

User Testing the Living Voters Guide with Paper Prototypes

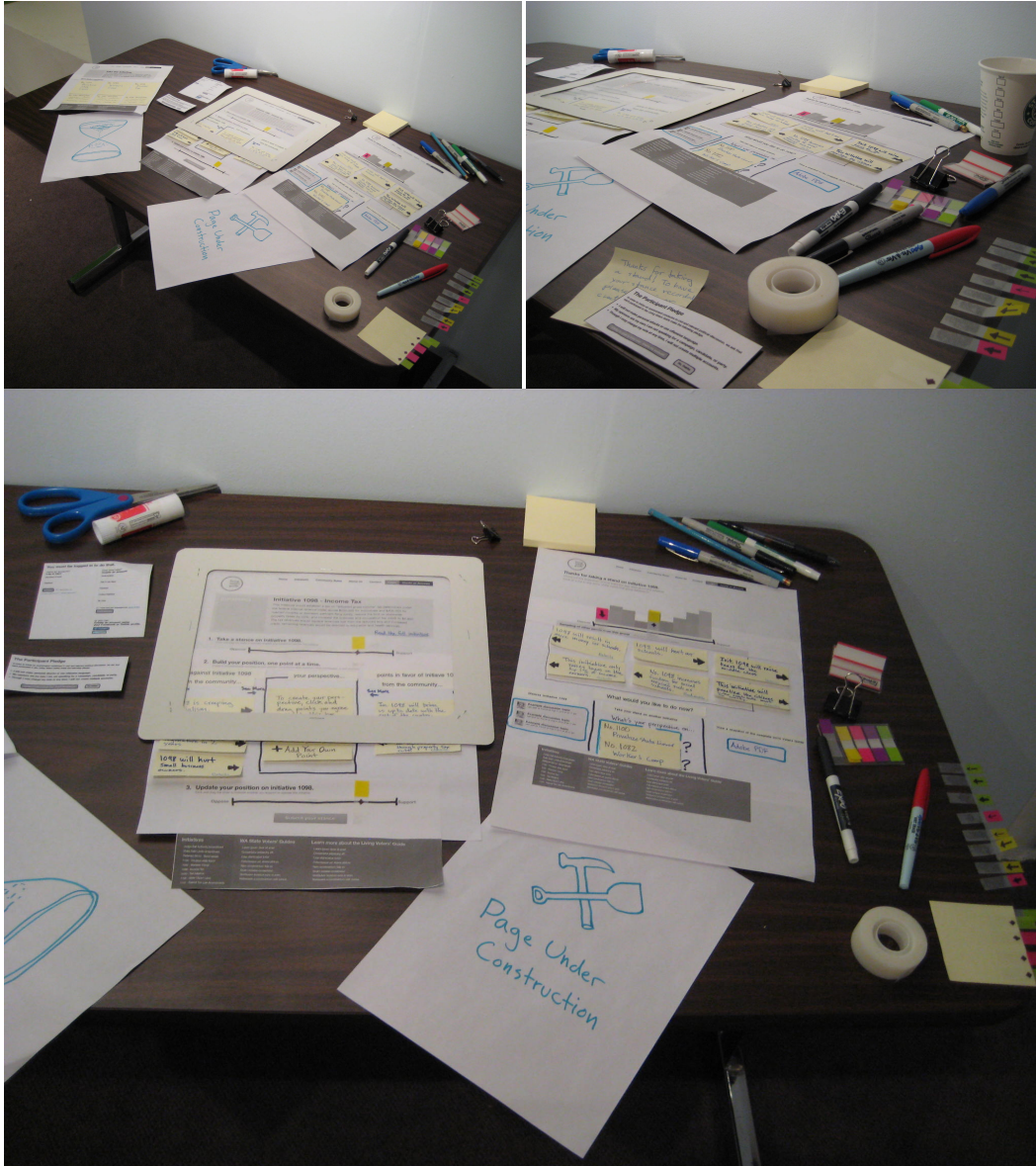


Figure 1: Paper Prototypes

A. Overview:

This test consisted of three 60-minute sessions with individual participants. All participants were either affiliated with or closely associated with Seattle City Club. All participants were professionally involved with non-profit community outreach or civic engagement activities. Two of the three participants were somewhat familiar with the purpose of the LVG before the test began and had been informed of the basic concepts behind the website, although none had been briefed in any detail on the specific features and mechanisms of the website. None of the participants had previously seen any prototypes of the LVG.

B. General Themes/High Level Questions:

- How to consistently implement the idea of transparency and non-partisanship in both the content (i.e. “About us” content) and the features (i.e. the mechanisms for selecting what points are included in the Voters Guide snapshots)

- How to make the process of creating your own perspective or stance easily iterative. For example, how do we make it apparent that people can go back and change their stance and reconsider points minutes, hours or days later? Is this still an activity that we want to support?

- How do we set ourselves apart from existing voters guides without disparaging them? We don’t want to say that we’re “Living” and they’re “dead”! One approach to this is to place the emphasis on the community-created nature of our Pro/Con points in our press releases and in the static text on our Home page and About Us page.

- How do we present “how-to” information? There needs to be some way for people to get a better sense of what they’re supposed to *do* available from the front page of the site. We can’t rely on text buried in the About Us page for this. Jessica has suggested some variation of Jonathan’s user scenario timeline would be an effective and low-cost solution to this.

C. Current Design Elements Validated

- several participants remarked that they disliked or mistrusted having to create accounts, and that they liked being able to interact with and explore the content of the LVG without creating a login. These participants also liked that the login process was easy and didn’t require much information.

- the first participant articulated the purpose of the second slider (which is to give users an opportunity to re-consider their initial stance after they have gone through the process of adding and endorsing points) while thinking aloud, without any prompting.

D. Specific Design Recommendations

1. Allow users to create their own personalized Voters Guide.

-based on the points you endorsed available as PDF (or printer-friendly web page? probably easier) once they have submitted their stance.

2. Facilitate linking to external sources (such as newspaper articles) within the long description of a point.

-This would (hopefully) encourage people to use this space to provide evidence for the opinions they are expressing through the pro/con points they create. The easy way to do this would be to enable rich text editing in this text field (allowing people to add hyperlinks and format text with bolding, bulleted lists, etc). A more complex but also possibly promising way might be to include a "References" section linked to embedded endnotes in the text.

3. Include percentages above the bars that appear on top of the slider on the stance results page.

-One participant said that he wanted to see some numbers after having gone through the process of creating his stance. I would advocate only making these percentages visible when the user hovers over or clicks on the bar.

4. Prominently feature link to the current Voters Guide Snapshot on the home page of the LVG.

-participants asked to be able to see not only the selection of points available on the Submitting Stance page, but also the pro/con points that were currently the most popular. Allowing easy access to these snapshots would also make the LVG a valuable resource to people who do not want to participate in creating/endorsing points at all, but still want to be informed. Media and campaign representatives would also be interested in monitoring these snapshots.

5. Include some forum for discussing points or initiatives.

-all participants liked the "discuss this initiative" on the final page and wanted to be able to chat. Although it may be a challenge to fully integrate the feature-rich discussion platform we envision into the LVG by this years deadline, we should at least set up blog pages for each of the Initiatives, where users who have created accounts can talk to each other. Enabling Reflect summaries on these discussion pages would be a great, low-cost research opportunity.

6. The "Read the full initiative" link that we've been including under the initiative summary on the Submitting Stance page should link to a local copy of the official initiative text.

-we don't want users leaving the site to read the full initiative, especially at the very point where we're asking them to start actively participating. Creating

simple, static site pages that include cleanly-formatted versions of the full initiative text would solve this problem.

7. *“Who we are” should be above “Purpose” paragraph on the About Us page to increase transparency and credibility.*

E. Open questions

- should participant be able to “un-endorse” points that they previously endorsed upon subsequent logins or subsequent runs through the stance-creation process?
- more generally, should participants have a way of seeing a list of the points they’ve created and endorsed (maybe this is the “Personal Voters Guide” page from D.1 above).
- will participants receive some sort of notification if someone else endorses their point? How do we notify them without spamming them?

Intriguing ideas (for v2.0?)

- increase integration with Facebook and Twitter APIs in order to let participants who login with those IDs to click a button and tweet (or post as a status update) that they have just “Submitted their stance on the Living Voters Guide.” This could be a great way to leverage social networks to create buzz about the LVG and attract more people to the site.