

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*In an era of political disinformation and spin, voters struggle to find trustworthy information on where candidates stand. Facing one of the most consequential elections in U.S. history, how do we overcome the political mistrust that makes too many voters, especially young voters, stay home in cynical resignation?*

[guides.vote](#) answers these challenges by creating and distributing nonpartisan [candidate guides](#) for America's most important elections, giving voters the confidence they need to participate, understand the stakes, and make informed decisions. The guides highlight where candidates stand on key issues, with links to credible sources. Concise, trustworthy, and user-friendly, the guides help people rise above the myth that voting is not worthwhile because candidates are "all the same."

With the help of our partners, we distributed over 600,000 guides in our first year, for the most important races nationwide. And colleges with a total enrollment of 715,000 posted enlarged versions as banners and posters in high-traffic locations. The guides traveled further as individuals emailed them to friends, faculty distributed them to their classes, people shared them on social media, and organizations used them in their canvasses, mailings, phone banks and text programs. With your help, we can double this reach or more in 2024.

## Why Guides Matter

To help people overcome barriers and vote



## Barriers:

Disinformation & Spin



Overload



Cynicism



Political Withdrawal



## The Antidote:

Information that's Accessible, Transparent, and Nonpartisan



Makes clear differences and stakes

# What makes the guides so effective?

- **Independently researched and edited by [veteran journalists](#)** and editors using multiple sources, not just the candidate’s website or survey responses.
- **Comprehensive**, providing candidate positions on over a dozen issues, from abortion and climate change to whether Biden’s election was legitimate.
- **Accessible**. Side-by-side format lets voters easily compare candidate stands.
- **Nonpartisan**. Can be distributed in environments like college and university campuses, and by nonpartisan partners. Can reach voters who mistrust partisan appeals.



Georgia Senate guide example

# How does guides.vote reach prospective voters?

We distribute our guides through [a broad range of nonprofits and advocacy groups](#), from Black Voters Matter and the NAACP, to Mi Familia Vota, Nonprofit Vote, Vote Early Day, and Vote.org, plus major campus networks like the student fellows of Andrew Goodman Foundation and Campus Vote Project. The guides help partners amplify their impact as they work to engage reluctant voters.

## Multiplying Our Impact



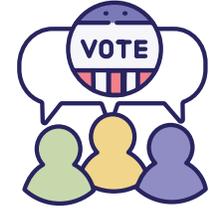
Direct reach



Distribution by partners



Reprints and links



Voter-to-voter sharing

We make the guides available through a [mobile-friendly format](#) and [printable PDFs](#) on our [guides.vote](#) site, and reprinting on partner websites like the NAACP, campus websites, and publications like *Teen Vogue*. Our [Spanish translations](#) are often the only non-English guides for key races. Partners email PDFs or links to the guides to their members, integrate them into their websites, use them in texting and phone bank campaigns, and distribute printed guides through canvassing, mailings, and tabling. They let us build on their relationships of trust and provide “boots on the ground” for person-to-person reach.

Our election guides are particularly useful for historically underrepresented constituencies, like young voters, who mistrust politics in general and feel they don’t know enough to decide. **Among youth who didn’t vote in 2022, 53% said it was because they [didn’t have enough information or didn’t think their votes mattered](#).**

## Background

An independent project since March 2022, [guides.vote](#) grew out of candidate guides that a previous organization produced for 10 years to engage college students. These guides became the favorite resource of our campus partners, who said they made a major difference in helping students decide not just which candidates to support, [but whether to vote at all](#). Being an independent project lets us dramatically expand the reach and impact of the guides beyond their original campus base.

Our guides are produced by [a stellar team](#) of researchers, writers, and editors, who’ve worked for places including *Business Week*, *Time*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *Congressional Quarterly* and CBC radio and TV. **They don’t just quote campaign websites or candidates’ misleading rhetoric—for instance, saying one thing in a primary and another in the general.** Instead, they cover the broad picture of candidate actions and stands, including what they’ve done if they’ve held elected office. Because our links are transparent and go to credible sources, they also teach media literacy and let readers follow up to understand the issues at stake. Partners say there are no other comparable guides.

“ Thank you for making available the guides we were able to utilize in the 2022 election and the Wisconsin Supreme Court race. Our partners were grateful for the resources, as they were easy to read and quick to distribute at various events leading up to the election. ”

—Alethea Bonello, Deputy Field Director, Black Voters Matter Fund

# 2022 IMPACTS

In just eight months from our March 2022 launch to the November election, we distributed our guides through a growing range of impactful partnerships—to colleges but also well beyond:

- guides.vote produced [45 nonpartisan guides](#), targeting [20 states](#) with the closest and most consequential statewide races: 12 U.S. Senate races, 18 Governor’s races, 5 Secretary of State races, and 7 State Supreme Court races. We created guides for [Alaska](#), [Arizona](#), [Colorado](#), [Florida](#), [Georgia](#), [Iowa](#), [Kansas](#), [Maine](#), [Maryland](#), [Michigan](#), [Minnesota](#), [Montana](#), [Nevada](#), [New Hampshire](#), [New Mexico](#), [North Carolina](#), [Ohio](#), [Pennsylvania](#), [Texas](#) and [Wisconsin](#). Plus a general [Congressional guide](#), and guides to [disinformation](#); and to the stakes of the election for [the US Supreme Court](#). For states with large Latino populations, we translated our guides into [Spanish](#).
- Our website had 143,000 unique visitors. More than 60,000 people read versions of our guides on the [NAACP site](#). Other groups that posted our guides on their sites ranged from the student paper of Wisconsin’s [Madison Area Technical College](#) to media outlets like [Teen Vogue](#).
- Partners distributed 280,000 printed guides, including Black Voters Matter (200,000), Arizona Student Association (40,000), and Mi Familia Vota (10,000). The NAACP also promoted us on social media and encouraged their state and local affiliates to print and distribute the guides.
- We distributed guides printed as large banners to 28 campuses with a combined enrollment of 524,000 students, plus various community groups, placing them in front of student unions, major academic buildings, and dorms.



NAACP website reprinting our guides



Congressional guide as banner at Middle Tennessee State

- Faculty, students, and administrators at 131 colleges and universities with a total enrollment of 1,899,000 students distributed the guides. Not every student saw them. But administrators, faculty, and students were actively emailing guides, posting them on campus websites, linking to them on social media, printing them out and sharing them in classrooms, placing guides as banners, and distributing them through tabling. Beyond our immediate impact, this gave us major campus networks to expand.
- We engaged young content creators to create [26 TikTok and Instagram videos reaching 787,182 people](#).

- Partners in addition to those previously mentioned included All In Challenge, All Sides, Arizona Student Association, Ben & Jerry’s Ice Cream, Bridge Alliance, Center for Common Ground, Do Something, the Fulcrum, Headcount, Rise, Living Room Conversations, LULAC, Nonprofit Vote, Oxfam America, Patagonia, the Catholic social justice lobby Network, the major Muslim engagement groups MPAC and Arab American Foundation, Ohio Student Association, US Vote Foundation, VoteRiders, Working America, and Youth Service America. States Newsroom had its affiliates run a permanent link to our site on their election pages.

“ As a trusted messenger, NAACP provided these nonpartisan guides to our network of over 2 million members, volunteers, social media activists, and partners. Carefully and transparently sourced, they’re useful for everyone. ”

—Phaedra Jackson, Field Director NAACP

Our 2022 work culminated in the December [Georgia Senate runoff](#), where we kept adding more partners—and ended up handing out more printed guides and having more website visits than in any state in the regular November election.

# THE MOST IMPORTANT ELECTION OF 2023

The *New York Times* called [the 2023 Wisconsin Supreme Court race](#) the most important of the year. guides.vote stepped up our efforts, created a new model of expanded impact, and reached even more people than in the Georgia runoff.

- Campus and community partners distributed more than 84,000 printed copies of our Wisconsin guides.
- We held educational webinars for the student Fellows of Campus Vote Project and Andrew Goodman Foundation, coaching them on how to distribute our guides with maximum impact. The student organization Rise distributed them to every dorm room at UW-Madison.
- Community partners distributing our printed guides included Black Voters Matter (through neighborhood canvasses and at a Milwaukee Bucks game), NAACP, Souls to the Polls, and individual African American churches. NAACP also printed their own copies of our guide and ran it on their website.
- Schools and campus partners posted our guides as large-format banners and posters at 19 colleges and universities with a combined enrollment of 191,437 students.



*Banner and printed guides at Carroll University*



*Guides as 11" x 17" posters UW Oshkosh*



*Guides as 11" x 17" posters Milwaukee Area Technical College*

- Our digital ads reached 61,000 students, and we emailed 14,500 faculty, many of whom distributed them in their classes. Campus newspapers also linked to our guides, and campus libraries included them in their election resource lists.
- We continued fruitful partnerships with all our 2022 national partners working in Wisconsin, and added new groups including Vote Forward (they referenced us in 300,000 letters that they mailed), Wisconsin League of Women Voters, the Civics Center, Vote America, and MTV, which retweeted our social posts, as did Black Voters Matter and Ben & Jerry's Ice Cream.

“ Without exception, every campus I visited and every student I talked with appreciated the guides. This is the exact kind of resource that our students want and need. ”

—Noah Foster, 2023 Campus Vote Project Wisconsin Assistant Director

While guides.vote tracks our distribution numbers wherever we can, we can document only the initial level of our reach. Once partners distribute them, the guides ripple out still further. We keep learning about examples of groups and people who passed them on and mentioned them in mailings, social media, and web postings. This includes people telling us about post card mailings linking to them from a group we'd never heard of, and friends of a UW-Madison professor printing the guides and posting them on lampposts in their neighborhood. So we regard these numbers as a floor, with guides.vote's ultimate reach substantially higher.

## 2023–2024: BUILDING ON OUR SUCCESSES

**2023 is key to our 2024 plans. It's when we have a chance to engage existing partners more deeply and approach new partners before the pace of the election overwhelms them. It gives us time to update our resources and approaches, test them out in the field, and reach out to new networks.**

### Target Guides

For 2023, we've already tested effective new approaches and built important new relationships around the Wisconsin Supreme Court race. We'll do the same for races for the 2023 Kentucky, Mississippi, and Louisiana governors, Pennsylvania Supreme Court, Virginia and New Jersey legislature, Philadelphia mayor, and an Ohio initiative to make future initiatives, like those around abortion or redistricting, more difficult to pass.

Young people in particular [disapprove of the performance of both President Biden and former President Trump](#). So our guides will be particularly important to give them a clear sense of how the candidates differ and help them understand the stakes. In 2024 we'll produce a Presidential guide, and updated Congressional guide, and guides for all the most salient Senate, governor, and state Supreme Court races. With enough funding, we'll also hire the researchers, writers, and editors needed to add 35 individual close Congressional races. We'll also update resources like our [national Congressional guide](#) and our [guide to disinformation](#).

To take our partner relationships to the next level, we're holding in-depth conversations with existing key partners and with others who were interested in the guides but didn't have time or staff capacity to integrate them into their 2022 efforts. Our goal is to increase collaboration, gain valuable external perspectives, and help these groups make the guides a core element of their outreach, rather than just giving them a brief mention. The models of Black Voters Matter and NAACP offer promising alternatives, where we worked out detailed distribution plans and even signed formal MOUs.

We'd particularly like to reach out more to the service-oriented nonprofits, like YMCAs, United Ways and Boys & Girls Clubs, and to libraries and interfaith groups. We'll engage these organizations with the help of our fiscal sponsor, Youth Service America. They reach historically underrepresented constituencies where our guides could make the difference between people voting and not.

## THE RESOURCES WE NEED

For a startup with less than eight months from the March launch of our website to the November 2022 election, we had a highly successful pilot year, drawing on a budget of less than \$400,000, (plus \$170,000 of pro bono contributions). **Our \$1.4 million budget for the combined 2023–2024 cycle will support additional guides, expanded partnerships and distribution, assessment of our 2022 work, and, most critically, enough staffers to do the necessary outreach.**

If we can hire sufficient outreach staff, we'll approach national and local organizations as early as possible so groups can integrate the guides into their 2024 planning. The more closely we can coordinate with our major partners, the more successful we'll be. With sufficient resources, we'll be able to significantly expand our work with national nonprofits, advocacy groups, corporations, and major local groups, both in our 2023 states and in key 2024 states. This includes spending the time and energy to approach groups that we know should be receptive, but where we didn't have enough staff to engage them in 2022. It will also let us help existing partners fully integrate the guides into their voter engagement approaches, so they can make our guides a core element of their voter education and get out the vote work. It will let us make a major impact in getting people to the polls in 2024 and giving them the confidence they need to vote as informed citizens.

Donations to our project are tax deductible through our 501(c)3 fiscal sponsor, Youth Service America, with instructions to donate [here](#). We'd love to schedule a conversation on how you can help us play a critical role in getting voters to the polls in the 2023–2024 cycle and beyond. Contact Outreach Director [Payge Hardy](#) for more information.