

BOSTON ELECTIONS

Harvard Kennedy School
DPI-663: Tech and Innovation in Government

1 IN 6

registered voters vote in municipal elections

4X LOWER

turnout than for state and federal elections

OUR TEAM



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HKS MPP



Dasha Metropolitansky
Harvard College

How can we increase voter turnout
in Boston's municipal elections?

OUR PROCESS



DISCOVERY

Framing the problem

USER RESEARCH

Data analysis
Intercepts & interviews

PROTOTYPING

Prototype solutions
Test on users
Iterate!

RECOMMENDATIONS

Share findings
Deliver final products

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QUANTITATIVE

Voter turnout analysis

QUALITATIVE

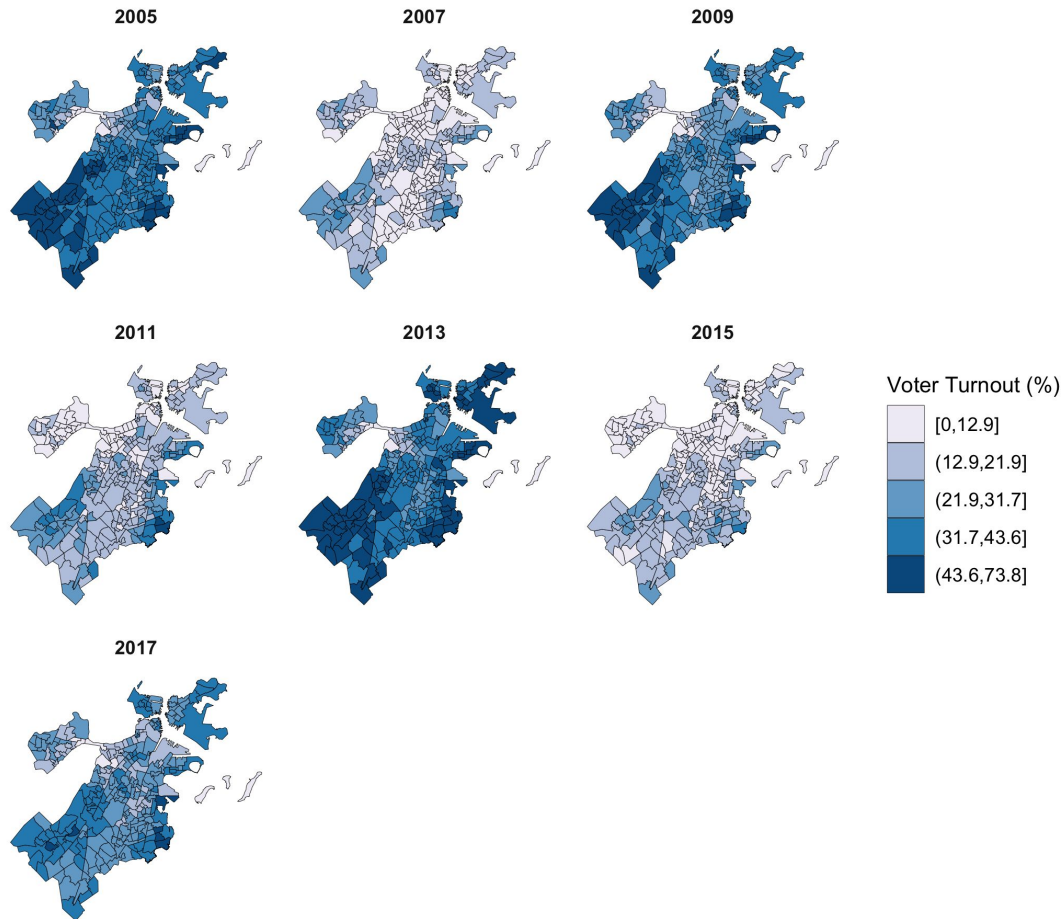
Intercepts and interviews

QUANTITATIVE INSIGHTS

1. TURNOUT IS MUCH HIGHER IN MAYORAL ELECTIONS THAN OTHER MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS.

Voter Turnout in Boston

% of registered voters who voted in the municipal election



**2. LOW TURNOUT NEIGHBORHOODS ARE
CONSISTENTLY LOW, BUT HIGH TURNOUT
NEIGHBORHOODS ARE NOT CONSISTENTLY
HIGH.**

We calculated the **BOTTOM 10** and **TOP 10** precincts by turnout for each of the 7 municipal elections from 2007 - 2017.

BOTTOM 10:

14 precincts

3 wards

43% of precincts were in the bottom in all elections

7% of precincts were in the bottom only once

TOP 10:

30 precincts

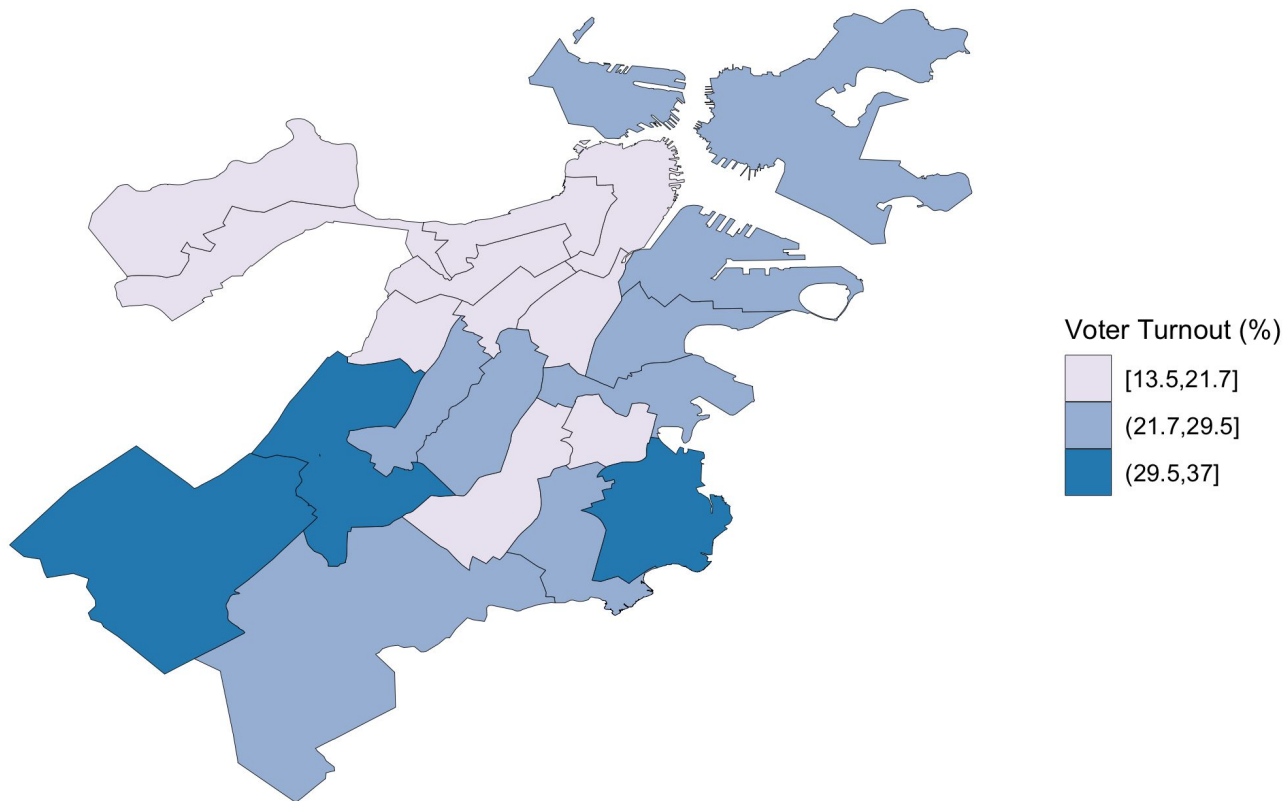
10 wards

7% of precincts were in the top in all elections

50% of precincts were in the top only once

Voter Turnout in Boston's Wards

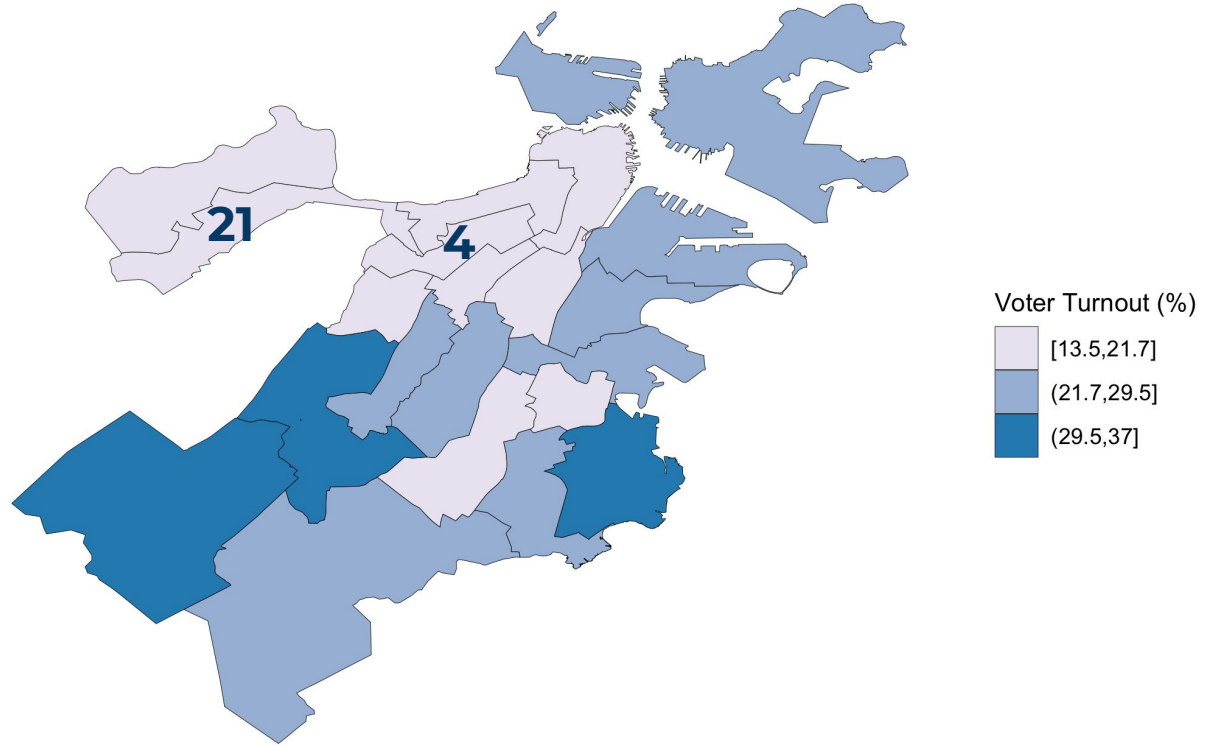
% of registered voters who voted in the municipal election, averaged over wards



LOWEST TURNOUT WARDS

Voter Turnout in Boston's Wards

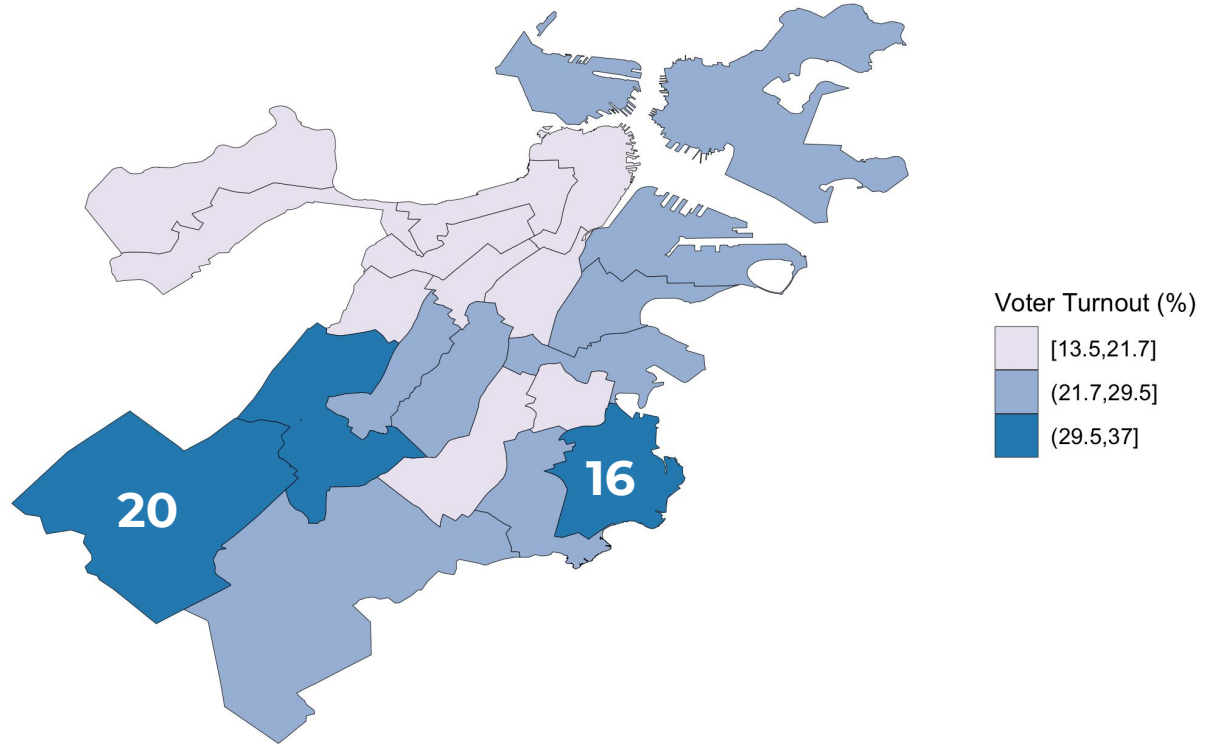
% of registered voters who voted in the municipal election, averaged over wards



HIGHEST TURNOUT WARDS

Voter Turnout in Boston's Wards

% of registered voters who voted in the municipal election, averaged over wards



3. LOW TURNOUT AREAS TEND TO HAVE LARGE % OF RESIDENTS WHO ARE:

- BELOW THE POVERTY LINE**
- NEW TO BOSTON**
- STUDENTS**

QUALITATIVE INSIGHTS

40+ intercepts

MBTA, homeless shelter, HKS cafeteria, polling stations

1 min - 30 mins conversations





We visited

LOW TURNOUT

(Ward 21 Precincts 2 and 3,
Ward 4 Precinct 10)

HIGH TURNOUT

(Ward 16 Precinct 12)

areas

WHAT BOSTON HAD TO SAY

“Local elections? All I care about is getting Trump out of office!”

“I’m just lazy!”

“I love democracies and what a privilege! Everybody should participate in a democracy.”

“Didn’t do enough research on the candidates, I’m not educated on this stuff and it’s not always mentioned on the ballot, what’s on the ballot isn’t clear.”

“It’s our civic duty and I’m excited to vote. Also, I wanted stickers!”

“It impacts things that can be felt directly like affordable housing/zoning.”

“City council elections have more impact than the state in terms of development, city budgets, representation.”

“Didn’t know enough about it and didn’t check candidate information.”

“I was busy subletting and fixing my move.”

“Everything is political, we need to exercise the power to vote, use this privilege.”

VOTERS



NEWS JUNKIE

Always in the know
about current events,
both local and
national

*"I vote to get the
services we need."*



ACTIVIST

Active community
member; passionate
about civic duty and
engagement

*"People who look like
me have died just for
registering to vote."*



BOSTONIAN

Longtime resident;
family, friends, or
community members
always vote

*"Mom always says, 'If
you don't vote, you
can't complain.'"*

REGULAR VOTERS

typically had at least one of the following reasons for voting:

- (1) The people around them vote
- (2) They tie their vote to a concrete impact
- (3) They feel voting is a duty
- (4) They've made voting a habit

NON-VOTERS



STUDENT

Informed about registering and voting by school; unlikely to vote if inconvenient

“We went to the wrong place. It’s not clear where we’re supposed to vote.”



NEW RESIDENT

New to Boston; feels disconnected from the city and unsure of what it does for them

“City government isn’t accessible to me. I don’t even know what they do.”



BUSY BEE

Busy with work and life; doesn’t feel like voting in local elections is a priority

“I’m trying to make ends meet. I don’t have time to vote.”

NON-VOTERS

typically had at least one of the following reasons for **NOT** voting:

- (1) They don't think it's important
- (2) They feel voting is inconvenient
- (3) They lack a connection with the city
- (4) They didn't have enough access to information

KEY QUALITATIVE INSIGHTS

Probability
of voting
depends
on...

AWARENESS

Do they know an election is occurring, and how/where to vote?

CONVENIENCE

Do they think that voting is a hassle?

...with
roughly
equal
importance

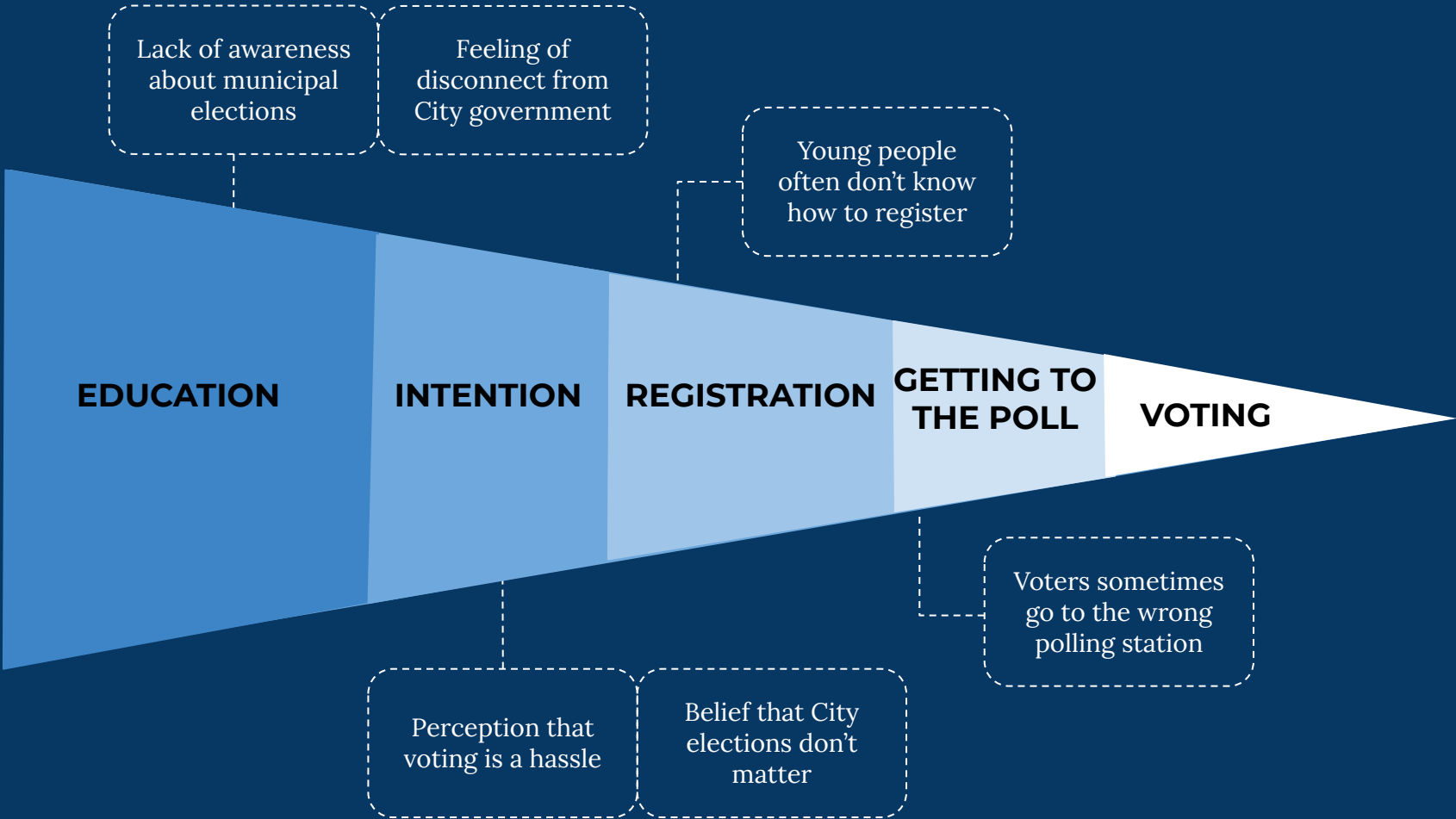
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INTEREST

Do they care about the election or civic duty?

NETWORKS

Do the people around them vote?



Lack of awareness about municipal elections

Feeling of disconnect from City government

Young people often don't know how to register

EDUCATION

INTENTION

REGISTRATION

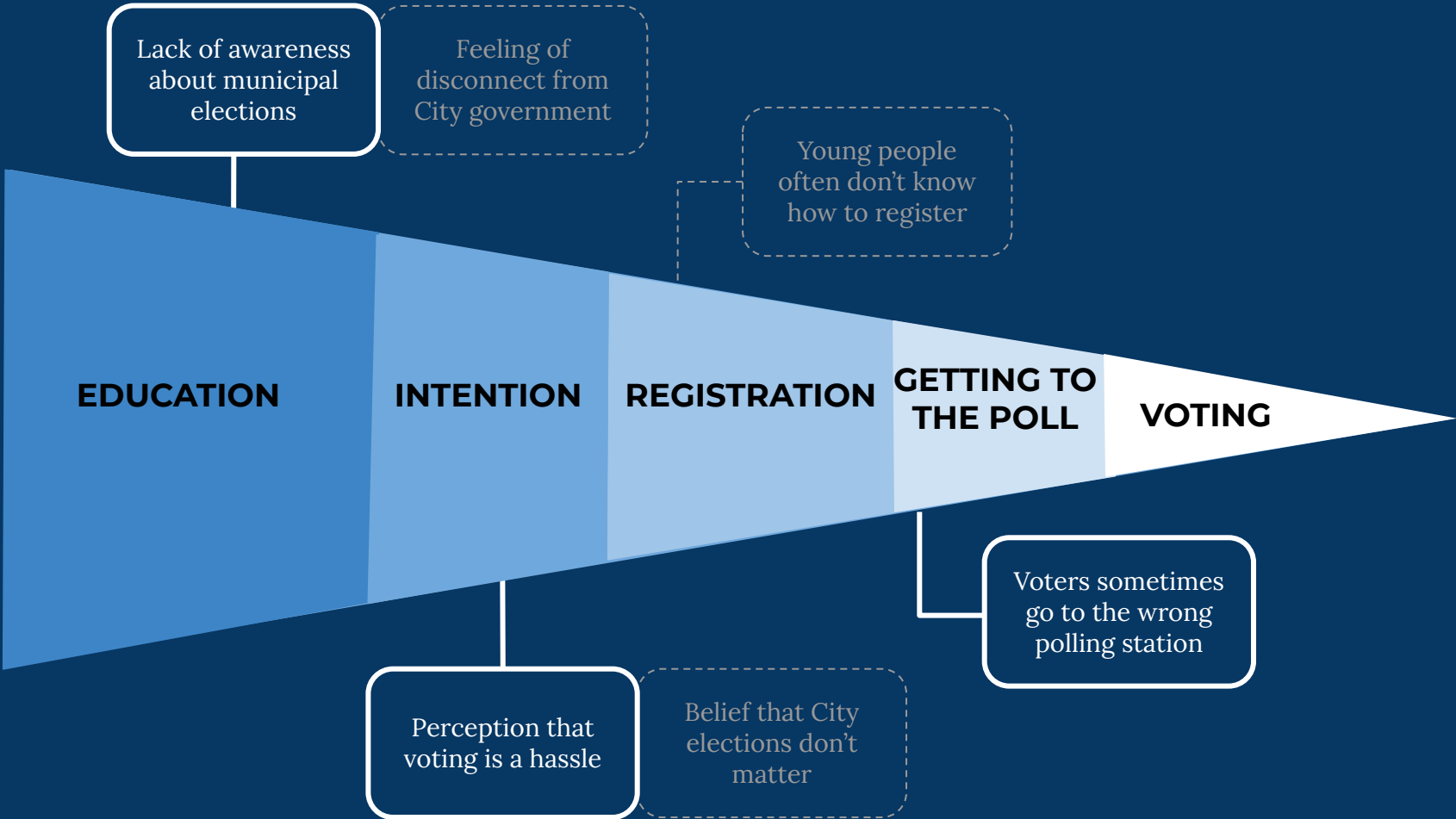
GETTING TO THE POLL

VOTING

Perception that voting is a hassle

Belief that City elections don't matter

Voters sometimes go to the wrong polling station



Lack of awareness about municipal elections

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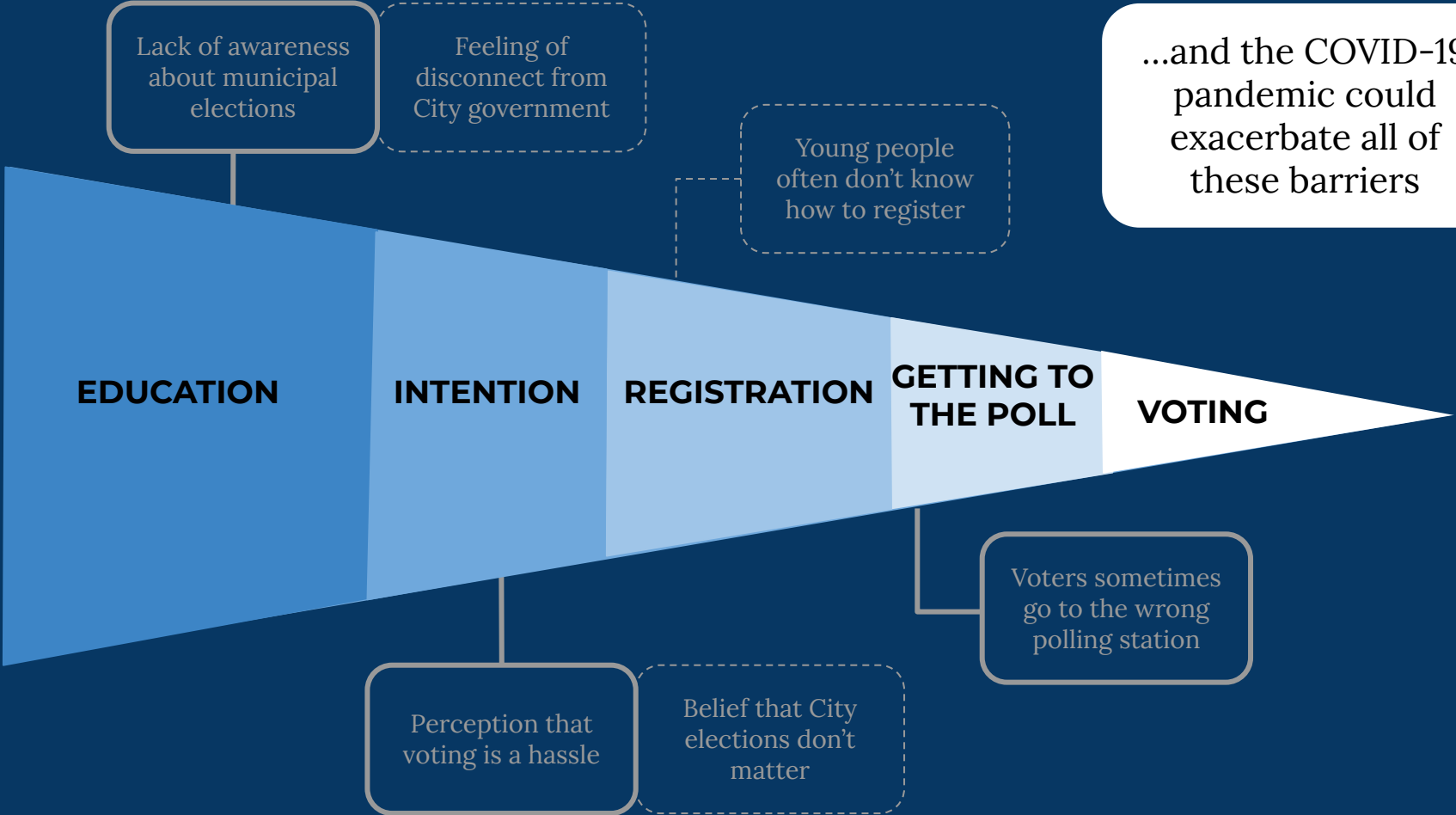
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Our records show that **you voted in 3 of the past 3 city elections:**

- 09.26.2019 (COUNCIL): VOTED
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- 10.07.2017 (MAYOR): VOTED

You're in the top 5% of Bostonians who have a perfect voting record!

Thank you for doing your civic duty! Stay engaged and vote for your city councilor in the upcoming election on **September 1**.

Jane Doe
111 Main St
Boston, MA
01111

CITY of BOSTON

VOTING IN BOSTON IS EASY AND CONVENIENT!

CITY of BOSTON


 **VOTE IN PERSON**

Vote on Election Day, September 1st from 7am - 9pm at your polling location:

**123 School Street,
Boston, MA, 02222**

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Español dentro 中文里面 Tiếng việt bên trong

For more information, please contact us: boston.gov/elections 617-635-8683

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(2) An envelope to easily mail your application

CITY of BOSTON

Checklist for requesting an absentee ballot:

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- Mail your application.** Use the pre-stamped and addressed envelope attached.
- Vote!** Once you receive your ballot in the mail, complete and return it to cast your vote.

Do you want to vote by mail?

Return this application by mail by August 15, 2020.

Address at which you are registered to vote:

Mail my ballot to: Same as above OR

Street _____

Boston, MA _____ Zip code _____

Phone number _____

Voter: Sign here.

I certify under penalty of perjury under the laws of the State of Massachusetts that the contents of this application are true and correct.

X _____

Need help?

Learn more at boston.gov/elections

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→ **VOTE**
Absentee ballot or at
polling station


NUDGE MAILER

Encourage voting and inform of upcoming election

VOTE BY MAIL INFO PACKAGE

Reduce friction in voting process

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60% of Boston residents who did not vote in the 2017 election are eligible to vote in the upcoming election on September 1st. Join your neighborhood on the upcoming election day.

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AWARENESS INTEREST NETWORK



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[Redacted]

Mail my ballot to: Same as above OR

Street _____
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Phone number _____

Voter: Sign here.
I certify under penalty of perjury under the laws of the State of Massachusetts that the contents of this application are true and correct.

[Redacted Signature]

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AWARENESS CONVENIENCE



VOTE

Absentee ballot or at polling station

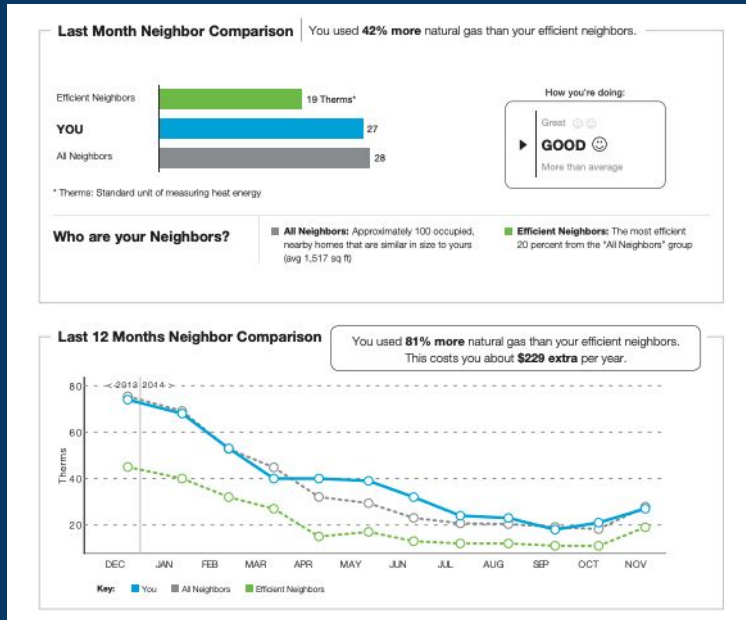
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Mailed “nudges” are proven to change behavior.



Personalized tips | For a complete list of energy saving investments and smart purchases, visit utilityco.com/rebates.

Quick Fix

Something you can do right now

- Open your shades on winter days**
Taking advantage of winter's direct sunlight can make a dent in your heating costs. Open blinds and other window treatments during the day to capture free heat and light.
South-facing windows have the most potential for heat gain, and the sun is most intense from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.
When you let the sun in, remember to lower the thermostat by a few degrees. These two steps combined are what save money and energy.

Smart Purchase

An affordable way to save more

- Program your thermostat**
A programmable thermostat can automatically adjust your heat or air conditioning when you're away, then return to your preferred temperature when you're home to enjoy it.
If you don't already have a programmable thermostat, look for one at your local home improvement store. For comfort and convenience, be sure to program your thermostat with energy-efficient settings.
If you need help installing or programming your thermostat, consult your manual or call the manufacturer for assistance.

Smart Purchase

An affordable way to save more

- Weatherstrip windows and doors**
Windows and doors can be responsible for up to 25% of heat loss in winter for a typical home.
If you're comfortable doing the task yourself, you can weatherize your home in just a few hours. Seal windows for about \$1 each with rope caulk, or install more permanent weatherstripping for \$8-\$10 per window. Also, install sweeps at the bottom of exterior doors.
A professional can help you with this work if you prefer.

SAVE UP TO \$10 PER YEAR

SAVE UP TO \$65 PER YEAR

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OPOWER HOME ENERGY: Social comparison and action steps mailer decreased energy usage

COVID-19 restrictions sparked focus on vote-by-mail.

NEWS & COMMENTARY

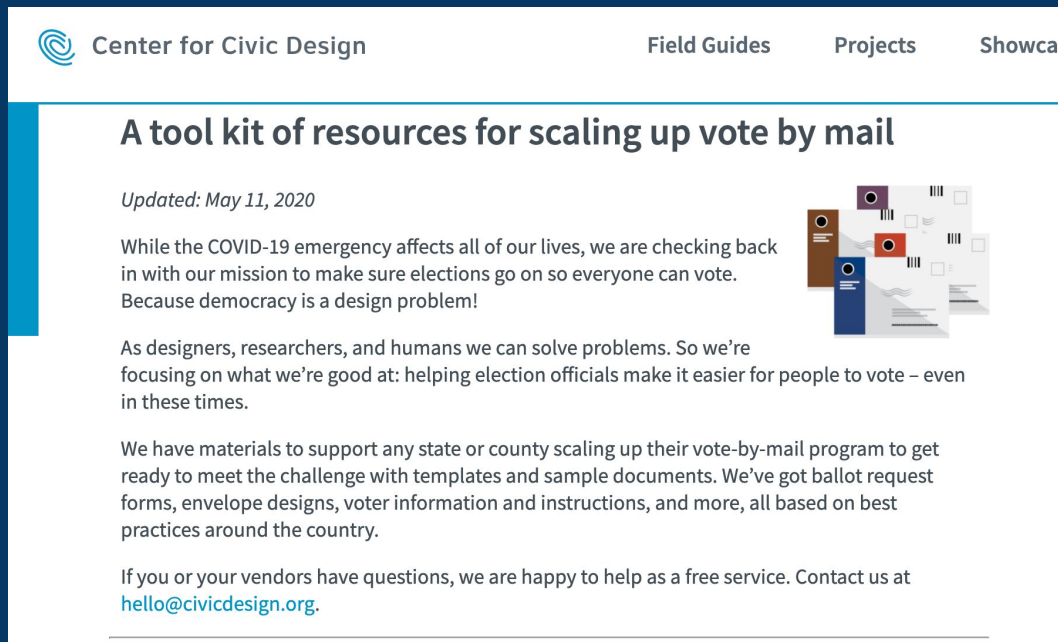
This is No Time to Play Politics with our Democracy

Opinion

We Should Never Have to Vote in Person Again

Our new paper shows vote-by-mail dramatically boosted Colorado's turnout. It could change this fall's election and every election after.

The race to change how America votes



The screenshot shows the website for the Center for Civic Design. The navigation bar includes the logo, the name 'Center for Civic Design', and links for 'Field Guides', 'Projects', and 'Showca'. The main content area features a blue vertical bar on the left and a white background for the text. The title is 'A tool kit of resources for scaling up vote by mail', with an update date of 'May 11, 2020'. The text discusses the impact of COVID-19 on elections and the organization's mission to ensure everyone can vote. It includes a call to action for designers and researchers to help election officials. An illustration of various ballot forms and envelopes is shown on the right. At the bottom, there is contact information for the organization.

Center for Civic Design

Field Guides Projects Showca

A tool kit of resources for scaling up vote by mail

Updated: May 11, 2020

While the COVID-19 emergency affects all of our lives, we are checking back in with our mission to make sure elections go on so everyone can vote. Because democracy is a design problem!

As designers, researchers, and humans we can solve problems. So we're focusing on what we're good at: helping election officials make it easier for people to vote – even in these times.

We have materials to support any state or county scaling up their vote-by-mail program to get ready to meet the challenge with templates and sample documents. We've got ballot request forms, envelope designs, voter information and instructions, and more, all based on best practices around the country.

If you or your vendors have questions, we are happy to help as a free service. Contact us at hello@civicdesign.org.

THERE IS AN UPCOMING ELECTION ON SEPTEMBER 1ST



Jane,

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20% of Bostonians have voted in more city elections than you.

Join your neighbors and be an outstanding citizen by voting for your city councilor in the upcoming election on **September 1.**

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FRONT OF MAILER

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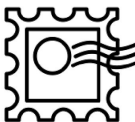
INFREQUENT

+

FREQUENT

VOTERS

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BACK OF MAILER

STAY SAFE WHILE VOTING DURING COVID-19

CITY of BOSTON

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VOTE BY MAIL

Mail-in ballots are available to all Bostonians to help keep you safe.

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GENERAL

+

COVID

CONTEXT

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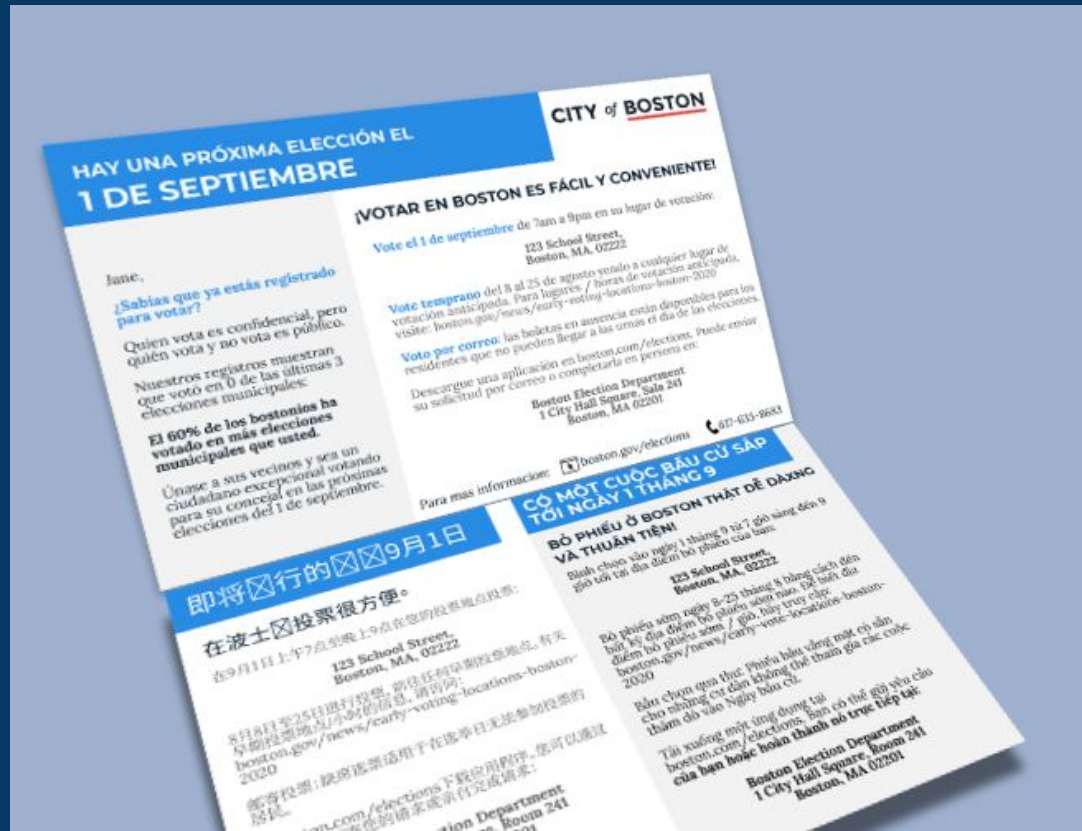


boston.gov/elections



617-635-8683

INSIDE OF MAILER



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Phone number _____

Voter: Sign here.

I certify under penalty of perjury under the laws of the State of Massachusetts that the contents of this application are true and correct.

X

Need help?

Learn more at
boston.gov/elections

Contact us

election@boston.gov
617-635-8683

NUDGE MAILER

Encourage voting and inform of
upcoming election

VOTE BY MAIL INFO PACKAGE

Reduce friction in voting process

You are entitled to vote early by mail.

Because of COVID-19, Massachusetts is allowing more voters to vote absentee. Voting by mail is safe, secure, and easy.

To get you started, this envelope includes:

(1) Instructions for requesting an absentee ballot and how to request help or more information.

(2) An envelope to easily mail your application

CITY of BOSTON

Checklist for requesting an absentee ballot:

- Complete absentee ballot application.**
The form is enclosed, or you can do it online.
- Mail your application.**
Use the pre-stamped and addressed envelope attached.
- Vote!**
Once you receive your ballot in the mail, complete and return it to cast your vote.

INFO + APPLICATION TO VOTE ABSENTEE

Do you want to vote by mail?

Return this application by mail by **August 15, 2020**.

Address at which you are registered to vote:

Mail my ballot to: Same as above OR

Street _____

Boston, MA _____ Zip code _____

Phone number _____

Voter: Sign here.

I certify under penalty of perjury under the laws of the State of Massachusetts that the contents of this application are true and correct.

X

Need help?

Learn more at
[boston.gov/](https://boston.gov/elections)
elections

Contact us
election@boston.gov
617-635-8683

Tiene derecho a votar temprano por correo.

Debido a COVID-19, Massachusetts está permitiendo que más votantes voten en ausencia. Votar por correo es seguro y fácil.

Para comenzar, este sobre incluye:

(1) Instrucciones para solicitar una boleta en ausencia y cómo solicitar ayuda o más información.

(2) Un sobre para enviar fácilmente su solicitud.

CITY of BOSTON

Lista de verificación para solicitar una boleta en ausencia:

- Complete la solicitud de boleta en ausencia.**
El formulario está adjunto o puede hacerlo en línea.
- Envíe su solicitud por correo.**
Use el sobre pre-sellado y con la dirección adjunto.
- ¡Vote!**
Una vez que reciba su boleta por correo, complétela y devuélvala para emitir su voto.

Bạn có quyền bỏ phiếu sớm qua thư.

Vì COVID-19, Massachusetts đang cho phép nhiều cử tri bỏ phiếu vắng mặt. Bỏ phiếu qua thư là an toàn, an toàn và dễ dàng.

Để giúp bạn bắt đầu, phong bì này bao gồm:

(1) Hướng dẫn yêu cầu bỏ phiếu kín và cách yêu cầu trợ giúp hoặc biết thêm thông tin.

(2) Một phong bì để dễ dàng gửi đơn đăng ký của bạn

CITY of BOSTON

Các bước để yêu cầu bỏ phiếu kín:

- Hoàn thành việc bỏ phiếu kín.**
Các hình thức được đính kèm, hoặc bạn có thể làm nó trực tuyến.
- Gửi đơn của bạn.**
Sử dụng phong bì dán sẵn và địa chỉ đính kèm.
- Bỏ phiếu!**
Khi bạn nhận được phiếu bầu của mình qua thư, hãy hoàn thành và gửi lại để bỏ phiếu.

您有权通 件提前投票。

由于COVID-19, 马 塞州允 更多 民 投票缺席。通 件投票是安全, 可靠且容易的。

了帮助您入门, 此信封包括:

(1) 有关 求缺席 票的 明以及如何 求帮助或更多信息。

(2) 信封, 可 松 寄您的申

CITY of BOSTON

求缺席投票的步 :

- 完整的缺席 票申 。**
表格已附上, 或者您可以在 行。
- 寄您的申 。**
使用随附的 先盖章并已 址的信封。
- 投票!**
一旦您收到 件中的 票, 填写并退回以 行投票。

¿Quieres votar por correo?

Devuelva esta solicitud por correo antes del 15 de agosto de 2020.

Dirección en la que está registrado para votar:

Envíe mi boleta a: Igual que la anterior O

Calle

Boston, MA Código postal

Número de teléfono

Votante: Firme aquí.

Certifico bajo pena de perjurio según las leyes del estado de Massachusetts que el contenido de esta solicitud es verdadero y correcto.

X

¿Necesitas ayuda?

Obtenga más información en boston.gov/elections

Contáctenos
election@boston.gov
617-635-8683

Bạn có muốn bỏ phiếu qua thư?

Trả lại đơn này qua thư trước ngày 15 tháng 8 năm 2020.

Địa chỉ mà bạn đã đăng ký để bỏ phiếu:

Gửi phiếu bầu của tôi tới: Tương tự như trên HOẶC

đường phố

Boston, MA Mã Bưu Chính

Số điện thoại

Cử tri: Ký vào đây.

Tôi xác nhận theo hình phạt khai man theo luật của Tiểu bang Massachusetts rằng nội dung của đơn này là đúng và chính xác.

X

Cần giúp đỡ?

Tìm hiểu thêm tại boston.gov/elections

Liên hệ chúng tôi
election@
boston.gov
617-635-8683

您想通 件投票 ?

于2020年8月15日之前通 件退回 申 。

您注册投票的地址:

将我的 票 寄至: 与上述相同或

街

马 塞州波士 政

号

民: 在 里 名。

我保 根据马 塞州法律 罪作出的 是
本申 的内容真 正确。

X

需要帮忙?

在**boston.gov/lections**上了解更多信息

系我
election@boston.gov
617-635-8683

TRANSLATED INSERT

Vote by mail in the September 1 municipal elections.

Voting by mail is safe and the process is easy.

Requesting a ballot is your first step.

Complete and return the form included in this envelope to get started.



Return Address
Boston, MA

Stamp



Jane Doe
1 Boston Way
Boston, MA 02101

Vote por correo en las elecciones municipales del 1 de septiembre.

Votar por correo es seguro y el proceso es fácil. Solicitar una boleta es su primer paso. Complete y devuelva el formulario incluido en este sobre para comenzar.

在9月1日的城市中以件表决。通件投票是安全的，并且程很容易。申票是您的第一步。完成并返回此信封中包含的表格以开始使用。

Bỏ phiếu qua thư trong cuộc bầu cử thành phố ngày 1 tháng 9.

Bỏ phiếu qua thư là an toàn và quá trình dễ dàng. Yêu cầu một lá phiếu là bước đầu tiên của bạn. Hoàn thành và trả lại mẫu có trong bản phát triển này để bắt đầu.

Absentee application return envelope

To be opened only by Boston
Election Commission

Mail this envelope
by **August 15** to
receive your ballot
in time for the
September election.



BOSTON ELECTION COMMISSION
1 CITY HALL SQUARE, ROOM 241
BOSTON, MA 02201
UNITED STATES

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

First Class Postage Required



BOSTON ELECTION COMMISSION
1 CITY HALL SQUARE, ROOM 241
BOSTON, MA 02201
UNITED STATES

Sobre de devolución de solicitud en ausencia

Envíe este sobre antes del 15 de agosto para recibir su boleta a tiempo para las elecciones de septiembre.

缺席申 回程信封

在8月15日之前寄出信封，以便在9月大之前及收到您的票。

Phong bì nộp đơn xin vắng mặt

Giữ phong bì này trước ngày 15 tháng 8 để nhận phiếu bầu của bạn kịp thời cho cuộc bầu cử tháng Chín.

ENVELOPE TO VOTER

PRE-STAMPED & ADDRESSED RETURN ENVELOPE

USER TESTING

INTERVIEWED 26 USERS

13 for the Nudge Mailer and 13 for the Vote By Mail Info Package

21 BOSTON-AREA RESIDENTS

recruited from our personal networks and nextdoor.com; varied in age (20s to 80s), gender, and political interest (non-voters and longtime voters)

5 NON BOSTON-AREA RESIDENTS

recruited from UserTesting.com and paid to give quality feedback

NUDGE MAILER

“Turn around the negative language: make it say ‘become one of the outstanding citizens by voting.’”

“Avoid red ink, and use the blue instead. Red makes me think people are making fun of me or criticizing me. And when it’s used for the date, it feels like something bad is going to happen.”

“I would never use a QR code. Include a phone number and website link instead.”

“I like seeing the percentage of people who voted. It’s more impactful and less creepy than saying ‘the number of people or households in your neighborhood’.”

VOTE BY MAIL INFO PACKAGE

“I love the checklist on the side. Overall, it’s well organized, simple, easy to follow, and very clearly coming from the City of Boston.”

“The application deadline should be bigger.”

“A little colour wouldn’t hurt. I tend to read things that catch my attention and skim otherwise. Adding some bold colours to important pieces of information would help.”

“What do you mean by ‘early vote by mail’? Are we referring to a specific thing within early voting, or was ‘early’ just a modifier?”

KEY TAKEAWAYS

NUDGE MAILER

1. Balance accountability and creepiness
2. Positive language works better than negative
3. Avoid using red ink

VOTE BY MAIL PACKAGE

1. Make sure all components look official
2. Include stamped envelope and clear instructions
3. Highlight the deadline

OUR PROCESS



DISCOVERY

Framing the problem

USER RESEARCH

Data analysis
Intercepts & interviews

PROTOTYPING

Prototype solutions
Test on users
Iterate!

RECOMMENDATIONS

Share findings
Deliver final products

THERE IS AN UPCOMING ELECTION ON SEPTEMBER 1ST

Jane,

Congratulations, you're a frequent voter!

Who you vote for is confidential, but who votes and doesn't vote is public.

Our records show that you voted in 3 of the past 3 city elections:

09.26.2019 (COUNCIL): VOTED
10.05.2019 (COUNCIL): VOTED
10.07.2017 (MAYOR): VOTED

You're in the top 5% of Bostonians who have a perfect voting record!

Thank you for doing your civic duty! Stay engaged and vote for your city councilor in the upcoming election on **September 1**.



Jane Doe
111 Main St
Boston, MA
01111

CITY of **BOSTON**

VOTING IN BOSTON IS EASY AND CONVENIENT!

CITY of **BOSTON**

VOTE IN PERSON

Vote on Election Day, September 1st from 7am - 9pm at your polling location:

**123 School Street,
Boston, MA, 02222**

Vote Early August 8th - 25th by going to any early voting polling location.

For early voting locations/hours, visit:
boston.gov/news/early-voting-locations-boston-2020

VOTE BY MAIL

Absentee ballots are available to residents who can't get to the polls on election day.

Download an application at boston.com/elections. You can either mail your application to or complete one in person at:

**Boston Election Department
1 City Hall Square, Room 241
Boston, MA 02201**


Español dentro

中文里面

Tiếng việt bên trong

For more information, please contact us:

 boston.gov/elections

 617-635-8683

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Street _____

Boston, MA _____ Zip code _____

Phone number _____

Voter: Sign here.

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X

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+ MEMO

Detailing findings and further ideas

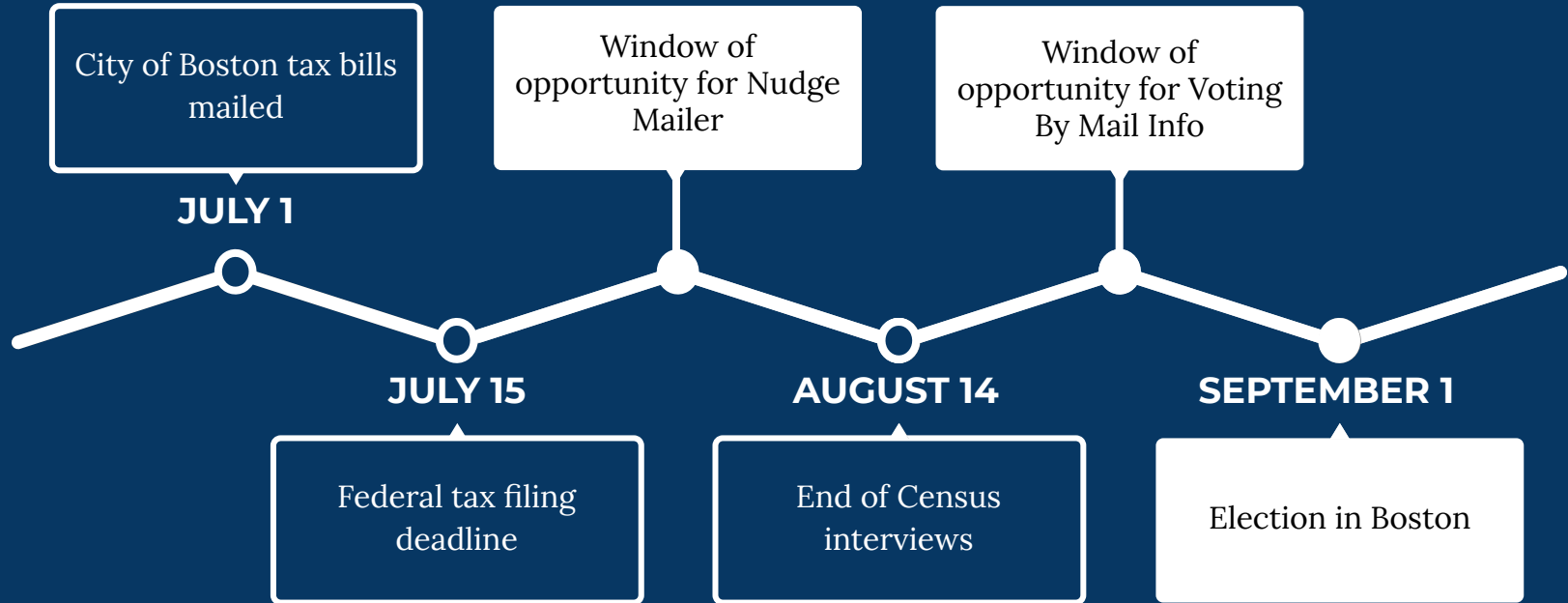
NUDGE MAILER

Encourage voting and inform of
upcoming election

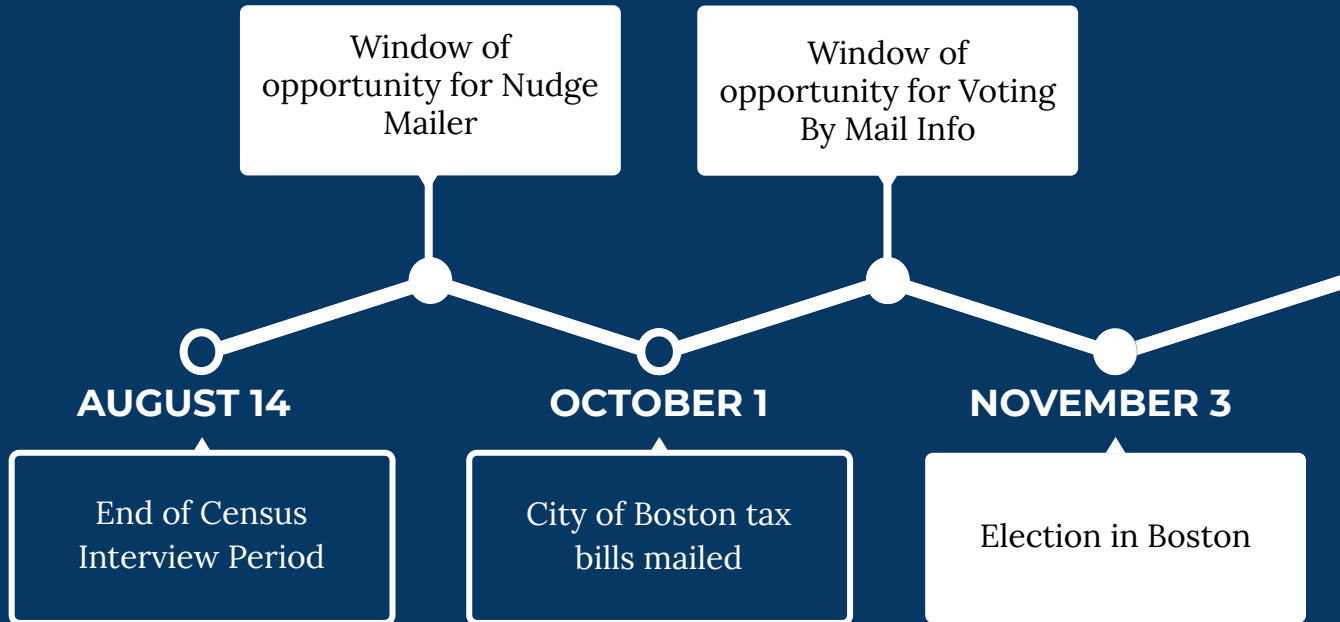
VOTE BY MAIL INFO PACKAGE

Reduce friction in voting process

TIMELINE 1 (SEPT)



TIMELINE 2 (NOV)



ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

COMMUNICATIONS

NETWORKS

+

PROMOTIONS

LEGISLATIVE
CHANGE

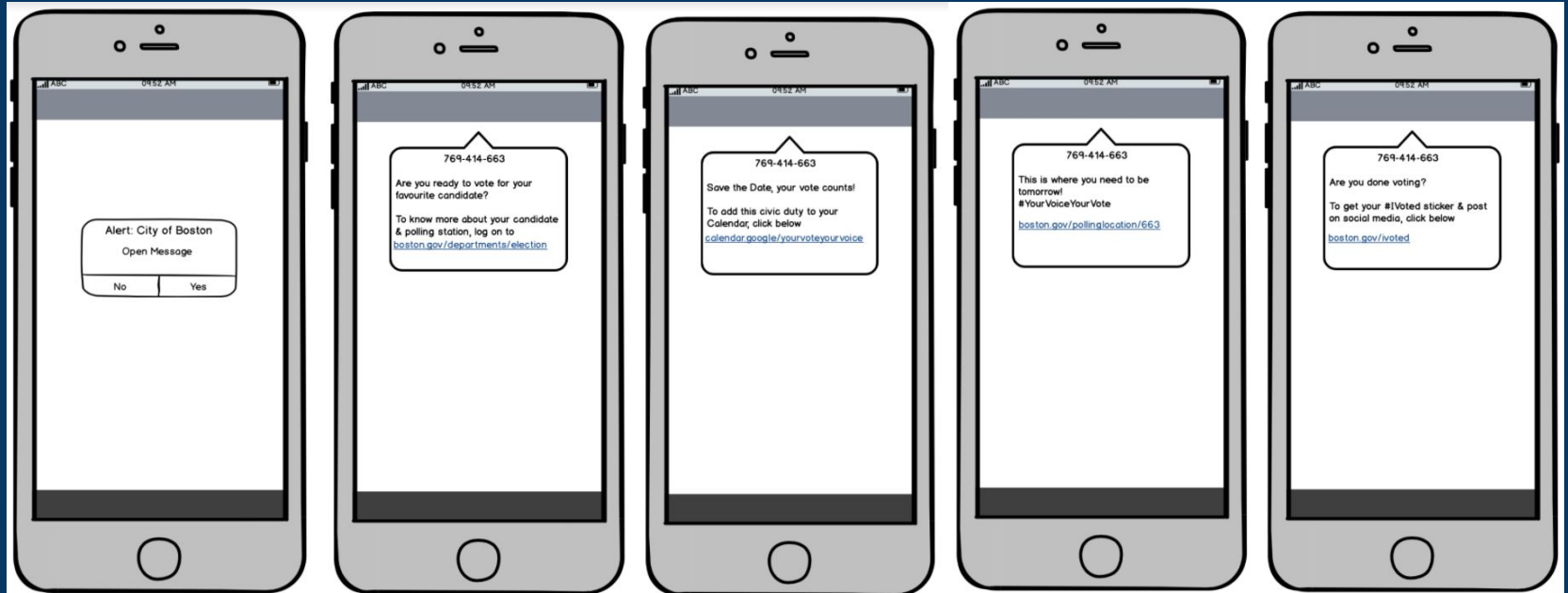
EVALUATION CRITERIA

Memo recommendations were evaluated based on:

1. **Feasibility:** What is the time-horizon? Is it legal? What's the cost?
2. **Value:** What is the short-term and long-term value to the City? Do we have evidence of impact in other cities?
3. **Sustainability:** How easy is it to maintain over time?

COMMUNICATIONS

Digital voting reminders would boost awareness and convenience by making key information (i.e. voting dates, poll location) easily accessible.



NETWORKS

Leverage the power of networks by promoting upcoming elections and distributing information via existing:

1. Community centers and cultural groups;
2. Student vote organizations at university and colleges; and
3. Organizations committed to helping new residents of Boston

PROMOTIONS

Reduce friction in the voting process by providing free public transportation on election day, and raise awareness about upcoming elections by using city-owned ad spaces.



LEGISLATIVE/POLICY CHANGES

Making voting more convenient for Bostonians by:

1. Making Election Day a holiday
2. Implementing regional ballot alignment
3. Increasing the accessibility of provisional ballots
4. Offering same day voter registration

THANKS!