



Electronic Voter Guides

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Giving voters what they want

People increasingly are looking online for candidate information. The League is addressing this need by expanding the Vote 411 system to offer voter guides.

Local leagues have the option this year to create online voter guides with Vote 411 software licensed by LWVNYS.



We believe that online guides are the future of the League. This handout outlines steps you can take now so that your voter guide will be ready in time for Fall 2011 elections.



Voter Guide Features

For Voters:

- ⇒ Attractive guide with photos of the candidates and a side-by-side comparison feature.
- ⇒ Voter can enter address to get customized set of races, or browse races and candidates
- ⇒ Vote 411 also has info on registration, absentee ballots and polling places.

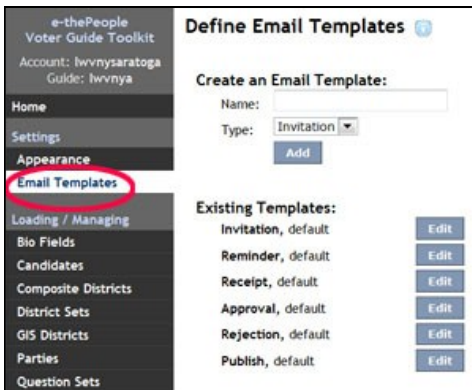
For Leagues:

- ⇒ Easy race wizard to guide setup. Once the guide is created, candidates input their own biographical info and answers to questions
- ⇒ Automated email functions with forms for invitations to candidates, reminders, confirmations, etc.
- ⇒ Useful tracking system to see who has been invited, who has responded.

Getting Started

- Contact Laura Bierman by June 15th laura@lwvny.org or (518) 465-4162
- Review training materials (see last page)
- Email Jeanette Senecal (jsenecal@lwv.org) or Allison O’Flinn (aoflinn@lwv.org) at LWVUS to obtain a user name and password for the Vote 411 system.
- Determine which races you will cover. Start with the most important races the first year, so the project is doable.
- Create work group to coordinate the voter guide.

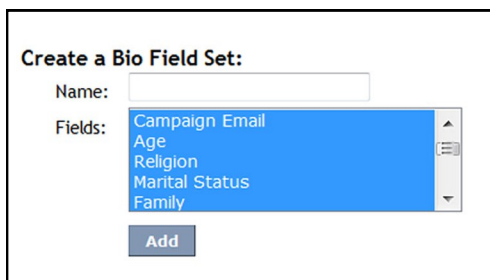
Step 1: Customize the email templates



The Vote 411 administrative panel contains six email templates you can use to communicate with candidates: Invitation, reminder, receipt, approval, rejection and publication.

You can edit and customize these templates to meet your needs. From the administrative panel, select Email Templates to bring up the screen as shown at left. You can then edit the existing templates or create your own. Within the templates, you can personalize the emails with individual candidate names, a list of questions, or any information you want to add.

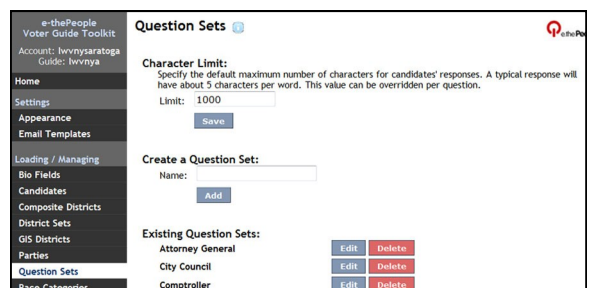
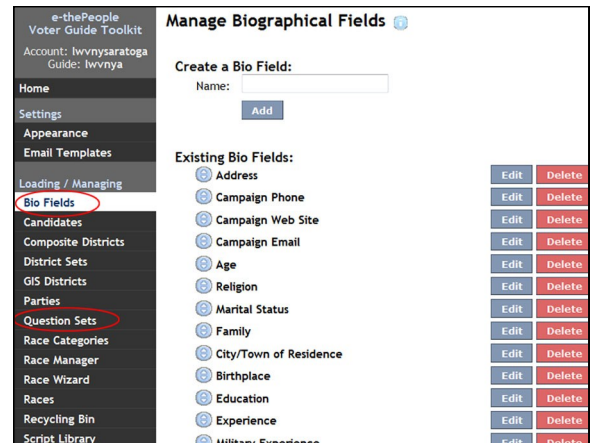
Step 2: Prepare questions and biographical field sets



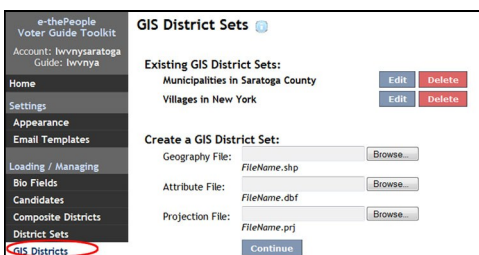
This step creates the biographical fields and question fields you want candidates to complete. The administrative panel gives you many bio fields to choose from, or you can

create your own. The League recommends using no more than 5-7 biographical fields. You can set up bio field sets to apply to all races or to specific races. The pull-down menu allows you to select bio fields to add.

In addition, you can enter a set of questions for candidates to answer. These question sets can be applied to one race or to multiple races. You can specify the maximum length of answers. This feature is especially useful if you intend to export the answers to create a print



Step 3: Create local districts - GIS



The Vote 411 system has built-in district boundaries for Congressional, state legislative and county races. For cities, towns, villages and special districts, you can upload GIS files to set the boundaries or else supply question so voters can select their districts. GIS files for towns, cities and villages are available through the U.S. Census, and will be posted on the League website. See the resource section at the end of this handout.

Step 4: Set up the races

Vote 411 gives you several methods to set up races. The easiest method is to let the Race Wizard guide you through each step of the process. After you have created your races, you can use the Race Manager shown at left to organize and edit the race information, and fill in any information you left blank along the way.

Race Wizard steps include:

- Choose the type of office and district
- Name the race
- Add candidates, emails and party affiliations (you can add this info later)
- Add description of race (optional)
- Select if primary or general election
- Choose race category (e.g., City Council)
- Select bio set
- Select question set

Step 5: Add candidate names and emails

Start as early as possible to gather candidate names and emails. You may wish to begin with incumbents before the petitions are filed, and then watch the Board of Elections (BOE) website to fill in and modify candidate names as petitions are accepted. Email accounts listed on campaign websites tend to be unmonitored, so it is worthwhile to make the extra effort at the beginning to call or write to candidates to get good email addresses, so you will have reliable candidate email addresses when you ask them to participate. As updates are posted to the BOE website, update your candidate list.

Step 6: Track responses

Candidate	Party	Race	Created	Invited	Resp.	App.
George A. Amadore	R	New York Assembly District 105				
Charles Barron	FDM	Governor, New York				
Bruce Bakeman	TXP	US Senator (New York), Unexpired 2 Ye...				
Neil D. Breslin	D	New York Senate District 46				
Deborah M. Busch	R	New York Assembly District 104				
Candidate 1	D	Supervisor, City of Saratoga Springs				
Candidate 2	R	Supervisor, City of Saratoga Springs				
Ronald J. Canestrari	D	New York Assembly District 106				
Michael J. Carey	Rfm	New York Senate District 46				
Colla Clark	Grn	US Senator (New York), 6 Year Term				

The Vote 411 Campaign Tracker is an excellent way to keep track of the Voter Guide progress. You can see which races have been created, which candidates were invited, who has responded, who should be reminded, and which responses are ready for review.

From this screen, you can invite candidates, generate email reminders, approve responses for publication, and notify candidates of the status of their responses.

Publicity

Help voters find your guide. There are a number of steps you can take to get the word out about your Electronic Voter Guide:

- Issue a press release when you go live.
- Add a link from your website and Facebook page.
- Collaborate with a local news organization to get the Voter Guide published and distributed in printed form.
- Feature your Voter Guide in your newsletters and publications, and mention it at your events.
- Distribute printed versions of your Voter Guide in selected locations, such as local libraries or candidate forums.



Resources

The League offers a number of resources to help you establish an online voter guide.

LWV US Training Materials

(Go to www.lwv.org website, click on the blue “For Members” tab, select “Templates, Trainings & Tutorials” from the pull-down menu, then select the “Voters Service” link, and click the link to “VOTE411: New Opportunities for 2010!”)

- Recorded Basic Training Webinar, Advanced Districting Webinar, Spreadsheet Upload Webinar, Spreadsheet Export Webinar, and the Printable Template Webinar.
- Online Voters’ Guide How-To Manual <http://www.lwv.org/Content/ContentGroups/Membership/ToolsForLeaders/VoterService/VGManual.pdf>
- Voter Guide Tour: <http://dp.thevoterguide.org/tour/1>
- Page-by-page Guide: <http://dp.thevoterguide.org/help/index>
- LWV US may offer new webinars and training materials, but possibly not in time for the 2011 elections

LWV NY Resources

(will soon be on www.lwvny.org website, select “Voter Services” page)

- Vote 411: A Guide for New York State Leagues
- GIS Files for cities, towns and villages - also available now at lwvsaratoga.org/members

LWVUS Staff:

- Allison O’Flinn, Elections Coordinator: aoflinn@lwv.org
- Jeanette Senecal, Senior Director of Elections: jsenecal@lwv.org
- Help desk at e.thePeople re: software issues: Contact Allison or Jeanette first

Local leagues that have used Vote 411 voter guide software:

- LWV Saratoga: Chris Alexander, LWV Saratoga County Webmaster (for questions about using voter guide software) and Francine Rodger (for general questions about voter guide)
- LWV NYC: Ashton Stewart, Executive Director