Executive Summary

I conducted a remote think aloud protocol and informal evaluation of the Washington Voters' Pamphlet. The think aloud protocol consisted of three participants ages 18, 19, and 50.

Based on the findings of both evaluations, the pamphlet provides information to help users understand the registration and voting process. It also provides information for voters with disabilities and who speak other languages. However, there are some areas where the pamphlet can be improved to deliver more information to voters and increase the overall user experience.

An important aspect of the voting process is knowing the election's purpose. The League of Women Voters of California Education Fund recommends clearly outlining the election's purpose in voter guides and ballots (2015). Two of the three think aloud protocol participants had difficult determining this election's purpose. A separate page with the purpose should be included in this pamphlet to help voters understand what they're voting for and why.

The League of Women Voters of California Education Fund also recommends providing candidate information, such as plans for presidency and stances on popular issues, easy to identify (2015). My participants also stated that this information was the most important to them when considering voting and elections. The current candidate information provides a large amount of background information and what the candidate has already done. Instead, this information should be focused on what they are going to do and theirs values and beliefs in regard to the election and popular issues.

In addition, each participant stated they were pleased with the table of contents and the useful section and page headers. However, they spent a significant amount of time scrolling through the document or referring back to the table of contents. A consistent navigation bar should be included on the side of the page to help readers orient themselves within the document. Links could also be placed in the table of contents to help readers easily navigate to a specific page in addition to a "return to ToC" or similar button found on each page.

Lastly, a sample ballot should be included in the pamphlet to help provide voters with an example of what to expect when they are voting. This will be helpful to new voters, especially, but will assist all voters in knowing exactly what is on the ballot.

The Washington Voters' Pamphlet contains useful and rich information that helps inform voters of their civic duty and the steps to successfully complete this duty. The pamphlet can be improved by implementing changes that define the election's purpose, allow voters to easily identify and compare candidates' stances/presidency plans, enhance the document's navigation, and provide voters with an example of their ballot.

Introduction

This report describes the think aloud protocol and informal evaluation findings of the Washington Voters' Pamphlet. Based on these findings, the Washington Secretary of State has created an informative guide that effectively outlines the voting and registration process for new and experienced voters. However, the Washington Secretary of State should consider making

improvements that clearly define the election's purpose, allow easier identification and comparison of candidates' stances/presidency plans, enhance the document's navigation, and provide a sample ballot. These changes will help tailor information to what's important to voters while also making the document easier for them to use.

Methodology

To learn more about how voters and potential voters use the Washington Voters' Guide, I conducted a remote think aloud protocol. I had three participants assess the voters' guide. The participants were 18, 19, and 50 years old. One of them stated they had never voted before, and the other two made no comment on their voter experience. The think aloud protocol consisted for four tasks. Each of these tasks were followed by two post-task questions, and a set of post-test questions followed once the participants completed their tasks (Appendix A, B, and C).

I also completed an informal assessment of the voters' guide. Using best practices outlined by the League of Women Voters of California Education Fund, I created a checklist of the most important elements for a voters' guide (Appendix D) (2015). I assessed the Washing Voters' Guide using this checklist to determine how closely the guide follows the best practices for voter documentation.

Findings

Based on the think aloud protocol, the guide does a good job of presenting helpful information in a way that is easy for readers to find. Each participant commented on the helpfulness of the table of contents and the clarity of the headings. These two elements helped the participants find the information needed to complete the tasks. Two out of three of the participants also stated that the guide made them feel better about the voting process.

However, participants had issues determining the purpose of the election. Two out of three participants used information in the pamphlet to determine that the election was for presidential candidates. Although these participants identified the main objective for the election, they assumed the election was to decide who was president rather than who would be the Democratic and Republican candidates. To provide more information to voters who may not know the election's purpose, the pamphlet should include a designated section that explains the election's purpose and the importance behind everyone's vote.

A message from Assistant Secretary of State Mark Neary

On March 10, voters in our state will have the opportunity to participate in Washington's Presidential Primary. It's your chance to have your voice heard on the nomination process for the office of U.S. President.

The Presidential Primary was created in 1989 as a citizens' Initiative to the Legislature. In the past, the two major political parties used caucus results to allocate some or all of their delegates to the national conventions, rather than the results of the primary. Additionally, the Presidential Primary occurred in May, well after the field of candidates had been condensed.

After years of working with the Legislature to move our primary to an earlier date, lawmakers approved a bill in 2019 to advance the primary to March. Now, Washingtonians will have a greater voice in selecting the nominees for President. For the first time in state history, both major political parties will use the results of the Presidential Primary to allocate their delegates to the national conventions.

Candidates from both parties will appear on your primary ballot. It is important to note that you are required to declare a party for the primary contest you're voting in. The declarations, written by the parties, appear on the return envelope. Without your signature and party selection, your vote cannot be counted. The Presidential Primary is the only statewide election in which you are required to select a political party.
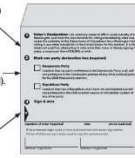
I am excited to offer you this special 2020 Presidential Primary Voters' Pamphlet, and hope you find it helpful in casting your ballot. In the Office of the Secretary of State, we strive to provide a trusted source of information for voters to use in making informed decisions in Washington elections. This pamphlet is one of many resources we provide, which includes information from the candidates about their background and views, as well as contact information for their campaigns.

Voting in the Presidential Primary

Your ballot will be mailed by **February 21.**
Follow these steps for your vote to count.

1. Read the declarations on your return envelope.
2. Mark **one** political party declaration box (required).
3. Sign and date the declarations (required).
4. Vote for **one** candidate from the political party you marked in Step 2.
5. Follow steps shown on the insert included in your ballot packet to return your voted ballot.

Why do I need to mark a party box?

For this election only, you must mark and sign a party declaration for your vote to count. The major political parties require voters to mark a party box.

If you mark the Democratic Party box, you must vote for a Democrat.

If you mark the Republican Party box, you must vote for a Republican.

Attempts to change the party declaration wording could result in your ballot not being counted.

Your choice of party will not affect how you may vote in future elections.

Vote for one.
You may vote for one candidate or the "Uncommitted Delegates" option, but not both.
- A vote for one candidate listed on the ballot directs party delegates to support that candidate at their national convention.
- A vote for Uncommitted Delegates allows uncommitted party delegates who represent Washington to decide during their national convention.

Figures 1 and 2: Current Election Purpose Location

All three participants had difficulty identifying Michael Bloomberg and Donald Trump's plans for presidency, who were the focus for this specific task. The information provided about each candidate was helpful in telling readers what these candidates have previously accomplished, but it did not tell readers what the candidates' plans were if they were elected. In addition, each participant commented on the length of the text provided. One participant commented specifically on the lengthy background that was provided and also seemed to be skimming the information. One participant suggested having each candidate answer the same questions and include those answers to help compare and contrast them more. Another way to approach this would be to include the same information about each candidate; however, this information should be focused on policies and plans versus their background.

While the table of contents helped participants identify the information in the guide and where to find it, each participant spent a significant amount of time scrolling to find each page. One participant suggested adding clickable links to the table of contents. This option would also benefit from a "return to ToC" or similar button on each page. This guide could also be improved by adjusting the page numbers to match the PDF page count so readers can simply enter the page number using the page search feature. In addition, a navigation bar could be added on the side of the page to tell readers what section they are in and what is coming up next. This would also be beneficial to readers who may be using a print version of the document.
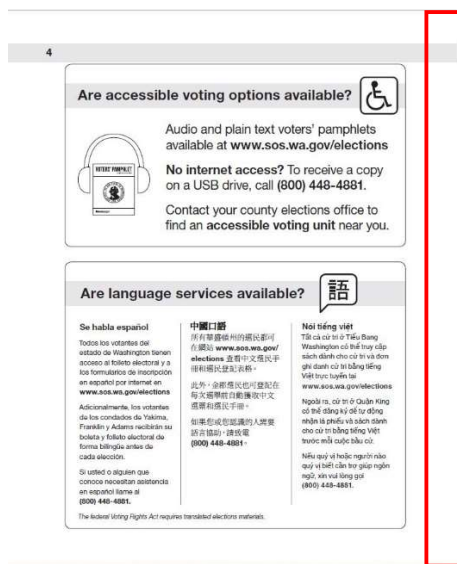

Figure 3: Potential Navigation Tool Location

Lastly, the Civic for Civic Design recommends including a sample ballot in voter pamphlets and similar documents. This sample ballot would be extremely useful to first time voters as it would provide a visual example of what they can expect to see on election day (or when they receive their ballot). This could be included as an individual page following the steps to successfully vote, or it could be included as an appendix entry at the end of the document with references used throughout the rest of the pamphlet.

Conclusion

This report covered the think aloud protocol and expert evaluation findings for the Washington Voters' Guide. The Washington Secretary of State should maintain the content that is currently in the pamphlet as each participant commented on its helpfulness. However, improvements could be made to clarify the election's purpose and importance of each person's vote. Improvements could also be made to efficiently compare and contrast candidates, help assist readers when navigating through the document, and provide an example of what voters can expect to see on their ballot. These improvements will increase the guide's usability and help current and potential voters find the information that is most important to them.

Appendices

Appendix A: Tasks

What is the first step to register to vote?

Based on the information in this pamphlet, what is the purpose of this election?

How many ways can you register to vote in Washington? What are these ways?

You are looking at candidates Mike Bloomberg and Donald J. Trump. Based on the information given, provide 2 plans for presidency of both candidates. Please speak these out loud.

Appendix B: Post-Task Questions

Did you successfully complete this task?

How easy was completing this task? [1-5 scale, 5 being very easy]

Appendix C: Post-Test Questions

Did this document make you feel better or worse about the voting process?

What changes would you like to see in this document to improve how easily you can access information?

What information is most important to you regarding elections?

What information was difficult for you to find (or maybe you were unable to find) that you wanted?

Appendix D: Washington Voters' Pamphlet Checklist

- ☐ Uses plain language (active voice, short sentences, simple words, etc.) and defines election terminology as necessary
- ☐ Provides roadmap to the booklet and elections process
- ☐ Provides a distinctly marked sample ballot with any differences compared to the official ballot stated
- ☐ Provides voting methods available
- ☐ Uses front cover as an informational tool and includes essential information (name of election, date, languages offered, polling place, etc.)
- ☐ Structures headings as questions or active instructions
- ☐ Provides a way to easily compare candidates and/or measures
- ☐ Uses running headers, "thumb tabbed" edges, or a similar device to help users navigate the document
- ☐ Uses an official seal (such as a county stamp or election insignia)
- ☐ Includes a signature to provide a source
- ☐ Includes voters' rights
- ☐ Includes links to campaign sites (electronic documents only)
- ☐ Defines/explains the election type

References

League of Women Voters of California Education Fund. (2015). How Voters Get Information [PDF file].