# Creative Campus Voting Project

# Designing *for Participation*

Most college students understand voting as an important adult rite of passage. But being able to follow through on their intent to vote is challenging. The process is unfamiliar. The rules are confusing. New student voters often feel anxious about asking "dumb questions."

**The Creative Campus Voting Project (CCVP) designs** **clear tools and welcoming, delightful experiences** that address the many logistical and psychological tripping points for new student voters.

We aim to **set in motion a lifetime of positive voter identity.**

Creative Campus Voting Project (CCVP) is led by co-PIs Associate Professors **Stephanie Rowden** and **Hannah Smotrich,** U-M Stamps School of Art & Design

CCVP works in close coordination with the Ann Arbor City Clerk and our UMICH Votes campus partners: Turn Up Turnout, U-M Democracy & Debate, Ginsberg Center, UMMA, and the Duderstadt Gallery.

**Our creative research,** using art and design skills and sensibilities, grounded in behavioral science insights, is ongoing and year round. The work takes visible, public form in the Fall of election years.

**In Fall 2022,** CCVP created three projects:



### Campus Voting Hubs

We designed voting hubs in two art spaces on campus where — starting 40 days before the election — students could register with the Ann Arbor City Clerk, request an absentee ballot and vote early.

**"I was registered in 5 minutes or less. Great energy — voting in person is such a wonderful experience. Answered all of my questions."**

*— student survey respondent*



### UMICH Votes Fellows

We created a cohort of 20 trained peer mentors, recruited from across campus, to support student voters and answer their questions.

**"you're almost talking to friends rather than higher ups or older figures... (which) really helped make the conversation more open and less scary"**

*— student voter*



### Ballot Wayfinder

We created a playful, large-scale installation that invited students to 'walk through' a ballot and learn how to connect their vote to the issues they care about.

**"this was the first time I ever connected with any resource for voting, the first time I felt genuinely excited about (voting)**

*— student voter*

## Welcome Area
To help student voters start the process, a peer mentor oriented visitors as they entered. Information was available for students wishing to register and vote in Ann Arbor, elsewhere in Michigan or in another state.

*"I liked how helpful and attentive the staff were. I felt like all my questions were answered."*

— student survey respondent

➤ **Campus Voting Hubs**

**The UMMA exhibition** (Sept 27–Nov 8, 2022) expanded dramatically from the single gallery we used in 2020. We designed four spaces, each tailored to a point along the voter's journey:

1) a welcome area to invite students into the voting process and provide resources

2) a pop-up location of the city clerk for those choosing to vote in Ann Arbor

3) a comfortable voting space with clear instructions for completing the ballot; and

4) a celebratory end point to mark the achievement.

**The Duderstadt Gallery exhibition** (Oct 12–Nov 8, 2022) brought a smaller-scale version of the project to North Campus.

Our work included design and production of the two sites as well as ongoing project management and coordination with the Ann Arbor City Clerk's office, UMMA and the Duderstadt Gallery staff and our UMICH Votes campus partners.
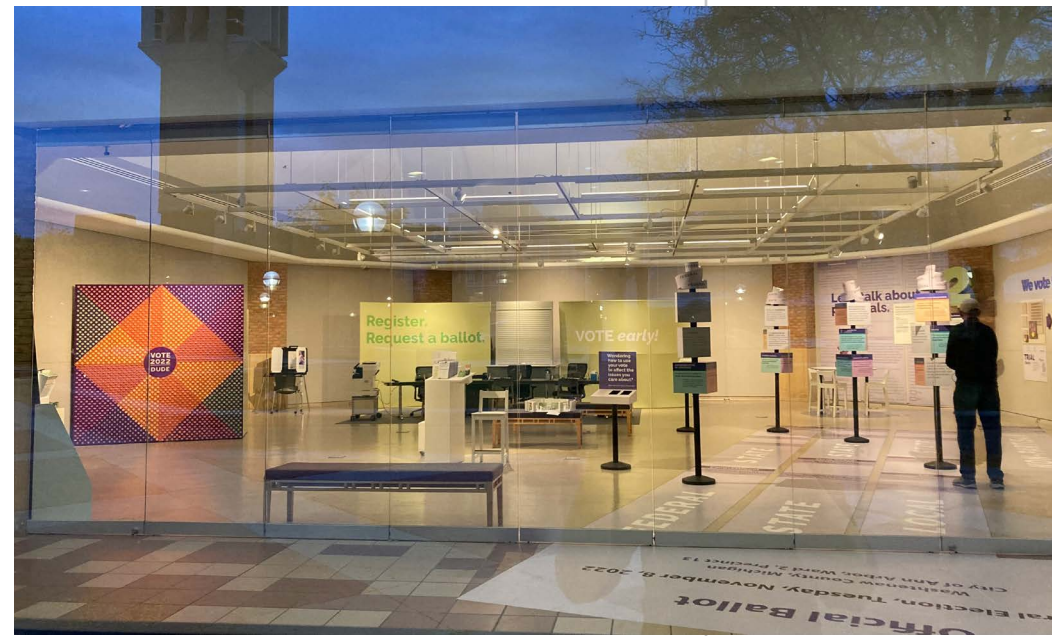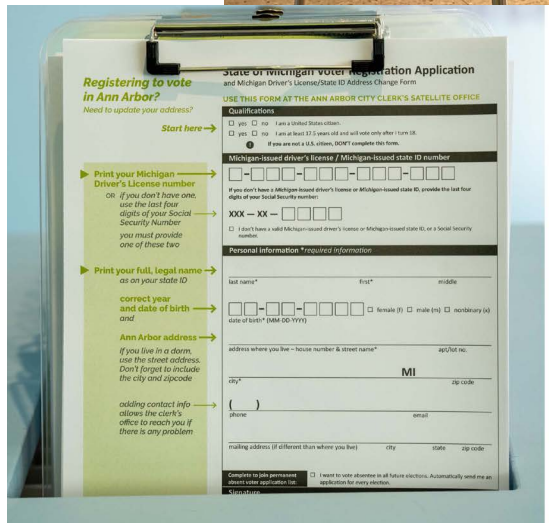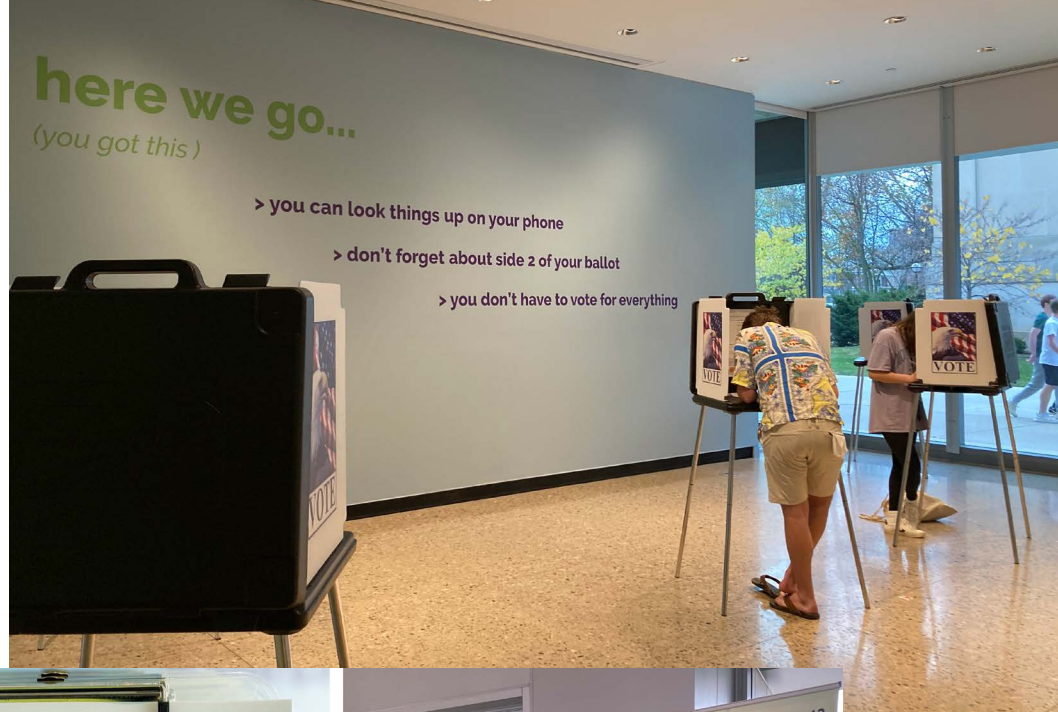




**Ann Arbor City Clerk's Office**
At the center of the voting hub was a pop-up location of the Ann Arbor City Clerk's office. Students choosing to vote in Ann Arbor could take care of the whole process in one visit and have their questions answered by a member of the clerk staff.

Vibrant graphics that could be seen through the gallery's glass walls made the office visible for students walking by, giving them a glimpse of civic participation in action.

Over **40 days** at UMMA, and **28 days** at the Duderstadt Gallery **3900 voters were registered** and **4600 ballots** were collected.

here we go...
(you got this )

> you can look things up on your phone

> don't forget about side 2 of your ballot

> you don't have to vote for everything





**Voting Area**
Visual design elements with
a conversational tone —
whether on registration forms,
small handouts, signage or
walls — established a friendly
voice to accompany and guide
voters through the process.

Throughout, we used concise,
plain language and clear, calm
visual forms to create an
inviting, reassuring context.
We explain what voters need
to know just at the point in the
process when it is relevant.





**Celebration Area**
This year we added an
opportunity for students to
mark their accomplishment
with a celebratory selfie by
our large button mural or
by making a button at our
buttonmaking cart staffed
by a UMICH Votes Fellow.
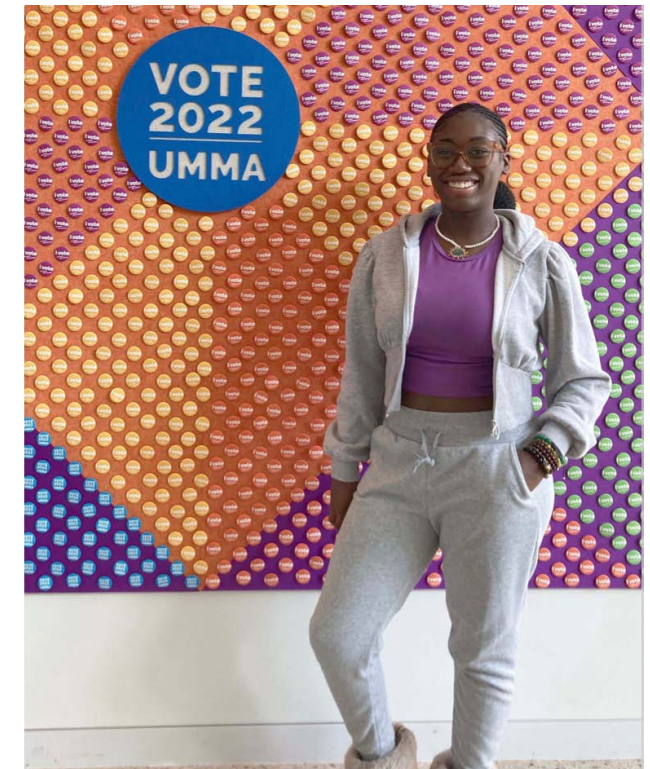




**"I loved how friendly
everyone was there,
and the wide selection of buttons
was amazing!"**

— student survey respondent

## ➤ UMICH Votes Fellows

Our 2020 project at UMMA highlighted the potential of peer-to-peer interactions to shape the student voter's experience. For 2022, we designed a peer mentor cohort as an integral piece of the experience in the two voting hubs.

UMICH Votes Fellows welcomed and oriented their peers, answered questions and offered non-partisan resources. Fellows were also there to chat and celebrate voting at a button-making cart! Their upbeat energy was central to creating a positive social experience for student voters.

UMICH Votes Fellows
Fall 22 cohort included students majoring in:

**Art and Design**
**Biopsychology Cognition**
   **and Neuroscience**
**Chemical Engineering**
**Communications**
   **and Media**
**Computer Science**
**English**
**Nursing**
**Philosophy, Politics,**
   **and Economics**
**Political Science**
**Public Policy**
**Sociology**

*we received*
**76 applications**

*conducted*
**33 interviews**

*and made*
**20 hires**



freshmen · sophomores · juniors · seniors · graduate
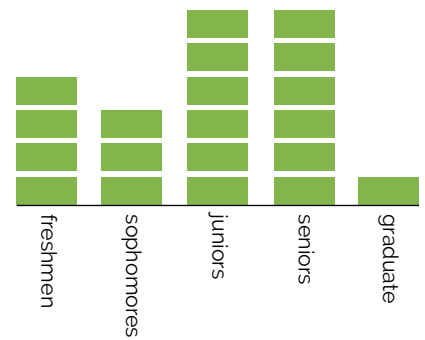
### Recruitment

*"Help us Reimagine the Voting Experience!"*
We recruited 20 Fellows from across campus through an interview process that emphasized the role as an opportunity to build professional and interpersonal skills.

Recruitment began in the summer of 2022. We contacted a wide variety of student organizations including identity-based organizations, the Central Student Government, Fraternity and Sorority Life, and any other organizations that were likely to represent a wide variety of perspectives and backgrounds.

### Interviews

Key questions included: *Is the applicant ready to participate in a non-partisan effort? Are they able to guide students through the registration process? What connections do they have on campus that they could use to bring student voters to the voting hubs?*
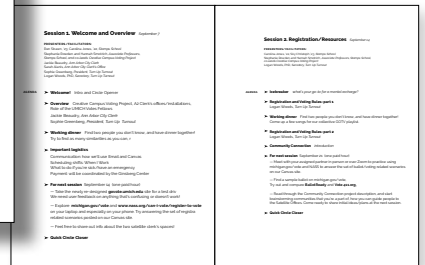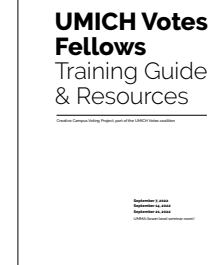


### Training

We designed three training sessions that focused on registration and voting knowledge, insights from behavioral science, the workings of each voting hub, soft-skill strategies, and team building. Turn Up Turnout took the lead on teaching voting rules and regulations. A2 City Clerk Jackie Beaudry and Sarah Alanis introduced the Clerk's office operation and Catherine Carver shared information about related D&D programming.

Importantly, we wanted to create a cohort that felt that they could rely on each other. Each training session included icebreakers and time over dinner for informal socializing. Fellows met outside of training sessions to practice answering questions. *"Ask me about voting"* t-shirts both helped visitors identify Fellows and created a sense of community. Building comfort amongst the cohort created a safe, supportive environment for their learning and development and helped create a welcoming atmosphere for visitors.



**$15/hr**

*Help us reimagine the voting experience*
**Be a UMICH Votes Fellow!**

**What will you do?**

• Create a welcoming atmosphere at two A2 City Clerk's offices on campus where visitors can **register**, **request a ballot**, and **vote**.

• Provide non-partisan guidance

• Help your peers make their voices heard in the midterm elections — and celebrate voting!

**FIND OUT MORE & APPLY**

**Ask me about voting**
The first point of contact as students entered the voting hub was a warm welcome from a UMICH Votes Fellow. These peers made it easy to ask questions — normalizing the idea that navigating registration and voting is a learning process.

Fellows could provide resources to support students whether they chose to vote in Ann Arbor or in their home districts.



**Celebrate your vote!**
Fellows working the button-making cart near the ballot dropbox gave voters a chance to chat and celebrate their accomplishment in an upbeat, creative way. An easy entry point for conversation, this opportunity was particularly powerful for fostering a sense of belonging and voter identity.



*"I learned so much. Not only...the ins and outs of the voting and registration process, but...how to communicate this information to people as clearly as possible."*
— UMICH Votes Fellow

*"I was able to truly help people, and for many, it was their first time voting."*
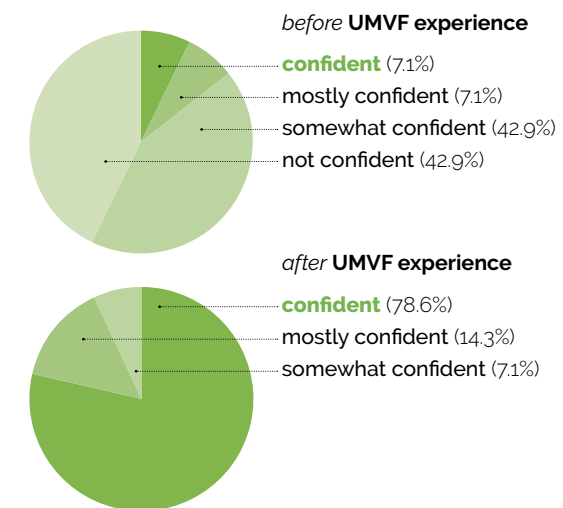— UMICH Votes Fellow

**Connecting to the larger campus**
In addition to staffing the voting hubs, Fellows created outreach activities tailored to their individual campus communities. Activities included: giving voting presentations, acting as a voting point person in a student org, making announcements, posting TikTok videos and more.

In post-Election assessments, Fellows spoke about how much they valued the chance to play this role promoting civic participation.

*"It was noticeable how confused students were when coming in to vote initially and how much more confident they seemed after engaging with a Fellow or [clerk]."*
— UMICH Votes Fellow

**How confident do you feel explaining voting and registration rules?**

*before* **UMVF experience**
confident (7.1%)
mostly confident (7.1%)
somewhat confident (42.9%)
not confident (42.9%)

*after* **UMVF experience**
confident (78.6%)
mostly confident (14.3%)
somewhat confident (7.1%)

➤ **Ballot Wayfinder**
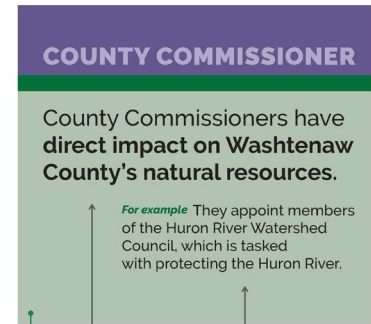
**Helping students navigate their ballot**
We designed a playful, 40-ft Ballot Wayfinder installation in the Duderstadt Gallery to give new voters a playful first encounter with their ballot. Spilling outside of the gallery, a giant floor graphic invited students into the "Partisan" section of the ballot — an area with four playground-like sculptures introducing key offices on the federal, state and local levels.
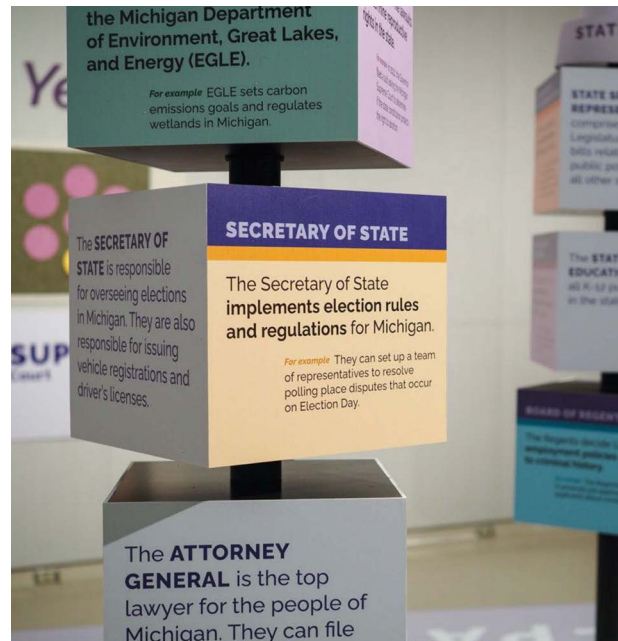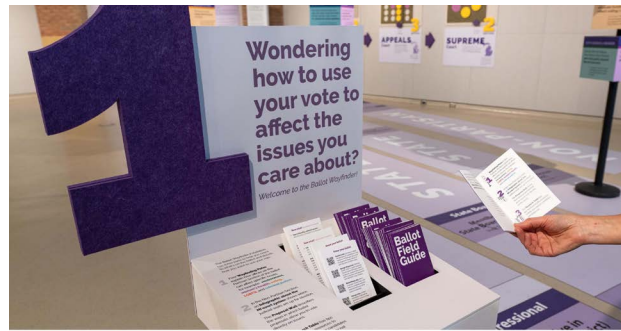
**Connecting offices with issues**
For each office, a rotating cube helped voters understand both the role and the impact that the office could have on specific issue areas.

A Ballot Field Guide explained the color-coding system for the highlighted issue areas and helped students connect the issues they care about with offices and proposals on the ballot.

*"I found myself bringing the information back home with me. I was talking to people in my life about real issues that we had never discussed before."*
— student voter



**COUNTY COMMISSIONER**

County Commissioners have **direct impact on Washtenaw County's natural resources.**

*For example* They appoint members of the Huron River Watershed Council, which is tasked with protecting the Huron River.

general impact of office

specific example

*green background signifies impact on environmental issues*
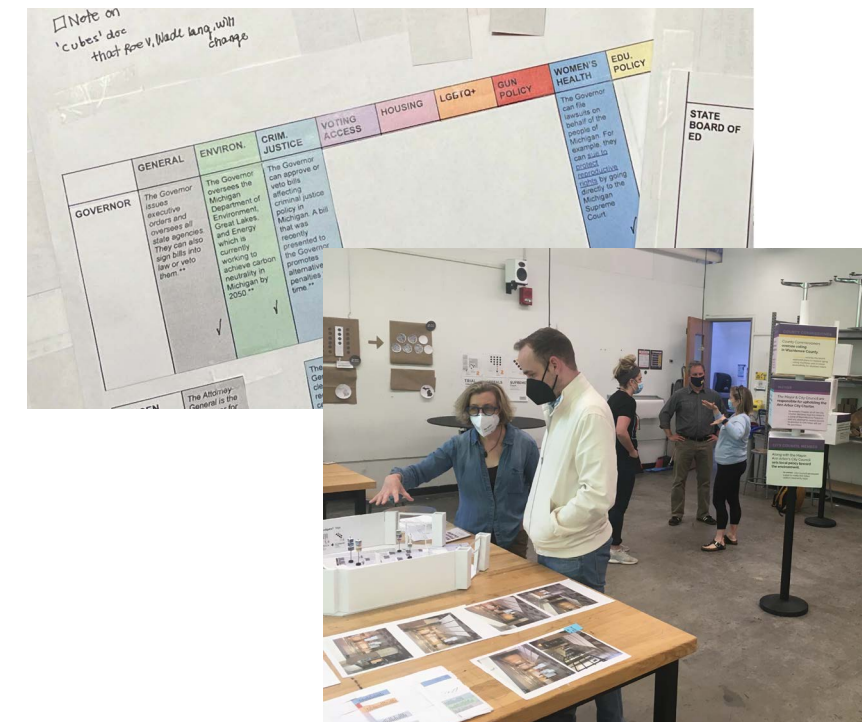


**Design Process**
Developing the concept, generating content and resolving the form for this installation was an ongoing, year-long process. We worked closely with student research assistants, TUT and other campus partners, outside experts, local and state elections officials to vet the content and ensure that the information we were presenting was not only engaging for students, but also strictly non-partisan and accurate.



**Demystifying down-ballot**
We built an infographic with architectural felt to explain the Michigan court system and visualize which judicial seats were up for election.

A Proposal Wall explained how the proposal system works in Michigan and pointed students to reliable, non-partisan information to research each proposal on the ballot.

**voting hubs**

**ballot wayfinder**

UMICH Votes Fellows
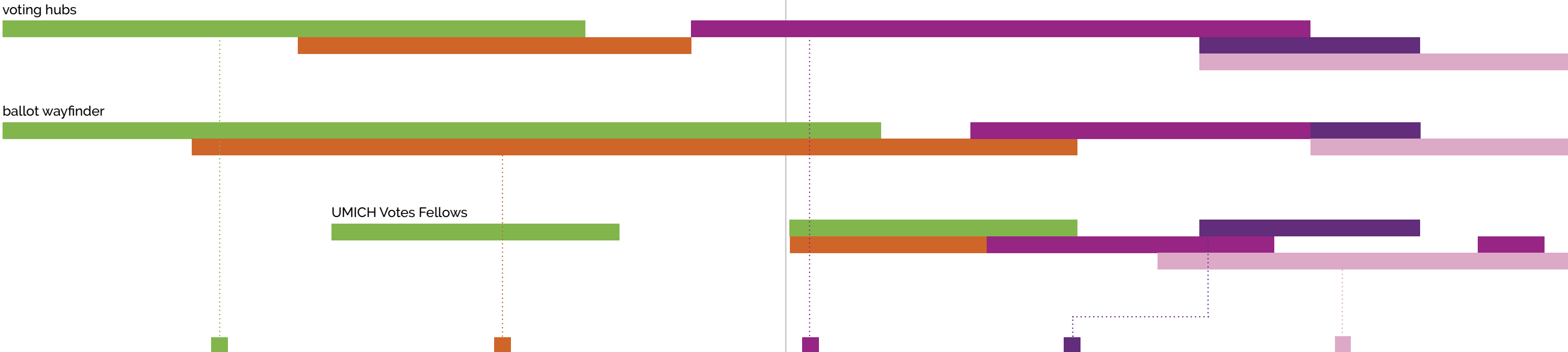
## Phases of work

### conceptual exploration and design development

— translate qualitative data from ballot literacy focus groups into design prompts

— concept contributions from Stamps Exhibition Design class

— design explorations with FEAST research team on flow, furniture, distribution of information in the voting hubs

— research the issue areas most salient for U-M students

— explore physical forms for Ballot Wayfinder

— define goals for and name the cohort of UMICH Votes Fellows

— craft Fellows job description, seek input from and coordinate with UMICH Votes Coalition

### prototyping and testing

— prototype and test physical forms in the studio and gallery

— substantive content generation for Ballot Wayfinder including rewriting, vetting with experts

— redesign registration form, test, get input from TUT and A2 City Clerk (seek approval from MI Secretary of State)

—develop 3-session training for UMICH Votes Fellows cohort; coordinate with TUT to deliver substantive voting rule info

### production, fabrication, and installation

— coordinate with Ann Arbor City Clerk, UMMA and Duderstadt staff

— fabrication of furniture elements

— production of printed materials (reg forms, handouts, non-partisan "know your ballot "guides)

— finalize working files for external fabricators (vinyl, sculptural elements), coordination with vendors

—3D printing at Stamps

— interview and recruit UMICH Votes Fellows

— implement 3-session training for UMICH Votes Fellows to build knowledge and soft skills

— installation planning, coordination with UMMA Tech staff

— installation planning and coordination with Duderstadt gallery director, on site, hands-on installation

### daily operation and adjustments

— day-to-day supervision of the voting hubs, including acting as liaison with clerk's staff at UMMA and Duderstadt, providing support for Fellows

— scheduling UMICH Votes Fellows, managing last-minute replacements

— provide media assets for social (Stamps, UM Social, D&D, etc)

— respond to press inquiries

— adjust signage, update fellows to align with time-based procedural changes (as per state election law)

### documentation and assessment

— audio interviews, photography, videography

— work with UMICH Votes coalition partners to design Qualtrics survey, IRB submission

— work with UMICH Votes coalition to distribute and publicize survey

— administration for HSIP

— clean and analyze survey data

# Creative Campus Voting Project

Our 2022 Midterm Elections projects
were made possible
by generous support from:
**U-M Democracy & Debate**
**U-M Office of Research**
**U-M Stamps School of Art & Design**

and close coordination with our
**UMICH Votes Coalition partners:**

Ann Arbor City Clerk
Democracy & Debate
Duderstadt Center Gallery
Ginsberg Center
Turn Up Turnout
University of Michigan Museum of Art

**Creative Campus Voting Project**
is a non-partisan initiative led by co-PIs
Stephanie Rowden and Hannah Smotrich,
Associate Professors at the University of
MIchigan Stamps School of Art and Design.

This ongoing research investigates how
the skills and sensibilities of art and design
practice can help alleviate the challenges
faced by student voters. We design inviting,
celebratory experiences and materials that
deliver practical, accessible information to
engage and educate college-age voters.

**www.creativecampusvoting.org**

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