

Tips for Empowering Voters with Disabilities in the 2020 General Election and COVID-19 Crisis



U.S. ELECTION
ASSISTANCE
COMMISSION

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Overview

The COVID-19 crisis has led to additional accessibility challenges in the administration of elections. We recognize that the pandemic has amplified existing barriers for voters with disabilities and want to commend the work of election officials during this time. State and local officials have spared no effort to address the challenges of COVID-19 and extraordinary progress has been made to protect the safety of both voters with disabilities and poll workers. A number of states have adopted new accessible technology to provide remote options for voters with disabilities. Now more than twenty states and the District of Columbia offer electronic ballot delivery. As new election procedures are implemented in the states and localities, this document provides recommendations on meeting accessibility requirements.

It is estimated that more than 38.3 million Americans with disabilities, roughly one-sixth of the electorate, are eligible to vote in the 2020 general election. This growing demographic encompasses a broad range of voters, including those with mobility, visual, communicative, physical, or cognitive impairments.

The Help America Vote Act (HAVA) and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) affirm the right to a private, independent, and accessible vote for people with disabilities. The EAC works to assist election officials by serving as a clearinghouse, strengthening voting systems, and improving overall voting experiences. Below are some tips and recommendations to localities to empower voters with disabilities this fall. We want to hear your continuous feedback on

local best practices that are helping serve voters with disabilities on the front lines. Please email listen@eac.gov to share your thoughts and ideas. We will update this resource with your input.

Communicating Voting Options:

We understand this election season is incredibly busy, but it is vital that 2020 procedural materials are accessible.

- Make sure your website is accessible and clearly details all voting options as set forth by the ADA and HAVA.
- Consult resources such as the [United States Access Board's internet standards](#), [National Council on Independent Living's website elections toolkit](#) for disability advocates, Department of Justice [ADA informal directives](#), and [Website Content Accessibility Guidance](#).
- Create accessible documents to outline new COVID-19 procedures.
- Incorporate alternatives to electronic communication including television, radio, and print advertisements for those without internet access.
- Engage various organizations such as local chapters of disability advocacy groups, independent living centers, veteran facilities, nursing homes, disability rights network organizations, and assisted living centers. [This site](#) may serve as a starting point for identifying groups in your area.
- Consider hosting a virtual discussion for voters with disabilities and advocates on accessible voting options, election information, and any relevant deadlines.
- If necessary, reach out to the EAC or local sources with any questions.

Early Voting:

Early voting will help reduce lines or congestion on Election Day and may be a popular option for voters concerned about COVID-19 risks. This option must be accessible. Election offices that serve as early voting sites need to be prepared for voters with disabilities.

- Please remember that all HAVA and ADA requirements apply to early voting.
- Communicate your early voting options to people with disabilities through media, civic associations, and local advocacy organizations.

In-Person Accessible Voting:

Millions of voters with disabilities will exercise their right to vote in person this fall. To help in-person voting run smoothly:

- Ensure poll workers and election workers are trained on accessible voting systems. Many jurisdictions are facing a shortage of experienced poll workers; an increase in first time poll workers means this training is even more essential.
- Provide poll workers with instruction on how to assist voters with disabilities while practicing social distancing.
- Ensure physical access and the path to vote are not disrupted by COVID-19 precautions.
- In making access preparations, consult the [Department of Justice polling place ADA checklist](#).
- Integrate the cleaning of accessible voting systems into regular polling place COVID-19 procedures.
- As you prepare for an increased demand for curbside voting, troubleshoot potential logistical issues and consider additional staff, resources, and traffic management solutions.
- Consider partnering with advocacy groups to encourage voters with disabilities to serve as poll workers and assistants at the polling place.
- Find accessible methods to accommodate voters that usually rely upon lip reading. Informational displays and clear face shields for poll workers may be helpful.
- Actively publicize new procedure information to the public and local disability advocacy organizations.
- Harness social media, public service announcements, and online outreach to ensure voters with disabilities are aware of changes to 2020 polling locations.
- Update all information on your elections website and make sure it is accessible and easy to locate.

Making Lines and Wait Times Work for Voters with Disabilities:

A significant portion of the disability community has mobility challenges.

This may make waiting in line difficult. Please consider flexible options:

- Chairs should always be available for voters with disabilities.
- Poll workers and greeters should check with voters regarding any disability needs.

- As plans are made, remember most polling place adaptations are very budget friendly. Often you will be able to use existing supplies or low-cost materials to remove physical impediments and improve signage.
- Effectively communicate accessible early voting and mail and absentee options to reduce Election Day lines.

Mail and Absentee Voting:

In the 2020 general election, many people with disabilities will vote by mail or absentee ballot. Please consider the following as you work to make this option accessible:

- Depending on your jurisdiction's options, effectively communicate all services and corresponding deadlines to voters with disabilities and advocacy organizations.
- Actively promote mail and absentee voting alternatives, especially accessible options such as electronic ballot delivery systems.
- Ballot drop boxes should be accessible for all disabilities. This includes both location and physical access.
- Communicate any no-excuse ballot options and corresponding requirements.
- Utilize local disability leaders and organizations to disseminate information about available services.
- Make sure your website is accessible and clearly displays all information.

Additional Information:

- The EAC released [frequently asked questions](#) to further assist election officials in the use of CARES Act and HAVA funds to help voters with disabilities. Low-cost adjustments can be a valuable use of these funds. Email the EAC grants office at Havafunding@eac.gov if you have any funding questions.
- For more information on EAC resources to assist in your accessibility efforts, email listen@eac.gov, visit eac.gov, or call (301) 563-3919.