

Finding Voter Registration Information on NJ State and County Web Sites: It's a Challenge!

A Report from the New Jersey Project, Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers University, summarizes the experience of looking on the State's web site and on the 21 county web sites for voter registration information. It was originally issued before the voter registration deadline, Tuesday, October 17, 2006, and revised in February 2007.

THE STUDY IN BRIEF

If the internet is a voter's source for information, Eagleton's New Jersey Project cautions that it won't necessarily be easy to find a voter registration form and election information on the web. There are two reasons:

1- The front page of the State's web site, nj.gov, does not include a reminder about the voter registration deadlines and a clickable connection. To find this information, look under "How to ...," or under "E" for elections and "V" voter registration in the alphabetical listing, or click on government source, then civic information, then voter registration or look under departments, then Law and Public Safety, then Division of Elections. These clicks will take you to NJElections.org, click on Voter Resources and look for paragraph on Where to Register and click on registration form in middle of paragraph.

2- County web sites yield very different results. Counties have major responsibility for administering elections in New Jersey. However, county web sites vary in their usefulness for information about elections. This means that New Jersey's would-be-voters and voters do not have the same opportunities to get easy-to-find voting information. A solution to this problem would be to create a simple "Register to Vote link" prepared by the state and posted on each county's web site to provide uniform, helpful information.

HOW THE STUDY WAS CONDUCTED.

Ingrid W. Reed, director of the New Jersey Project, asked a sophomore work study student, Malissa Pansa-ad, to look at each of the 21 county web sites to find out how easy it was to locate the voter registration form and how many clicks it took to find it.

Based on the number of clicks required to find the voter registration form, nine of the county web sites were rated A as "Easy to Access;" five were rated B as "Moderately easy to access;" and seven were rated C as "Difficult to Access," using this scale:

Easy A – 1-4 pages clicked
Moderate B – 5-7 pages clicked
Difficult C – 8-10+ pages clicked

In the following section, county by county notes are presented about the experience of seeking information from the web sites of New Jersey counties about voter registration.

In collecting this information, Malissa Pansa-ad observed that navigation of the web sites was facilitated by the experience in doing so. Assessment of counties at the end of the alphabet benefited from the searches conducted of county web sites at the beginning of the alphabet. Obviously, citizens looking for information on the internet would not have had the benefit of this experience when searching a web site for the first time.

County-by-County findings from a search of County Web Sites for a voter registration form.

Atlantic County

October 2006: When at the home page, I clicked on *government* on the website's sidebar of options. I clicked on *elections* and other similar links, but couldn't find anything. After going through many of the pages listed under *government* I finally just went back to the main page, clicked on *A-Z* at the very top of page, scrolled down to the letter *V* and clicked on *voting*. From there, it took me to another page also with a list of links/options to the left. Among the options, I clicked *Voter Registration Form** and that took me to a PDF file of the form. Ease of Access: B

February 2007: Under *A-Z* choose *V* which takes you to the Voter Registration Form, or choose *Government* on sidebar, click *Elections*, then Voter Registration Form. Suggestion to county webmaster: under *Click for Quick Find* add a link to the Voter Registration Form.

Bergen County

October 2006: Main page under *Find County Services* (on the right), click *Board of Elections*, click *Voter Registration*. However, the link to the web registration form no longer works and all the page gives you is the address to where you should send your registration form. I can get the form for the voter absentee ballot, but no where can I get a regular registration form, so the address is useless to me. Finding the page was pretty simple and straight forward, however. Ease of Access: B (lowered score because form does not exist).

February 2007: Same as Fall 2006. Link still does not work.

Burlington County

October 2006: Main page: click *Departments*, scroll down, under *V* voting does not exist, scroll up to *E*. Click *Election Board*. New page: click *NJ Division of Elections* to left. State page for *Division of Elections* comes up: <http://www.state.nj.us/lps/elections/electionshome.html>, click banner that reads *21 Day Voter Registration Deadline*, click *Voter Registration Application* (brings you to bottom of page). Click *Voter Registration Application* (PDF form). Overall, the steps were pretty straightforward if you knew where to look, or had an idea of where to look. Ease of Access: C

February 2007: NJ Division of Elections link doesn't work anymore after following the same steps from before. I found the form only after doing a search on the main page. First link shown after search is to the *County Clerk* page. Choose *Register to Vote* on left and click the Voter Registration Application.

Camden County

October 2006: Main page, click on *Government* at top, click on *Voter Information* to left. First link is *Voter Registration form*. Scroll to bottom to find the PDF form in English or Spanish. This site was the easiest to navigate so far. I like how the application comes in Spanish also. The address to mail the form to is also on the page. Ease of Access: A

February 2007: Same as Fall 2006.

Cape May County

October 2006: Click *Departments* on sidebar to left, click on *Board of Elections*, scroll to bottom of page & click on *Board of Elections Downloadable Forms* (links also in Spanish). Click either *Register to Vote*, which takes you to the NJ Division of Elections page, or click the link beneath that called *Registration Form (Help America Vote Act)*, which takes you directly to a PDF application. Link also found in Spanish. Ease of Access: A

February 2007: Same as Fall 2006.

Cumberland County

October 2006: There is no site that gives you a voter registration form. After clicking and clicking (through gov't and services, to browse by department, to board of elections, etc.) I eventually did a *government directory* search for *voter registration*. It took me to a link for the Voter Registration Department which then only gave me the name, address, and phone number of the department's office and the administrator. There is no form to access and no information on how to get one. Ease of Access: C

February 2007: Same as Fall 2006.

Essex County

October 2006: Very difficult to navigate. Site layout busy and messy. No easy search option. I found nothing. Ease of Access: C.

February 2007: Same as Fall 2006. However, the search directory does not have a link to the *Board of Elections* page; there is just a drop-down menu. There is no available "type-in" search anywhere.

Gloucester County

October 2006: Main page, click *Online Services*, click *Voter Registration* to the left, scroll to find links to forms. The form was easy to find only after I tried the link to government and found nothing there. However, like the other sites, they could be clearer about where to/how to register to vote. Ease of Access: B

February 2007: Same as Fall 2006, but a look through the link to government yielded results this time around. Choose *Departments* after clicking *Government* at the top of the screen, click *Board of Elections*, then from drop-down menu choose *Resources & Forms*, finally click link to Voter Registration Form

Hudson County

October 2006: The layout is fine and easy to read, but there still isn't a link to any forms nor is there a search option. I found nothing useful. Ease of Access: C

February 2007: At the sidebar to the right click the link to *County Clerk*, then chose *Records & Forms* up top. Voter Registration Form is first link. Ease of Access: B

Hunterdon County

October 2006: Very easy to find. The main page has a direct link on its menu list to *Voter and Election Information*. It takes you to another page where you can access the form through PDF and the mailing address. Ease of Access: A.

February 2007: Same as Fall 2006.

Mercer County

October 2006: The menu and department listings have nothing on voter registration. When searching for voter registration, the site uses a Google-type search engine called FreeFind to search the site (which doesn't help because it doesn't find departments or links, rather, articles and key words). Ease of Access: C

February 2007: This time around I found the form, though with difficulty. Choose *Elected Officials* from sidebar to left, then choose *County Clerk*. Next, choose *Voting Machines* from sidebar at left and click Voter Registration. Under *Where to Register* click link *Registration Application*. This was difficult because the link is hidden in a paragraph even after searching through many pages.

Middlesex County

October 2006: A search of the website does not yield useful results. If you go to the Board of Elections department and scroll to the bottom, there is a link to the State's Division of Elections website, but the Middlesex County homepage has no direct link to a PDF form for voter registration. Ease of Access: C

February 2007: Same as Fall 2006

Monmouth County

October 2006: When at the main page, click on *Departments* option/tab at top, click on *Division of Elections*, click on *Civilian Absentee Ballot Information and Application*, click on *Superintendent of Elections*, click on *Form to Register to Vote*. I found the page all by accident. I thought, "What if I click here? What does that do?" None of the pages are clear about where to go to register or how to register. It was all trial and error when I found the form.

After all of that, I looked to the top of the page where it says *How do I...* and then there's a drop-down list of things and *register to vote* is one of them. It takes you directly to the PDF form. It is convenient, yet on a visit to the site, I would not have thought to look there first. Ease of Access: B

February 2007: I found other options from my previous search: 1) Under *Government* tab, choose *County Clerk*, then *Elections* at bottom of page and choose Voter Registration Form, or 2) Under

Departments tab, choose *Division of Elections* link, then Voter Registration Form. However, the drop-down search at the top of the page (“How Do I...”) is still the best option.

Morris County

October 2006: Main page, click *Forms* found on sidebar, click on *Voter Registration Application* (also in Spanish). Very straightforward and easy, best site so far. Ease of Access: A.

February 2007: Same as Fall 2006.

Ocean County

October 2006: Main page, scroll and click *Government*, click *Government Website*, scroll to second box in middle of page titled *Public Information* and click *Voter Registration Forms*, click *Select here for the form*. It took me a while to find it because initially I did not click *Government Website*. I was looking for a Board of Elections link or something along those lines. Ease of Access: B.

February 2007: Follow directions from Fall 2006 or choose *Government* on right from main page, then click *County Clerk’s Office* from left. Choose *Elections & Voter Information* (under picture that says VOTE), then scroll to *Election Information* and click Voter Registration Form. However, the link does not work.

Passaic County

October 2006: Main page, click *Departments* on sidebar, click *Elections* from list, scroll to *Election Links* box and click *Voter Registration Form* (also in Spanish). Ease of Access: A.

February 2007: After following the steps from Fall 2006, the link from *Election Links* box no longer works; the link is a connection to the State’s page.

Salem County

October 2006: Main page, go to *County Government* on sidebar and click on *Departments*. When you highlight the bar, scroll and click *Election Board*, click *Registration Form*. Ease of Access: A.

February 2007: Same as Fall 2006.

Somerset County

October 2006: On the main page there is a link to the absentee ballot, but none for the regular registration. After clicking on *Voter Info* on the sidebar, it takes you to another page where I clicked *How do I register to vote?*. I thought I would get a link to the registration form, but the only form available is the absentee ballot. After doing a search on the website (click *Search* near bottom of sidebar), and typing in *Voter Registration* I got the PDF form. Ease of Access: A.

February 2007: *Voter Info* is no longer on the sidebar. Instead, go to *Board of Elections* on the sidebar, click *Voter Info* button/graphic, then Voter Registration, and choose link *New Jersey Voter Registration Application*.

Sussex County

October 2006: After failing to find a Board of Elections or county government page, I did a search on the website for *Voter Registration*. I got a page with one link: *Voter Registration*. I thought that this would take me to the form, but it just took me to another page where I had to scroll and click *Voter Registration* and got a PDF form. Ease of Access: A.

February 2007: Choose *Links* on sidebar. Under *Elections*, click *Sussex County Clerk* and choose *Election Services* on sidebar. Under *Voter Registration* the link is in the paragraph. A new window opens; scroll to the bottom and click *Voter Registration*. Or, under *FAQs* on the sidebar, choose the link *How & where do I register to vote?*, then under *Board of Elections*, click link in paragraph (though it does not work).

Union County

October 2006: Main page, go to *Quick find* and click on the letter *E*, then click *Election Services*. Scroll and click link to voter application (in blue, right before *Election Information* in brown). This was a little confusing. Ease of Access: B.

February 2007: I couldn't find the *Quick find* option this time, so I went to *Government* at the top of the page, chose *Board of Elections*, and under *Quick Tip* (gray box) there is a link to the *Voter Registration Form*.

Warren County

October 2006: Main page, scroll to bottom and click *Elections*, click first link *NJ Voter Registration*. Quick and easy. Ease of Access: A

February 2007: Same as Fall 2006.

About Malissa Pansa-ad. She is a Douglass College sophomore majoring in Political Science with a minor in Music. This is her second year as a student assistant at the Eagleton Institute of Politics. Last summer, she completed an internship with Center for American Women and Politics's New Leadership program. After working for the University's student-run newspaper, *The Daily Targum*, Malissa hopes to get a journalism internship in the coming year. She is also a Cullen Family Endowed Scholarship recipient and thanks James G. Cullen for his generosity and support in her dreams to become an international journalist.

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