



2022 EAC CLEARINGHOUSE AWARDS
Outstanding Innovation in Elections
Love Your Ballot Voter Educational Campaign

St. Louis County, Missouri

Summary

Every vote matters. Yet every vote cannot always be counted when ballots are torn, marred, improperly marked, or a voter's intent is unknown. With nearly 335,000 absentee ballots mailed to St. Louis County's Board of Elections since June 2020, ballot openers witnessed repeated problems that can cause ballots to be rejected or require time-consuming duplication. Wanting every vote to count, the Board of Elections launched "Love Your Ballot", an educational campaign through social media to address common mistakes made by voters. Taking a humorous approach to a serious subject, the Elections Board produced a series of eight videos featuring employees showing common mistakes, with voiceover scripts explaining how these actions can affect accurately counting the votes cast. The successful campaign ran prior to the primary and mid-term elections in 2022 and was shared on the agency's Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and TikTok platforms. The *Love Your Ballot* campaign, along with other strategies, significantly improved ballot quality in time for the 2022 primary and mid-term elections, with a duplication rate that decreased to 3.5% from 13.7%.

Common Mistakes



Mailed ballots sometimes arrive in poor condition.

In Missouri, under absentee voting laws, voters have the choice of requesting a ballot and returning it by mail to the Board of Elections prior to Election Day. Since June of 2020, St. Louis County's Board of Elections has received 334,702 mailed in absentee ballots. Voters mark these absentee ballots at home, in nursing homes and hospitals, and in other places of their choosing. Without the predictability of casting a ballot at a polling place, mailed absentee ballots sometimes arrive in poor condition or are incorrectly marked, causing the

potential for their rejection or the need to duplicate them, a time-consuming process.

Mailed absentee ballots are opened by bipartisan teams who saw the same mistakes repeatedly made by voters.

The most common mistakes include:

1. Returning two absentee ballots in one affidavit envelope (typically from family members in the same household), which prevents one ballot from being cast.
2. Marking and sending a Sample Ballot, which is not a legal ballot, instead of the actual absentee ballot.
3. Marking the ballot with a gel pen or using white-out to change or correct ballot marks, making scanning the ballot difficult or creating confusion as to voter intent.
4. Tearing the absentee ballot to where the tear interferes with ballot content.
5. Not signing the affidavit envelope.
6. Doodling or writing notes on the absentee ballot.
7. Spilling food/drink on the absentee ballot.

These common mistakes became the motivation and subject matter for launching a voter education initiative prior to the 2022 mid-term elections.

Why Love Your Ballot?

Conveying to voters the reasons to give tender loving care to their ballots was the first step in preparing an educational campaign. The Board of Elections wanted its messages to reflect three key reasons for carefully marking and handling ballots:

- Ensures the ballot is cast and counted.
- Accurately counts each marked selection.
- Clearly shows voter intent.

Everyone benefits when ballots are properly marked, handled, and mailed. Election administrators can prepare election results accurately and more quickly, and voters gain greater confidence in the system.

Launching the “Love Your Ballot” Campaign



The “Love Your Ballot” campaign was produced in-house through a series of videos featuring a cast of Election Board employees. The videos were created in July 2022 by the agency’s public information coordinator and a communications intern. In total, there were eight videos filmed, including an introduction to the *Love Your Ballot* campaign, followed by seven videos to address the most common mistakes made by voters. Often humorous, the videos clips showed how voters can make innocent

mistakes that have serious consequences. Voiceover scripts explained how these actions can affect accurately counting the votes cast. The videos were shared on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok prior to the August 2022 election, resulting in nearly 7,000 views during the campaign.

Positive Impact

The “Love Your Ballot” campaign was a vital component to reducing ballot rejection and duplication, but it was not the only effort made by the Election Board. The instructions that accompany absentee ballots were reviewed for clarity and readability. The Board of Elections also worked with its print vendor to address ballot tearing issues and adjust the perforation for the ballot tracking strip at the bottom of ballots. Collectively, all these efforts improved the overall quality of mailed in absentee ballots. For the November 8, 2022, election, there were 21,128 absentee ballots mailed to the Election Board. The duplication rate of these ballots was 3.5%, a dramatic improvement from a high of 13.7% in April of 2022.

Love Your Ballot Videos

Click the link to see the *Love Your Ballot* videos. <https://youtu.be/ifQWpg4GShc>