

THE
PEW
CENTER ON THE STATES

Being Online is Not Enough

State Elections Web Sites



OCTOBER 2008

The Pew Charitable Trusts applies the power of knowledge to solve today's most challenging problems. Our Pew Center on the States identifies and encourages effective policy approaches to critical issues facing states. The goal of Make Voting Work is to foster an election system that achieves the highest standards of accuracy, convenience, efficiency and security.

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For additional information on the Pew Center on the States, please visit www.pewcenteronthestates.org.

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Dear Reader:

As Election Day approaches, excitement is building for a presidential race expected to generate greater voter interest than we have seen in decades.

Many of those going to the polls on November 4 will be first-time voters who will need to know how to register to vote, where to vote and, likely, who and what are on the ballots for the 2008 elections. Today's technology should make it easier for these first-time voters. However, while it is clear that the Internet helps people search for and use information, it is not clear that voters will in fact find the information they are looking for or that the information they do find will help them vote in the coming elections.

Americans are increasingly incorporating the Internet into their daily lives. Today, it's an easy way to look for directions, purchase gifts or household necessities, get a movie or book review or search for information about a presidential candidate. For many companies like Marriott, Progressive, Best Buy or Toyota, a first-class Web site is part of their core strategy and the site's usability sometimes makes the difference between success and failure. Businesses realize that their customers rely on Web sites to help them not only purchase goods, but also to gather information—comparing products and prices—that can help consumers make better decisions.

In this report, Make Voting Work (MVW) examined the state elections Web sites in all 50 states and the District of Columbia to determine whether citizens can find the official election information they need to register to vote, check their registration status and locate their polling places. More importantly, MVW measured if potential voters can use the information on state elections Web sites and if it helps them. We found that every state has room for improvement. However, states can still take steps to help voters; as the election approaches, many states have updated their Web sites and developed tools to help voters this November.

How easy a state's elections Web site is to use dictates if citizens can efficiently learn what they need to know to vote on November 4. According to experts, on average, people spend less than two minutes on a Web site before they abandon their search for information. Web sites that quickly and easily deliver the information citizens seek about the upcoming election will potentially improve the voting experience and ease the burdens placed on election officials' resources. A 2007 U.S. Election Assistance Commission survey found that election administrators are realizing the importance of offering voting information online—saving election offices time and resources while also possibly reducing voter frustration.

Make Voting Work, a project of the Pew Center on the States, is committed to making the election system work optimally for all voters. Through this research, MVW has identified areas for improvement for all state elections Web sites and made recommendations for improvement. MVW has also partnered with the JEHT Foundation and state and local election administrators, with technical assistance from Google, Inc., to create the Voting Information Project, which is working to develop and implement a technical standard to more efficiently disseminate accurate voting information.

Being Online is Not Enough: State Elections Web Sites was researched and written by The Pew Charitable Trusts' Center on the States (PCS). PCS identifies and encourages effective policy approaches to critical issues facing states.

MVW hopes this report will help state and local election officials continue to find new and better ways to deliver information to voters through the Internet to make the election process easy and efficient for citizens.

Sincerely,

Sue Urahn

Executive Summary

Can I find it?
Can I use it?
Does it help?

Three broad questions, but ones critical to any user searching a Web site for information.

According to Pew Research Center's Internet and American Life Project, as of May 2008, almost three in four adults use the Internet. Although roughly three-quarters of users go to the Internet for information on expected topics such as health, the weather and travel planning, increasing numbers of Internet users—two-thirds of all users—are also turning to government Web sites for information.¹ And this year, Americans are using the Internet to gather information about the campaigns and the 2008 election more than ever before.

In many ways, the 2008 presidential election represents the first campaign of the 21st century. Using modern technologies and Web-based trends developed in the past few years, like social networking, both Democratic and Republican campaigns have raised money, recruited volunteers and sent out messages to their supporters through the Internet. In turn, a record-breaking 46 percent of Americans have used the Internet, e-mail or cell phone text messaging to get news about the campaigns, share their views and mobilize others.² However, despite the prominence of the Internet in the 2008 elections, 60 percent of users reported that a great deal of misinformation exists online.³

With the prevalence of the Internet as a source of information in the 2008 campaign, Make Voting Work (MVW), a project of the Pew Center on the States, seeks to understand how the Web and the information available on state elections sites will help engage citizens in this November's election.

As of June 2008, 40 percent of all adults were turning to the Web for campaign information—a nine percentage point increase over a comparable stage in the 2004 presidential campaign.⁴ Some groups of voters—particularly young and first-time voters—will increasingly go to the Web to find basic information about how to register, where to vote and what is on the ballot this year. MVW finds that much of this information is available at the state and local level, but finding and using the information can be difficult—particularly on state elections Web sites.

Being Online is Not Enough: State Elections Web Sites assesses how well state elections Web sites are doing to provide the necessary information to help citizens vote. To answer the three basic questions (Can I find it? Can I use it? Does it help?), this research critically focuses on the ease of navigation in accessing the information and the usability of that information.

MVW found that all states have room to improve. Furthermore, making election information easy to find and use can yield a return on investment (ROI) for election officials. If people are locating the information they need online, fewer of them will need to use the phone to call a state or county elections office. Experts suggest that calls to state or county elections offices can cost between \$10 and \$100 each, depending on the staffer's qualifications.⁵

There are many ways that states can address the limitations described in this report. To further highlight these avenues of improvement, we introduce the Voting Information Project, a unique partnership between Pew, the JEHT Foundation and state and local election officials. This partnership, made possible with technical support from Google, Inc., will enable states to place critical election information directly in the hands of their voters.

Introduction

In recent years, state and local election offices across the country have been following the national trend of making information available online. As more and more Americans use the Internet, simply putting information online is not enough. State Web sites must be easy-to-find and easy-to-use if they are to fulfill their intended purpose of helping voters.

Brian Ryu, a 24-year-old transplant to D.C. who works in finance, voted in the last presidential election by absentee ballot from New York. In this November's election, he is voting for the first time in the District of Columbia.

To register to vote in D.C., the first thing he did was turn to the Web to find out how. "I went online and typed in, 'Washington D.C. voter registration' using Google. The link to the registration page was the first hit," he said.

Brian then had to fill out an online form, which required his home address, driver's license number and date of birth. That still wasn't enough to get to the registration form. He had to declare a party affiliation as well. Only then was he able to download the registration form. But, he wasn't done yet. He had to sign the form and mail it back. "It wasn't too difficult, but it wasn't easy either. At first, I didn't affiliate with a party, but D.C.'s Web site wouldn't let me move on."

Thanks to the government site, Brian was able to find and fill out the right form to register to vote. For Brian, because he's had a computer since he was seven years old, when he wants information his instinct is to turn to the Internet, where he, and according to research, his peer group, go for most of their information gathering needs. "Registering to vote took time, but when I need to find out where to vote or who is running for city council, I'll still look on D.C.'s Web site. It's just naturally where I would go to get that information."

It is simply no longer enough to have the data on state elections Web sites. If citizens turn to the Internet for election-related information, they require information they can find, use and trust to help them participate in the 2008 election and beyond. As a result, it is important that state elections Web sites be easily accessed, easy to use and helpful. This report is limited to state elections Web sites only, since elections are primarily a function of state law. Local elections Web sites, however, are also important and can benefit from the study's analysis and findings on usability.

Using the Internet to find voting information

More and more Americans are looking to the Internet to find information. Users increasingly have incorporated the Internet into their daily lives since the World Wide Web became popular in the mid to late 1990's. Currently, more homes have high-speed internet connections than had

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computers 10 years ago (58 percent vs. 43 percent).⁶ Many users prefer the Internet over traditional channels to research services and products, manage finances and make purchases. Users' expectations are set by user-friendly online services.

The number of adults who turn to the Web for campaign information has increased by 29 percent since the 2004 election.⁷ And if the 2008 primary season is an indicator of voter turnout, the upcoming election is likely to see a record number of young voters. Some states witnessed as much as a 15 percent increase in young voter rates between the 2004 and 2008 primaries.⁸

This election's youngest voters are members of Generation-Next, a generation that has grown up with personal computers, cell phones and the Internet and uses technology in fundamentally different ways than previous generations. Unlike other groups of voters, these young voters are turning to the Internet as their primary source of information about the election—for the first time the Internet has supplanted cable television as the preferred source of campaign and political information for 18- to 29-year-old voters.⁹ These young voters will also likely rely on the Internet for information about voter registration, polling locations, ballot measures and other voter concerns in the same ways they rely on the Internet as a source of political news.

Voter turnout is not expected to surge just among young voters; if election interest and voter registration numbers are indicative, many predict record levels of Americans of all ages will vote this November. A June 2008 poll conducted by the Pew Research Center projects that, based on self-reported voter interest in the election,

voter turnout in November will be significantly higher than in the previous four presidential elections.¹⁰

Voter registrations have grown exponentially in many states over the past year. *The Washington Post* reported that in Nevada there are 400,000 more voters registered now than four years ago and that over half a million voters have registered in Indiana since January of this year. In response to this growth in Indiana's electorate, Secretary of State Todd Rokita said this could be "the biggest Election Day in our nation's history in terms of turnout."¹¹ According to George Mason University's Michael McDonald, "If all conditions remain the same as what they are now, we could see voter turnout up three to four percentage points, cresting over turnout rates in the mid-1950s."¹²

What we know about voter concerns

There is little data available on Web usage by voters in need of assistance during the election process; however, the concerns of voters in earlier elections are indicative of the information voters will likely need leading up to this November's election. In the 2006 election cycle, approximately 70,000 calls were made to four hotlines providing election information.¹³ The most commonly asked questions were related to where to vote (42 percent of questions) and registration concerns (33 percent of the inquiries).¹⁴ For example, 65 percent of calls received by the MyVote1 National Election Hotline, which helps voters through an automated Interactive Voice Response System, were about locating a polling place.¹⁵ Some of these calls could be avoided if states were able to provide accessible and usable voting information online.

The importance of state elections Web sites

Between 2002 and 2003, use of government Web sites increased by 50 percent.¹⁶ Today, 66 percent of Internet users go to government Web sites for information.¹⁷ As the election approaches, these government Web sites are likely to be sources of trusted information on how and where to vote.

Noting the importance of making government data accessible online, J.L. Needham, manager of public sector content partnerships at Google, Inc.—the division dedicated to finding official information and making it searchable—explains that “some state government documents are hidden behind design elements of the Web site or, more commonly, in a database that a search engine’s crawlers can’t access.”¹⁸

With an increasing number of Internet users, it is paramount that state elections Web sites meet

the needs and expectations of current and prospective voters by providing useful and usable elections Web sites. For many businesses, this is a core strategy. For state elections Web sites, this is no longer a nice thing to do, but a must-do to enable citizens to exercise their right to vote.

User-friendly Web sites can also ease the burden on election officials. One Election Assistance Commission (EAC) survey showed that state election offices are realizing the importance of offering voter information online.¹⁹ Election officials can save time and resources if voter information is readily available online. An effective Web site can reduce the number of inquiries and alleviate voter frustrations. An added benefit is that these online services are accessible 24 hours a day, seven days a week, from the voter’s home and other locations.²⁰ The presence of user-friendly official sites also reduces the likelihood of outside groups creating unofficial, and potentially unreliable, sources for voting information.

How well are elections Web sites helping voters?

Make Voting Work's study, an examination of the information available to voters, looked at elections Web sites of all 50 states and the District of Columbia. This report assessed whether state elections Web sites could be easily found and used by voters seeking information before going to the polls this November. These questions usually come in the form of one or more of the following voter frequently asked questions (FAQs):

- Am I registered; or, how do I register?
- Where do I vote?
- What candidates and issues are on the ballot?

Much of this information is available at the state and local level as part of election management systems and voter databases, many of which were created as a result of state appropriations funded in part by the Help American Vote Act of 2002. Election officials use this information to manage voter registration, select polling locations and prepare ballots for the millions of voters who go to the polls each year.

However, this information comes from a patchwork of data sources that are not consistently available to information providers, such as newspapers, civic organizations and other outlets where voters turn for voting information. Most importantly, this data is not readily accessible to the growing segment of Americans who rely on search engines for finding government information online.

As voters look to the Internet for election information, it is good practice for states to increase transparency and make official voting information easily accessible. For the current study, MVW examined if election information is easily available through state elections Web sites.

First, can voters find official election information? Ideally, citizens who sit down at their computers and search for voting information should be able to easily find their state's official elections Web site. It doesn't matter how many bells or whistles states may have on their Web sites. If voters can't find the site, they can't use it.

Next, do state elections Web sites provide the information voters need, and will likely be looking for, in the upcoming election? To facilitate voter participation, states can provide critical tools online, such as polling place locators, online voter registration verification and information so voters know which candidates and initiatives are on the ballot. By providing this information online, states may reduce the number of people who need to contact local or state election officials to request information.

Finally, is the information on state elections Web sites easy to use? MVW looked at how user-friendly and accessible state elections Web sites are. State efforts will be wasted if the information they provide to voters is mired in poor Web site design. Many of the Web sites MVW analyzed for this report are rich with data, but data is not information; it is

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only through the design of usable interfaces that data can be put in context and combined to provide useful, meaningful information for citizens preparing to vote. For example, historical data clutters some Web sites, and that can confuse or distract voters from obtaining the information they seek. Historical data is not useful to citizens preparing to vote by registering, verifying registration, locating polling places and analyzing candidates and issues that will be on their ballot.

Can voters find the information they need?

The user's ability to find the state Web site is the most critical element of our evaluation. If voters can't find a site, they can't use it. Users' strategies for finding Web sites fall into two categories. First, some users will attempt to type a name or term into the address bar of their browser, figuring that someone who offers a corresponding service will have bought the domain name. Alternatively, and increasingly more common, users will type a name or term into a search engine. If the state Web site does not appear within the first few search terms, users may be confused about where to go to find the information, go to an unofficial Web site that could include out-of-date or incorrect information, or give up entirely. The official Web site ideally should appear as the first search term to guide users quickly to the correct information.

Users who have to scroll through multiple results may end up on unofficial or paid advertising sites before finding the information they are looking for. These Web sites may not be up-to-date or users may give up altogether. Because many users reach a site via search engines, states need to pay special attention to the page titles, tags and descriptions so a Web site can be indexed and presented properly through a search engine.

Our study found that 38 official state sites do appear as the first search result when searching for "voting in <state name>." For example, a voter in Kentucky can type "voting in Kentucky," and the official state elections Web site appears as the first result in the search list. However, for 12 states, the official site appears within the first five results and South Dakota's Web site does not appear at all on the first page of results. For Web users searching for information on their polling places, only 34 official state Web sites appear as the first search result when users enter in their state name with "polling place."

The main homepage of a state's Web site should also include a prominent link specifically for that state's elections Web site. Seventeen states included such a link. Although many states added these links as the election drew closer, all states should add this feature because many voters may go to the primary state government page before searching for the elections Web site. All states should do everything possible to point users in the right direction. For example, the Rhode Island state government site currently includes a prominently labeled "Spotlight" section on its home page, and when we checked the site it was using this location to promote the election Web site.

Do state elections Web sites provide the tools to answer voter questions?

To facilitate voter participation, states can provide critical tools online, such as polling place locators, online voter registration verification and information about which candidates and initiatives are on the ballot.

Generally, we found sites lacking basic tools such as registration verification and poll locator features

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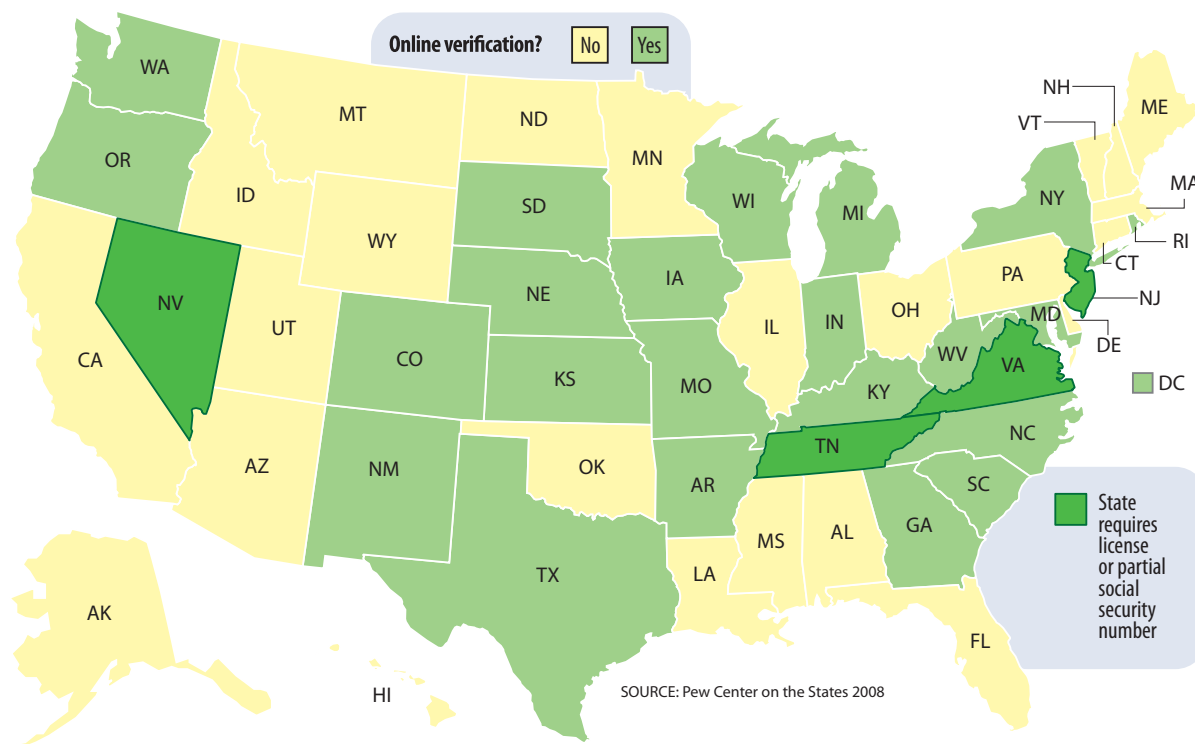
(see Exhibits 1 and 2). However, we know that these sites have the data—they just have not built usable interfaces that take that data and turn it into useful information. Approximately half the states (53 percent) offer a way for voters to verify their registration online. All of these tools require personal information, but there is tremendous variation in the amount and type of personal information required to check one's registration status. For example, in North Carolina and New Mexico voters need only input their last names to find very comprehensive voter information. States such as Nevada, New Jersey, Tennessee and Virginia require voters to input as much as the last four digits of their Social Security number to retrieve confirmation of their registration. Users in some

states can indirectly check their voter registration status by using a polling locator tool that requires personal information; these states were not credited with having a voter registration tool because there is a notable disconnect between the functionality and the usability of these services (see sidebar on page 10).

Two-thirds (67 percent) of elections sites have a tool for finding polling locations. Many of these sites require users to enter personal information and already be registered to find their polling location. Of the states with a polling place locator tool, one third (32 percent) will identify the polling place for any address in the state. However, the remaining states (68 percent) require either some form of

Exhibit 1 AM I REGISTERED TO VOTE? | ELECTION SITES WITH REGISTRATION VERIFICATION

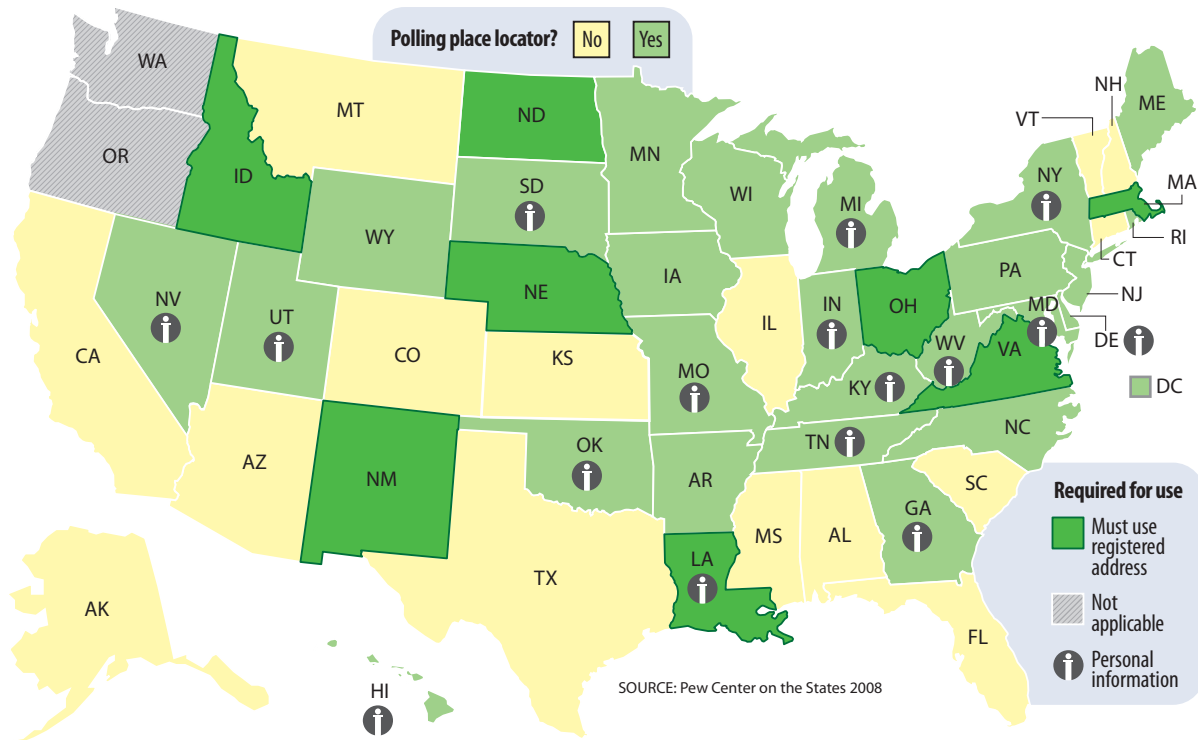
Half the states have online registration verification tools.



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Exhibit 2 WHERE CAN I VOTE? | ELECTION SITES WITH POLLING PLACE LOCATORS

Two-thirds of the states have polling place locators on their Web sites, but many of them require the user to enter personal information, and some only work with registered addresses.



NOTE: Both Oregon and Washington have vote-by-mail systems. In Oregon, voters may only vote by mail, while Washington is predominantly vote-by-mail. The Washington site notes that a ballot drop-off locations tool is coming soon.

personal information or locate polling places only for addresses associated with registered voters.

If these tools are going to help voters, it is critical that users can easily find information by entering basic information such as street address and ZIP Code or name and date of birth (see Exhibits 1 and 2 for more information about what each state requires).

Some states without poll locator tools have attempted to use tables and other features to funnel visitors toward their polling places, but these features do not “push” the information to

their users; instead they require users to sort through layers of data and to synthesize the pieces that are most pertinent. For example, the Florida Web site has an interactive map, but it links to the phone number for each county supervisor who the voter would need to call to get their polling location. In this study, the only type of polling location tools that were given credit are those that provide the relevant information to users once they input some pieces of personal information such as a street address.

ALIGNING FUNCTIONALITY AND USABILITY

Georgia, Idaho, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Ohio, Oklahoma and Utah all have poll locators that require different levels of personal information or only serve voters with registered addresses. These poll locators essentially act as registration verification tools but are not labeled as such. While these states have the information necessary to provide users with online voter registration verification, they have not made this information easy to navigate to or use. For example, in Massachusetts users can input any registered address and find detailed voter information such as a sample ballot and a list of current elected officials. However, the Web site does not provide information on the specific individual's registration. If there are multiple residents at the same address, they are unable to confirm who is registered. With some minor adjustments these states could dramatically increase the functionality and usability of their voter information tools. The information that voters need is online, but it can only be accessed indirectly and may be difficult to decipher.

Eight sites require users to sift through tables or lists and know their ward and precinct to find their poll location. Another seven states do not have any polling location information on their Web sites (Alabama, Colorado, Connecticut, Illinois, Kansas, Mississippi and Montana).

In lieu of providing the tools and information that are truly required by users, many state elections Web sites tell users to call or visit county and city officials. Not only do these sites frustrate users who are unable to find information needed to

vote, they potentially generate phone volume for the Web site's own agency and other government agencies.

Is the information on state elections Web sites easy to use?

While the features and tools that states provide are critical, states' efforts will be wasted if they fail to provide user-friendly and easy-to-access Web sites. On average, people spend less than two minutes on a Web site before they abandon their search for the information.²¹ According to usability experts Jakob Nielsen and Hoa Loranger, "Usability...refers to how quickly people can learn to use something, how efficient they are while using it, how memorable it is, how error prone it is, and how much users like using it. If people can't or won't use a feature, it might as well not exist."²²

Making a site usable can avoid many undesirable consequences for state voting officials. Frustrated users give up on Web sites that are not straightforward to use. They pick up the phone instead, driving up costs and drawing on personnel resources for state and county election offices. For commercial use, Web site usability is most commonly discussed in terms of the return on investment (ROI) that brings in business, but Jakob Nielsen advocates that government Web sites can reap similar returns by increasing the usability of their informational sites. Nielsen finds that the easiest way to measure the usability ROI for government sites is in terms of the reduced call-center burdens; if more people are finding the information they need online, they will not have to call a state or county elections office. Experts suggest these calls can cost that office between \$10 and \$100 each, depending on the staffer's qualifications.²³

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Also, poor information—or simply the lack of it—on candidates and ballot issues can lead voters to the polls without the information they need to make informed decisions. It’s not the job of state elections Web sites to help users make choices, but it is the job of the elections sites to present voters with the choices so they can then research on their own.

For example, Delaware’s elections Web site includes a link where voters can enter their addresses and find their polling places, where they are registered and what is on the ballot.

These are critical tools for voters. Unfortunately, the link to all of this information is labeled, “Find your polling place”. If a potential Delaware voter is going to the Web site to explicitly find out if they are registered or to see who is on the ballot in their local election, what are the chances they would think to fill out the form listed under “find your polling place”? If voters fail to fill out the form, they would miss the information they are looking for; and, there are no other links on the site that might lead them to find out if they are registered or who is on the ballot. Potential voters may give up if they can’t find those links.

Exhibit 3

SEVEN CRITERIA FOR EVALUATING USABILITY OF STATE ELECTIONS WEB SITES

Web Presence	How easily can users find the official state elections Web site when conducting standard Web searches for key phrases related to voting? Can they find the elections Web site from the state’s main Web site?
Navigation and Information Architecture	Is it easy to navigate to key topics? Can users easily tell where they are within the site if accessing a deep link from a search engine? Are links named intuitively? Is the site organized in a user-centered manner?
Content	Is the content understandable to users? Is it easy to scan and find the right information? Is information made available in HTML versus PDFs?
Homepage	Is the homepage organized such that users can tell which information is intended for them? Are important links placed and presented so they will be noticed? Is the homepage easy to scan?
Accessibility	Can users with disabilities (severe or mild) utilize the site effectively?
Search	Is there an open search field available on each page of the site? Do search results seem appropriate? Are result titles/content understandable?
Site Tools	Are tools for looking up registration, finding a poll location, etc. intuitive and efficient?

SOURCE: Pew Center on the States 2008, based on research from Nielsen Norman Group

NOTE: Full details on the project methodology are included in Appendix A, and the Web addresses for the 51 Web sites scored are included in Appendix B.

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Having a site that allows users to find what they need quickly and reliably without having to invest an inordinate amount of effort is essential. Uncomplicated access to accurate information is key to successfully navigating the election process. If users cannot understand or if they receive inaccurate information regarding polling places or registration procedures, they may get lost in the system and not be able to vote.

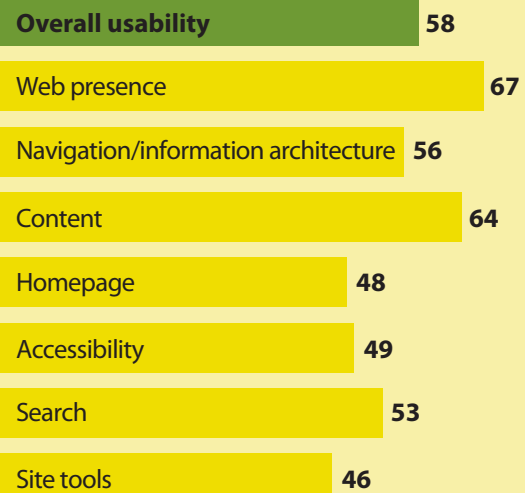
To measure the usability of a Web site, it's best to use the site within context—as users would interact with it. We tested several tasks that users would likely perform on state elections Web sites as they sought to answer the typical Voter FAQs:

- Am I registered; or, how do I register?
- Where do I vote?
- What candidates and issues are on the ballot?

Based on our evaluations and the final scores (see Exhibit 3 for assessment criteria), state elections Web sites overall are not meeting usability standards. The average usability score across the Web sites of all 50 states and the District of Columbia is 58—far below what it should be given the importance of these Web sites in serving the people and supporting democracy. Overall usability scores (scored on scale of 1 to 100) range from a high of 77 (Iowa) to a low of 33 (New Hampshire).

As Exhibit 4 shows, the average scores on the seven criteria for our assessments reflect some specific challenges for state elections Web sites. At two points during our study, we checked each states' elections Web sites for our usability assessment. The average Web presence score of these sites dramatically increased—to 67—

Exhibit 4 AVERAGE USABILITY | ELECTIONS SITES' COMPLIANCE SCORES



SOURCE: Pew Center on the States 2008, based on research from Nielsen Norman Group

between our two review periods. This increase may be attributed to the rise in traffic to these sites; the more a site is visited the greater likelihood of it appearing as a top search result rises. This trend will probably continue as the election approaches. This growth does not negate the need for improvements; it highlights the need for official Web sites to appear as top search results. If unofficial elections sites, with potentially incorrect or out-of-date information, are top search results, the traffic to those sites could increase, diverting voters from the accurate, state administered elections Web sites. On average, many states had easy to understand content on their state elections Web sites, but scored weakly on homepage and middle-of-the-road on the navigation and information architecture criteria. Therefore, many of these Web sites have easy to understand content but users will have trouble getting to it and finding it.

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Exhibit 5

STATE ELECTIONS WEB SITES AND USABILITY—THE TOP 10 AND BOTTOM 10

Top 10			Bottom 10		
Rank	State	Score	Rank	State	Score
1	Iowa	77	42	Alabama	49
2	Texas	75	42	Georgia	49
3	Utah	72	44	South Dakota	48
4	Pennsylvania	71	45	Wisconsin	47
4	New Jersey	71	46	Idaho	46
6	West Virginia	70	47	New Mexico	45
7	Missouri	69	48	Connecticut	37
8	Maine	68	49	Illinois	36
8	Minnesota	68	50	Mississippi	35
8	Wyoming	68	51	New Hampshire	33

SOURCE: Pew Center on the States 2008, based on research from Nielsen Norman Group
NOTE: The scoring accounts for ties.

All but six states scored under 70 points out of a possible 100, suggesting considerable room for improvement. Scores for all 51 state elections Web sites are included in Appendices C and D. Half of the states scored at or below 58 points (the mean score). Most state elections Web sites'

usability scores fall between 45 and 65 points. As Exhibit 5 shows, no size (population) or geographic (U.S. region) patterns emerge when looking at the top and bottom performers. What is clear is that most state elections Web sites have room to upgrade their usability so that citizens

SITE UPDATES SHOULD BE LOGICAL, PERSISTENT AND CONSISTENT

Usability is critical to the success of any Web site, and Alabama is an example of a state that has invested in a new site with new user tools and improvements in content. In this study, MVW analyzed the Secretary of State's Web site—the primary source of official information available to Alabama voters when data collection began. Over the course of the study, Alabama introduced a new Web site to help voters. But, unfortunately users cannot find the new Web site through a browser search (i.e., Google) and it is not linked to the Secretary of State's site. Only when visiting the official state Web site will users be directed to www.alabamavotes.gov. As a result, voters in Alabama are being directed to different and unrelated sources of information depending on how they begin their search for voter information. If Alabama's two elections Web sites were seamlessly integrated with each other and accessible through the same Web search channels, all voters would have access to comprehensive and useful elections information.

Alabama's new site, www.alabamavotes.gov, has many improvements and would have scored well on several of the study's criteria. However, usability research suggests that additions and improvements should be incorporated within a unified Web site rather than spread across different URLs or separate windows. As state elections Web sites update their information and tools, they should aim for consistency in the navigation and information architecture of their sites.

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have an easier time finding answers to the voter FAQs and using this information to facilitate voting.

The top scoring state elections Web sites are those that are easy to find, navigate and understand. For example, Iowa—a technical assistance provider to MVW on the Voting Information Project—received the highest score in our usability analysis because the links on its homepage are divided into useful categories, and voter information is the first and most prominent category link (see Exhibit 6). The direct links to voters' most critical questions about absentee voting, registration status and polling places are easy to locate in the bottom of the page. The site also scored perfectly on two of the three Web search criteria, and a link to the site is prominently listed on the state's Web site homepage. Although the reading level of the content was a little high, overall the Web site easily guides voters to the information they need.



SOURCE: <http://www.sos.state.ia.us/elections/>; Accessed September 10, 2008.

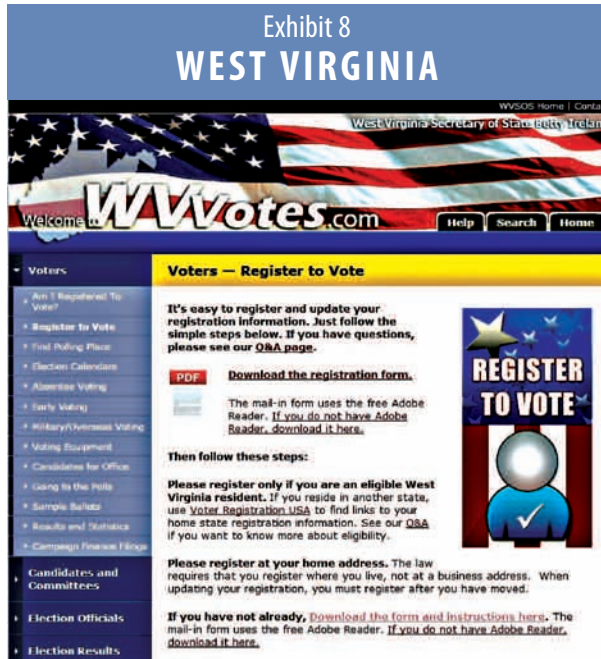


SOURCE: <http://www.votespa.com/AboutVotingandElections/ImportanceofVoting/tabid/60/language/en-US/Default.aspx>; Accessed September 10, 2008.

Contrast the Iowa page with that of Mississippi. Rather than including links to the key tasks for voters, the Mississippi elections homepage includes descriptions of what the election officials do. The Web site is difficult to navigate and the sidebar links to election information by year, rather than to the specific pieces of information needed by voters for the upcoming election. Users must click around to several pages before they find information relevant to the upcoming election.

The navigation and architecture of elections Web sites is vital because many users may access the site via Web search “deep links.” Deep links are below the homepage and essentially thrust the user into the midst of the Web site. Therefore, it’s important that users can verify that they are in the right place, easily navigate to other information/services and find what they need without exerting much effort. The navigation links should be logical and consistent on every page of the site, so users can quickly return to the previous page or the main elections site.

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SOURCE: <http://www.wvvotes.com/voters/register-to-vote.php>; Accessed September 10, 2008.

For example, both the Pennsylvania (see Exhibit 7) and West Virginia (see Exhibit 8) Web sites include a navigation bar on the left-hand sidebar. Links within the site are logically labeled and highlight the page the user is currently viewing. Users can use the navigation bar to orient themselves on the site and jump to another topic without having to return to the main page.

States don't need sophisticated tools and programming to be user-friendly. The Texas state elections Web site (see Exhibit 9) is relatively modest in scope but performed well in our usability analysis because it provides a logical introduction, clear links to voter tools and is easy to understand.

Missouri is another state to look to for homepage and navigation inspiration. The homepage is well-organized, easy to scan and to the point. Unfortunately, Missouri lost points for Web presence. Poor search results for polling place and the absence of a link on the state's main Web site

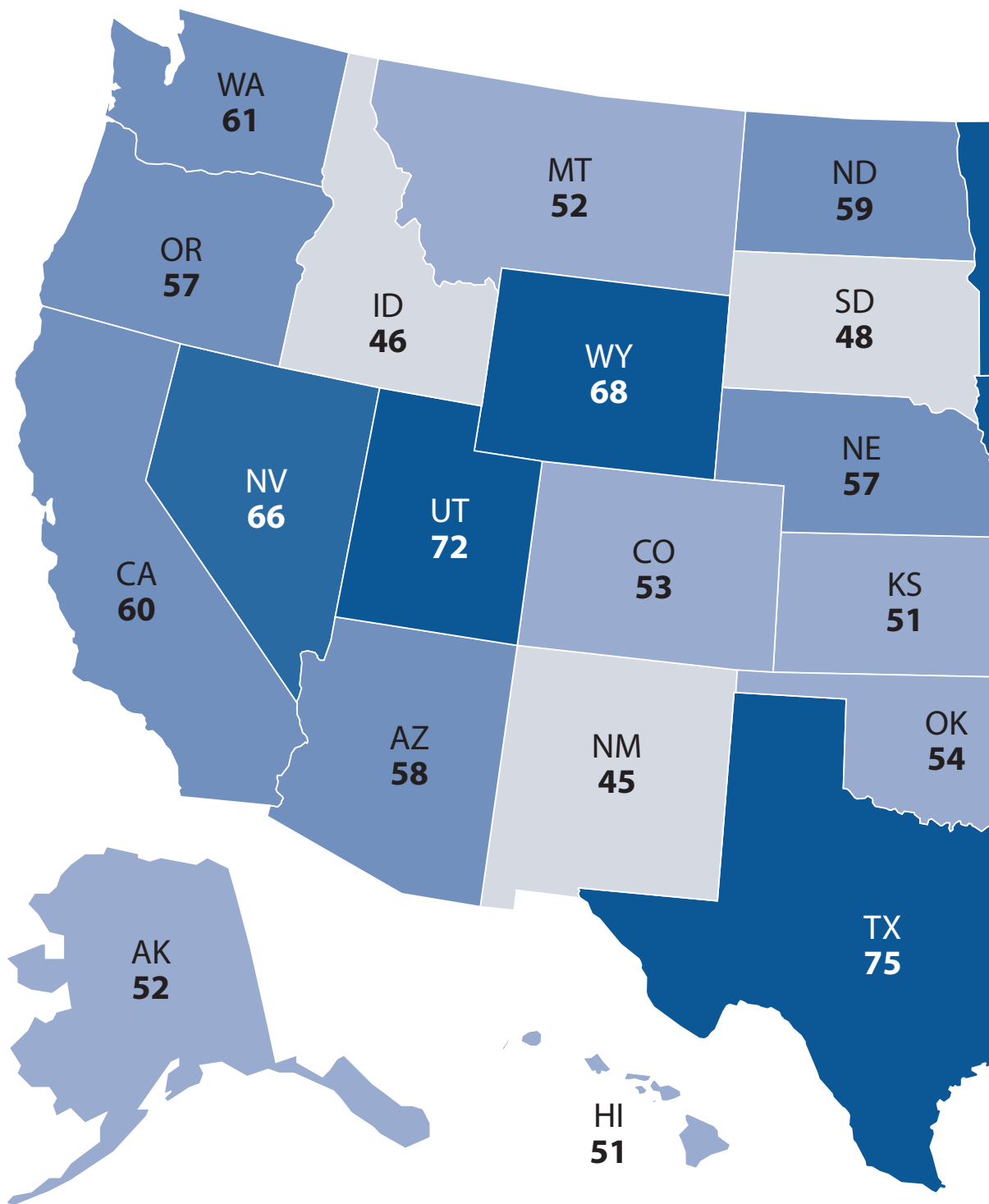
to the elections site lowered Missouri's overall score. However, with minor improvements in these areas, the Missouri Web site has the opportunity to truly be a stand-out site.

Nevada also scored well on usability and is the only site to feature poll locator and registration verification tools directly on the homepage. Placing the voter tools directly on the homepage illustrates the state's understanding of the purpose of the site—users want easy-to-find and easy-to-use information. Additionally, the links below the tools are grouped and organized to help users find the right content. Given the predicted surge in the number of voters, election officials are using their Web site to push information out to voters. However, Nevada's tools require more personal voter information than most sites, and the multiple labels describing different functions can be confusing to users. Voters looking for help may want to call election offices for assistance but see a graphic



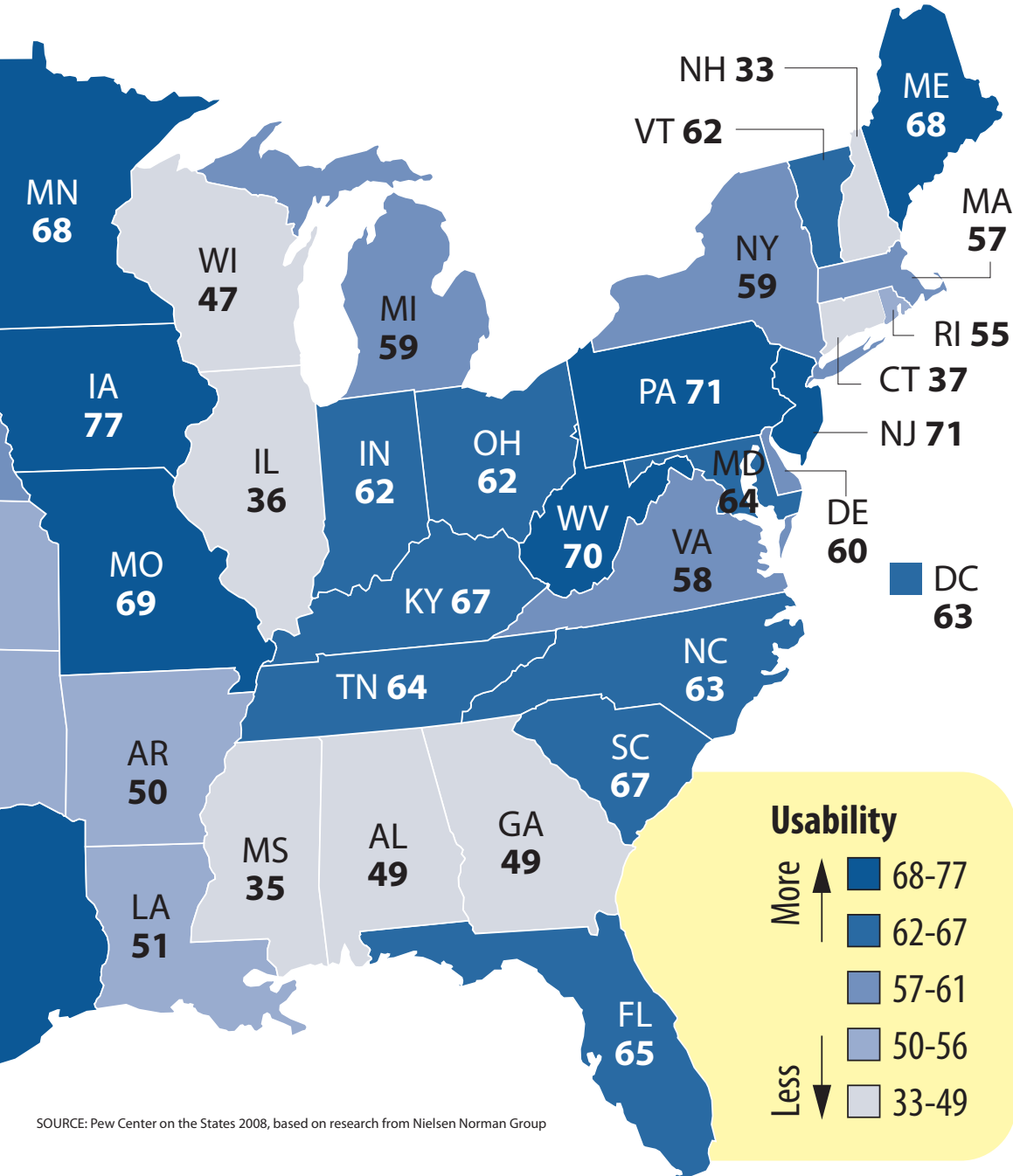
SOURCE: <http://www.sos.state.tx.us/elections/index.shtml>; Accessed September 10, 2008.

All states can



STATE ELECTIONS WEB SITES
OVERALL USABILITY

improve their elections Web sites



SOURCE: Pew Center on the States 2008, based on research from Nielsen Norman Group

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that relates, “Please Don’t Call nvsos.gov”. When placing the mouse over the graphic, one sees that it provides information about how to get on the state’s do-not-call list. But, unless a user finds the roll-over text, the graphic conveys the message: please do not call state election offices.

On government Web sites, content truly is king. Users come to the site trying to find out information about programs, processes and guidelines. Reading level, formatting and easy access are of the utmost importance. Government Web sites serve a wide and varied audience. They must be written so that readers of all levels can comprehend the information. Experts recommend that content be written at an 8th grade or lower level—this will allow both lower and higher-literacy users to gain information from this site—and written specifically for Web sites with concise bullet points and easy to scan content.²⁴ The average score for content across the 51 Web sites is 64, which is the second highest category score



SOURCE: <http://www.elect.ky.gov/>; Accessed September 10, 2008.



SOURCE: <http://www.sos.state.tx.us/elections/index.shtml>; Accessed September 10, 2008.

but still not at the level it needs to be. For example, although Kentucky scored near our top ten usability sites, the text on the homepage is written at a reading level well above the 12th grade (Exhibit 10). The tools on other pages of the Web site are easy to use, but the homepage that serves as a welcome mat to users may prohibit some voters from clicking on the more user-friendly content. The Wyoming Web site (Exhibit 11), on the other hand, is easy to read and scan.

Overall, most of the state elections Web sites leave considerable room for improvement in very basic areas. User expectations are based not on what they see on other elections or government Web sites but rather on those sites they use every day, such as banks, bookstores and news outlets. States should be investing in the usefulness and usability of not only their elections Web sites, but all state Web sites that serve citizens. Voter Web sites do not need fancy tools or programming, but the information should be accessible and usable.

Recommendations for states

By investing in a Web site with easy-to-find and easy-to-use information that helps voters, states can realize a return on their investments.²⁵

Improved Web sites can provide citizens with the information they need to exercise their right to vote. Also, states will see a reduction of the number of telephone inquiries to call centers and election officials, which can rack up costs for elections offices—up to \$100 per call.²⁶

The following recommendations are specific areas that all states can improve upon.

Homepage design

Agencies need to clean up their homepages, remove historical data, group content by audience-type, place key content and links in the body of the page and highlight tasks critical to voters—register to vote, verify registration, find your polling location and view your ballot. Ultimately, focus on voters!

Site tools

During our review, we found many sites lacked basic tools such as polling place locators and ballot generators. However, we know that these sites have the data—they just have not built usable interfaces that take that data and turn it into useful information. For example, some sites still post long PDF lists of poll locations that require users to know their ward and precinct to find their poll location. It is essential that users can easily find information by providing basic, known information such as a street address.

States should also remove barriers to accessing polling place and voter information. Information on polling places is publically available, and potential voters should not need to enter personal information to access it. Although 34 states have a tool for finding polling locations, two-thirds require users to enter personal information and already be registered to find their polling location. This is a serious impediment to the usefulness of such a tool.

States should also focus on embedding the proper tags and meta tags that will allow search engines to easily catalog the content and make the site more accessible during Web searches.

HOW THE VOTING INFORMATION PROJECT CAN HELP STATES REACH THEIR VOTERS

Recognizing the need to make official voting information both widely and equally available to voters, Make Voting Work partnered with the JEHT Foundation—with technical assistance from Google, Inc.—to create the Voting Information Project (VIP). The VIP has worked with state and local election officials to develop and implement a technical standard, known as an "open format," by which state and local election officials can more efficiently disseminate voting information to citizens, the media, civic groups, search engines and political parties.²⁷

Benefits of the VIP

The availability and accessibility of this information will bring information straight from election officials to voters. Voters will gain access to the full range of voting information, including voter registration, polling place location, absentee ballot instructions and identification requirements at the polls. Using the open format increases transparency and allows for any organization to serve as a distribution channel—taking voting information directly from election officials and bringing it to the voters. Additionally, election officials will likely see reduced call traffic from voters and may experience considerable savings in staff time and resources. For more information, visit www.votinginfoproject.org.



Endnotes

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- 5 Jakob Nielsen, "Do Government Agencies and Non-Profits Get ROI from Usability?" *Jakob Nielsen's Alertbox*, February 12, 2007, <http://www.useit.com/alertbox/government-nonprofit.html> (accessed September 17, 2008).
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- 12 Electionline, *2008 Primary in Review*, July 2008, Pew Center on the States, <http://www.pewcenteronthestates.org/uploadedFiles/Primary%202008%20FINAL.pdf>, (accessed September 17, 2008) p. 5.
- 13 The four hotlines with publicly available data about the 2006 election cycle were: Voting Rights Institute of the Democratic Party, Election Protection Hotline, My Vote1 Consortium and Nation Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials.
- 14 U.S. Election Assistance Commission, *U.S. Election Assistance Commission: Voter Hotline Study*, 2008, http://www.eac.gov/program-areas/research-resources-and-reports/copy_of_docs/voterhotline_5_20_final.pdf/attachment_download/file (accessed September 12, 2008), p. 16. This is of jurisdictions that had hotlines dedicated to providing information to voters and poll workers.
- 15 The hotline provided help to voters using an Interactive Voice Response system. Of the total number of calls made, 11 percent were categorized as complaints—registration concerns made up the majority of complaints. Christopher Patusky, Allison Brummel and Timothy Schmidt, *MyVote1 National Election Report: Voice of the Electorate 2006*, Fels Institute of Government, University Pennsylvania, August 20, 2007, p. 5-6.
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- 22 Nielsen and Loranger, *Prioritizing Web Usability*, pg. xvi.
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- 26 Ibid.
- 27 The states invited to participate in the pilot phase of this partnership were carefully chosen to reflect the nation's political and geographical diversity and the variety of election management technologies currently in use nationwide.

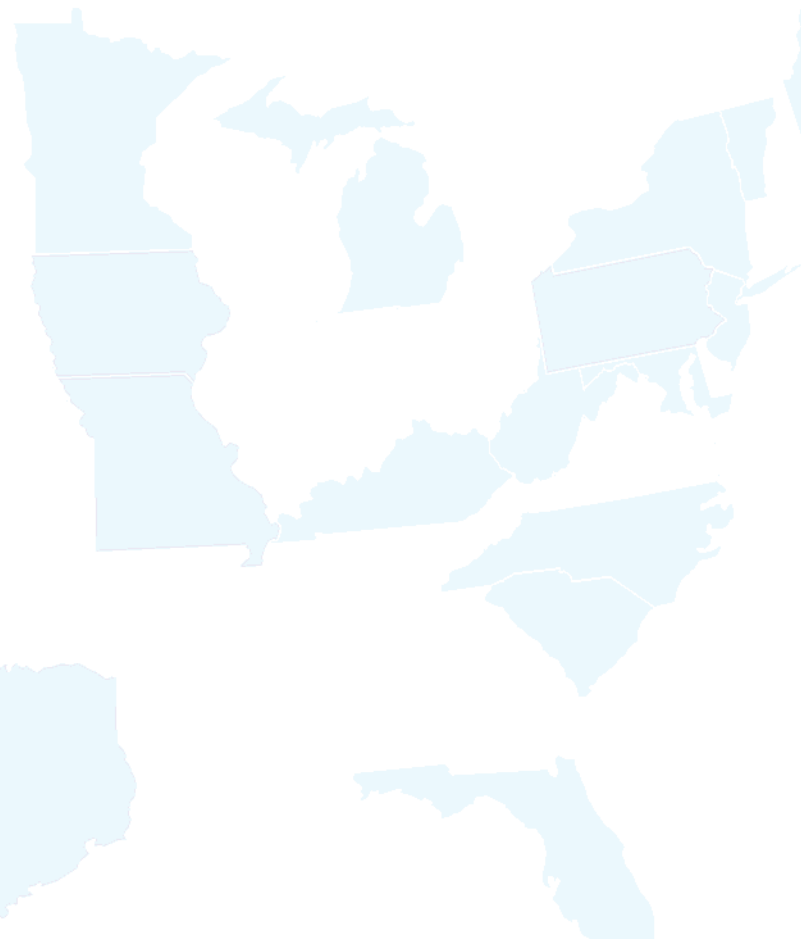
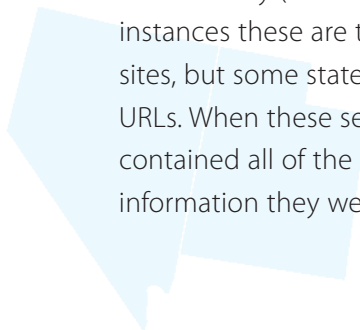
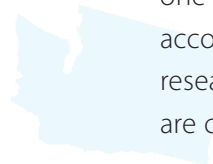
Our Methodology

To develop the benchmarks for the usability criteria, the Nielsen Norman Group conducted an analysis of state elections Web sites on behalf of Make Voting Work. Usability data was collected between September 4 and 15, 2008 and all of the sites were reviewed again on October 6 and 7, 2008. Although some state elections Web sites may change leading up to the election, these results reflect what users would have experienced with these sites during this study period. To maintain browser consistency, all state Web sites were accessed using the Internet Explorer 7 browser, and all Internet searches were conducted using Google.com. Researchers used one search engine for Internet searches because, according to Hitwise—an Internet market research firm, over 70 percent of all U.S. searches are conducted using Google.com.

At the onset of this study, we selected the state elections Web sites to be scored for functionality and usability (listed in Appendix B). In most instances these are the Secretaries of States Web sites, but some states maintain separate voter URLs. When these separate, but official, state sites contained all of the pertinent elections information they were used for the study.

In the current study, we utilized an overall usability score that was a composite of seven category scores. Category scores with breakdowns for each criteria are included in Appendices C and D. Each category was weighted to reflect its contribution to overall usability, and included three to five criteria that were scored to determine the individual category scores.

For each category, we summed the points the sites received on all the criteria and divided that number by the total number of points possible for the category. These category scores were then weighted according to the category weight and were totaled to determine a state's overall usability score.



CRITERION

Web Presence (25%)

- State election site falls within first page of Web search results. Search for "register to vote in [state]". [use Google]
- Search for "polling place in [state]".
- Search for "election candidates in [state]".
- Noticeable link to the elections Web site (or specific functions on the elections Web site) on the state Web site homepage.

Navigation and Information Architecture (20%)

- Global and local navigation: logical, persistent and consistent.
- Effective use of page titles, navigational highlighting and breadcrumbs to help users determine where they are within the site.
- Descriptive link names clearly indicate content the user is linking to (instead of links such as "Click Here", "Go" and "More").
- Site architecture groups information logically and allows users to easily get all the information for a topic without having to jump around the site or visit numerous pages. (e.g., voter registration information is not located across 10 different pages).

Content (20%)

- Key voter-oriented content written at an 8th grade level (or lower).
- Written for the Web (concise, bullet points, easy-to-scan and hyperlinks used to direct users).
- PDF usage limited to print-and-fill-out forms, not for basic content (e.g., How to register to vote). Also, links to PDFs are labeled as such (eliminating surprise).

Homepage (15%)

- Chunking of information/links so that users can easily determine which information is intended for voters versus candidates and researchers.
- Links to key voter content and functionality are grouped and located noticeably on the homepage above the fold: Am I registered to vote? How to register? Polling Locations? Absentee voting?
- Homepage is easy to scan—light on prose-style content. Links are easily identifiable; content is concise and presented in brief format.

Accessibility (10%)

- "Skip Navigation" link at top of all pages.
- Site uses scalable fonts.
- ALT text on informative/functional graphics (i.e., graphics you need to understand in order to use the site).
- High contrast between background and text and in images.
- Visited links change color.

Search (5%)

- Search field (or link) located on every page in consistent location.
- Search results titles/content are understandable.
- Search results are appropriate to the query.

Site Tools (5%)

- Tool descriptions adequately describe the tool users are about to use and what they will receive by entering their information.
- Tools are designed with intuitive flow, buttons, controls, and links.
- Clear error messages.

APPENDIX A

Scoring

Each criterion was scored on a scale from zero to three. Most of the criteria were scored according to a general scoring key:

General Scoring Key

- 3 Full compliance/User-centric implementation
- 2 Partial compliance/User needs considered
- 1 Poor compliance/Requires significant improvement
- 0 Not available on site/Extremely poor

For three of the Web Presence criteria (numbers 1-3 above), scoring was determined based on the location of the result in the search results using the following scoring:

Web Search Scoring Key (used for criteria 1-3)

- 3 First result
- 2 Within first 5 results
- 1 Within first page of results
- 0 Not on first page of results

The content grade level was assessed using the Flesch-Kincaid Grade level metric, which is one of the most widely used readability tests to determine comprehension difficulty. The metric translates a text passage based on the complexity as determined by the number of words and syllables in the sentence. The score is translated to a specific grade level need to understand it, as calculated by the following formula:

$$0.39 \left(\frac{\text{total words}}{\text{total sentences}} \right) + 11.8 \left(\frac{\text{total syllables}}{\text{total words}} \right) - 15.59$$

The criterion for content grade level was scored using the following scale:

Content Grade Level Scoring Key (used for criterion 9)

- 3 8th grade or lower (grade school to junior high)
- 2 9th-12th grade (high school)
- 1 13th-16th grade (undergraduate)
- 0 Higher than 16th grade (graduate)

Web sites Included in Scorecard

Alabama	http://www.sos.state.al.us/Elections/Default.aspx
Alaska	http://www.elections.alaska.gov/
Arizona	http://www.azsos.gov/election/
Arkansas	http://www.sos.arkansas.gov/elections.html
California	http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/elections.htm
Colorado	http://www.elections.colorado.gov
Connecticut	http://www.ct.gov/sots/cwp/view.asp?a=3&q=415810
Delaware	http://elections.delaware.gov/
District of Columbia	http://www.dcboee.org/
Florida	http://election.dos.state.fl.us/index.shtml
Georgia	http://sos.georgia.gov/Elections/
Hawaii	http://hawaii.gov/elections/
Idaho	http://www.idahovotes.gov/
Illinois	http://www.elections.state.il.us/
Indiana	http://www.in.gov/sos/elections/
Iowa	http://www.sos.state.ia.us/elections/
Kansas	http://www.kssos.org/elections/elections.html
Kentucky	http://elect.ky.gov/default.htm
Louisiana	http://www.sos.louisiana.gov/tabid/68/Default.aspx
Maine	http://www.maine.gov/sos/cec/elec/
Maryland	http://www.elections.state.md.us/
Massachusetts	http://www.sec.state.ma.us/ele/eleidx.htm
Michigan	http://www.mi.gov/sos/0,1607,7-127-1633---oo.html
Minnesota	http://www.sos.state.mn.us/home/index.asp?page=4
Mississippi	http://www.sos.state.ms.us/elections/elections.asp
Missouri	http://www.sos.mo.gov/elections/
Montana	http://sos.mt.gov/ELB/
Nebraska	http://www.sos.ne.gov/dyindex.html
Nevada	http://sos.state.nv.us/elections/
New Hampshire	http://www.sos.nh.gov/electionsnew.html
New Jersey	http://www.state.nj.us/state/elections/index.html
New Mexico	http://www.sos.state.nm.us/sos-elections.html
New York	http://www.elections.state.ny.us/
North Carolina	http://www.sboe.state.nc.us/
North Dakota	http://www.nd.gov/sos/electvote/
Ohio	http://www.sos.state.oh.us/SOS/voter.aspx
Oklahoma	http://www.ok.gov/~elections/
Oregon	http://www.sos.state.or.us/elections/
Pennsylvania	http://www.votespa.com/
Rhode Island	http://www.sec.state.ri.us/elections
South Carolina	http://www.scvotes.org/
South Dakota	http://www.sdsos.gov/electionsvoteregistration/electionsvoteregistration_overview.shtm
Tennessee	http://www.state.tn.us/sos/election/index.htm
Texas	http://www.sos.state.tx.us/elections/index.shtml
Utah	http://elections.utah.gov/
Vermont	http://vermont-elections.org/
Virginia	http://www.sbe.virginia.gov/cms/
Washington	http://www.secstate.wa.gov/elections/
West Virginia	http://www.wvotes.com/
Wisconsin	http://elections.state.wi.us/
Wyoming	http://soswy.state.wy.us/Elections/Elections.aspx

Usability Scores

State	Overall Usability Score	Web Presence	Navigation and Information	Content	Homepage	Accessibility	Search	Site Tools
		Total out of 25	Total out of 20	Total out of 20	Total out of 15	Total out of 10	Total out of 5	Total out of 5
Iowa	77	18.75	15.00	15.56	15.00	7.33	3.89	1.11
Texas	75	20.83	15.00	15.56	10.00	6.67	2.78	4.44
Utah	72	18.75	13.33	15.56	11.67	4.67	3.33	5.00
Pennsylvania	71	16.67	18.33	15.56	15.00	2.00	0.00	3.89
New Jersey	71	18.75	13.33	15.56	11.67	5.33	3.33	3.33
West Virginia	70	14.58	20.00	20.00	5.00	6.67	0.00	3.33
Missouri	69	14.58	11.67	15.56	15.00	4.67	3.33	3.89
Maine	68	20.83	15.00	15.56	3.33	7.33	3.33	2.78
Minnesota	68	18.75	16.67	17.78	6.67	5.33	0.00	2.78
Wyoming	68	22.92	15.00	11.11	6.67	5.33	3.89	2.78
Kentucky	67	22.92	13.33	13.33	5.00	6.00	1.67	5.00
South Carolina	67	18.75	13.33	15.56	5.00	7.33	3.89	2.78
Nevada	66	10.42	16.67	15.56	13.33	2.67	3.89	3.33
Florida	65	16.67	13.33	15.56	10.00	6.00	3.89	0.00
Maryland	64	22.92	10.00	13.33	5.00	4.67	3.89	3.89
Tennessee	64	12.50	11.67	13.33	11.67	6.00	3.89	4.44
North Carolina	63	12.50	15.00	15.56	10.00	4.67	4.44	1.11
District of Columbia	63	10.42	15.00	15.56	13.33	3.33	3.89	1.11
Indiana	62	20.83	13.33	13.33	10.00	2.67	0.00	2.22
Ohio	62	12.50	15.00	11.11	15.00	3.33	3.33	1.67
Vermont	62	22.92	13.33	13.33	5.00	6.00	1.11	0.00
Washington	61	18.75	6.67	11.11	11.67	5.33	3.89	3.33
California	60	18.75	11.67	8.89	11.67	6.00	3.33	0.00
Delaware	60	20.83	8.33	15.56	5.00	4.67	3.89	1.67
New York	59	10.42	15.00	13.33	8.33	6.00	4.44	1.67
North Dakota	59	16.67	6.67	11.11	8.33	7.33	4.44	4.44
Michigan	59	18.75	11.67	11.11	5.00	6.00	3.89	2.22
Arizona	58	18.75	10.00	13.33	8.33	4.00	3.89	0.00
Virginia	58	20.83	11.67	11.11	5.00	4.67	3.89	1.11
Nebraska	57	16.67	10.00	13.33	6.67	4.67	3.89	2.22
Massachusetts	57	20.83	8.33	13.33	6.67	4.00	2.78	1.11
Oregon	57	12.50	6.67	15.56	10.00	6.00	1.11	5.00
Rhode Island	55	22.92	11.67	6.67	1.67	5.33	3.33	3.33
Oklahoma	54	20.83	6.67	15.56	1.67	6.67	0.00	2.22
Colorado	53	18.75	6.67	11.11	8.33	5.33	0.56	2.22
Alaska	52	16.67	11.67	11.11	6.67	3.33	2.78	0.00
Montana	52	16.67	11.67	11.11	5.00	6.67	1.11	0.00
Hawaii	51	14.58	10.00	13.33	3.33	6.00	2.78	1.11
Louisiana	51	16.67	11.67	11.11	1.67	3.33	3.33	3.33
Kansas	51	14.58	16.67	11.11	0.00	2.00	3.33	3.33
Arkansas	50	14.58	5.00	11.11	8.33	6.00	2.78	2.22
Alabama	49	14.58	13.33	13.33	1.67	2.67	0.00	3.33
Georgia	49	20.83	6.67	8.89	5.00	0.67	3.33	3.33
South Dakota	48	6.25	11.67	11.11	5.00	5.33	4.44	4.44
Wisconsin	47	10.42	10.00	11.11	3.33	4.67	4.44	3.33
Idaho	46	12.50	10.00	8.89	8.33	5.33	0.00	0.56
New Mexico	45	14.58	5.00	13.33	3.33	4.67	1.67	2.22
Connecticut	37	8.33	5.00	11.11	8.33	3.33	1.11	0.00
Illinois	36	16.67	3.33	2.22	8.33	3.33	1.11	1.11
Mississippi	35	12.50	5.00	13.33	0.00	4.00	0.56	0.00
New Hampshire	33	14.58	3.33	8.89	0.00	6.00	0.00	0.00
51 state average	58	16.67	11.27	12.85	7.25	4.93	2.63	2.31

Web Presence *(weighted 25%)*

State	Search "register to vote in [state]"	Search "polling place in [state]"	Search "election candidates in [state]"	Link from official state Web site homepage	Total score (out of 12)
Alabama	3	1	2	1	7
Alaska	3	3	1	1	8
Arizona	3	2	3	1	9
Arkansas	3	3	1	0	7
California	3	3	0	3	9
Colorado	3	2	2	2	9
Connecticut	2	0	0	2	4
Delaware	2	3	2	3	10
District of Columbia	3	2	0	0	5
Florida	3	2	3	0	8
Georgia	3	3	1	3	10
Hawaii	3	3	1	0	7
Idaho	3	3	0	0	6
Illinois	3	3	2	0	8
Indiana	3	3	2	2	10
Iowa	3	3	0	3	9
Kansas	3	3	1	0	7
Kentucky	3	3	3	2	11
Louisiana	2	3	1	2	8
Maine	2	3	2	3	10
Maryland	3	3	2	3	11
Massachusetts	3	3	2	2	10
Michigan	3	2	1	3	9
Minnesota	3	3	2	1	9
Mississippi	3	3	0	0	6
Missouri	3	2	2	0	7
Montana	3	3	2	0	8
Nebraska	3	3	0	2	8
Nevada	3	0	0	2	5
New Hampshire	3	3	0	1	7
New Jersey	3	3	0	3	9
New Mexico	2	3	2	0	7
New York	2	1	0	2	5
North Carolina	3	3	0	0	6
North Dakota	2	2	1	3	8
Ohio	2	2	0	2	6
Oklahoma	3	2	2	3	10
Oregon	3	0	2	1	6
Pennsylvania	3	2	0	3	8
Rhode Island	2	3	3	3	11
South Carolina	3	3	0	3	9
South Dakota	0	3	0	0	3
Tennessee	3	0	2	1	6
Texas	3	3	3	1	10
Utah	3	3	2	1	9
Vermont	3	3	2	3	11
Virginia	3	2	2	3	10
Washington	3	3	0	3	9
West Virginia	2	3	1	1	7
Wisconsin	2	3	0	0	5
Wyoming	2	3	3	3	11
51 state average	3	2	1	2	8

Navigation and Information Architecture *(weighted 20%)*

State	Global and local navigation	Help users determine where they are	Easy to use links	Information grouped logically	Total score (out of 12)
Alabama	2	2	2	2	8
Alaska	2	2	1	2	7
Arizona	1	1	2	2	6
Arkansas	0	0	2	1	3
California	2	1	2	2	7
Colorado	1	0	2	1	4
Connecticut	1	1	0	1	3
Delaware	2	1	1	1	5
District of Columbia	2	2	3	2	9
Florida	1	2	3	2	8
Georgia	0	1	2	1	4
Hawaii	1	1	2	2	6
Idaho	1	1	2	2	6
Illinois	1	0	1	0	2
Indiana	1	1	3	3	8
Iowa	1	2	3	3	9
Kansas	3	2	3	2	10
Kentucky	2	2	2	2	8
Louisiana	2	2	1	2	7
Maine	2	3	2	2	9
Maryland	1	1	2	2	6
Massachusetts	0	1	2	2	5
Michigan	2	1	3	1	7
Minnesota	3	2	3	2	10
Mississippi	0	1	2	0	3
Missouri	2	1	3	1	7
Montana	2	1	2	2	7
Nebraska	0	2	2	2	6
Nevada	3	1	3	3	10
New Hampshire	0	0	1	1	2
New Jersey	2	1	3	2	8
New Mexico	1	0	2	0	3
New York	2	1	3	3	9
North Carolina	3	1	3	2	9
North Dakota	0	1	2	1	4
Ohio	3	2	2	2	9
Oklahoma	0	1	1	2	4
Oregon	1	1	2	0	4
Pennsylvania	3	3	2	3	11
Rhode Island	1	2	3	1	7
South Carolina	2	2	3	1	8
South Dakota	1	1	3	2	7
Tennessee	2	1	3	1	7
Texas	2	1	3	3	9
Utah	2	1	3	2	8
Vermont	2	1	3	2	8
Virginia	2	2	1	2	7
Washington	0	1	2	1	4
West Virginia	3	3	3	3	12
Wisconsin	1	1	3	1	6
Wyoming	3	3	2	1	9
51 state average	2	1	2	2	7

Content (weighted 20%)

State	Written at 8th grade level (or lower)	Written for the Web	Limited PDF use	Total score (out of 9)
Alabama	2	2	2	6
Alaska	2	1	2	5
Arizona	2	2	2	6
Arkansas	1	3	1	5
California	1	2	1	4
Colorado	3	1	1	5
Connecticut	2	2	1	5
Delaware	3	2	2	7
District of Columbia	3	3	1	7
Florida	2	3	2	7
Georgia	1	1	2	4
Hawaii	2	2	2	6
Idaho	2	1	1	4
Illinois	1	0	0	1
Indiana	1	2	3	6
Iowa	2	3	2	7
Kansas	2	1	2	5
Kentucky	2	2	2	6
Louisiana	2	2	1	5
Maine	3	2	2	7
Maryland	2	2	2	6
Massachusetts	2	2	2	6
Michigan	2	2	1	5
Minnesota	2	3	3	8
Mississippi	2	2	2	6
Missouri	1	3	3	7
Montana	2	1	2	5
Nebraska	2	3	1	6
Nevada	2	2	3	7
New Hampshire	2	0	2	4
New Jersey	2	3	2	7
New Mexico	2	1	3	6
New York	2	2	2	6
North Carolina	2	3	2	7
North Dakota	2	1	2	5
Ohio	2	1	2	5
Oklahoma	3	2	2	7
Oregon	3	2	2	7
Pennsylvania	2	2	3	7
Rhode Island	1	1	1	3
South Carolina	2	2	3	7
South Dakota	2	1	2	5
Tennessee	2	1	3	6
Texas	2	2	3	7
Utah	2	2	3	7
Vermont	2	1	3	6
Virginia	1	1	3	5
Washington	2	2	1	5
West Virginia	3	3	3	9
Wisconsin	2	1	2	5
Wyoming	2	2	1	5
51 state average	2	2	2	6

Homepage *(weighted 15%)*

State	Content grouped for voters	Links to key voter content	Homepage is easy to scan	Total score(out of 9)
Alabama	0	0	1	1
Alaska	1	2	1	4
Arizona	2	0	3	5
Arkansas	2	2	1	5
California	2	2	3	7
Colorado	1	2	2	5
Connecticut	2	1	2	5
Delaware	1	2	0	3
District of Columbia	3	3	2	8
Florida	1	3	2	6
Georgia	0	2	1	3
Hawaii	0	2	0	2
Idaho	2	1	2	5
Illinois	2	2	1	5
Indiana	2	3	1	6
Iowa	3	3	3	9
Kansas	0	0	0	0
Kentucky	1	1	1	3
Louisiana	0	1	0	1
Maine	0	0	2	2
Maryland	1	1	1	3
Massachusetts	0	3	1	4
Michigan	1	2	0	3
Minnesota	1	1	2	4
Mississippi	0	0	0	0
Missouri	3	3	3	9
Montana	1	1	1	3
Nebraska	1	1	2	4
Nevada	2	3	3	8
New Hampshire	0	0	0	0
New Jersey	3	2	2	7
New Mexico	0	1	1	2
New York	0	3	2	5
North Carolina	0	3	3	6
North Dakota	0	3	2	5
Ohio	3	3	3	9
Oklahoma	0	1	0	1
Oregon	1	3	2	6
Pennsylvania	3	3	3	9
Rhode Island	0	0	1	1
South Carolina	1	1	1	3
South Dakota	0	2	1	3
Tennessee	2	3	2	7
Texas	1	3	2	6
Utah	2	2	3	7
Vermont	1	1	1	3
Virginia	1	1	1	3
Washington	3	2	2	7
West Virginia	1	1	1	3
Wisconsin	1	0	1	2
Wyoming	0	2	2	4
51 state average	1	2	2	4

Accessibility (weighted 10%)

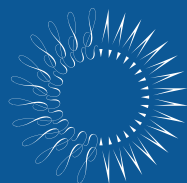
State	"Skip Navigation" link	Scalable fonts	Easy to use graphics	High contrast (easy to view)	Visited links change color	Total score (out of 15)
Alabama	0	0	1	3	0	4
Alaska	0	0	2	3	0	5
Arizona	0	0	2	2	2	6
Arkansas	0	3	3	3	0	9
California	0	3	3	3	0	9
Colorado	0	2	3	3	0	8
Connecticut	0	2	2	1	0	5
Delaware	0	3	1	3	0	7
District of Columbia	0	0	3	2	0	5
Florida	0	3	3	1	2	9
Georgia	0	0	0	1	0	1
Hawaii	0	3	3	3	0	9
Idaho	0	0	2	3	3	8
Illinois	0	1	1	3	0	5
Indiana	0	0	0	1	3	4
Iowa	0	3	2	3	3	11
Kansas	0	0	2	1	0	3
Kentucky	0	2	1	3	3	9
Louisiana	0	0	2	3	0	5
Maine	0	3	2	3	3	11
Maryland	3	0	1	3	0	7
Massachusetts	0	0	2	3	1	6
Michigan	0	3	1	2	3	9
Minnesota	0	1	1	3	3	8
Mississippi	0	1	2	2	1	6
Missouri	0	3	2	2	0	7
Montana	0	3	3	2	2	10
Nebraska	0	1	0	3	3	7
Nevada	0	0	1	3	0	4
New Hampshire	0	3	2	2	2	9
New Jersey	0	0	3	2	3	8
New Mexico	0	3	2	2	0	7
New York	3	3	2	1	0	9
North Carolina	0	0	3	3	1	7
North Dakota	2	3	3	3	0	11
Ohio	0	1	3	1	0	5
Oklahoma	0	3	2	2	3	10
Oregon	0	3	3	3	0	9
Pennsylvania	0	0	0	3	0	3
Rhode Island	0	3	2	3	0	8
South Carolina	0	3	2	3	3	11
South Dakota	0	3	2	3	0	8
Tennessee	0	3	3	3	0	9
Texas	0	3	3	3	1	10
Utah	0	2	2	3	0	7
Vermont	0	3	3	3	0	9
Virginia	0	0	2	2	3	7
Washington	0	3	2	3	0	8
West Virginia	0	3	3	3	1	10
Wisconsin	0	2	2	3	0	7
Wyoming	0	3	2	3	0	8
51 state average	0	2	2	3	1	7

Search (weighted 5%)

State	Consistent location	Results are understandable	Results are appropriate to the query	Total score (out of 9)
Alabama	0	0	0	0
Alaska	3	1	1	5
Arizona	3	1	3	7
Arkansas	1	1	3	5
California	2	1	3	6
Colorado	1	0	0	1
Connecticut	2	0	0	2
Delaware	3	3	1	7
District of Columbia	3	2	2	7
Florida	3	1	3	7
Georgia	1	2	3	6
Hawaii	3	1	1	5
Idaho	0	0	0	0
Illinois	2	0	0	2
Indiana	0	0	0	0
Iowa	3	1	3	7
Kansas	3	1	2	6
Kentucky	3	0	0	3
Louisiana	2	1	3	6
Maine	3	1	2	6
Maryland	3	1	3	7
Massachusetts	2	0	3	5
Michigan	3	1	3	7
Minnesota	0	0	0	0
Mississippi	1	0	0	1
Missouri	3	0	3	6
Montana	1	0	1	2
Nebraska	3	1	3	7
Nevada	2	2	3	7
New Hampshire	0	0	0	0
New Jersey	3	1	2	6
New Mexico	3	0	0	3
New York	3	2	3	8
North Carolina	3	2	3	8
North Dakota	3	2	3	8
Ohio	3	1	2	6
Oklahoma	0	0	0	0
Oregon	2	0	0	2
Pennsylvania	0	0	0	0
Rhode Island	3	1	2	6
South Carolina	2	2	3	7
South Dakota	3	2	3	8
Tennessee	3	1	3	7
Texas	3	1	1	5
Utah	1	2	3	6
Vermont	1	1	0	2
Virginia	3	1	3	7
Washington	2	2	3	7
West Virginia	0	0	0	0
Wisconsin	3	3	2	8
Wyoming	3	1	3	7
51 state average	2	1	2	5

Site Tools *(weighted 5%)*

State	Adequate tool descriptions	Tools are intuitive	Clear error messages	Total score (out of 9)
Alabama	2	2	2	6
Alaska	0	0	0	0
Arizona	0	0	0	0
Arkansas	1	2	1	4
California	0	0	0	0
Colorado	1	2	1	4
Connecticut	0	0	0	0
Delaware	1	1	1	3
District of Columbia	0	1	1	2
Florida	0	0	0	0
Georgia	1	3	2	6
Hawaii	0	1	1	2
Idaho	0	0	1	1
Illinois	1	1	0	2
Indiana	1	1	2	4
Iowa	0	1	1	2
Kansas	2	2	2	6
Kentucky	3	3	3	9
Louisiana	2	2	2	6
Maine	3	1	1	5
Maryland	2	3	2	7
Massachusetts	0	1	1	2
Michigan	0	2	2	4
Minnesota	3	1	1	5
Mississippi	0	0	0	0
Missouri	3	2	2	7
Montana	0	0	0	0
Nebraska	0	3	1	4
Nevada	1	3	2	6
New Hampshire	0	0	0	0
New Jersey	2	2	2	6
New Mexico	0	3	1	4
New York	0	2	1	3
North Carolina	0	1	1	2
North Dakota	3	3	2	8
Ohio	0	1	2	3
Oklahoma	0	2	2	4
Oregon	3	3	3	9
Pennsylvania	2	2	3	7
Rhode Island	2	3	1	6
South Carolina	0	2	3	5
South Dakota	2	3	3	8
Tennessee	2	3	3	8
Texas	3	3	2	8
Utah	3	3	3	9
Vermont	0	0	0	0
Virginia	0	2	0	2
Washington	2	2	2	6
West Virginia	1	3	2	6
Wisconsin	3	1	2	6
Wyoming	3	1	1	5
51 state average	1	2	1	4



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