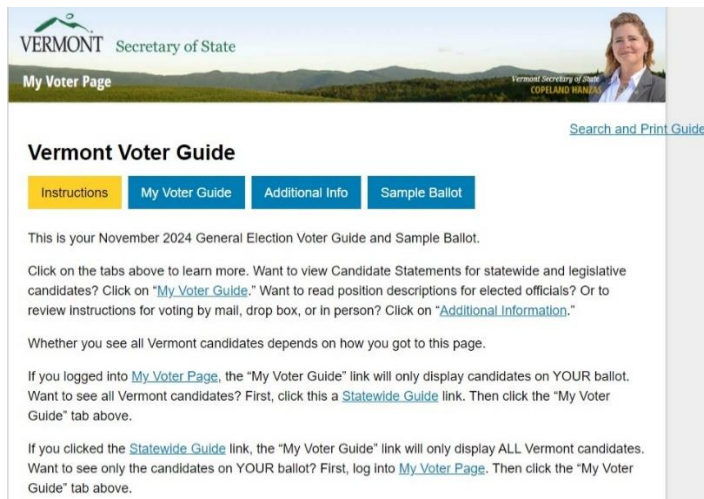




2026 NASS IDEAS Award Submission

## “Statewide Online Vermont Voter Guide”



Submitted by:

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Secretary of State  
State of Vermont

Ahead of the 2024 General Election, the Vermont Secretary of State’s office launched an Online Voter Guide as a new initiative (no statutory obligation) for Vermont voters. All federal, statewide, and legislative candidates were invited to submit a profile that included a photo, a candidate statement, contact information, and social media links. The Voter Guide also included voting instructions and a list of position descriptions for elected officials so that voters could learn more about the duties of each office. Although some news outlets in Vermont create voter guides, this effort from our state elections office provided equal and non-partisan access to all candidates, from top statewide officials to local representatives, and was made available to all voters at the same time that they received their ballot.

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Elections

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## Executive Summary:

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### History

Vermont, along with seven other states and Washington, D.C., mails ballots to all registered voters for the General Election, which gives voters ample time to research the candidates on their ballot and make an informed choice. But is this information readily available? For national and statewide races, it can be easier to look up a candidate's platform and learn about them. But what about your local state representative race, or the candidates for your town's Justice of the Peace position? And what does a Justice of the Peace do, exactly?

Some news outlets provide voter guides, but they don't necessarily represent all of the candidates on an individual voter's specific ballot, and can have varying degrees of partisan commentary built in. At the state government level, Vermont lacks any statutory charge to create this kind of resource.

Understanding this gap, we wondered: what if your general election ballot could be delivered along with a non-partisan, personalized and comprehensive guide that offered details about the various elected positions at stake, and had straightforward, consistent information from all of the candidates vying for those positions? This was what we sought to offer for the 2024 General Election.

### Significance

We are always working to optimize each of our core responsibilities, ensuring that elections are free, fair, and accessible. This effort ties all three together, recognizing that simply having a ballot full of positions and candidate names does not necessarily mean that voters are prepared to make well-informed choices. As evidenced in the National Conference on Citizenship (NCOC) [Civic Health Index](#) project we undertook this same year, voters in our state access news and information in a variety of ways. In this era of increasing polarization and algorithmic personalization, it's more impactful than ever to provide a shared, consistent foundation from which everyone can build.

Our voter guide offered straightforward explanations of the roles/responsibilities of each elected position on the ballot, seeking to answer the fundamental question that can sometimes be overlooked: "what does this position actually do?" From there, voters could consider the candidates' information to decide how to cast their vote.

It took a lot of coordination, but we were able to reach out to all candidates, from the national to the statewide and local, to solicit their entries for the guide. The format was straightforward – a photo, a candidate statement (200 words or less), contact information and links to website(s) and social media. This consistent approach made it easy for voters to compare candidates and offers a potentially paradigm-shifting model for leveling the playing field when it comes to campaigning, with all candidates given the same platform to communicate their message to voters.

The Online Voter Guide was made available in two forms: An overall guide, searchable by candidate name or voting district; and in personalized form – voters who logged into the state's voter information platform with their registration details could access a copy of the guide that matched exactly what was on their ballot.

## **Impacts/Results**

The 2024 General Election saw record-breaking turnout in Vermont, with 372,885 registered voters casting a ballot (70.6% of registered voters). We understand that Universal Vote by Mail (UVBM) plays a large role in this – by ensuring that every registered voter in Vermont receives their ballot with ample time to fill it out and return it to their clerk at their convenience.

As we continue to work on increasing the accessibility of our elections, we believe that the Online Vermont Voter Guide offered an impactful service to Vermonters for a comparatively modest investment of resources (one of the larger expenses was simply the cost of printing 5x7inch cards announcing the guide that were included in every voters' mailed ballot envelope – see Supporting Materials). Since the resource was online and personalized, the information was widely accessible and allowed Vermonters to learn about the content of their ballot as they received it.

We also feel that there is a lot of potential in this approach to disseminating consistent, standardized information about candidates. Of course, candidates are free to invest in the myriad means of campaigning and communicating in our modern media ecosystem, but this resource created a “floor,” so to speak, where all candidates had the same access to share their message with voters. We feel that this can lower some of the barriers that are faced by lesser-resourced candidates and those running for more local-level positions. So, while this initiative worked to make the process of voting more accessible, it also holds great potential to make running for elected office more accessible too. Ultimately, this is a great “double-edged sword” for strengthening our democracy.

## ***Supporting Materials:***

[An online folder of supporting materials can be found here.](#)