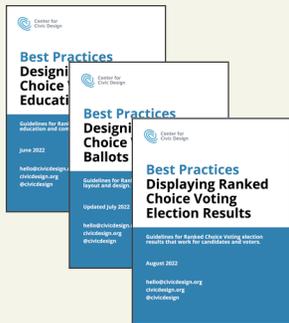
🖥 Check them out:
**civicdesign.org/topics/rcv**

## Designing systems to register more voters

Meeting people where they are is all part of responsive government. That's why so many people register to vote through Motor Voter programs. We're proud to work with advocates to design and implement forms that can help people register more easily at social services offices, as part of Medicaid applications, and, yes, at the Bureau of Motor Vehicles.

This year, we went to **Augusta, ME** to test the forms at an **open demo day** before their automatic voter registration system launched. We adapted our usability testing process to collect input from 32 people during the public demonstration.

## Raising the bar for accessible voting systems

We were thrilled that the Presidential Executive Order in May 2021 called for more attention to voters with disabilities. We've been researching voting system accessibility and the barriers that voters with disabilities face as part of our ongoing work with the National Institute of Standards and Technology Voting Project. The report from NIST was released this year in a **briefing by Vice President Harris.**

Sean worked with volunteers from several community organizations to improve voter registration systems in **Maine**

March 24, 2022, Vice President Harris announced additional steps in response to the President's Executive Order to Promote Access to Voting

# Reimagining elections & looking to the future

**Looking ahead to new challenges and asking new questions.**

We're tackling big questions through ongoing, multi-year research and developing our skills and knowledge to address them. Working in this way means we're ready when new problems come up in the election landscape.

## What if election offices all met standards for excellent elections?

We are thrilled to be part of the U.S. Alliance for Election Excellence, a collaboration between several non-profits focused on the fundamentals of democracy.

In 2022, we began drafting standards and reviewing our collection of existing resources. In the coming 4 years, we'll work with county-level election offices across the country.

## What if voters could understand the questions they are asked to vote on?

Voters often tell us that ballot questions are confusing or even deceptively written. But figuring out how to change the way ballot questions are written so that they meet legal requirements and voters understand them is difficult.

Our research on plain language in ballot questions and voter forms will be used as the jumping off point as we develop recommendations for ways to meet this challenge.

## What if communities and election offices worked together to engage voters?

We are continuing to explore how we can weave community engagement into our work. We call this emerging theory of change Elections 360. It entails bringing local organizations and local election officials together to increase civic engagement and voter turnout.

## What if new technology could help build voter confidence?

We are excited to be part of ElectionGuard, a system that adds technology for end-to-end verification to an election. In November 2022, 111 voters successfully used it in a 500-voter district in **Preston, ID**.

It was an exciting first public pilot of an innovative system that **Microsoft**, **Hart InterCivic**, **Enhanced Voting**, and **Mitre** developed. Our role in this amazing team was to develop communications for voters and the public and to research how voters and poll workers used the system in a live election. Stay tuned to see how we keep addressing mistrust in elections and building confidence through transparency into how elections work.

# Projects

In a country as large as ours, each election challenge must be tackled differently. We work at the local, state, and national level to address a diverse range of challenges. Our goal is always to widen voter participation.

## Tools

We synthesize what we've learned in order to create tools such as templates and best practices that are easy for election workers to use.

## Research

Our research is based on interviews and usability testing with real voters and election offices around the country.

## Running Elections

These projects explore how to design voter information, forms, and systems to make them usable and accessible.

## Core Skills

A few core skills are at the heart of our work. We've seen that when offices improve 1 core skill, it carries into many aspects of their work.

## Tools

### Forms InDesign template
An InDesign template for CCD's signature sidewalk style form that has many accessibility features built-in

*Template launched March 18*

👤 Sean, Emma

🖥 civicdesign.org/fieldguides/accessible-forms-print-pdf/

### Communicating election and post-election processes toolkit
A collection of educational materials for election observers and the public that can be adapted for any size jurisdiction; developed in partnership with the EAC

*Toolkit launched April 18*

👤 Emma, Asher

🖥 eac.gov/election-officials/communicating-election-and-post-election-processes-toolkit

### AccessibleVoting.net
The first platform with information about accessible voting options in every state

*Partners: Coforma.io and Microsoft*

*Website launched September 12*

👤 Whitney, Anna, Evie, Rachel

🖥 AccessibleVoting.net

### Icons library on ElectionTools.org
Added more icons and instructional illustrations on election processes, polling places, healthy voting for election offices. In partnership with the Center for Tech and Civic Life

👤 Grace

🖥 electiontools.org/tool/civic-icons-and-images/

### Ranked Choice Voting best practices
Three revised best practice guides based on new research

*Guides released October 18*

👤 Emma

🖥 civicdesign.org/topics/rcv

### Language Access Quick Guides
Three new guides to level up any election office's language access program

*Guides released October 26*

👤 Fernando, Emma

🖥 civicdesign.org/topics/language

## Research

**Bilingual youth voters**

Learning about the voting experience of 18 to 26-year-old bilingual voters and their civic engagement in northern CA

👤 Robert (Civic Design Fellow)

🖥 **civicdesign.org/subtopics/bilingual-youth-voters/**

**NIST: Administering accessible vote-by-mail systems**

Challenges and recommendations for making voting by mail accessible for people with disabilities

👤 Lynn, Whitney

**NIST: Electronic pollbooks: Usability and accessibility recommendations**

Guidelines for designing and testing e-pollbooks

👤 Lynn, Whitney

**NIST: Handbook for VVSG 2.0 testing for usability and accessibility: Guidance and test strategies**

Integrating user-centered design and usability testing into creating a voting system, including test cases for federal voting requirements

👤 Lynn, Whitney, Colin (CCD Alum)

## Running Elections

**U.S. Alliance for Election Excellence**

Partners in a collaboration with county-level election offices focusing on the fundamentals of democracy

👤 Tasmin, Emma, Evie, Whitney

🖥 **electionexcellence.org**

**Macoupin County, Illinois vote by mail postcard**

Coaching an office through plain language redesign and usability testing in our first project with a USAEE center for elections excellence

👤 Anna, Grace, Tasmin

**Automatic Voter Registration**

Design support for AVR programs in Maine, Georgia, Pennsylvania, Illinois, and at Medicaid offices

👤 Sean

**Ranked Choice Voting**

Working with Alaska as the state adopted RCV; consulting with cities and states that are considering RCV

👤 Emma

**ElectionGuard**

Creating voter information, communications, and training for new election technology through usability testing, observations, and voter interviews

👤 Anna, Whitney, Sean, Isabelle, Grace, Evie, Drew
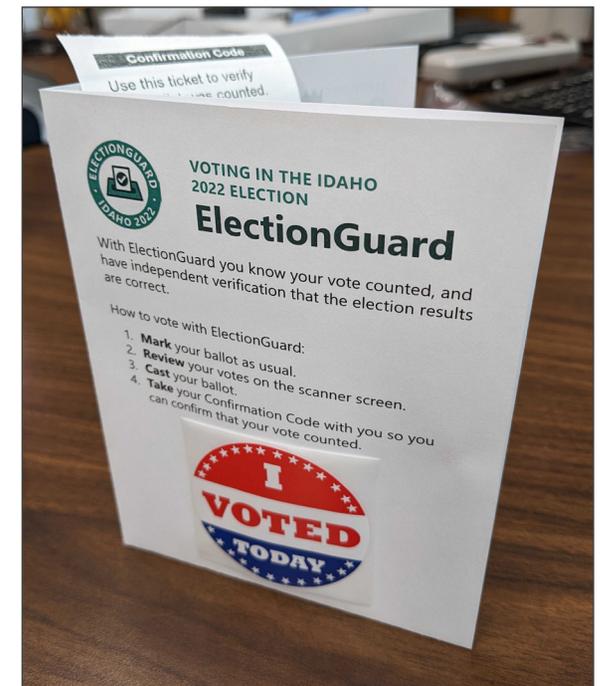


ElectionGuard pocket guide has instructions, a pocket for the Confirmation Code, and an "I Voted" sticker

## Running Elections *continued*

**California Ballot Design Advisory Committee**
Improving design and plain language on ballots
👤 Whitney
🖥 **sos.ca.gov/elections/bdac**

**Georgia**
Updating forms and envelopes to meet new laws
👤 Sean, Whitney

**Maryland**
Redesigning vote by mail materials and conducting bilingual testing with the University of Baltimore User Research Lab
👤 Tasmin, Sean

**Massachusetts Gateway Cities**
Developing a 360 degree approach to elections through work with community organizations
👤 Isabelle, Asher, Fernando, Tasmin

**Michigan Board of Elections**
Coaching staff on revising the elections training manual
👤 Tasmin, Asher

**New York State Public Campaign Finance Board**
Redesigning the handbook and forms for a new policy so that it is clear and easy to understand
👤 Anna, Emma

**Pennsylvania**
Updating the voter registration to allow voters to request a mail-in ballot on the same form
👤 Whitney, Drew

**Texas**
Creating voter information and improved forms to reduce vote by mail rejection rates
👤 Asher, Grace, Fernando, Sean, Emma

**Vermont**
Designing cure postcards, envelopes, and other notices for their switch to all vote by mail elections
👤 Sean, Anna, Emma

## Core Skills

**Easy Voter Guide for California**
Testing plain language explanations of statewide ballot propositions before they were distributed to over 153,000 voters
👤 Sean, Isabelle

**Election Design Course at the University of Minnesota Hubert H. Humphrey School of Public Affairs**
Teaching current and future elections officials about civic design
👤 Whitney, Anna, Fernando
🖥 **hhh.umn.edu/certificate-programs/ certificate-election-administration**

**Plain language in voting**
Supporting proposed updates to the NYC Charter for plain language RCV instructions
👤 Sean

**Snohomish, WA Language Access workshop**
2-day cross-departmental workshop on building a langauge access program
👤 Fernando, Isabelle

# We've been growing

## More people.

We are now a team of 12 with a few part-time collaborators.

## More skills.

We've added depth in our core skills of plain language, information design, and usability testing. That means that we bring more ideas, more perspective, and more research approaches to everything we do. We're cross-training, too, so everyone has opportunities to learn what works from voters, first-hand.

## More diverse backgrounds.

We know how important diversity is to our mission to remove barriers and help everyone vote. We've worked hard at attracting diverse applicants.

We were intentional about where we posted hiring notices and are proactively building a staff that reflects American voters.

## Meet our new team members

**Teallary** is our first People Ops Lead, bringing her experience in staff development, hiring, and HR to support our growing team.

**Grace** is an information designer, bringing her skills in graphic design, industrial design, illustration, and systems thinking.

**Isabelle** is a design researcher bringing a background in equity-centered community design, participatory design, systems thinking, and facilitation.

**Leeron** is a writer and content strategist bringing her work experience in media, publishing, and storytelling.
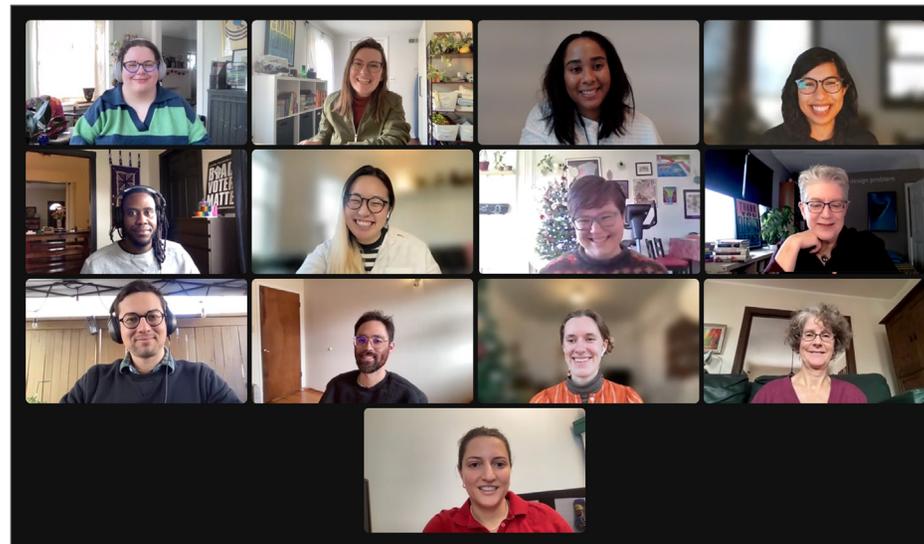


The CCD Team "URL" during our last weekly meeting of 2022!

## CCD Staff

Whitney Quesenbery
Anna Haraseyko
Asher Kolieboi
Emma Werowinski
Evie Lacroix
Fernando Sánchez
Grace Oh
Isabelle Yisak
Leeron Hoory
Sean Isamu Johnson
Tasmin Swanson
Teallary Williams

Drew Davies, Oxide
Laura Pointon, OnPoint
Lynn Baumeister
Rachel Goddard

**2022 Civic Design Fellow**
Robert Pérez

# Press

In 2022, local and national press covered our work, and we were featured in several in-depth reports about using design to strengthen elections.

We especially loved seeing mentions of our work in local papers on several of our trips.

Visit **civicdesign.org/news/press-and-media** for a full list of our press this year.
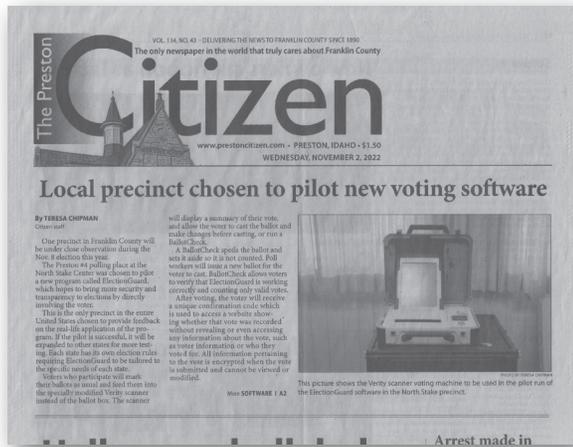


The ElectionGuard pilot was featured on the front page of **The Preston Citizen**.

**"Verifying that the number of votes counted matches the number of votes cast is an important part of ensuring election integrity. The ElectionGuard program allows independent groups or individuals to check those numbers, providing transparency and another layer of security to the election."**

**ProPublica** covered our online guides for designing accessible forms in an article on how to fix America's confusing voting system.

**NPR** covered the work we did in Texas to make sure voters' ballots are counted after thousands of mail-in ballots were rejected in March.

**Denver 7 ABC** used CCD as a source to cover why ballot questions can be so confusing.

**"Quesenbery's work is having an impact in Georgia ahead of the midterms. The Center for Civic Design reworked a large chunk of copy into bullet points and fewer words."**

**Stanford Social Innovation Review** highlighted our work as a tool to protect American democracy.

**"Groups such as Center for Civic Design and U.S. Digital Response accelerate improvements in the most important parts of our election system."**

**Politico** featured the Accessible Voting Index.

**"The Accessible Voting website launched on Monday to provide accessibility resources to voters with disabilities. The site, created by the Center for Civic Design and Microsoft, was launched in recognition of Disability Voting Rights Week."**



**Macoupin County, IL Enquirer-Democrat** announced that the county was named as a finalist in the inaugural U.S. Alliance for Election Excellence cohort on their front page.

# Funders and Partners

## Funders

We are grateful for the support of foundations and individual donors.

- Barr Foundation
- Democracy Fund
- William and Flora Hewlett Foundation
- The Joyce Foundation
- Kelson Foundation
- New Venture Fund
- The David and Lucille Packard Foundation
- Spitzer Trust
- U.S. Alliance for Elections Excellence

## Project partners

Our partnerships make our work stronger.

- Alaskans for Better Elections
- All Voting is Local
- Center for Secure and Modern Elections
- Center for Tech and Civic Life
- Coforma.io
- Common Cause of New York
- The Elections Group
- Healthy Democracy Healthy People
- Institute for Responsive Government
- League of Women Voters CA
- Microsoft Democracy Forward and Accessibility
- NIST Voting Project
- Oxide
- Prototyping Systems Lab
- Hasso Plattner Institute of Design (the d.school) at Stanford University
- University of Baltimore User Research Lab
- U.S. Elections Assistance Commission
- U.S. Digital Response

## Community Partners

We're inspired by the many community based organizations who shaped our work this year.

We're also grateful to community centers like the San Leandro Library, Carlinville Public Library, and the Lowell TeleMedia Center, who made space available for workshops and helped us identify people for our research.

Finally, thanks to all of the people who helped with our research, including elections officials who graciously talked to us about so many aspects of election administration. And to all of the 435 voters who took part in usability testing and other research.

**Maine**
- AARP
- Bernstein Shur
- Democracy Maine
- League of Women Voters-Maine
- Maine Trans Net

**Massachusetts**
- Cambodian Mutual Assistance Association
- Coalition for a Better Acre
- Latinx Community Center for Empowerment
- Latino Coalition of Haverhill
- Lowell Votes
- Merrimack Valley Project
- Project Citizenship

**Texas**
- Boat People SOS Houston
- DisABILITYsa
- League of United Latin American Citizens
- League of Women Voters-Texas and local chapters in Houston, Comal County, San Antonio, and Austin
- NAACP Dallas and Waco
- NALEO Houston
- Texas Disability Rights
- TrucViet
- Young Black Lawyers' Organizing Committee

# Center for Civic Design

# Thank you!

## Follow us year round

civicdesign.org

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410-921-6811

@civicdesign

Civic Designing
Practical tips and civic design research

Civic Design Irregulars
News for friends interested in civic design

## Board of Directors

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Katy Peters, *Treasurer*

Adam Ambrogi

Kathy Boockvar

Nick Chedli Carter

Tiana Epps-Johnson

Whitney Quesenbery,
*Executive Director/Board Secretary*

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Joseph Lorenzo Hall

Ricky Hatch

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Astrid M. Ochoa

Christopher Patten

Tammy Patrick

Ginny Redish