



# The 2026 U.S. Midterm Engagement Playbook

For community and engagement  
leads, newsroom editors, and  
moderation teams

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Produced by **Viafoura**

**Midterms are a direct-traffic event. Readers come back daily, they want to weigh in, and their intent to register is at a yearly high.**

**Leverage that traffic to strengthen and grow your community.**

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**This playbook helps you prepare with:**

- pre-cycle setup tips
- seven engagement plays ready to deploy
- moderation frameworks for the situations election coverage creates
- strategies to convert participants to long-term community members
- checklists for quick use

# Set up before the cycle peaks

## 1.1 Update your community guidelines

Before early voting begins, update your public-facing guidelines page to include:

- What's welcome (criticism of candidates and policies, partisan advocacy, scepticism about outcomes)
- What you'll act on (false claims about voting procedures, attacks on other community members), and
- What moderation standards apply

### Your moderation coverage for the cycle

Prepare before early voting begins. Your Viafoura Customer Experience Manager can help you assess your moderation needs across the full midterm window, whether you run your own team or are considering additional human coverage. Reach out early.

## 1.2 Brief your newsroom on community engagement rules

Having journalists and community staff in comment threads is one of the most effective ways to build community during election coverage. Agree on these before early voting begins:

**Who speaks in comments:** Reporters on their own stories, community managers anywhere, editors on request.

**What staff comments are for:** Asking thought-provoking questions, driving conversation toward substance, answering reader questions, and pointing to related coverage and official sources.

**The one-reply rule:** Staff answer once and step back.

**Two eyes on the hard ones:** Allegations of bias, threats, doxxing, or electoral fraud claims get a second review before any public response.

**What to escalate.** Threats toward staff or election officials, doxxing of poll workers, coordinated content, and anything requiring legal review. Route these directly to your escalation contact.

## 1.3 Review your CommunityOS setup

**Roles, access, and badges.** 🛡️ Confirm community roles, staff badges, and access permissions are in place. Verified journalist and moderator badges build reader confidence in staff contributions and ensure your team can respond effectively when activity peaks.

**Moderation Intelligence.** 🛡️ Review automated thresholds and keyword filters for election-specific content. Document any changes and set a revert date. If Viafoura is moderating on your behalf, share your calibration set (see Part 3) before volume peaks.

**Engagement Engine.** Schedule participation plays against your editorial and election calendar. Live Q&As benefit especially from early promotion.

**Broadcast Notifications.** 🛡️ Configure your notification series and opt-in prompts for the full cycle: debate nights, primary results, election night, certification milestones, and Live Q&A reminders.

# Engagement plays

PLAYS 1–4

## 01

### Daily homepage prediction poll

Polls

- Rotate questions across key races, chamber control, and major ballot measures.
- Show live results to bring readers back daily.
- Prompt registration when a reader records their prediction.
- Feed results to your editorial team as a live audience signal.

## 02

### Poll of the day + open debate

Polls and Conversations

- Frame one contested issue/day: economy, a local ballot measure, a debate outcome.
- Route poll voters directly into the linked conversation.
- Surface strong arguments from multiple positions to keep the thread substantive.
- Feed daily engagement data to your newsroom about what readers are focused on.

## 03

### Scheduled live Q&As

Live Q&A

*Moderated sessions where your audience puts questions directly to political reporters, editors, and outside experts in real time.*

- Schedule sessions around high-attention moments: debate nights, primary results, early voting periods, election night, and the days after key calls.
- Pre-seed and moderate questions live to ensure success
- Share transcripts and top exchanges as follow-up editorial content & newsletter features.

## 04

### Feature the best reader voices

Conversations, Engagement Starter, Trending Conversations

- Curate standout comments into a recurring Reader Reactions block in your election newsletter.
- Feature strong contributions on article pages and homepage modules.
- Recognition builds the participation habit in your most engaged members. Trending comments entice new members to engage.

# Engagement plays

PLAYS 5–7

## 05

### Reader image contributions

**Conversations**

- Create a submission prompt: lawn signs, early-voting queues, debate watch parties, and post-election community moments. Route submissions through moderation before publication.
- Curate the strongest images into homepage galleries and article modules.
- Turn your community into a distributed visual presence for races your team cannot physically cover.

## 06

### Community intelligence for the newsroom

Viafoura MCP Server — Community Data Layer

*The Community Data Layer's MCP integration connects live community discussion to your editorial workflow. Newsrooms access real-time data on reader questions and discussions.*

- Surface the questions, tensions, and storylines readers are actively debating.
- Plan stories and follow-ups that answer what your community is already asking.
- Report on the election debate your own community is having, and bring readers back to see how it lands.

## 07

### Live election alerts

**Broadcast Notifications & Notifications webhook**

*Election coverage gives readers repeated reasons to say yes to notifications. Each opt-in builds a direct channel that lasts past November.*

- Map a notification series to the midterm calendar: debate previews, primary alerts, race calls, certification milestones, and Live Q&A reminders.
- Prompt opt-in at peak engagement moments: when a reader registers, votes in a poll, or joins a Live Q&A.

## Keeping the conversation civil

A community that holds its standard through contested coverage is one readers return to and grow with. The guidance below helps your team maintain that standard, whatever your setup looks like.

Each standard needs to live in three places:

1. your internal guidelines,
2. your moderation team's working reference (with a calibration set of 20 to 40 real comments, each labelled with the decision and reason; include borderline keeps alongside removals), and
3. your public community guidelines

### 3.1 Voter education versus voter suppression

#### Remove:

- False specifics about voting mechanics: dates, locations, hours, eligibility, ID requirements, ballot handling, and methods of return.
- Impersonation of election officials, election offices, or news outlets.
- Intimidation: implied surveillance at polling places, threats directed at voters or poll workers, doxxing of election officials.
- Targeted suppression framing: content telling a specific group their votes will not be counted, presented as fact.

#### Keep:

- Sincere confusion, including confidently wrong claims. Correct these; do not remove them.
- Anger at the system, low confidence in outcomes, and cynicism about whether voting matters, stated as opinion.
- Advocacy, persuasion, get-out-the-vote messaging, and partisan appeals, including aggressive ones.

**The deciding question:** would a reader who believed this take action that prevents a valid ballot from being cast? Yes: remove. No: it is persuasion.

### 3.2 Misinformation versus scepticism

|                      | Keep: treat as scepticism              | Act: treat as misinformation                                                                                  |
|----------------------|----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Form</b>          | Questions, doubt, demands for evidence | Flat assertions of fact                                                                                       |
| <b>Verifiability</b> | Contests interpretation or motive      | Directly contradicts the official record (Secretary of State, county clerk, certified results, court rulings) |
| <b>Harm path</b>     | Diffuse distrust                       | Specific and actionable                                                                                       |

Working rules:

- "Unproven" is not "false." Remove for direct contradiction of the official record.
- Predictions, opinions about fairness, and normative claims about how elections *should* work are not misinformation.
- Where possible, use a middle step: hold for review, add context, or reply with an official source.
- Pre-agree your authoritative sources beforehand and communicate to moderators: election authorities for process, certified results for outcomes, court records for disputes.
- Recount claims and "the result is illegitimate" assertions are largely opinion and stay up. We still remove false procedural specifics within them.

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### 3.3 Political speech versus harassment

A community that stays civil through the most contested coverage of the year is one readers trust, return to, and recommend. The guidance below helps your team build and maintain those standards across the full midterm cycle.

#### Generally allowed:

- Harsh criticism of ideas, parties, campaigns, policies, and media coverage.
- Insults directed at the conduct or public record of candidates and public figures, including blunt ones.
- Sarcasm, mockery, and profanity where your site allows it generally.

#### Address promptly:

- Attacks based on identity or protected characteristics: race, ethnicity, religion, national origin, gender, sexuality, or disability (including when the target is a candidate).
- Slurs, in any direction.
- Dehumanising language and expressed wishes for or threats of harm.
- Attacks on ordinary community members. Regular commenters deserve a higher standard of protection than public figures.
- Pile-ons: the same mild insult repeated at one user by multiple accounts. Each comment might pass individually; the pattern is harassment.

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### 3.4 Pre-written moderation responses

#### Thread-opening pin for election stories

*"We're moderating comments on this story closely through [date]. Criticism of candidates, policies, and coverage is welcome. Attacks on other community members and false claims about voting procedures are not. Full community guidelines: [link]."*

#### Slower approval notice

*"We're reviewing comments on this story before they post, so you may see a delay. This is temporary and applies equally to everyone."*

### **Election results pin**

*"Results are unofficial until certified. For official counts, see [state/county source]. We remove comments that misstate voting or certification procedures; disagreement about the outcome is welcome."*

### **De-escalation reply (from a named staff account)**

*"This thread has gotten heated and we've removed several comments for personal attacks. The thread remains open. Please keep discussion focused on the story."*

### **Thread closure notice**

*"We've closed comments on this story. This isn't about the views expressed; we don't have moderation coverage to keep this thread safe right now. Other election threads remain open."*

### **Correction reply template**

*"To clarify one point in this thread: [correct fact], per [authority]. Original story: [link]."*

## Turning election engagement into lasting growth

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01

### **Keep the conversation going.**

Runoffs, certification timelines, and early legislative moves give engaged communities natural reasons to stay. Schedule Live Q&As with your political reporters through the certification window.

02

### **Convert your notification audience.**

Election notification subscribers are already opted in. Keep them engaged: policy outcome updates, early legislative coverage, and early signals from the next cycle.

03

### **Review and carry forward what worked.**

Use your Community Data Layer to identify what drove growth: top plays by registration, best notification opt-in rates, highest-performing threads.

# Operational checklist

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## EDITORIAL AND COMMUNITY SETUP

- ☐ Community guidelines updated on-site with effective and end dates
  - ☐ Newsroom engagement rules agreed and distributed: who speaks, what for, one-reply rule, escalation contacts
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## COMMUNITYOS SETUP

- ☐ Community roles, staff badges, and access permissions confirmed
  - ☐ Moderation Intelligence: thresholds and keyword filters reviewed; revert date set
  - ☐ Engagement Engine: Plays 1–5 scheduled against the election and editorial calendar
  - ☐ Broadcast Notifications: series and opt-in prompts configured for the full cycle
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## MODERATION OPERATIONS

- ☐ Internal standards distributed to all newsroom and community staff
  - ☐ Calibration set of 20–40 real comments built, labelled, and shared with your moderation team
  - ☐ Trusted sources list agreed and shared: election authorities, certified results sources, court records
  - ☐ Pre-written moderation responses (Section 3.4) approved and accessible to all who may need them
  - ☐ Escalation contacts and after-hours coverage confirmed for election night and the following week
  - ☐ Post-election coverage plan in place: runoff calendar, certification dates, ongoing community management
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## ONGOING DURING THE CYCLE

- ☐ Weekly calibration check during the peak window; reversals logged and fed back into standards
  - ☐ Post-cycle Community Data Layer review: registration sources, return-visit patterns, notification opt-in rates
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## APPENDIX B

# Quick reference: what stays, what comes down

| Scenario                                                                 | Decision                                               |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| False claim about polling hours, ID requirements, or eligibility         | <b>Remove</b>                                          |
| "I heard you can't vote by mail here" (sincerely wrong)                  | <b>Correct with official source; keep</b>              |
| Get-out-the-vote advocacy for one party                                  | <b>Keep</b>                                            |
| "These results will be rigged" (prediction or opinion)                   | <b>Keep</b>                                            |
| False procedural claim about certification contradicting official record | <b>Remove</b>                                          |
| Harsh insult directed at a candidate's record or policy position         | <b>Keep</b>                                            |
| Slur directed at a candidate based on identity                           | <b>Remove</b>                                          |
| Insult or attack directed at another community member                    | <b>Remove</b>                                          |
| Scepticism about media coverage or electoral legitimacy                  | <b>Keep</b>                                            |
| Impersonation of an election official or election office                 | <b>Remove</b>                                          |
| Near-identical comments from multiple accounts on one thread             | <b>Escalate for coordination review</b>                |
| Thread heating up; individual comments still within guidelines           | <b>De-escalation reply from named staff; keep open</b> |

The 2026 U.S. Midterm Engagement Playbook was produced by Viafoura. CommunityOS, Engagement Engine, Moderation Intelligence, Personalization Suite, Community Data Layer, and Broadcast Notifications are components of Viafoura's CommunityOS: the community operating system for media brands.

For setup support, moderation inquiries, or to discuss the Viafoura midterm moderation add-on, contact your account team.