Librarians' Elections and Voting Toolkit

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The American Library Association Emerging Leaders Program provides the opportunity for new library professionals from across the country to collaborate on team projects and find solutions to issues within the profession. In 2019 the Government Documents Round Table (GODORT) proposed an Emerging Leaders Team (EL Team) project that centered around the GODORT Education Committee's prototype toolkit for librarians to help them answer voting and elections reference questions. The goals of the project involved developing design recommendations, a marketing plan, and implementation recommendations. The project took place between January to June 2019.

The EL Team examined existing toolkits, consulted the GODORT project representatives, and conducted a survey to make considerate suggestions in response to the project prompt. The EL Team created a thirteen-question survey that focused on the toolkit's content and usability, including one free-write field to allow for additional insights. The survey questions asked librarians about the perceived demand for voting and election information in their daily work and existing voting and election resources and training that they may already access. The survey provided a link to the toolkit prototype so librarians could explore all the resources available to each state. The survey was shared with academic, public, and special librarians via personal networks, the Public Library Association listserv, Oregon Library Association listserv, California Library Association listserv, and Cal-Doc listserv. The survey received seventy-four responses, which were used to inform the recommendations.

Following survey results, the EL Team recommended maintaining the current title and LibGuide platform, which would be helpful in both the ongoing maintenance of the state-level updating and the usability to other librarians. The team recommended keeping the LibGuide format, as most respondents wanted to keep the current format of short sections with tabs for subcategories. In spite of the toolkit's organization, the EL Team received several emails from librarians, which centered on being overwhelmed by the amount of information included. The EL Team recommended evaluating the toolkit's learning objectives to avoid information overload, a common pitfall of many LibGuides. The EL Team recommended reviewing existing voting and elections guides as well as their survey results in order to consider how the GODORT toolkit stands out and should be the preferred resource for librarians.

The EL Team recommended improving the toolkit by incorporating visual improvements, user-feedback forms, candidate platform information, ways for patrons to participate, and toolkit learning objectives. The toolkit should utilize a larger font size and color to help define and delineate the many topics included.

The toolkit could feature an option to contact a librarian with questions for further assistance similar to GODORT tools like the State Agency Databases Project (https://godort .libguides.com/statedatabases) or Government Information Online (https://godort.libguides.com/GIO). One solution to offering local election information is providing tips on finding information on candidates or including easy-to-navigate resources for patrons. One comprehensive guide to federal, state, and local elections is called Voter's Edge. This online guide is funded by MapLight, a 501(c)(3) nonpartisan research organization and is currently available for California, Illinois, and New York. Based on user feedback, the EL Team considered that providing information about how to volunteer or participate would allow the toolkit to stand out from other existing online elections and voting guides.

As part of the marketing plan, the EL Team first created a list of librarian audiences and value propositions. A value proposition is a statement that communicates the specific needs of the audience. The exercise was used to understand why and how the toolkit is a beneficial resource for a specific group. The EL Team identified audiences and assigned value propositions to public,

academic, prison, government, and school librarians. For example, prison librarians have a very complex issue to address when it comes to voting and elections. Statutes and regulations vary by state as to whether inmates can or cannot vote while they are incarcerated or when they are released. Prison librarians would benefit enormously from the detailed state by state voter registration information that could be included in the LibGuide.

The EL Team created a scalable digital marketing plan and marketing message that utilized several methods of communication, and recommended a timeline and continuity plan. The EL Team drafted a press release for the toolkit launch and created content for GODORT to use on email/listserv and Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and SnapChat. The EL Team created a contact list for twenty-one American Library Association roundtable listservs and fifty state library association listservs or contacts for mass emails. Listservs are an easy way to directly reach many librarians and share the press release or request for survey responses. While the EL Team created sample content, they acknowledged that GODORT may not have the capacity to maintain all social media accounts that it made sample content for. It is important that GODORT pick social media outlets and maintain them by posting regularly and interacting with related user content. Similar to the email contact list, the EL Team created a list of organizations to follow on the various social media outlets. Finally, the EL Team created a timeline template, which specified when to market, which communication method to use, what content to use, and how to use the content. The timeline would be enacted from one month to before the toolkit was launched to the day of launch to one year after the launch, in which GODORT would solicit user feedback.

Moving forward, the continuity plan is a vital piece of the marketing plan as it ensures current users will continue to interact with the toolkit and it allows for GODORT to identify potential users. The EL Team created an annual survey for GODORT to share with all librarians who answer reference questions, regardless if they have used the toolkit or not. Due to the limited survey participation during the EL Team's study, the EL Team recommended implementing further studies. It is important that GODORT continue its messaging of the toolkit during non-federal election years, too, as there are many state and municipal elections that happen during this time. A great resource is essentially useless if no one knows or remembers it exists when the information is needed. The EL Team outlined a scalable marketing plan for GODORT to promote the Librarians' Elections and Voting Toolkit, and provided helpful exercises to continually think about audiences, potential audiences, and how to improve the toolkit overtime.

Elections and Voting Guide Toolkits

USA.gov Voter Information Site
https://www.usa.gov/voter-research
Specific Resource: This guide provides apolitical information on how to choose research a candidate and how to decide who to vote for in a brief, easy to understand format.

Vote 411
https://www.vote411.org/
Specific Resource: This guide has a fantastic search function (https://www.vote411.org/search-by-topic#.XL5eaaZ7lp8), which allows users to research a list of predetermined topics and make a state-by-state comparison of statutes and regulations regarding voting and elections.

Other Voting and Election Toolkits

E.thePeople
http://ethepeople.org/our-affiliates/

Congress's State Legislature Website Database
https://www.congress.gov/state-legislature-websites

League of Women Voters
https://www.lwv.org/

Reporters' Committee
https://www.rcfp.org/open-government-guide/

The Voter Participation Center
https://www.voterparticipation.org

Voter's Edge California
https://votersedge.org/ca

Vote Smart
https://justfacts.votesmart.org/

Ballotpedia
https://ballotpedia.org/Main_Page