2012 Professional Practices Program

Elections at Your Fingertips: App-ortunities to Connect with Wisconsin Voters

Wisconsin Government Accountability Board

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Overview of the Project

The Wisconsin Government Accountability Board's (G.A.B.) mobile elections application (app) for smart phones allows Wisconsin voters to participate in the electoral process in a new and exciting way. This year, 2012, is an unprecedented election year for Wisconsin with six statewide elections instead of the normal four. The number and historic nature of these elections has elevated and sustained voter interest. The G.A.B. recognized the voters' interest in more accurate and timely information and sought to meet this need through means that are becoming increasingly accessible and familiar to the voting public, specifically, technology and social media. The G.A.B. now reaches out to voters through the use of Facebook, Twitter, and most recently the use of a mobile smart phone application called "Vote WI." The use of social media affords the G.A.B. the ability to reach a new group of people who primarily look for information through social media rather than other traditional media outlets. Voters can now access information about Wisconsin elections and the G.A.B. through their hand-held device. The new tools provide information that is easy to interact with and that helps put the voter in control of their voting experience.

Goals of the Project

The G.A.B.'s mobile application and social media projects were created in accordance with the Wisconsin Government Accountability Board's 2009-2014 Election Administration Plan, in which the G.A.B. committed to "expand the breadth, level, depth and scope of outreach to the public…" As part of the action taken to fulfill this promise, the G.A.B. is utilizing social media forums to better inform and involve the residents of Wisconsin in the activities of the G.A.B. and local election officials. A mobile smart phone application is an integral part of this goal as it allows the G.A.B. to provide information and outreach to voters even when they are on-the-go.

What the G.A.B. Mobile Elections Application Does

The G.A.B. mobile elections application (Exhibit A) allows voters to access and interact with the following information:

- Voters are able to look up their voter registration information (Exhibit B). When the voter enters their name and date of birth, the app will search the G.A.B.'s voter registration database.

  If the voter is found in the system, then information about the voter will be displayed such as:
    o The voter's registration record
    o The voter's polling place (with GPS directions to the polling place)
    o The voter's current elected officials
    o The voter's municipal clerk's information (with direct e-mail and phone dialing capabilities)
    o Date of the next election that voter is eligible to vote in
    o A sample ballot for the next election that voter is eligible to vote in (when it becomes available).

  If a voter is not found in the voter registration database, instructions will display regarding how to register to vote in Wisconsin.

- If a voter is not registered to vote, they can look up information relevant to them through the use of an address search (Exhibit C). The address search allows the voter to enter in their address and the app will then return the following information:
    o The polling place for that address
    o The elected officials representing that address

- o The municipal clerk's information for that address (with direct email and phone dialing capability)
- o The next election for that address
- o The sample ballot for the next election for that address

Once a voter has entered in their information and interacted with their voter registration record through the app, the app will then retain that information and when the voter returns to the app upon subsequent use they will be able to access the following information with just one click of their mobile device:

- My Polling Place (Exhibit D) – Once the voter's registration record is stored on the phone, this function navigates the voter to their polling place with instant GPS directions.

- My Next Election (Exhibit G) – Once the voter's registration record is stored on the phone, this function displays the date of the voter's next election along with a sample ballot for that election. There is also an election "countdown" feature that can be displayed on the main screen of the smart phone that displays the days until the next election.

- My Elected Officials (Exhibit F) – Once the voter's registration record is stored on the phone, this function displays a list of the voter's current elected officials.

- My Clerk Info (Exhibit E) – Once the voter's registration record is stored on the phone, this function displays the voter's municipal clerk's information and allows the voter to e-mail or call the clerk with one click. This function also navigates the voter to their municipal clerk's office with instant GPS directions.

See Exhibit J for a full demonstration of the G.A.B. elections mobile application.

What the Application Will do in the Future

Currently the G.A.B's mobile election application is only available on the Android smart phone. The G.A.B. is currently developing the application for other platforms including the iPhone. These other platforms will be available in the coming months.
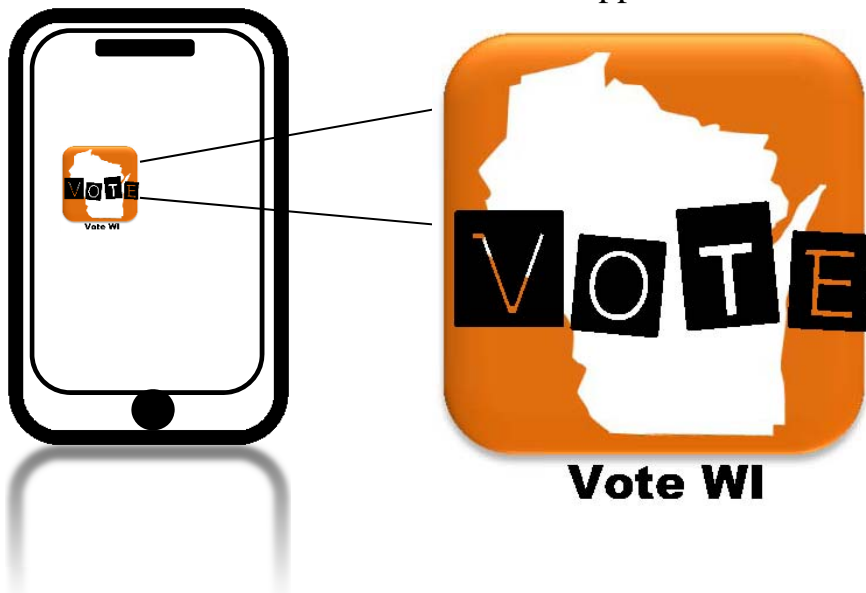
The G.A.B. is also developing the mobile app to include more convenience for voters on the go. In the coming year, the app will be expanded so that voters can access and complete a voter registration application, which they will then be able to simply print from their smart phone. Absentee ballot applications will also be available through the application for voters to complete and print from their smart phones. In addition, military and overseas voters will be able to request and access their official election ballots through the application which they will then be able to print from their smart phones and mail to their municipal clerk in Wisconsin.

The Application and Social Media

The G.A.B.'s election application is a part of a larger vision to utilize social media to best reach Wisconsin's voters. The G.A.B.'s Facebook and Twitter accounts, along with the mobile app, all provide information to voters at their fingertips through their smartphones. The G.A.B.'s mobile election app will be promoted through our existing Facebook (Exhibit H) and Twitter accounts (Exhibit I). We will also promote the app through our existing website http://gab.wi.gov. In addition, the G.A.B. will partner with Wisconsin's 1,851 municipal clerks, 72 county clerks, school districts statewide, and the college and university systems to increase awareness of our mobile application and social media initiative.

Exhibit A

This is the icon that will appear on the main screen of the smart phone and will launch the application.

Vote WI

Once the user has launched the application, the following "buttons" will appear:

My Voter Info
Address Search
My Polling Place
My Clerk Info
My Elected Officials
My Next Election

Exhibit B

My Voter Info

My Voter Info – This function asks for the voter's name and date of birth. The app then searches our database. If the voter is found in the database, the app returns information about the voter including polling place, elected representatives, municipal clerk info(with email/phone capability), next election, and a sample ballot for the next election. If no voter registration record is found, information about how to register to vote will display.

Exhibit C

Address Search

Address Search – This function asks for the voter's address information then searches the G.A.B. database. If the address is found in the database, the app returns information about the address including polling place, elected representatives, municipal clerk info (with email/phone capability), the next election, and a sample ballot for the next election.

Exhibit D

Vote Here!
My Polling Place

My Polling Place – If the voter info is stored on the phone, this function navigates the voter to their polling place. If voter information is not stored, the address search is then launched.

Exhibit E

My Clerk Info

My Clerk Info – If the voter info is stored on the phone, this function navigates the voter to their municipal clerk's office and displays information allowing the voter to call or email their clerk with one click. If voter information is not stored, the address search is then launched.

Exhibit F

My Elected Officials

My Elected Officials – If the voter info is stored on the phone, this function displays the voter's current elected officials. If voter information is not stored, the address search is then launched.

Exhibit G

VOTE
My Next Election

My Next Election – If the voter info is stored on the phone, this function displays information for the next election including a sample ballot. If voter information is not stored, the address search is then launched.

Exhibit H

Use of Facebook

http://www.Facebook.com/WisconsinGovernmentAccountabilityBoard

Exhibit I

Use of Twitter

http://www.twitter.com/Wisconsin_GAB