Voter’s Edge 2016
assessment and learnings
May 18, 2017
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Impact on confidence in choices

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User-Centered Design and Feedback

Front-end user testing

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I. Executive Summary
The 2016 Voter’s Edge expansion brought opportunities for refining the Voter’s Edge interface, testing new strategies and systems for data collection, and reaching wider audiences both in California and in Illinois and New York. Our in-depth evaluation of the site’s usage and impact, data collection processes, and partnership strategies forms a nuanced and encouraging picture of the success of Voter’s Edge in the three states that we served in 2016.

Usage and Engagement
In 2016, 1.9 million people turned to Voter’s Edge for pre-election research. This included 1.2 million Californians who used Voter’s Edge California—built in partnership with the LWVCEF—before the general election. We also saw promising starts in Illinois and New York, which represented markets that were new to both Voter’s Edge and MapLight. The expansion of Voter’s Edge to these states also provided an important opportunity for staff to test theories for scaling the Voter’s Edge model to reach new and larger audiences with important civic information about elections.

In all three states, site usage and engagement improved significantly between the primaries and the general election, as we refined the site’s user interface and honed our process for working with media outlets and civic engagement groups. Site usage peaked in the week leading up to the general election. Interestingly, while usage increased, the average time users spent and the number of pages they visited dropped on Election Day, suggesting that Voter’s Edge may have been used to inform last-minute voting—possibly even at the voting booth.

Site usage concentrated in major cities, especially in Illinois and New York, where significant amounts of traffic came from Chicago and New York City, likely due to our partnerships in these metropolitan areas.

In 2016, we saw a significant shift from desktop usage to mobile devices—with nearly half of all Voter’s Edge usage in the general election coming from mobile devices and tablets. This indicates success for the mobile-responsive design of the new site and further bears out the hypothesis that people were actually using Voter’s Edge at the voting booth (as mobile usage increased dramatically on Election Day).

Demographics and Impact
Survey data suggests that Voter’s Edge was an extremely valuable tool to site users and improved significantly on our 2014 prototype. In 2014, 57% of survey respondents rated Voter’s Edge “very” or “extremely” useful, with most choosing “very,” while in 2016, an astounding 89% found the site “very” or “extremely” useful, and the vast majority of these chose “extremely.” Similar trends were observed in the site’s impact on users’ confidence in their choices and knowledge about the races on their ballots. While respondents from all three states were largely positive about the site, Californians responded the most positively, likely due to the comprehensiveness of Voter’s Edge California.

Voter’s Edge was especially impactful on voting behavior in down-ballot state and local races, suggesting that our one-stop shop model for voter information remains highly valuable. Nearly three-quarters of survey respondents reported that they would vote for more offices as a result of Voter’s Edge, suggesting that Voter’s Edge functionally increases turnout in lower-level races. Moreover, high percentages of respondents reported that they would consider different ballot measure choices and candidates at the state and local levels. A lower percentage of
respondents indicated they were considering different choices on congressional candidates, suggesting that at the federal level, users were more likely to come in with pre-formed opinions—but that Voter’s Edge may have caused many to think critically about their choices.

Demographic data from Google Analytics suggests that Voter’s Edge was particularly successful at reaching younger voters, who were overrepresented among our users relative to their share of voter turnout in all three states. This may reflect the higher likelihood for young voters to use online tools for civic engagement. It is also an encouraging sign that Voter’s Edge provides a useful function for young voters, who are an underrepresented group in U.S. elections.

However, data from our surveys suggests that one area where Voter’s Edge can improve is in reaching people in other underrepresented groups, including people with lower education and income levels and people from racial/ethnic minorities. These groups were all significantly underrepresented in our survey results relative to their share of the voting population. The survey results are not perfectly representative of Voter’s Edge users, and some of this effect may be due to the skew in who chose to respond to the survey (respondents were older and likely richer, whiter, and more highly educated than site users as a whole). Nonetheless, our evaluation suggests there is an opportunity to reach a wider, more diverse population with Voter’s Edge information.

That said, Voter’s Edge was particularly successful with Hispanic users. This is likely due to the professional Spanish-language translation that we provided on Voter’s Edge California, which was used by over 100,000 people before the general election. Hispanic survey respondents formed more strongly positive impressions of the site than survey respondents as a whole.

**Data Collection and Candidate Participation**

In order to scale to new states, Voter’s Edge developed new system for collecting federal, state, and local election data, in particular grappling with the challenges of non-standardized data at the level of local election authorities.

Voter’s Edge built a unique and comprehensive database of electoral districts and elected offices in California, Illinois, and New York. This database was used to match users’ addresses to their ballots, and is also one of the less obvious value adds of the project—creating a political district database that could potentially be utilized for other civic technology applications in the future. This represents an incidental but very significant success of Voter’s Edge in 2016.

Voter’s Edge provided at least basic information on over 11,000 candidates across California, Illinois, and New York. In many places, it was either the only guide or the most comprehensive guide available for federal, state, and local elections.

We deployed a new model for collecting candidate data in 2016: inviting candidates to fill out their own Voter’s Edge profiles. Candidate participation was enabled by the newly developed data entry system, and ultimately 29% of candidates across all three states participated in the guide. Candidate participation was significantly higher in California (41%), where the LWVCEF’s broad network of volunteers handled candidate outreach, than in Illinois (13%) or New York (5%). Participation was higher in contested races, with 34% of candidates participating overall, 45% in California, 20% in Illinois, and 8% in New York.

This pattern demonstrates the importance of a large and recognized network, like the LWVCEF, to effectively execute a candidate participation model. Candidate participation works best where strong local relationships exist to incentivize participation. The Voter’s Edge partnership
with the Chicago Sun-Times is a particularly telling example: during the general election, while 19% of candidates in contested races participated in Illinois overall, 81% of candidates in competitive races within the Sun-Times coverage area participated. This was because the Sun-Times, as part of our partnership, required candidates to participate in Voter’s Edge before they would be eligible for a Sun-Times endorsement.

**Partnerships**

Voter’s Edge developed successful partnerships with 42 media outlets and civic engagement organizations to expand the reach of the site. We provided these groups with co-branded subdomains, customizable versions of the Voter’s Edge website with dedicated URLs and custom branding. We also developed embeddable widgets that allowed groups to easily share Voter’s Edge on their websites, a tool that was used by 81 groups. Over the course of the year, we substantially improved our pitching and communications processes with partners in order to minimize the effort required on their part and maximize the impact of our work together.

Our experiences showed that partners drove significant amounts of traffic in each state—36% of site visits in California, 42% in Illinois, and 52% in New York. Users of our partner subdomains tended to engage more deeply with Voter’s Edge content than visitors to the main Voter’s Edge site. Co-branded subdomains were more effective than embedded widgets in terms of driving site traffic.

**II. Voter’s Edge Overview**

**Background**

MapLight, a nonprofit, nonpartisan research organization, provides timely and in-depth civic information to citizens, journalists, and advocacy groups with the goal of empowering people to hold their government accountable. MapLight’s online voter guide, Voter’s Edge, is a “one-stop shop” for comprehensive, nonpartisan information about candidates and ballot measures, equipping voters with the unbiased information they need to vote in ways that reflect their own interests.

Since its launch in 2010, Voter’s Edge has expanded its reach and impact with each election cycle. In its first year, Voter’s Edge was just a set of pages on the main MapLight website that focused on funding for select statewide ballot measures in California. In 2012, Voter’s Edge expanded to offer comprehensive coverage of California statewide ballot measures on a standalone site, including summaries, funding for and against, endorsements, news, editorials, campaign ads, and more. By the 2014 election cycle, Voter’s Edge had begun to evolve into what it is today, covering federal and state-level candidates as well as statewide ballot measures.

That year also saw the creation of the Voter’s Edge California prototype for local coverage, built in partnership with the League of Women Voters of California Education Fund (LWVCEF). Voter’s Edge California gave Californians access to detailed information about their local candidates and ballot measures in addition to full coverage at the state and federal levels. In 2014, Voter’s Edge California reached 680,000 visitors—the equivalent of one in 11 California voters.

For the 2016 election cycle, MapLight renewed its partnership with the LWVCEF to build on the successful 2014 California pilot, and also expanded this in-depth coverage model to Illinois and New York, giving voters in all three states access to meaningful information about their primary
and general election ballots. The site’s interface was redesigned to improve ease of use and increase accessibility for Spanish-language voters and other underserved groups. The Voter’s Edge team conducted extensive outreach to media partners to ensure that voters, especially those in underrepresented communities, knew about and could access the site. In addition to improvements made to the user experience, Voter’s Edge expanded its content and developed systems for collecting data in new states.

**Key 2016 Successes**

- Voter’s Edge served 1.9 million people in 2016, with over 1.8 million users from California and promising starts in the new Illinois and New York markets (approximately 80,000 users each).
- Site usage and engagement increased steadily from the primaries to the general election, with over half a million users across the primaries and 1.3 million users in the month before Election Day.
- In California, over 100,000 people viewed the Spanish-language version of Voter’s Edge.
- Voter’s Edge positively impacted survey respondents. Overall, 89% found the site to be “very” or “extremely” useful, and large majorities reported increased knowledge, confidence, and likelihood of voting in down-ballot races. All of these metrics showed significant improvement from 2014, and strong performance in the new states.
- Voter’s Edge staff conducted extensive user testing throughout 2016 of the front-end user experience as well as the new Data Entry System for candidates. This approach allowed us to modify the site iteratively, greatly improving user experience.
- We introduced a feature called “My List” to help users track their voting choices (an improved version of the “My Ballot” feature on the 2014 site).
- In addition to comprehensive coverage of federal, state, and local elections, Voter’s Edge redesigned its display of campaign finance data in all three states, added judicial ratings data in Illinois, and added descriptions of offices and guides to voting in each state.
- To match users’ addresses to their ballots, we created a database of information on districts and offices in California, Illinois, and New York that does not exist elsewhere.
- Voter’s Edge saw significant rates of candidate participation. In 2016, over 43% of California candidates participated on the site (thanks to the LWVCEF), while 17% of Illinois candidates and 7% of New York candidates participated.
- Forty-two partners—including NBC, ABC, Telemundo, the Chicago Sun-Times, and the NYC Campaign Finance Board—launched custom subdomains, greatly expanding the reach of Voter’s Edge.

**About This Assessment**

Our 2016 expansion brought opportunities for refining the Voter’s Edge interface, testing new strategies and systems, and reaching wide audiences in California, Illinois, and New York. The purpose of this assessment is to evaluate what worked in 2016 in order to inform future growth of the project and gain insight into voter information needs and behavior in the three states in which we were active. We hope that this report will also prove informative to other groups in the field of civic engagement.
In 2014, MapLight conducted an in-depth assessment of Voter’s Edge in the midterm election. Available online here, this evaluation concluded that the Voter’s Edge California prototype, which provided local ballot information in addition to federal and state, provided significant value to users and was a model worth replicating. By analyzing site traffic, survey results, widget and API usage, and feedback from user testing, we were also able to identify opportunities for reaching broader audiences and improving the site’s interface.

For 2016, we replicated many elements of the 2014 assessment in order to compare the two and measure changes in the site’s impact on voters. In addition, we have added new sections examining the systems for data collection that we developed as well as the outreach strategies that we pursued. Combining quantitative and qualitative data, this assessment builds a nuanced understanding of the site’s real-world user demand, enabling us to pinpoint its strengths and identify directions for improvement.

Some of our main research questions were:

- Who used Voter’s Edge, and did they find the site useful?
- What impact did Voter’s Edge have on users’ voting behavior and decisions?
- How did Voter’s Edge perform in California, and how did that compare with the new Illinois and New York sites?
- Were our systems for data collection successful and scalable?
- What outreach and distribution strategies work best for reaching a wide audience?

We compiled and analyzed several streams of data to address these questions from a variety of perspectives:

1. **Site usage and engagement (Google Analytics):** Quantitative data about site visitors and site behavior gathered by Google Analytics let us visualize how many people were using the site, for how long, and how many pages they accessed, along with demographics and other information.

2. **User demographics and feedback (online site surveys):** Quantitative data about user demographics and feedback on the site itself, gathered using opt-in surveys on the Voter’s Edge site, provided more detail on the backgrounds and voting behavior of site users, along with information about how Voter’s Edge impacted users. Surveys were based on the ones run in 2014, which were designed by market research consultant Jeni Sall, of Genesis Research Associates, with input from the Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) at Tufts University.

3. **Detailed feedback on content and interface (user testing interviews and feedback emails):** Qualitative data about users’ experiences on the site, gathered via structured interviews with MapLight staff, LWVCEF volunteers, and outside participants, enabled us to iteratively refine the Voter’s Edge interface to make it more user-friendly.

4. **Election data collection processes (site content, candidate participation rates, and candidate feedback):** Evaluating the completeness of the election information offered on Voter’s Edge, including rates of candidate participation in our new data collection model, as well as candidate feedback on the Data Entry System, enabled us to refine our processes for collecting data.
5. **Outreach performance (partner feedback and Google Analytics):** Qualitative feedback from the media outlets and civic engagement groups that partnered with us to distribute Voter’s Edge and quantitative data on the amount of site traffic driven by these groups helped us to measure the success of our outreach.
III. Site Usage and Engagement

Methodology and Terminology
We used Google Analytics to track site usage and engagement over the course of 2016. This allowed us to access data about how many people were using the site at a given time, for how long, and how many pages they accessed. Google Analytics also provided demographic data and information about what devices people used to access Voter’s Edge.

Some of the data below required segmentation of users and was calculated on Google Analytics through the use of sampling (rather than using all data). Google Analytics explains that sampling “is the practice of selecting a subset of data from your traffic and reporting on the trends available in that sample set. Sampling is widely used in statistical analysis because analyzing a subset of data gives similar results to analyzing all of the data. In addition, sampling speeds up processing for reports when the volume of data is so large as to slow down the report queries.”¹

Key terms
“Sessions” or “visits” refer to the number of times the site was opened.

“Users” or “visitors” refer to the number of unique visitors to the site. A user who visits the site more than once opens a new session each time and, if using the same device, is counted as a repeat visitor. However, if one user visited the site from multiple devices, that would be counted as multiple unique visitors.

Data collection windows
For the general election, Google Analytics data was collected from October 10, 2016–November 9, 2016. For the primaries, data was collected for one month leading up to and including each primary election in each state. Usage in the months between elections was low and is disregarded here.

The dates of the elections Voter’s Edge covered were as follows:

- Illinois primary: March 15, 2016
- New York Presidential primary: April 19, 2016
- California primary: June 7, 2016
- New York Federal primary: June 28, 2016
- New York State and Local primary: September 13, 2016
- General Election: November 8, 2016

Overall Site Usage
Findings from the analysis of data provided by Google Analytics demonstrate several key successes for Voter’s Edge in 2016:

- **Voter’s Edge was visited 2.3 million times by 1.9 million users** in 2016 to get information on their primary and general election ballots. Of these, over 1.8 million came from California, while approximately 80,000 visited from Illinois and New York each.

- **Voter’s Edge saw growth across all three states** in both the total number of users and their overall site engagement between the primary and general elections in 2016.

- **1.2 million Californians** visited Voter’s Edge in the month leading up to the general election, with the highest traffic in the week before the election. This is approximately equivalent to 8% of California voter turnout.

- **Over 100,000 users in California** accessed Spanish-language pages on Voter’s Edge in the month leading up to the general election.

### Peak Usage

Site usage peaked in the week before the general election (November 1-8), with over 800,000 users accessing the site that week. This surge in Voter’s Edge traffic before the election made up 61% of total general election usage.

#### Table 1: Peak usage vs. total usage in 2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>All general election usage</th>
<th>November 1-8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of users</td>
<td>1,320,356</td>
<td>800,670</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average pages per session</td>
<td>7.05 pages</td>
<td>7.80 pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average session length</td>
<td>7.88 minutes</td>
<td>9.28 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While the highest number of site visits occurred on Election Day, the greatest depth of usage occurred in the several days preceding the election (November 5-7). During these days, over 400,000 users visited the site, viewed more than 9 pages, and spent over 11 minutes on site on average.

Interestingly, users spent less time on the site and viewed fewer pages per session on Election Day than in the days directly preceding Election Day, possibly because they were preparing themselves to vote last minute, checking the choices they had saved to the My List tool, or even using Voter’s Edge at the polls (as mobile data discussed below would suggest).
Figure 1: Peak engagement leading up to Election Day

Growth by State

In 2016, Voter’s Edge launched in-depth voter guides from scratch in New York and Illinois, with full coverage of every contest in those states. Voter’s Edge reached a much larger proportion of the voting population in California than in Illinois and New York, likely due to the strength of our reputation and that of the LWVCEF in the state, which also generated more partnerships with other media and civic engagement groups. However, it is encouraging to note the dramatic growth in usage in Illinois and New York from the primaries to the general: in Illinois, site usage as a percentage of voter turnout more than doubled in the general election, and in New York, it nearly tripled.

See Table 2 below for an overview of Voter’s Edge usage as a percentage of voter turnout in each election.

Table 2: 2016 Voter’s Edge usage as percentage of voter turnout in each state

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Primary</th>
<th>General</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>5.49%</td>
<td>8.39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>0.42%</td>
<td>0.98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>0.17%²</td>
<td>0.50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

California

During the month before the 2016 general election, Voter’s Edge saw an 80% increase in users from 2014. Users spent nearly twice as much time on the site in 2016, with a 48% increase in the average time on site. All three metrics that we use to measure usage and engagement improved: number of users, average pages visited per session, and average length of time spent on site per session.

² This refers to the New York Presidential primary only. The Federal and State and Local primaries did not apply to the whole state and do not have comparable turnout statistics.
In addition to the significant improvement from 2014, Voter’s Edge also saw increases in site usage and engagement between the California primary and general elections.

### Table 3: Usage and engagement in California from 2014 through 2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>2014 general</th>
<th>2016 primary</th>
<th>2016 general</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of users</td>
<td>682,143</td>
<td>470,080</td>
<td>1,225,891</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voter turnout</td>
<td>7,513,972</td>
<td>8,548,301</td>
<td>14,610,509</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usage as % of turnout</td>
<td>9.08%</td>
<td>5.49%</td>
<td>8.39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average pages per session</td>
<td>6.19 pages</td>
<td>5.61 pages</td>
<td>7.06 pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average session length</td>
<td>4.76 minutes</td>
<td>5.14 minutes</td>
<td>8.07 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Illinois

Site usage and engagement also improved from the primary to the general election in Illinois, with usage as a percentage of voter turnout more than doubling. The Illinois primary was the first election testing ground for Voter’s Edge in 2016. We subsequently improved site design and outreach strategies significantly over the course of the year.

### Table 4: Usage and engagement in Illinois from the primary to the general

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Primary</th>
<th>General</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of users</td>
<td>15,137</td>
<td>55,671</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voter turnout</td>
<td>3,569,960</td>
<td>5,666,118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usage as % of turnout</td>
<td>0.42%</td>
<td>0.98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average pages per session</td>
<td>3.83 pages</td>
<td>6.78 pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average session length</td>
<td>3.38 minutes</td>
<td>4.57 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### New York

Due to the way elections in the state of New York are organized, it is difficult to get statistics for all of the primary elections that are comparable to other states. In 2016, New York had three primary elections, only one of which was statewide (the Presidential primary). Only certain districts had contests in the Federal primary and the State and Local primary, so we lack data on the proportion of total voters in the state who used the site.

Excitingly, Voter’s Edge saw progressive growth in usage and engagement from the primaries through the general election in 2016. While preparing for the general election, the average session duration was close to twice as long as during any of the primary elections, demonstrating improvement in the site’s usefulness over time.

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3 California Secretary of State’s Office: Election Results. ([http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/prior-elections/prior-statewide-elections](http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/prior-elections/prior-statewide-elections)).

4 Illinois State Board of Elections. ([http://www.elections.il.gov/ElectionResults.aspx?ID=SKR13%2f24Geo%3d](http://www.elections.il.gov/ElectionResults.aspx?ID=SKR13%2f24Geo%3d)).
This growth is likely due to significant improvements made to our site design and outreach strategies throughout the year — with the New York primaries providing key opportunities to test and refine the site.

Table 5: Usage and engagement in New York from the primaries to the general⁵

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Presidential</th>
<th>Federal</th>
<th>State &amp; Local</th>
<th>General</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of users</td>
<td>4,823</td>
<td>10,983</td>
<td>15,298</td>
<td>39,109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voter turnout⁶</td>
<td>2,892,671</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>7,786,881</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usage as % of turnout</td>
<td>0.17%</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>0.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avg. pages/session</td>
<td>3.12 pages</td>
<td>6.47 pages</td>
<td>7.29 pages</td>
<td>6.68 pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avg. session length</td>
<td>1.55 minutes</td>
<td>2.69 minutes</td>
<td>2.23 minutes</td>
<td>4.68 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Geography

Across all three states, site usage was concentrated in major metropolitan areas. In California, this pattern was somewhat diffuse, with most site visitors coming from Los Angeles (17%) and San Francisco (10%).

Table 6: Top cities for Voter’s Edge usage (California)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Number of sessions</th>
<th>% of total CA sessions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Los Angeles</td>
<td>238,695</td>
<td>16.54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Francisco</td>
<td>146,534</td>
<td>10.15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Diego</td>
<td>100,641</td>
<td>6.97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Jose</td>
<td>48,393</td>
<td>3.35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oakland</td>
<td>44,498</td>
<td>3.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacramento</td>
<td>27,119</td>
<td>1.88%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Illinois (Table 7), 40% of site traffic came from Chicago, while in New York (Table 8), 71% of site traffic came from New York City. This concentration of site usage is likely due to the population distribution in both states, as well as to our partnerships in those states, which were strongest in those cities.

Table 7: Top cities for Voter’s Edge usage (Illinois)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Number of sessions</th>
<th>% of total IL sessions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chicago</td>
<td>24,245</td>
<td>40.12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naperville</td>
<td>1,286</td>
<td>2.13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joliet</td>
<td>883</td>
<td>1.46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Champaign</td>
<td>743</td>
<td>1.23%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

⁵ New York’s Federal and State and Local primaries were not statewide elections, so we do not have voter turnout data that could be compared to the Presidential primary and general elections.

⁶ (http://www.elections.ny.gov/2016ElectionResults.html).
Table 8: Top cities for Voter’s Edge usage (New York)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Number of sessions</th>
<th>% of total NY sessions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>30,313</td>
<td>70.98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buffalo</td>
<td>570</td>
<td>1.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rochester</td>
<td>558</td>
<td>1.31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albany</td>
<td>319</td>
<td>0.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ithaca</td>
<td>285</td>
<td>0.67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syracuse</td>
<td>261</td>
<td>0.61%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Acquisition and Devices**

**Traffic sources**

Users reached Voter’s Edge through several channels. Half (50%) of all site traffic leading up to the general election came from organic searches. Most other users were referred to Voter’s Edge from other websites (20%), visited votersedge.org directly (18%), or were driven by ads (8%). The remainder came via social media and a negligible amount of paid search, email, and other methods. However, in the day before the election, social media overtook display ads.

*Figure 2: Sources of Voter’s Edge traffic in the 2016 general election*

**Devices**

From 2014 to 2016, mobile and tablet usage surpassed desktop computers. In 2016, during the lead-up to the general election, 49% of site usage was on PCs and just over half was on mobile devices (41%) and tablets (10%). This is nearly double the percentage of mobile and tablet usage.
we saw in 2014, when 26% of visitors used non-desktop devices (17% mobile and 9% tablets)—note that the real growth is in mobile usage, rather than tablet usage, which has held steady.

We believe this change is the direct result of designing Voter’s Edge responsively to work on any screen size, as well as improvements made to the mobile experience after user testing. Some of this shift is also likely attributable to the public’s increasing reliance on smartphones.

Interestingly, on Election Day, mobile usage surged past desktop usage to make up 52% of all sessions (41% came from PCs and the remaining 7% from tablets). We hypothesize that this is because people utilized Voter’s Edge on-the-go for last-minute research or to review previous My List selections—possibly even in the voting booth.

**Figure 3: Voter’s Edge usage by device**

![Figure 3: Voter’s Edge usage by device](image)

Sources: 2014 Voter’s Edge Assessment and Google Analytics

**Spanish-Language Usage**

In 2016, we professionally translated all static content (such as site navigation) into Spanish for all three states and provided more complete translation of candidate and ballot measure information for Voter’s Edge California. Spanish speakers could access the translation via a prominent “en Español” button.

Nearly 7% of all general election traffic on Voter’s Edge included Spanish-language pages. Californians made up the vast majority of Spanish-language traffic (96% of all Spanish-language site visits). Although Spanish-language users engaged less deeply with the site than users as a whole, visiting fewer pages and spending less time on Voter’s Edge, survey data (described later on in this assessment) suggests that their experiences of the site were positive.

**Table 9: Spanish-language usage and engagement**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metric</th>
<th>CA primary</th>
<th>CA general</th>
<th>All general</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of users</td>
<td>25,527</td>
<td>101,852</td>
<td>106,254</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of sessions</td>
<td>26,210</td>
<td>118,731</td>
<td>123,269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avg. pages/session</td>
<td>3.78 pages</td>
<td>3.89 pages</td>
<td>3.79 pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avg. session length</td>
<td>5.25 minutes</td>
<td>3.86 minutes</td>
<td>3.71 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The decrease in session duration from the California primary to the general election was due to an increasing amount of Spanish-language traffic from paid search; users arriving on Voter’s Edge via paid search in general spent less time on the site.
IV. User Surveys and Feedback

Survey Methodology
In the five weeks leading up to the general election (October 1-November 8, 2016), we gathered information on the demographics and opinions of Voter’s Edge users using two online surveys. This year’s surveys were based on the ones conducted for our 2014 Voter’s Edge Assessment, which were designed in conjunction with Jeni Sall, of Genesis Research Associates, and the Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) at Tufts University.

Voter’s Edge users could opt in to take a survey by clicking on a prominent button on the Voter’s Edge website. They were then randomly directed to one of the two surveys we were running. (The purpose of splitting questions into separate, randomly administered surveys was to keep the surveys brief in order to encourage a high rate of completion.)

The Demographics Survey asked Voter’s Edge users about their background (i.e., gender, age, ethnicity, level of political engagement, etc.). We collected and analyzed responses from 2,679 Voter’s Edge users between October 1 and November 8. Demographics Survey data is intended to provide context for other survey findings about Voter’s Edge, since those who opted to complete surveys were not fully representative of site users overall (discussed below).

The purpose of the About Voter’s Edge Survey was to gauge how useful visitors found the site and measure its impact on their voting choices. This survey also collected some demographic data in order to correlate responses on site usefulness with key demographic indicators. We collected and analyzed responses from 1,674 Voter’s Edge users between October 1 and November 8. We have included partial responses in our analysis of findings.

Demographics Survey
Representativeness of responses
Relative to overall Voter’s Edge usage, the response rate for our online surveys was quite low (as is the case with most online surveys). When compared to the demographic data about site users gathered by Google Analytics (gender and age), we found differences that indicate that survey respondents may not be perfectly representative of Voter’s Edge users as a whole.

However, responses are likely fairly representative of site usage by state, as the proportion of respondents from each state mirrors proportions of site usage fairly closely (Table 10).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>% of survey responses</th>
<th>% of general election site usage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7 Approximately 2% of all Demographics Survey respondents reported being from states other than California, Illinois, or New York. We have excluded them from this analysis.
Age
In all three states, Voter’s Edge users who opted to respond to the survey skewed much older than Voter’s Edge users as a whole. However, Voter’s Edge users as a whole (as measured by Google Analytics) skewed younger than voter turnout. This suggests that Voter’s Edge was used by a relatively large proportion of young voters—who have historically been underrepresented in elections.

Figure 4: Survey respondents, site users, and voter turnout by age group (all three states)

![Chart showing survey respondents, site users, and voter turnout by age group](chart.png)

Sources: Demographics Survey, Google Analytics, and exit polls conducted by CNN

Gender of survey respondents
Overall, more women took the Demographics Survey than men, and women made up a greater percentage of site usage than men, although the effects were much less extreme than the overrepresentation of older voters described above. Across all three states, 57% of respondents identified as women, 40% of respondents identified as men, and 4% identified as “Other” or declined to answer (Figure 5).

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Registration status and voting frequency
Survey data suggest that survey respondents tended to be active voters—more so than the voting population at large. Ninety-eight percent of Demographics Survey respondents were registered to vote, less than 1% of respondents were eligible but not registered, and just under 2% were not eligible to vote. In contrast to Voter’s Edge users, only 78% of the voting-eligible population in California is registered to vote. In Illinois, 91% of the voting-eligible population is registered to vote, and in New York, 84%. Sixty-eight percent of Demographics Survey respondents reported that they vote in every election and 25% of respondents reported that they vote in almost every election. Only 3% of respondents reported voting sometimes, 1% reported seldom voting, and 3% reported that they never vote.

Note: It is not possible to say whether the number of survey respondents who responded “other/prefer not to answer” is representative, as Google Analytics and exit polls do not include this information.

Source: Demographics Survey

Eighty percent of Demographics Survey respondents reported that they have voted in every federal election since 2008. Predictably, more respondents reported voting in presidential election years than in midterms: 97% of respondents reported voting in the 2012 presidential election and 96% reported voting in 2008. In contrast, 86% of respondents reported voting in the 2014 midterms and 85% in 2010.

**Note on representation:** Since older users are overrepresented among our survey respondents and older people are more likely to vote, voting frequency rates reported above are likely to be higher than for site users overall. Additionally, we hypothesize that Voter’s Edge users may be more likely to vote frequently than the general population, based on the assumption that people who do not vote frequently are less likely to seek out information about voting.

**Political views**

More than half of all Demographics Survey respondents (54%) identified as “liberal” or “very liberal,” one-third (33%) identified as “moderate,” and a smaller proportion (13%) identified as “conservative” or “very conservative.”

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In all three states, Voter’s Edge users self-identified as much more liberal and much less conservative than each state’s voting population overall, as determined by exit polling in the states. However, this difference was more pronounced in California than it was in Illinois and New York. Notably, California was the only state in which exit poll respondents were (slightly) more likely to identify as liberal than as moderate.

Figure 8: Political views of Demographics Survey respondents compared to exit polls (California)

Source: Demographics Survey, exit polls conducted by CNN13

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Unlike in California and New York, Illinois survey respondents were more likely to self-report as moderate than exit poll respondents.

**Party affiliation**

Political party affiliation followed a similar pattern to political views, with some differences across states. In California (Figure 11), survey respondents were much more likely to identify as Democrats and less likely to identify as Republicans compared to exit poll data and voter

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registration records. Respondents identified as “Independent or Other” at approximately equal rates to the voting population overall.

**Figure 11: Party affiliation of Demographics Survey respondents (California)**

In Illinois (Figure 12), respondents identified as Democrats at approximately equal rates to exit poll respondents. However, those who responded “Independent or Other” were overrepresented among survey respondents, and Republicans were underrepresented. Note that in Illinois, voter registration data was unavailable, so survey respondents are only compared against exit polls.

**Figure 12: Party affiliation of Demographics Survey respondents (Illinois)**

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In New York (Figure 13), survey respondents identified as Democrats at higher rates than voters in the state overall, but at lower rates than registered voters in New York City, where Voter’s Edge usage was highest (71% of all New York users). Survey respondents identified as Republican at lower rates than in the state overall, but at approximately equal rates as New York City specifically. Those who identified as “Independent or Other” were slightly overrepresented in both New York City and the state overall.

**Figure 13: Party affiliation of Demographics Survey respondents (New York)**

Across all three states, respondents to the Voter’s Edge Demographics Survey tended to be significantly more educated than voters as a whole. While true in all three states, this skew was most extreme in California. The proportion of respondents in California who held postgraduate degrees was more than double that in exit polls (42% compared to 19%), and respondents with a high school diploma or less were underrepresented compared to exit polls (4% compared to 15%).

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20 New York State Board of Elections: Enrollment by County ([http://www.elections.ny.gov/enrollmentcounty.html](http://www.elections.ny.gov/enrollmentcounty.html)).
In the other states, particularly Illinois, educational attainment tracked more closely with exit polls. However, the phenomenon of voters with postgraduate degrees being overrepresented and those with high school degrees or less being underrepresented was consistent everywhere.

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Income

Voter’s Edge Demographics Survey respondents reported higher incomes than voters as a whole, particularly in California. Across all three states, 21% of respondents reported making less than $50,000 per year, 32% of respondents reported making $50,000-$99,999, and 47% of respondents reported making over $100,000.

In California (Figure 17), the overrepresentation of high-income users was most extreme. Those who reported earning $100,000 or more per year comprised 49% of survey respondents, but only 37% of exit poll respondents. People earning less than $50,000, by contrast, comprised 20% of survey respondents, but made up 37% of exit poll respondents.

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In Illinois and New York (Figures 18 and 19), reported annual incomes of survey respondents tracked much more closely with exit polls. In fact, the dramatic overrepresentation of those earning $100,000 or more that was observed in California did not exist in Illinois and New York. Respondents in these states still reported earning less than $50,000 at significantly lower rates and earning between $50,000-$99,999 at greater rates than exit poll respondents.

**Figure 18: Income of Demographics Survey respondents (Illinois)**

![Bar chart showing income distribution in Illinois](source)

Source: Demographics Survey, exit polls conducted by CNN

**Figure 19: Income of Demographics Survey respondents (New York)**

![Bar chart showing income distribution in New York](source)

Source: Demographics Survey, exit polls conducted by CNN

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Note on income representation: We hypothesize that the higher incomes of Voter’s Edge survey respondents are likely due to the skewed age and educational attainment levels reported by respondents.

Race/ethnicity
Survey respondents identified as white at significantly higher rates than exit poll respondents. This was especially the case in California (Figure 20), where 72% of survey respondents identified as white compared to 48% of exit poll respondents. Latino voters were the most underrepresented in California — 11% of survey respondents identified as Hispanic/Latino compared to 31% in state exit polls.27

Illinois (Figure 21) followed the same pattern to a less extreme degree.

Figure 20: Race/Ethnicity of Demographics Survey respondents (California)

Source: Demographics Survey, exit polls conducted by CNN28

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27 Exit polls recorded separate categories for white, black, Latino, Asian, and other/multiracial. We asked survey respondents if they identified as Hispanic in a separate question, but include those numbers here for comparison.

Figure 21: Race/Ethnicity of Demographics Survey respondents (Illinois)

Source: Demographics Survey, exit polls conducted by CNN

New York is the exception to this trend, with white voters actually slightly underrepresented by Voter’s Edge Demographics Survey respondents. Latino and Asian voters were slightly overrepresented in Voter’s Edge survey data by the same standard. Black voters are the only group consistently underrepresented by survey respondents across all three states.

Figure 22: Race/Ethnicity of Demographics Survey respondents (New York)

Source: Demographics Survey, exit polls conducted by CNN

Note on representation: Demographics Survey respondents track more closely with the U.S. Census Bureau’s data on registered voters in 2014 than they do with exit poll data from 2016.


Particularly in California, white voters were not nearly as overrepresented by survey respondents when compared with 2014 census data (77% of survey respondents compared to 79% of California voters). Latino voters were also less underrepresented (11% of survey respondents compared to 19% of California voters). This phenomenon is consistent across all three states, with survey respondents being much more representative of the voting population when compared to 2014 census data instead of 2016 exit polls in each case.

It is possible, according to the Pew Research Center, that more people who identify as Hispanic/Latino turned out to vote in California in 2016 than in 2014. For this reason, and for consistency with other comparisons made in this report, we use the 2016 exit polls instead of the 2014 census data. However, it is also possible that exit poll data is less accurate than census data. Therefore, we will revisit this analysis once 2016 census data is available.

**Voter information sources**

When asked what three sources of voter information they rely on most, 43% of survey respondents ranked Voter’s Edge in their top three, behind news stories and editorials (53%) and endorsements from organizations they trust (51%). However, this effect was only observed in California. Illinois and New York survey respondents were much less likely to name Voter’s Edge in their top three sources of voter information. This discrepancy is likely due to the newness of the site in Illinois and New York. See Table 11 for the full breakdown of responses to this question.

For California, this represents a shift from the results of the 2014 assessment. In 2014, survey respondents reported that they mainly relied upon information from official state and/or county ballot pamphlets, opinions of friends, family, or other trusted individuals, and other voter information websites and blogs besides Voter’s Edge. Voter’s Edge overtook all of these information sources in 2016—suggesting that people who use Voter’s Edge in one election are likely to rely on it in subsequent years.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How useful would you say the Voter’s Edge website was overall?</th>
<th>Combined</th>
<th>California</th>
<th>Illinois</th>
<th>New York</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>News stories and/or editorials</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endorsements by organizations you trust</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voter’s Edge</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Official state and/or county ballot pamphlets</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opinions of your family/friends/other individuals you trust</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV or radio pundits/commentators</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other voter information websites or blogs</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any other source(s)</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other election information that you receive in the mail</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

State-Specific Questions for California and Illinois
The Voter’s Edge Demographics Survey also asked California and Illinois respondents some state-specific questions to assess state-specific voter information needs and voting patterns.

California voting behavior
Respondents from California were asked whether they usually vote by mail, at their polling place in their precinct, or by other methods. We found that a plurality of voters (49%) use vote-by-mail ballots and most others vote in-person on Election Day (44%), confirming the pattern reported by the California Secretary of State.

Figure 23: How California survey respondents vote

Source: Demographics Survey
Figure 24: Vote-by-mail ballot usage

![Bar graph showing vote-by-mail ballot usage](image)

Sources: Demographics Survey and California Secretary of State

California survey respondents who indicated that they sometimes do not vote also received a question that asked for their main reason(s) for not voting. While many responded that they are too busy (29%) or they believed their vote would not make a difference (18%), the most common answer was that they did not have enough information on who or what to vote for (51%). (See Figure 25.) This indicates that the mission of Voter’s Edge—to provide comprehensive, nonpartisan voting information—may boost voter turnout, at least among the population represented by survey respondents.

Figure 25: Reasons for not voting among California respondents

![Bar graph showing reasons for not voting](image)

Source: Demographics Survey

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Judicial contests in Illinois

In Illinois, Voter’s Edge provided judicial evaluations data to help voters make informed decisions on the many judicial contests in the election. We included questions about judicial races in the Demographics Survey to assess whether these efforts were effective.

Most survey respondents from Illinois (54%) reported looking at judicial races on Voter’s Edge. Of those that visited judicial contest pages, a majority (57%) reported that they looked at judicial ratings. When asked whether they would make a different choice in one or more judicial contests based on ratings they found on Voter’s Edge, a plurality of these respondents (43%) responded “agree” or “agree strongly.” This suggests that, while just under half of Illinois site users may not have noticed or been interested in judicial data, those that did look at judicial ratings data found it useful in making their decisions.

Figure 26: Likelihood of making different choice on judicial contests based on ratings data

A plurality (44%) of respondents also indicated that they would vote for more judicial offices and leave fewer choices blank based on information they found on Voter’s Edge.

Figure 27: Likelihood of voting for more judicial contests based on Voter’s Edge information
Finally, a majority of respondents (52%) indicated that judicial ratings are the most useful information for deciding which judicial candidate to vote for. However, information on past rulings and experience were also indicated by many respondents.

**Figure 28: Most useful information for deciding on judicial candidates**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experience</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past rulings</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ratings</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Demographics Survey

**About Voter’s Edge Survey**

**Site usefulness**

The vast majority of survey respondents (89%) found Voter’s Edge to be “very” or “extremely” useful, with most rating it “extremely” useful. Only 8% of survey respondents found the site to be “somewhat” useful, and only 3% of users rated the site “not at all” useful. (See Figure 29.)

**Figure 29: Site usefulness for About Voter’s Edge Survey respondents**

Source: About Voter’s Edge Survey

This finding represents a major improvement from the 2014 survey results. During the same period in 2014, only 57% of survey respondents described Voter’s Edge as “very” or “extremely” useful, with the majority of those in the “very” category. (See Figure 30.)
Although the majority of respondents in all three states found the site to be “very” or “extremely” useful, the effect was strongest in California and weakest in Illinois, with New York in the middle. Illinois-based respondents were also more likely to report the site as being “not at all” useful. This difference is likely due to the newness of Voter’s Edge in Illinois and New York, as well as the lower levels of candidate participation in those states.
Impact on confidence in choices

The vast majority, 91%, of survey respondents reported that Voter’s Edge made them feel more confident about making the right choices on Election Day, with 51% of respondents reporting that it made them “much more” confident. While 6% of respondents claimed no change in their confidence after visiting Voter’s Edge, only 2% reported feeling “less” or “much less” confident. (See Figure 32.)
This finding represents a significant improvement from survey results in 2014. During the same period in 2014, 72% of survey respondents reported that Voter’s Edge made them feel “more” or “much more” confident about making the right choices on Election Day.

Figure 33: Improvement in impact on confidence about choices from 2014 to 2016

As with the usefulness metric, Voter’s Edge had the strongest positive impact on California respondents’ confidence in their choices, and weaker impacts on Illinois and New York respondents.
Figure 34: Impact on confidence about choices by state

Source: About Voter’s Edge Survey

Impact on knowledge of ballot
Survey results clearly indicate that Voter’s Edge users gained valuable information from the site. Ninety-three percent of survey respondents reported feeling “more” or “much more” knowledgeable about the candidates and ballot initiatives that they viewed on Voter’s Edge, while only 5% of survey respondents reported no change, and 2% reported feeling “less” or “much less” knowledgeable.

Figure 35: Impact on knowledge of candidates & ballot initiatives

Source: About Voter’s Edge Survey

As with the other metrics above, this marks a significant improvement over 2014, when 73% reported feeling “more” or “much more” knowledgeable.
While Californians’ responses to this question tended to mirror responses to the confidence question above, it is interesting to note that Illinois and New York responses were significantly more positive on this metric than on confidence.

**Figure 36: Impact on knowledge of candidates and ballot initiatives by state**

Source: About Voter’s Edge Survey

**Impact on discussing voting choices**

A majority of survey respondents (64%) reported being more likely to discuss their voting choices with others after using Voter’s Edge. **Thirty-three percent** of respondents reported no change, and 2% of respondents said they were “less” or “much less” likely to discuss voting choices with anyone. By contrast, only 50% of 2014 respondents reported they were more likely to discuss their choices.
Figure 37: Impact on likelihood to discuss voting choices

![Figure 37: Impact on likelihood to discuss voting choices](image)

Source: About Voter’s Edge Survey

**Impact on likelihood to vote**

Voter’s Edge appears to have had a modest impact on survey respondents’ likelihood to vote; 45% of respondents reported that they were “more” or “much more” likely to vote, 54% reported no change, and 1% reported being “less” or “much less” likely to vote because of information they found on Voter’s Edge. We believe this is due to the fact that people who are unlikely to vote in the first place are less likely to seek out an online voter guide like Voter’s Edge. Moreover, survey respondents were overwhelmingly active voters, as the demographics data above indicates, suggesting that there was little room for movement on this metric.

That said, this number was up significantly from 2014, when 36% of respondents reported being more likely to vote.

**Impact on voting in down-ballot contests**

Voter’s Edge had a significant impact on users’ voting behavior in down-ballot state and local races, where turnout is often low due to the lack of readily available information. Moreover, this impact represents significant improvements over 2014, suggesting that our redesign of the site successfully made information on these contests more accessible.

Excitingly, Voter’s Edge had a significant impact on users’ likelihood to completely fill out their ballot; 74% of survey respondents reported that they would vote for more offices and leave fewer choices blank because of information they found on Voter’s Edge. This is up from 52% of respondents in 2014.

Thus, while Voter’s Edge only had a modest impact on respondents’ likelihood of voting (for the reasons noted above), the site had a greater impact on the functional voter turnout for down-ballot contests—which may otherwise have been left blank or filled out randomly.

A majority of survey respondents, 66%, reported that they were considering making a different choice on one or more ballot initiatives based on information they learned from visiting Voter’s Edge. This is up from 39% of respondents in 2014. **Forty-four percent** reported that they were considering different candidates for state or local office—up from 30% of respondents in 2014. These numbers represent an impressive impact on voting choices given voters’ tendencies.
towards confirmation bias, though it could be surmised that due to the lower profile of state and local races, voters were less likely to have made up their minds.

A majority of survey respondents, 64%, reported that they were considering different issues or criteria in their voting decisions based on information they found on Voter’s Edge, suggesting that the types of information displayed on Voter’s Edge may have shaped how users evaluated candidates and ballot measures (in addition to shaping their voting choices). This is a significant increase from 39% of respondents in 2014.

**Impact on U.S. congressional contests**

More than half of survey respondents, 56%, indicated that information they found on Voter’s Edge gave them a better idea of how the candidates for the U.S. Senate and U.S. House compare to their own values and preferences—an increase from 45% of respondents in 2014. **Sixty-one percent** of survey respondents reported feeling more knowledgeable about what the candidates for U.S. Senate and U.S. House really stand for because of information they found on Voter’s Edge. This is an increase from 42% of respondents in 2014.

**Twenty percent** of survey respondents reported that they were considering switching their vote to a different candidate for U.S. Senate or U.S. House based on information they found on Voter’s Edge, an increase from 14% of respondents in 2014. This number is especially interesting given voters’ tendencies towards confirmation bias. While the effect is lower than on down-ballot races (discussed above), this might be because congressional races are higher profile and as such, voters were more likely to already have made up their minds.

**Differences Among Survey Respondents**

Our analysis of About Voter’s Edge survey responses found statistically significant relationships (p<0.05) between a few of the variables we tested. Location (i.e., state), voting frequency, and whether or not a respondent identified as Hispanic had the largest impact on users’ responses to certain questions. Notably, while liberals and Democrats are overrepresented among site users and survey respondents, political views and partisan affiliation did not affect users’ answers to questions about their experience using Voter’s Edge.

**No impact based on political views**

Although our survey sample skewed heavily toward the liberal end of the political spectrum, there is no statistically significant correlation between political views or party affiliation and respondents’ impressions of the site. While fewer conservatives and Republicans used the site overall, those that did appear to have found it just as useful and were influenced by it to the same degree as other groups of users. This suggests that Voter’s Edge is a successful voter information tool across party lines.

**Impact of state on changes to voting behavior**

There are statistically significant relationships between where respondents were located (i.e., whether in California or one of the other two states) and how likely they were to change their voting behavior. Although across the board, survey respondents stated that they would be more likely to vote for more state and local offices and leave fewer choices blank on their ballots, this effect was strongest in California. Californian respondents were more likely to say they “agree” or “agree strongly” that they would vote for more offices and leave fewer offices on their ballot blank, while respondents from New York and Illinois were more likely to say they “disagree” or “disagree strongly” with this statement.
Although respondents were less likely to respond “agree strongly” overall, this same pattern across states held true for the likelihood of considering different candidates for state or local offices after seeing information on Voter’s Edge. While Illinois respondents were slightly more likely than California respondents to say they “strongly agree,” New York respondents were much more likely to “disagree” or “disagree strongly” with this statement.
We hypothesize that the discrepancy between California and the new states is due to the higher candidate participation rates on Voter’s Edge California, which made the site more informative.

**Impact of voting frequency on likelihood to discuss voting choices**

The frequency with which respondents reported voting had a statistically significant effect on their likelihood of discussing voting choices with others after using Voter’s Edge. Overall, while the majority of respondents reported that using Voter’s Edge made them “more” or “much more” likely to discuss voting choices, those who identified as “never” voting in previous elections were much more likely to report Voter’s Edge making them “less” or “much less” likely to discuss their voting choices with others.
**Figure 40: Impact of voting frequency on likelihood to discuss choices**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Discuss Choices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Every election</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nearly every election</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seldom</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Usefulness, confidence, and knowledge for Hispanic respondents

Excitingly, Voter’s Edge appears to have had a strong positive impact on Hispanic survey respondents—indeed, slightly stronger than its impact on survey respondents overall.

Ninety percent of survey respondents who identified as Hispanic reported Voter’s Edge to be “extremely” or “very” useful, a slightly higher rate than users overall. Hispanic respondents were more likely to choose “extremely useful” than users overall.

**Figure 41: Impact on usefulness for Hispanic respondents**

Source: About Voter’s Edge Survey
Ninety-three percent of survey respondents who identified as Hispanic reported feeling “more” or “much more” confident about their choices after visiting Voter’s Edge, a higher rate than for users overall. Hispanic respondents were more likely to choose “much more confident” than users overall.

Figure 42: Impact on confidence in choices for Hispanic respondents

Survey respondents who identified as Hispanic reported feeling more knowledgeable at comparable rates to users overall; 90% of Hispanic users reported feeling “more” or “much more” knowledgeable. However, again, Hispanic respondents were more likely to choose “much more knowledgeable” than users overall.

These metrics are encouraging because they suggest that not only did Voter’s Edge successfully reach a large Spanish-speaking population (that has historically been underrepresented at the polls), but that members who identified as Hispanic found the site to be helpful in their decision-making.

User-Centered Design and Feedback

In 2016, we redesigned Voter’s Edge from the ground up, deploying the best practices of user-centered design to organize information, develop new features, and improve user experience. Voter’s Edge was used by a broad spectrum of people with varying degrees of civic and digital literacy. We analyzed user feedback trends in order to identify improvements and features that would have the most positive impact, implementing changes throughout the year.

Front-end user testing

Voter’s Edge conducted six rounds of user testing on the front end of the site between November 2015 and October 2016. We gathered feedback from a total of 38 different testers, including MapLight staff, LWVCEF staff and volunteers, and volunteers who were unconnected to either organization. While most sessions focused on the site overall, the third session (May 2016) focused on the My List tool specifically and the fifth session (August 2016) focused on the Spanish translation of the site.
We also solicited feedback from our civic and media partners (e.g., public radio stations), who provided multiple insights to help improve the site. Finally, we received feedback directly from site users using our “contact us” form.

**Improvements to the front end**

During early user testing, we observed confusion among users regarding how to navigate their ballot, from the overview page through the entire process of using the site. Once a user had chosen a path, they would not be sure how to continue through their ballot or return to a “home page.” Users often missed or did not use the “back” and “next” buttons.

In response to this feedback, we made a number of changes to site navigation in order to provide users with clear paths through the site. On the overview page, the navigation was streamlined, and all navigation tools listed vertically. We also added a “Go to first race” link to provide users with a clear next step and encourage users to move through their full ballot sequentially. In addition, we provided a list of links below the “Voting Info” section to make clear what type of information is available in that section, with shortcuts to popular information (Figure 43).

![Figure 43: Improvements to the overview page](source: Voter’s Edge)

On subsequent content pages — candidate, contest, and measure pages — we added drop-down options to the page header allowing users to see and select from a list of contests and measures. We also moved and redesigned the “back” and “next” buttons to be more prominent (Figure 44).
The positive impact of these revisions was observed in our final user tests before the general election, when we saw far less confusion about where to begin and fewer questions or complaints about redundant information. Users engaged more with the internal “back” and “next” button, and found the drop-down menus intuitive.

**Improvements to the My List tool**

The “My List” tool is a unique feature on Voter’s Edge that offers users the ability to mark and save their choices as they peruse the site. The My List page then displays all selections that a user has made. We first tested this tool during the California primary election. From direct user feedback and user testing, we received the following notes:

- Users were not always sure what My List was or that it was available to them until they had already been using the site and reviewing content for several minutes.
- The display of choices on the My List page was difficult to read.
- Users wanted to print their list to bring to their polling location, but the result was a very long and poorly formatted document.

In response to this feedback, Voter’s Edge made several improvements to the My List feature:

- The My List button in the upper right hand corner of the site was enlarged and given its own color to help users spot the link while they use the site.
Progress trackers were used to reinforce that each saved choice is “progress” and to encourage users to complete choices for their entire ballot.

The My List page was streamlined to provide more consistency when reviewing choices/selections. All choices were listed to the right of the contest title.

Printable lists were organized and formatted to be no longer than two pages.

**Figure 45: Improvements to the My List tool**

Though Voter’s Edge did not conduct any specific user testing focusing on these My List improvements, we received a great deal of positive user feedback through the “contact us” form about the value and ease of use of the My List tool.
V. Data Collection and Candidate Participation

Custom Ballot Lookup
One of the defining features of Voter’s Edge is that it allows users to enter their addresses to unlock a comprehensive breakdown of the various offices and ballot measures on their ballots. In states like Illinois, Voter’s Edge was the only guide that made this comprehensive information available so that voters could prepare themselves before Election Day.

In order to build this feature, the Voter’s Edge team built a unique and sophisticated database for matching offices, districts, and addresses. Voter’s Edge could match addresses and zip codes to districts by pulling data from the LWVCEF’s Smart Voter system in California as well as the Google Open Civic API, which provided data for Illinois and New York. To then match districts to federal, state, and local electable offices, Voter’s Edge staff collected and verified attribute data for offices and districts and assigned a code to each office so that it could be connected to one or more districts. This district-to-office connection was the mechanism that allowed Voter’s Edge to provide complete and customized local ballots to its users.

In 2016, the Voter’s Edge database contained 10,794 offices and 10,230 districts. See Table 12 for a breakdown of the types of jurisdictions we covered.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jurisdiction</th>
<th>Offices count</th>
<th>Districts count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Federal</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>625</td>
<td>856</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County</td>
<td>4,618</td>
<td>1,589</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place</td>
<td>1,959</td>
<td>2,105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special</td>
<td>3,487</td>
<td>5,457</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>10,794</strong></td>
<td><strong>10,230</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Collecting Candidate Data
In 2014, MapLight relied on the LWVCEF’s network of volunteers and connections with election authorities to collect local candidate data in California. For 2016, to support our expansion into new states that lacked this infrastructure, Voter’s Edge used a participation-based model for gathering candidate data.

To this end, we designed and developed a Data Entry System (DES) that allowed candidates or their staff to complete their profiles themselves. The Voter’s Edge team gathered lists of candidates, researched their contact information, and invited them to participate. All candidate submissions were reviewed for quality before being published to the site. In California, this work was done by the LWVCEF volunteers in each county. In New York and Illinois, candidate outreach and management of candidate data was handled entirely by Voter’s Edge staff.

We tested and refined the DES and candidate outreach strategies over the course of the primaries and up to the general election, resulting in a sophisticated system for collecting candidate data in new states.
Obtaining candidate lists

Voter’s Edge staff gathered lists of candidates for 104 election authorities in Illinois and 59 election authorities in New York. (In California, this information was gathered by the LWVCEF volunteer network.) In Illinois and New York, candidates file with either their state election authority or their local (usually county) election authority. Staff contacted each election authority in order to obtain their candidate lists, candidate contact information, and counts of how many candidates to vote for in each contest.

This process enabled us to pre-populate the DES and Voter’s Edge front end with basic information, including candidates’ names, parties, ballot designations, and offices sought. Over the course of the 2016 primary and general elections, Voter’s Edge staff covered all 2,413 Illinois candidates and 1,751 New York candidates. With 7,091 candidates in California who were managed by the LWVCEF, Voter’s Edge provided at least basic information on a total of 11,238 unique candidates.

Researching candidate contact information

One of the major hurdles our candidate participation model faced was the challenge of obtaining candidate contact information. We reached out to every candidate for whom we could find contact information, but were not able to find this information for many candidates. This lack of contact information likely contributed to lower candidate participation rates in Illinois and New York (discussed below).

While some election authorities were able to provide candidates’ mailing addresses, only some of them provided candidates’ phone numbers, and even fewer provided candidates’ email addresses. Because candidate log-in credentials were sent exclusively via email, Voter’s Edge staff had to research email addresses and other contact information for the vast majority of the 4,164 candidates in Illinois and New York. We tested three ways for collecting candidate contact information:

1. For the Illinois primary and the New York Presidential primary & Special Election, and the New York Federal primary, staff researched all candidate contact information. We spent about two minutes on each candidate gathering their email address, official campaign website, campaign Facebook and Twitter pages, and phone number.

2. For the New York Federal primary, we hired two part-time, temporary researchers to research all candidates’ contact information as well as their biographical information (see the biographical research section below).

3. For the Illinois General, New York State and Local primary, and the New York General, we tested using Mechanical Turk to research candidates’ contact information.

Mechanical Turk (MTurk) is an Amazon-run platform that allows people to crowdsourc research tasks. Our hypothesis for using this tool was that it would provide a more time- and cost-efficient way to research candidate contact information than hiring additional staff or dedicating Voter’s Edge staff time to this.

Unfortunately, MTurk results were poor—and still required significant staff time to obtain. In our first test, gathering information on Illinois candidates for the general election, MTurkers were asked to research all contact information for each candidate on their list. Thirty-six percent of MTurkers found no data on their candidates. Of the 64% that did find data, only 40% found all available data. We uploaded the good information we got from this round, and later performed our own research for some candidates in contested contests.
For New York’s State and Local primary and General Election, we continued using MTurk, but slightly differently. Instead of grouping all candidate contact information into a single research task, we split up each data point so that finding a candidate’s email address was its own task, finding a candidate’s campaign website was its own task, and so on. For local-level New York candidates, MTurk was particularly high cost/low gain. A typical example of a batch of candidates whose email research we submitted to MTurkers contained 195 local-level New York candidates. We got research results for 27, or 14%, of them (MTurkers couldn’t find emails for the remaining 86%). Of those 27 candidates for whom emails were found, 9 (or 33%) of those candidates’ emails were unpublishable—either because they were government emails or because the email did not seem to belong to the candidate. So we ended up with emails for 18 of the 195 candidates (9%).

Given the high failure rate of MTurk and the comparable cost of hiring part-time in-house researchers (we could have had part-time researchers research contact information for all candidates in contested contests for less than what we paid to do MTurk research for all candidates), we concluded that in future, Voter’s Edge should stick with in-house researchers to perform these types of research tasks.

**Contacting candidates**

The Voter’s Edge team contacted every candidate for whom we could find contact information, using all available communication methods:

- **Email**: We sent Voter’s Edge invitations to every candidate for whom we were able to find a working email address, along with periodic reminders.

- **Join form**: We set up a form on the front end of the Voter’s Edge site which candidates could fill out in order to obtain their DES login information. We received approximately 1,200 responses from this form for the general election. Forty-two of these responses were from Illinois candidates, 31 were from New York candidates, and the rest were from California candidates. Leading up to the general election, we added text to the profiles of candidates who hadn’t already participated in Voter’s Edge that read, “Are you this candidate? Add more info,” with a link to the form.

- **Voter’s Edge profiles**: We added buttons to non-participating candidates’ profiles that allowed users to send ready-made emails and tweets encouraging candidates to add information to their profiles.

- **Facebook**: We reached out to some candidates via their Facebook campaign pages. In Illinois, 15% of the candidates to whom we reached out via Facebook in the general election ended up participating, while in New York, 4% participated.

- **Twitter**: We tweeted at candidates’ campaign Twitter accounts. In Illinois, 48% of candidates we tweeted at ended up participating, and 16% of those in New York did.

- **Phone**: We reached out to many candidates by phone. In Illinois, 7% of the candidates we called ended up participating, while 13% percent of the candidates we called in New York ended up participating.

- **Mail**: In many cases (especially in New York) we had mailing addresses for candidates but couldn’t find any other contact information. To reach those candidates—and add yet another point of contact for those candidates for whom we did have email addresses and
other contact information—we sent Voter’s Edge postcards with instructions for accessing the join form.

We sent 1,463 postcards to 1,139 candidates in Illinois, and 655 postcards to 488 candidates in New York. In our join form, we let candidates tell us how they heard about Voter’s Edge. Twelve candidates in Illinois and eight in New York cited the postcard. Therefore, about 1% of candidates to whom we mailed postcards used the join form to obtain login information for their Voter’s Edge profiles.

Note that many candidates received multiple contacts from the Voter’s Edge team, and therefore it is difficult to isolate the effects of social media, phone calls, or mail.

Candidate interface

In order to fill out their profiles, candidates were provided with credentials to log into the Voter’s Edge DES. Information submitted by candidates was reviewed by LWVCEF volunteers or Voter’s Edge staff (depending on the state). Once approved, the data was published to the front end of Voter’s Edge.

If a submission didn’t comply with our terms of use or was otherwise unsuitable for publication, staff would reject the submission and email the candidate to notify them that their submission was rejected, the reason for rejecting it, and how the candidate could change their submission in order for it to be accepted.

At minimum, candidates were required to submit the following information for their profiles:

1. Profession
2. Top three priorities if elected

They had the option of submitting the following additional information:

- Headshot
- Extended biography
- Political philosophy
- Education history
- Professional history
- Public service history
- Activities
- Contact information (including website, social media pages, mailing address, etc.)
- Answers to questionnaire
- Endorsements
- Position papers
- Videos

Candidates’ profiles would update with their new submissions every few hours up to our cut-off date for each election (the day before each of the primaries and three days before Election Day for the general election).

Biographical research

There were some exceptions to the candidate participation model. For certain candidates, we researched and posted biographical information (while also inviting those candidates to participate in Voter’s Edge). For these candidates, we indicated on their profiles that information was researched by the Voter’s Edge team.

We researched full biographies—profession, educational history, professional and public service history, contact information, and headshot—for candidates running for statewide office
in all three states (including presidential candidates), as well as all candidates in New York’s Federal primary and certain other congressional candidates in New York’s general election—a total of 145 candidates.

**Judicial ratings data in Illinois**

In Illinois, we included lists of ratings from various bar associations and other lawyers’ groups on judicial candidate profiles. Through a partnership with the Chicago Appleseed Fund for Justice, Voter’s Edge collected judicial evaluations from the Illinois State Bar Association and the Alliance of Bar Associations for Judicial Screenings, both of which provide the public with information to aid Illinois voters in making informed decisions when electing and retaining judges. These ratings were based on a combination of evaluations by panels of judges’ colleagues and advisory polls sent to lawyers who work with the judges in question.

**Candidate participation**

Since Voter’s Edge sourced its information from candidates themselves using a participation model, getting candidates to participate in Voter’s Edge at high rates was vital to our work. Accordingly, we tracked candidate participation via the DES.

As noted previously, Voter’s Edge covered 11,238 candidates overall in 2016, across all three states. Of these, 3,315 (29%) participated in Voter’s Edge. If limited to contested races, this rate improved to 34% across all three states. See the table below for a detailed breakdown of participation rates across states, in both contested and uncontested races.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participation rate</th>
<th>CA</th>
<th>IL</th>
<th>NY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All 2016 elections</td>
<td>41.3%</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All 2016 contested races</td>
<td>43.3%</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary election contests</td>
<td>40.7%</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary contested races</td>
<td>41.3%</td>
<td>12.8%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General election contests</td>
<td>43.5%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General contested races</td>
<td>44.3%</td>
<td>18.9%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the above data clearly demonstrates, the resources, volunteer network, and name recognition of Voter’s Edge and the LWVCEF in California greatly increased candidate participation as compared with Illinois and New York. New York had the lowest candidate participation rates (an average of 5% across all 2016 elections), while Illinois saw more than double that participation, averaging 13% across all 2016 elections. Meanwhile, over 41% of candidates participated on Voter’s Edge in California.

Participation rates tended to be higher among candidates in competitive races, likely due to the higher incentive for candidates to participate. However, this effect was much smaller in California (where it changed fractions of a percentage) than in Illinois and New York, possibly due to the trusted role of the LWVCEF’s volunteers in approaching candidates.

An even more extreme example of a partnership increasing candidate participation rates was the Voter’s Edge’s partnership with the Chicago Sun-Times for the general election. Since participation in Voter’s Edge was required for candidates to be considered for endorsement by the Sun-Times, the participation rate for candidates in their coverage area was much higher.
than for the state of Illinois overall: while the participation rate for candidates in contested contests in Illinois at-large was 19%, the rate for competitive contests covered by the Sun-Times was a stunning 81%.

Table 14: Effect of Sun-Times partnership on candidate participation (general election)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coverage area</th>
<th>Participation rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>State of Illinois (overall)</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State of Illinois (contested)</td>
<td>18.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater Chicago area (overall)</td>
<td>31.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater Chicago area (contested)</td>
<td>42.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun-Times contests (overall)</td>
<td>56.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun-Times contests (contested)</td>
<td>80.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Much of our partnership with the Sun-Times was grounded in their candidate questionnaire, which they used to determine their coveted endorsements. The Sun-Times had administered this questionnaire to Chicago-area candidates for some years. When they partnered with us on Voter’s Edge for the general election, we folded their questions and candidate responses into a section of candidates’ Voter’s Edge profiles labeled “Questions & Answers.”

In our email invitations to candidates in contests that had a Sun-Times questionnaire (i.e. those in the Chicago area and a few beyond Chicago), we wrote “Chicago Sun-Times” in the subject line and told candidates that they had to fill out their profession, top 3 priorities, and their questionnaire in order to be interviewed by the Sun-Times. As a result of our partnership, candidates in the Chicago area had to participate in Voter’s Edge in order to be considered for an endorsement by the Sun-Times—which proved to be a compelling incentive.

**Note:** Voter’s Edge didn’t display these endorsements unless a candidate chose to list it themselves in their profile.

**Data Entry System Feedback**

Our team applied the same user-centered approach we used to design the front-end Voter’s Edge interface to the Data Entry System, which was used by candidates, LWVCEF volunteers, and Voter’s Edge staff.

We assimilated feedback from multiple sources to improve continuously on this new system. Voter’s Edge conducted one formal round of user testing on the DES in early 2016, with two MapLight staff (who weren’t working on the project) and two LWVCEF volunteers. We also surveyed LWVCEF volunteers to collect feedback after the California primary and general elections. In addition, we collected direct feedback from LWVCEF volunteers and candidates themselves.

**Improvements to the Data Entry System**

Two major features of the DES were updated during the course of 2016 in response to the feedback we received:

The first improvement was the creation of a “submit all items for review” button. The DES required candidates to save information they entered so that they could continue revising items in future sessions. Once done filling out their profiles, the candidate would then “submit” each
saved item for review by Voter’s Edge staff or LWVCEF volunteers. We received feedback that candidates were unaware that they needed to submit saved items, or were not clear on how to do so. Candidates would then wrongly assume that their data had been published.

In response, we made several changes to candidate profiles and the submission process. The most significant of these was the addition of a button labeled “submit all items for review” at the top of the candidate profile. The button was prominently placed so candidates do not forget to do it, and it allowed candidates to submit all their items in one easy step (see Figure 46).

**Figure 46: DES “submit all” option**

![Figure 46: DES “submit all” option](image)

The impact of this improvement was significant. Voter’s Edge saw a substantial decrease in the number of candidates—across all three states—who saved items without submitting them for review. This reduced the follow-up time necessary for each candidate from Voter’s Edge staff and LWVCEF volunteers. Encouragingly, there were far fewer complaints about the submission process during the weeks leading up to the general election than there had been leading up to the primaries.

The second major improvement to the DES in 2016 was an overhaul of the review page. The review page is where staff and volunteers review information submitted by candidates and approve or reject items for publication on Voter’s Edge. Given how much candidate information was submitted to our site, there was a good deal of feedback on how this page could be improved to make it efficient and reduce the probability of mistakes being made. The following points were all included in feedback received by Voter’s Edge:

- The review page included too much content and was confusing.
- It was too easy to mistakenly approve information for a candidate while working through information from another candidate.
Users could not tell if a candidate had met the requirements for participation while looking at the review page and had to check the profile before approving items.

In response to this feedback, Voter’s Edge made the following improvements (Figure 47):

- A filter was added to the review page to allow a user to select a specific election, contest, and candidate. This way, users could view one candidate at a time.
- Candidate participation status was listed below the candidate name for each item submitted, reducing the need to check the candidate profile before approving items.
- An activity log was added, allowing reviewers to see a list of all the actions they had taken in the previous 30 days, making it possible to identify and correct errors.

**Figure 47: Improvements to review page**

![Review Items](image)

Source: Voter’s Edge Data Entry System

These revisions significantly reduced the amount of time staff and volunteers spent in the review process and in fixing mistakes made during the review process.

**Other Data**

**Ballot measures**

Voter’s Edge California provided users with important information on ballot measures at the state and local level. Most of this information came from government sources such as election authorities, city auditors, budget offices, and legislative analysis offices. Local League of Women Voters chapters provided additional information on measures from their “Pros & Cons” documents and Easy Voter Guides.

Voter’s Edge staff supplemented this information by researching other data to help users make decisions on ballot measures, including lists of endorsements from organizations and public figures, links to news articles related to the measure, information about upcoming nonpartisan public events related to the measure, and links to opinion pieces, other voter guides, and videos about the measure. Furthermore, Voter’s Edge provided this information in Spanish for the 17 statewide ballot measures as part of its focus on Spanish-speaking and other underserved audiences. The comprehensiveness of Voter’s Edge state ballot measure coverage was cited in user feedback as one of the highest values of the California site.
In Illinois and New York, Voter’s Edge did not have partnerships with the state League of Women Voters chapters. Therefore, the bulk of the information Voter’s Edge provided on ballot measures came from official government sources (i.e., state and local election authorities). Voter’s Edge staff also conducted research for the same types of supplemental information as in California. However, with far fewer ballot measures in those states, there were fewer available data sources for these.

**Campaign finance data**

Voter’s Edge draws on MapLight’s expertise on money in politics to include campaign finance data for all federal candidates in California, Illinois, and New York, as well as all state-level candidates and ballot measures in California. Data was obtained from bulk files provided by the Federal Election Commission (FEC) for federal candidates and the California Secretary of State for statewide candidates and ballot measures. This information included top contributor lists as well as breakdowns of contributions by size, location, and type of contributor (organizations vs. individuals).

The visual display of campaign finance data was designed to maximize accessibility and usability. Technical explanations of data were provided via expandable tooltips, and the top contributor lists were set to automatically expand when a user visited a candidate, measure, or contest page that had campaign finance data—changes that user testing suggested would increase the likelihood of users to notice and understand this information. Though not all users were primarily interested in campaign finance data, this information—which was not available in any other guide—was a major value-add for those users who were interested in it.

**Voting information section**

In addition to the ballot guide, the site also provided extensive practical information regarding election rules, voting rights, registration and vote-by-mail deadlines, different ways to vote, instructions for military and overseas voters, and much more. This information was presented in the Voting Information Section (VIS), which was accessible from the ballot overview page, as well as via a button at the top of each page.

In California, with support from the LWVCEF, Voter’s Edge was able to provide extremely comprehensive voting information at both the state and local levels. In addition to statewide information, LWVCEF volunteers in the various counties in California provided detailed information about locations for voting or requesting vote-by-mail ballots, dates and times when early voting locations were open, how to get election materials from local election authorities in languages other than English, and other county- or election-specific information. Much of this information was translated to Spanish, and overall the California VIS provided an appreciated resource for civic information regarding elections, including links to public agencies that could provide more information.

In New York and Illinois, without the support of the county-level League of Women Voters volunteers that was available in California, Voter’s Edge only provided statewide information. The scope of voting information was similar, covering the same areas as in California, but limited to information provided by the state election authorities and other statewide resources. One exception is in New York City where, with the help of a partnership with the New York City Campaign Finance Board, Voter’s Edge did provide city-specific information about how and where to vote.

**Spanish translation**
Voter’s Edge California was funded to translate both the Voter’s Edge site itself and data for all statewide candidates and ballot measures. To accomplish this work, Voter’s Edge worked with a Spanish Language Advisory Committee to select a professional translation firm. Translated material included the site navigation and user interface, static content, and candidate/measure data.
VI. Voter’s Edge Partnerships

Distribution Partners
Strong local partnerships were crucial to collecting data for Voter’s Edge and promoting the site to a wide audience. Reaching as many potential voters as possible—in California and new states—was a major goal for Voter’s Edge. For 2016, Voter’s Edge relied heavily on partnerships with media outlets and civic organizations as the primary mechanism for outreach.

In previous years, our distribution strategy emphasized media citations of Voter’s Edge data. However, Voter’s Edge did not receive much media coverage in 2016, likely because the tool is now perceived as being geared towards voters rather than as a data source for journalists.

While our partnership-focused approach proved largely successful and resulted in tens of thousands of website referrals, there remains room to improve in future election cycles.

Tools for partners
Partner organizations were offered two tools for sharing Voter’s Edge with their audiences:

- **Customizable subdomains** that allowed partners to publish versions of Voter’s Edge that had dedicated URLs and custom branding for colors and logos. In total, 42 groups launched custom subdomains in 2016.

- **Embeddable widgets**, which allowed partners to insert candidate or ballot information from Voter’s Edge on their websites or to embed the Voter’s Edge address search on their sites. Eighty-one groups embedded Voter’s Edge widgets on their sites in 2016.

Partnerships by state
In California, 28 partners launched custom subdomains, including ABC 30 Action News, ABC 7 Bay Area, Capital Public Radio, KQED, KPCC, NBC Bay Area, NBC Los Angeles, NBC San Diego, Telemundo Bay Area, Telemundo Los Angeles, the ACLU of California, Asian Americans Advancing Justice, Disability Rights California, and many more. Sixty-eight organizations embedded Voter’s Edge widgets on their site, including 18 of our subdomain partners and 50 other California groups.

Our nine Illinois subdomain partners included ABC 7 Chicago, the Chicago Sun-Times, NBC Chicago, Telemundo Chicago, and various stations of the Illinois Public Media Collaborative. In addition, Vote for Judges embedded a Voter’s Edge widget on their website, as did four of our subdomain partners.

In New York, we partnered with five groups on subdomains: ABC 7 New York, the New York City Campaign Finance Board, NYPIRG, Reinvent Albany, and WHEC. All of these partners embedded Voter’s Edge widgets, as did three other groups.

Voter’s Edge was significantly more successful at attracting partnerships and promoting the site via widgets in California than in Illinois and New York. The following factors were likely influential in making partnership strategies more fruitful in California than the other states:

- Additional pitching capacity in California through MapLight’s partnership with the LWVCEF

- More complete site content in California due to higher candidate participation, as well as additional campaign finance data and voting information
- Greater brand recognition and legacy in California as a continuation of the LWVCEF’s Smart Voter project (which has more than a decade of activity in the state)
- MapLight’s contacts and knowledge related to California media and civic engagement organizations
- Higher interest in election information in California due to relatively high number of ballot measures

**Importance of communication**

When approaching potential partners, Voter’s Edge communications staff outlined the benefits of a Voter’s Edge partnership, relying on phone calls, pitch emails and short documents in the early months of 2016. Ultimately, communications staff created a short pitch video for prospective partners, which greatly simplified the pitching process while giving media outlets and civic groups a clearer understanding of the site. These tools and strategies were utilized throughout the year leading up to the general election in proactive attempts to secure new partnerships and reach a broad base of users.

Partner organizations did not all engage with Voter’s Edge closely. In some cases, our contacts at partner organizations were unresponsive or unable to make final decisions about the information displayed on their website or social media accounts. With partners who were more engaged, staff found that personal communication and regular phone calls helped to increase partners’ marketing efforts on behalf of Voter’s Edge, as well as partners’ understanding of Voter’s Edge features.

**Site Traffic from Partners**

Partners drove significant amounts of traffic to the Voter’s Edge website in each state, and users who came to Voter’s Edge via our partners often engaged with the site in greater depth than users who visited the Voter’s Edge site alone. In general, more traffic was generated by custom subdomains than by widgets.

**California partnership statistics**

The most successful partnerships in California drove hundreds of thousands of users to Voter’s Edge (417,140 unique users from the top five partners). Furthermore, engagement from users visiting these partner subdomains tended to be significantly higher than average, both in terms of average pages per session and average length of session in minutes.

Table 15 describes traffic to the main Voter’s Edge site and subdomains in California in the month leading up to the general election (October 10, 2016-November 9, 2016).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subdomain</th>
<th>Sessions</th>
<th>% total sessions</th>
<th>Avg. pages/session</th>
<th>Avg. session length (minutes)</th>
<th>Users</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>votersedge.org</td>
<td>885,332</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>5.56</td>
<td>6.21</td>
<td>764,527</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KQED</td>
<td>204,186</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>11.52</td>
<td>13.34</td>
<td>162,251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KPCC</td>
<td>123,013</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>9.15</td>
<td>10.84</td>
<td>95,821</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABC 7 News</td>
<td>87,188</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6.17</td>
<td>5.95</td>
<td>83,017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KPBS</td>
<td>80,810</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>12.05</td>
<td>15.73</td>
<td>64,760</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Widgets on partner sites were generally less effective than full subdomains in attracting traffic to Voter’s Edge. The table below details the number of users who viewed widgets and used them to visit a Voter’s Edge subdomain as opposed to those who viewed widgets and did not visit the site. Only 8% of visitors who saw a widget used it to visit Voter’s Edge California.

Table 16: Widget usage for top five California partners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Embed type</th>
<th>Viewed and visited</th>
<th>Viewed and did not visit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All embeds (CA)</td>
<td>37,047</td>
<td>447,386</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KPCC</td>
<td>15,110</td>
<td>165,766</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KPBS</td>
<td>8,272</td>
<td>26,329</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KALW</td>
<td>1,195</td>
<td>5,292</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NBC Bay Area</td>
<td>781</td>
<td>22,843</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capital Public Radio</td>
<td>488</td>
<td>6,446</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Illinois partnership statistics

Partnerships in Illinois drove 42% of site traffic, evenly split between the Chicago Sun-Times, ABC 7 Chicago, and NBC Chicago. While engagement from users visiting these partner subdomains tended to be much higher than for the main site (with the exception of Sun-Times traffic), this was less pronounced than in California.

Table 17 describes traffic to the main Voter’s Edge site and subdomains in Illinois in the month leading up to the general election (October 10, 2016-November 9, 2016).

Table 17: Subdomain traffic for top five Illinois partners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subdomain</th>
<th>Sessions</th>
<th>% total sessions</th>
<th>Avg. pages/session</th>
<th>Avg. session length (minutes)</th>
<th>Users</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>votersedge.org</td>
<td>31,989</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>5.68</td>
<td>3.95</td>
<td>29,213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicago Sun-Times</td>
<td>9,346</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>4.47</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>9,081</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABC 7 Chicago</td>
<td>9,214</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>11.53</td>
<td>6.78</td>
<td>8,403</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NBC Chicago</td>
<td>6,322</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>7.95</td>
<td>6.34</td>
<td>5,726</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IL Public Media</td>
<td>479</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>10.85</td>
<td>6.41</td>
<td>414</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WQPT Western IL</td>
<td>429</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>8.69</td>
<td>4.22</td>
<td>406</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Widgets on partner sites in Illinois were even less effective than in California. The table below details the number of users who viewed widgets and used them to visit a Voter’s Edge subdomain in Illinois as opposed to those who viewed widgets and did not visit the site. Overall, 1% of users who saw a widget used it to visit Voter’s Edge Illinois.
Table 18: Widget usage for top five Illinois partners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Embed type</th>
<th>Viewed and visited the site</th>
<th>Viewed and did not visit the site</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All embeds (IL)</td>
<td>2,083</td>
<td>158,434</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NBC Chicago</td>
<td>1,718</td>
<td>137,676</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telemundo Chicago</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>17,345</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABC 7 Chicago</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IL Public Media</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicago Sun Times</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

New York partnership statistics

New York partners accounted for 52% of New York traffic to Voter’s Edge, with most users coming from the NYC Campaign Finance Board. Users from the NYC Campaign Finance Board and many other subdomains also engaged with the site more deeply than visitors to the main Voter’s Edge site (with the exception of ABC 7 New York and Reinvent Albany).

Table 19 describes traffic to the main Voter’s Edge site and subdomains in New York in the month leading up to the general election (October 10, 2016-November 9, 2016).

Table 19: Subdomain traffic for top five New York partners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subdomain</th>
<th>Sessions</th>
<th>% total sessions</th>
<th>Avg. pages/session</th>
<th>Avg. session length (minutes)</th>
<th>Users</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>votersedge.org</td>
<td>17,572</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>5.91</td>
<td>4.28</td>
<td>16,166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NYC Campaign Finance Board</td>
<td>17,435</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>8.11</td>
<td>4.46</td>
<td>15,872</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABC 7 NY</td>
<td>3,621</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>4.87</td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td>3,401</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reinvent Albany</td>
<td>562</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>3.96</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>547</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NYPIRG</td>
<td>302</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>5.41</td>
<td>4.22</td>
<td>279</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News 10 WHEC</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>8.67</td>
<td>6.85</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Widgets made up a larger percentage of site usage in New York. The table below details the number of users who viewed widgets and used them to visit a Voter’s Edge subdomain in New York as opposed to those who viewed widgets and did not visit the site. Overall, nearly 11% of all Voter’s Edge sessions in New York included a widget.

Table 20: Widget usage for top five New York partners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Embed type</th>
<th>Viewed and visited the site</th>
<th>Viewed and did not visit the site</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All embeds (NY)</td>
<td>1,748</td>
<td>14,883</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NYC Campaign Finance Board</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>683</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABC 7 NY</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reinvent Albany</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
VII. Conclusion

In 2016, Voter’s Edge empowered people in California, Illinois, and New York to cast more informed votes by providing a one-stop shop for information about every race on their ballots. We successfully redesigned the site from the ground up and developed and tested unique new systems for collecting data on local elections. Overall, our analysis of survey responses, Google Analytics data, candidate participation data, and user testing results indicates that Voter’s Edge was a highly useful, impactful tool.

We plan to carry the learnings from this report forward to future iterations of Voter’s Edge in order to increase the usefulness of the site, reach a larger audience that includes more underserved voters, and make the site even more responsive to voter needs.