

Testimony of Michael Konetzka
Design for Democracy
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Good morning, Commissioners. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of Design for Democracy, the AIGA, and this project. Before I briefly discuss particular aspects of the report, I would like to emphasize our understanding and appreciation — which became ever clearer with each passing day—of the difficulties faced by election officials. This report is not intended to tell them how to do their job but, hopefully, to help them do their difficult job better and, in turn, help every citizen.

Specifically, I would like to discuss what resources are available in this report, how this report is structured and how these resources and structure can help a local election official improve the voting experience.

As Ms. Hare mentioned earlier, along with research data, this report contains best-practice samples of voter information materials, optical scan ballots, and DRE ballots. The report is made up of eight sections totaling 266 pages with 359 illustrations and 39 tables. Additionally, 227 supporting digital files are referenced in the report and will be available on the EAC web site. Faced with those numbers, an election official's first two questions might be, and rightfully so: "What is all this stuff?" and "How can it help me help the voter?"

This document can help the election official by providing not only a rich set of best-practice samples and the production specifications that describe them but by providing the design principles and usability testing data that support them, planning recommendations, and in the case of the voter information materials, a production planning table that outlines shelf-life, estimated costs and other considerations. This material appears in sections 2-5.

Section 2's voting information postings are organized into three categories, polling place identification, directional (also known as wayfinding) and informational/instructional. Samples are shown in three language sets: English, English/Spanish and English/Chinese. Many of the voter information materials—up to 48 items—can be printed out using the Acrobat PDF files available at eac.gov without any additional changes and used as-is. [show on screen: Image 1: Select voter information materials].

Other voter information materials, such as the Voters' Bill of Rights, will need to be edited and updated with jurisdiction-appropriate content. "Editable" electronic versions of these files also reside at eac.gov. [show on screen: Image 2: Select voter information materials] Of course, it is necessary to have the appropriate software to edit these files, but in this day and age, there is no avoiding that fact.

Despite the numerous files available in this section, not every situation and need is covered. However, based on the design approach and its consistent application, a designer could build out this system with additional items.

The same file organization and section structure is used in Sections 3 and 4. Due to the nature of these items the PDF files serve as useful visual references only—in every case the “editable” files (available at eac.gov) would have to be re-populated with appropriate content. [show on screen: Image 3: Select Optical scan ballots and Image 4: select Full-face DRE ballot] Accompanying the illustrations in Sections 3 and 4 are detailed production specifications. Terms like “leading,” “fill” and “tracking” may look like so much jargon to many, but to designers they are part of the necessary vocabulary to recreate these best practice ballots even without the “editable” files. They further demonstrate the flexibility of the design system’s components. [show on screen: Image 5: Effective Designs in Election Administration, pages 10-11]

The screen designs for the rolling DRE ballot interface can be used in working with the design and production team to develop successful screen designs and apply them to the vendor’s system. [show on screen: Image 6: rolling DRE interface screens]

The design relationships, color, layout, typography, use of illustrations, the quality of the simple language in the instructions and the translations of Spanish language versions are what matter, more so than the particulars of an illustration, text or ballot format. Again, the design system and the usability tests that guided their application can still be used even if content and voting technologies differ from those illustrated in this report.

All elements of the ballot and the voter information materials are interrelated. If the design is effective but the instructions are not clearly written the voting process suffers; if the language is clearly written but mistranslated, the voting process suffers.

In addition to this best practice document, to improve the voting experience the local election official needs the support of an information designer, a usability expert, well written instructional language, and quality translations that are culturally appropriate. Too often, the election official is unfairly expected to wear all of those hats. Resources should be made available to them that help ensure that these recommendations can be put into practice.

Thank you.