

Guidelines for Publishing a VOTER'S GUIDE Special Section

By Doug Cospers

Voter's Guides are special sections that can be distributed separately from your journal or inserted inside a regular edition before an election. They can be a valuable resource as your readers struggle to understand the issues, the candidates' stand on the issues, and the sometimes confusing process of voting in an election. Providing your readers with a voter's guide is an excellent way to win reader loyalty while increasing advertising revenue. Voters' guides should contain all of the information your readers need to understand the voting process and make informed decisions at the polls. You might want to consider distributing them free of charge.

A comprehensive voter's guide should include:

- Who can vote by law, and how, when and where to register.
- Voters' rights according to the constitution and election laws.
- The election date and the times the polls will be open.
- Clear maps of polling places in your circulation area.
- Details on absentee voting or early voting if these options are offered.
- A sample ballot so readers will be familiar with it on election day.
- A story that walks readers, step by step, through the voting process.
- Background about how elections function in a Democracy, perhaps using neighboring countries as a model. Keep in mind that your readers may not understand the principles of Democracy.
- **Candidate profiles:**
 - Arrange profiles by elective office, like they will be arranged on the ballot.
 - After each candidate's name, party and photograph, give relevant biographical data such as age, hometown, family members, present job, past jobs, education, previous elected posts held, endorsements and Web site address.
 - Give the qualifications for each office, and make sure each candidate meets them. Give the term of office.
 - Briefly provide background on the main issues involved in each race. Explain the issues using neutral sources if possible.
 - Focus your coverage and questions on problems your readers face in their lives and ask candidates how they would solve these problems. YOU identify the issues based on what you know of your readers' concerns. (These issues can be identified by reader polls.) Don't let the politicians choose the issues.
 - Ask each candidate running for the same office identical questions and record their answers accurately and in full if possible.
 - Also ask some personal questions that may give readers a glimpse of the candidate's values, such as: "What books have you read lately?" or, "Who is your personal hero and why?"
 - Be imaginative with your questions. Talk to as many voters as you can to learn what questions they have for the candidates.
 - If possible, report how each candidate's campaign is funded. How much money has he or she raised for the campaign? From whom?
 - Always ask, "What is the most important thing you will do for our readers?"