



National Coalition on Accessible Voting's Voter Access Guide

A guide for election administrators to making voting accessible for people with disabilities

August 2024

The National Coalition on Accessible Voting is a coalition that maintains and expands voting access for people with disabilities.

Chapter 1

About the Voter Access Guide

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Welcome to the National Coalition on Accessible Voting (NCAV)¹'s Voter Access Guide!

We wrote the Guide to help election administrators make voting accessible. The Guide provides information, recommendations, and checklists on accessibility for every stage of the voting process, from registering and gathering information on voting to casting a ballot. The Guide identifies barriers to accessibility in advance, allowing you to address them early in your planning process.

We provide links to the best free resources available for each topic. Use the resources provided in the Guide as starting points for further research.

The Guide was written by Kelly Israel, coordinator of the National Coalition on Accessible Voting (NCAV). Edits were made by members of the NCAV and election administrators. We hope that the Guide helps you develop fair, accessible elections with improved turnout from voters with disabilities.

The Guide refers to “expanding” or “improving” accessibility rather than “making voting accessible.” We (and many election officials) strive for full accessibility for all people with disabilities, but full accessibility is an always-moving, evolving target. Polling places may change. Voting equipment may need to be updated. Election administrators and state laws and regulations may change.

Disclaimers

The Guide does not cover every issue. It is a general overview of expanding voting accessibility. We encourage election administrators to do more research on all topics.

This Guide brings voting accessibility resources together in one place for easy access. We link to or cite resources we used to develop the Guide.

Conformance to any recommendations or use of any resources contained within or suggested by this Guide is not intended to act as a standard for compliance with federal or state law.

The recommendations in this Guide do not constitute legal advice or advice on how to comply with any federal or state law or policy, including the Help America Vote Act (HAVA),² the Voting Rights Act (VRA),³ the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA),⁴ Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of

¹ The National Coalition on Accessible Voting (NCAV) maintains and expands voting access for people with disabilities.

² Help America Vote Act, 52 U.S.C. §§ 20901–21145 (2022).

³ Voting Rights Act of 1965, 52 U.S.C. § 10101; 52 U.S.C. §§ 10301–10314; 52 U.S.C. §§ 10501–10508; 52 U.S.C. §§ 10701–10702 (2022).

⁴ National Voter Registration Act of 1993, 52 U.S.C. §§ 20501–20511 (2022).

1973,⁵ Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973,⁶ the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA),⁷ and the Voting Accessibility for the Elderly and Handicapped Act of 1984 (VAEHA).⁸

The Guide does not constitute advice on how to implement the President’s Executive Order on Promoting Access to Voting (March 7, 2021)⁹ or any other Executive Order or policy of any federal agency. Each department, office, agency, organization, entity, or individual must make their own independent determination on compliance with any and all applicable laws, including those discussed in this Guide.

⁵ Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 29 U.S.C. § 701 *et seq.* (2022).

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ 42 U.S.C. § 12101 *et seq.* (2022).

⁸ Voting Accessibility for the Elderly and Handicapped Act of 1984, 52 §§ 20101-20107 (2022).

⁹ President’s Executive Order on Promoting Access to Voting, Exec. Order No.14019, 86 Fed. Reg. 13623 (Mar. 7, 2021), <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2021-03-10/pdf/2021-05087.pdf>.

Federal regulations and guidance on voting and accessibility

Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973

All state and local election offices are covered by Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. Their “services, programs, or activities” cannot discriminate against people with disabilities.¹⁰ Section 504 requires agencies that receive federal funding to not discriminate against people with disabilities.¹¹ Section 504 provides voters with similar rights to those provided by the ADA.

The U.S. Code is available through the U.S. Government Publishing Office (GPO)’s GovInfo website at: <https://www.govinfo.gov/app/collection/USCODE>. The ADA is in Title 42, Chapter 126 of the U.S. Code. Section 504 is in Title 29, Chapter 16, Subchapter V of the U.S. Code.

Both the ADA and Section 504 have regulations. ADA regulations for Titles II and III are available at: <https://www.ada.gov/law-and-regs/regulations/>. Many agencies have Section 504 regulations pertaining to their specific jurisdiction area. Election agencies should look to the Section 504 regulations issued by the federal agency that is funding the state or local government’s activities, or the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), for specific guidance.

- The ADA’s 2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design describe requirements for physically accessible buildings. They are available at: <https://www.ada.gov/law-and-regs/design-standards/>.
- The U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) provides resources and guidance on voting, including a checklist on polling place accessibility, at <https://www.justice.gov/voting/accessibility-voting>.
- The U.S. Access Board’s Guide to the ADA Accessibility Standards is an excellent resource for physical accessibility. It is available at: <https://www.access-board.gov/ada/guides/chapter-1-using-the-ada-standards/>.
- The ADA National Network is an excellent general ADA resource: <https://adata.org/>.
- The Department of Justice released [final regulations on web accessibility](#) for Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act in April 2024. This rule will require covered agencies to adhere to at least the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1.
- The Department of Justice updated its guidance on [voting rights and disability](#) in April 2024. The new guidance clarifies people with disabilities’ voting rights, including their right to

¹⁰ 42 U.S.C. § 12132 (2022).

¹¹ 29 U.S.C. § 794 (2022).

assistance and right to be free of categorical disqualification from voting because of their disabilities or guardianship status.

Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973

Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 covers electronic and information technology accessibility. Federal agencies and agencies that receive federal funds must comply with Section 508. [Section 508.gov](https://www.section508.gov) provides covered agencies with detailed information and guidance.

Help America Vote Act (HAVA)

HAVA, passed in 2002, provides many protections to voters with disabilities. Voters with disabilities must have the “same opportunity for access and participation (including privacy and independence) as for other voters.”¹² HAVA resources can be found at:

https://www.eac.gov/about/help_america_vote_act.aspx.

EAC Resources

The Election Assistance Commission (EAC) serves as a “national clearinghouse” of information on elections and election administration.¹³ The EAC has a list of accessibility resources for election officials, including a webinar series, at <https://www.eac.gov/voting-accessibility>.

National Voter Registration Act Of 1993 (NVRA)

The NVRA requires Departments of Motor Vehicles (DMVs) to offer voter registration. Public assistance offices and offices that primarily serve people with disabilities must do the same.¹⁴ The NVRA is often called the “motor voter” law. The Department of Justice has a question-and-answer sheet on the NVRA at <https://www.justice.gov/crt/national-voter-registration-act-1993-nvra>.

Voting Accessibility for the Elderly and Handicapped Act of 1984 (VAEHA)

VAEHA requires that polling places and voter registration be accessible to elderly people and people with disabilities.¹⁵ The Department of Justice enforces this law and can be consulted on compliance.

¹² 42 U.S.C. § 15481(a)(3)(A); Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law, Autistic Self Advocacy Network, National Disability Rights Network, Schulte Roth & Zabel LLP, and Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP, *A Guide to the Voting Rights of People With Mental Disabilities 10-11* (2020) [hereinafter “Bazelon Mental Disabilities Voting Rights Guide”].

¹³ *About the EAC*, U.S. Election Assistance Commission, <https://www.eac.gov/about> (last visited Mar. 1, 2024).

¹⁴ U.S. Dept. Justice Civ. Rts. Div., *The National Voter Registration Act Of 1993 (NVRA)*, <https://www.justice.gov/crt/national-voter-registration-act-1993-nvra> (last updated Jul. 20, 2022).

¹⁵ 52 U.S.C. § 20102, 20104 (2022).

Terminology

These are some terms we use in the guide to refer to people with disabilities or who work in elections.

- **“Election officials”** and **“election administrators”** are interchangeably used to refer to state, county, and local personnel who manage and oversee federal, state, and local elections. They are the main audience for this Guide; we refer to them as “you” throughout.
- **“Poll workers”** refers to election workers who help people vote, as well as manage and run polling places and voting centers.
- **“Autistic people”** refers to people on the autism spectrum.
- **“Blind people, people with low-vision, and people with vision-related disabilities”** refers to vision-related disabilities.
- **“Deaf, DeafBlind, DeafDisabled, Hard of Hearing, Late-Deafened, and people with hearing disabilities”** refers to people with hearing disabilities.
- **“People with cognitive disabilities”** refers to people with disabilities that affect the mind who do not have a developmental disability and do not have a psychiatric or mental health disability.
- **“People with intellectual and developmental disabilities”** refers to people with IDD. According to the National Institutes of Health’s Eunice Kennedy Shriver Institute of Child Health and Human Development, intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDDs) are disabilities that are “usually present at birth and that uniquely affect the trajectory of the individual’s physical, intellectual, and/or emotional development. Many of these conditions affect multiple body parts or systems.” Some examples of IDDs are autism, cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, fetal alcohol syndrome, intellectual disability, and spina bifida.
- **“People with psychiatric or mental health disabilities”** refers to people with these disabilities.
- **“People with print disabilities”** refers to people whose disabilities make it hard or impossible for them to access or handle printed paper and text.¹⁶

¹⁶ Nat’l Disability Rts. Network and Am. Assoc. People with Disabilities, Making Voting Accessible to Voters with Print Disabilities 2 (Jul. 24, 2021), <https://www.aapd.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Making-Voting-Accessible-to-Voters-with-Print-Disabilities-1.pdf>.

List of NCAV Member Disability Rights Advocacy Organizations

International Cross Disability

- [World Institute on Disability](#)

National Cross Disability

- [American Association of People with Disabilities](#)
- [National Association of Statewide Independent Living Councils \(NASILC\)](#)
- [Association of Assistive Technology Act Programs \(ATAP\)](#)
- [Association of Programs for Rural Independent Living \(APRIL\)](#)
- [Association of University Centers on Disabilities](#)
- [Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund \(DREDF\)](#)
- [National Council on Independent Living](#)
- [National Disability Rights Network](#)
- [RespectAbility](#)

Regional Cross Disability

- [Center for Living and Working](#)
- [Independent Living Center of the Hudson Valley](#)
- [New Disabled South](#) (disability advocacy in Southern states)

Blindness and Low Vision

- [American Council of the Blind](#)
- [National Federation of the Blind](#)

Deaf, DeafBlind, DeafDisabled, Hard of Hearing, Late-Deafened, and People with Hearing Disabilities

- [National Association of the Deaf \(NAD\)](#)

Mental Health/Psychiatric Disabilities

- [Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law](#)

Physical Disabilities

- [Paralyzed Veterans of America](#)
- [United Spinal Association](#)

Autism

- [Autistic Self Advocacy Network](#)
- [Autism Society of America](#)

Intellectual and Developmental Disability

- [National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities \(NACDD\)](#)
- [Self Advocates Becoming Empowered \(SABE\)](#)
- [The Arc](#) of the United States

Natural Disasters and Disability

- [The Partnership for Inclusive Disaster Strategies](#)

Chapter 2

Gathering information on voting

In Chapter 2

- [Resources and tools for providing information about voting](#)
- [Providing information online](#)
 - [Creating accessible election websites](#)
 - [Creating accessible online documents](#)
 - [Creating accessible online videos and presentations](#)
 - [Creating accessible social media posts](#)
 - [Creating accessible emails](#)
 - [Using accessibility checkers and accessibility tools for online content](#)
- [Providing information at the office](#)
- [Providing information over the phone](#)

In order to vote, voters need information. They need to know how and where to register to vote, whether voting by mail, electronically, or in person is best for them, how to mark and verify their ballot, and how to cast their ballot.

Voters may need to know about where and how to request a mail or absentee ballot. They may need to know about early voting, curbside voting, same-day voter registration, and polling place accessibility.

They may also need to know about state laws and regulations on voting, such as: voter ID and document requirements, any limitations on voter assistance, and any state laws which disenfranchise specific people, such as convicted felons or people who a court ruled could not vote.

Voters get information on voting in many different ways.

- **Searching on websites.** They can visit federal and state websites like [Vote.gov](https://www.vote.gov) or the [state of Maryland's website](#), or visit election agency websites such as the [Maryland State Board of Elections website](#). Election administrators and officials are first-party sources of information on elections, and so it is particularly important for their websites to be accessible.
- **Looking at social media accounts they trust.** Some election agencies update social media accounts, such as for example the [Cuyahoga County Board of Elections' Twitter](#).
- **Using email** to reach out to election officials for information on voting.
- **Getting information and services in person.** These voters visit the offices of local election officials, federal benefits agencies, agencies that serve people with disabilities and departments of motor vehicles.
- **Calling election agencies over the phone.**

All information shared by election agencies must be accessible. This section of the Guide helps you identify features your content needs to be accessible. It also recommends best practices for providing services to people with disabilities in person and over the phone.

Providing information about candidates and issues

This Guide is for election officials and does not teach voters how to evaluate information on politics. However, we recommend that you provide accessible instructions to voters on how to “vote down the ballot,” including instructions in plain language or Easy Read.

Resources and tools for providing information on voting

General resources

The National Council on Independent Living (NCIL)'s [November 2018 Sample Ballot Toolkit](#) is a wonderful resource for election officials who want to create accessible sample ballots.

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)'s excellent 2015 brief, [Access Denied: Barriers to Online Voter Registration for Citizens with Disabilities](#), is a comprehensive look at common accessibility issues on election websites.

For general resources on online accessibility or elections:

- [The National Center on Accessible Educational Materials \(or AEM Center\)](#), while it is meant to help teachers design accessible online educational materials, can help others. Not all the information on the AEM Center website is relevant, but most is. The AEM Center has videos and guides that describe how to create accessible documents and websites.
- [WebAIM](#) provides many articles on online accessibility and easy access to free accessibility resources under its “articles” and “resources” tabs.
- The University of Minnesota's [Accessible U](#) “support resource” provides free information and articles on accessibility under its “Develop Accessible Websites and Applications” sub-tab under “What You Can Do.”
- The World Wide Web Consortium created the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), and its [Web Accessibility Initiative \(WAI\) subpage](#) contains many different resources on how to create accessible online websites and web content. WCAG 2.1's [Techniques page](#) provides web designers with examples on how to meet WCAG 2.1's requirements, although many techniques reference older versions of programs, such as Word 2007.
- The [A11Y Accessibility Checklist](#) is a free resource that provides a checklist of accessibility features for your websites and documents. You can use the checklist to determine whether you have addressed an accessibility need in your work.
- [Digital.gov](#) is primarily a Section 508 compliance resource, but also provides links to accessibility tools and resources.
- [ADA.gov's web accessibility guidance](#) describes how state and local agencies like election agencies can ensure their websites comply with the accessibility requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.

- [ElectionTools.org](https://www.electiontools.org) provides free resources to election administrators and officials looking to design responsive, effective elections with high turnout. It is especially helpful for election officials looking to expand their online presence.
- The American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD) offers [guides on how to vote in every state](#) on its website. If you are interested in sharing resources from other organizations, AAPD's guides are excellent accessible resources for voters.
- The National Disability Rights Network (NDRN)'s [Accessibility Guidelines](#) provide general information on web, presentation, and live event accessibility.
- In Colorado: The Colorado Secretary of State provides free takeaway training resources called EPIC. Their Navigating Elections Guide serves as a comprehensive resource designed to inform and empower county staff and election workers about statewide election voting systems and procedures. These resources are available upon email request to elections.training@coloradosos.gov.

We encourage you to reach out to us at kelly.israel_contractor@ndrn.org with any additional election administration resources from your state.

Accessibility Consultants

Although election officials are responsible for the accessibility of their services, we encourage you to work with experienced consultants, information technology (IT) staff, and web designers.

We do not endorse any specific for-profit vendor or content in this Guide. However, several advocacy organizations have created lists of accessibility consultants that may be useful.

- [NCIL](#) has a short list of accessibility consultants.
- The [National Federation of the Blind](#) has a similar list.
- Digital A11Y has a fairly [comprehensive list of consultants and professionals in North America](#).

Advocacy Organizations

The best people to ask about disability etiquette, assistance, employee training, and accommodations are advocacy organizations. Advocacy organizations are experts in the disabilities of their members and constituents. Their staff may even have a disability themselves. Keep in mind that advocacy organizations and accessibility checkers with disabilities will need to be paid for their work.

The following organizations have extensive familiarity with digital accessibility:

- The [National Disability Rights Network](#) and its [Protection & Advocacy system of member agencies](#)
- The [National Federation of the Blind](#)

- [The American Council for the Blind](#)
- [American Association of People with Disabilities](#)
- [National Council on Independent Living \(NCIL\)](#)
- [National Association of the Deaf \(NAD\)](#)

The following organizations have worked extensively on plain language, Easy Read, or readability:

- [Autistic Self Advocacy Network](#)
- [Self Advocates Becoming Empowered](#)
- [TASH](#)

We also encourage you to review the [Consortium for Constituents with Disabilities' list of member organizations](#). CCD is not related to the NCAV, but its members sometimes collaborate with us or attend our meetings as non-members.

For additional disability rights organizations, consult our list of [NCAV member organizations](#).

Providing Information Online

Creating Accessible Election Websites

Election websites can provide information on:

- Races and candidates in the state, county, or municipality
- Where and how to vote (including ballot drop box and curbside voting locations)
- Voter registration
- Early voting (where available)
- Mail-in voting
- Voting rules for the jurisdiction
- ... and more!

If your website is not accessible, it will be harder for voters with disabilities to get information. Additionally, you may be liable under federal law, including Title II of the ADA.

This Guide provides you with recommendations, lists of available resources on accessibility, and a checklist of important features so you or your website designers can create a website that most people with disabilities can use.

Web Content Accessibility Guidelines

Whether you have hired web designers or are designing a website yourself, your first stop should be W3C's Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG). The Department of Justice will [require the use of WCAG 2.1](#).

The WCAG 2.1 standards are located at: <https://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG21/>

The WCAG is a list of features that online content should have in order to meet the needs of people with disabilities. The WCAG is the “gold standard” for website accessibility. A website that has all the features listed in the WCAG will be accessible to people with many different types of disabilities.

The WCAG 2.1 guidelines cover most topics, including:

- Text size, color, and contrast
- Reading level
- Alternative (alt) text that helps describe images to viewers with disabilities
- Audio descriptions
- Captions on videos

- Having text that is searchable using a screen reader
- The ability to navigate the website using a keyboard.

The WCAG has “levels” of compliance. Level A requires the fewest accessible features and Level AAA requires the most accessible features.

We recommend that you use Level AA for most content. The Department of Justice will (beginning June 24, 2024) require the use of WCAG 2.1 at Level AA. We recommend the use of Level AAA for:

- Voter registration forms
- Applications for a provisional or absentee ballot
- Information on how to cast a mail-in or electronic ballot
- Information on early voting
- Information on where to find accessible ballot drop boxes
- Information on polling place locations, including information on accessible parking spaces, entrances, exits, and pathways through the building
- Instructions for how to vote upon reaching the polling place.

Section 508.gov

We recommend that you review [Section508.gov](#). The General Services Administration created Section508.gov to help federal agencies and state agencies that receive federal funds comply with Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

Section508.gov is a great general resource on accessible website design even if your office is not required to comply with Section 508. For example, the website [recaps the WCAG standards](#), describes [how to create many different kinds of accessible online media](#), and [explains how universal design principles apply to web design](#), among other features that benefit non-federal agencies.

Election Tools Website Template

The website [ElectionTools.org](#) has a [template](#) for a county or state election website. The template provides an example of how to best organize your website to convey all the information you need to as easily as possible.

Make sure to incorporate accessibility features into websites based on the template. Election Tools also has [resources on website accessibility](#), including an [accessibility statement](#) that explains how they made the Election Tools website accessible.

Website Accessibility Checklist

Disclaimer: Following our recommendations is not intended as legal advice, and does not necessarily ensure nor is intended as a substitute for full compliance with federal or state law, including the ADA.

- When you or your web designers begin to design your website, they or you can review this checklist of features that are common on more accessible websites. The checklist will help you determine if you've missed an important feature or aspect of online accessibility.
- Is your website organized in a clear, logical, and consistent way?
- Can a person get to different parts of the website using only a few mouse clicks or keyboard moves?
- Can a person using a magnifier-type screen reader make parts of the webpage larger? Does that make the webpage easier to read?
- Does the website:
 - Use shorter lines of text to make it easier for screen readers to read it?
 - Place things the user has to click to enter data or navigate the page to the left or center of the screen?
 - Allow for "text scaling," which means the size of the page's text can be changed by the viewer?
- Can the website be navigated easily using only a keyboard? The following is a keyboard accessibility checklist for you or your web designers:
 - Can the user navigate by using only "Tab" and arrow keys?
 - Can a "Submit" button or other interactable image be selected using the "Enter" key?
 - Does the website use a technique known as "semantic HTML" to label headings? For example, can a blind user, user with low-vision, or user with vision-related disabilities on the Section508.gov website tell they are on a subpage of 508.gov on this page?
 - Can the user perform "skip navigation" commands on their screen reader? For example, if you were using a screen reader and wanted to get to a specific tab, could you tell the screen reader to "skip over" reading the title and the information under it and to go to the tab instead?
- Are there alt text, image descriptions, and captions on all picture and form elements?
 - Are the alt text and image descriptions descriptive enough to show users what's in the image and what the point of it is?
 - Are the alt text and image descriptions accurate?
 - Are you using captions that were created by your web designer or yourself? Auto-captions are notoriously unreliable.
- Is there correct color contrast? Limited color contrast between text and background causes many screen readers to interpret text as part of a background image instead. Correct color contrast also makes it easier for low-vision readers to see the text.

- Is all text large enough? If the text is too small, the screen reader may not read it.
- If the website is a form (this Guide says more about forms in “Registering to Vote”):
 - Are all of the form’s elements labeled correctly in the screen reader?
 - Can a user navigate between them using only a keyboard?
 - For example, if there is a text box labeled “Street Address,” does a blind person, person with low-vision, or person with other vision-related disabilities have a way to know what the text box says, such as an alt text description or a screen reader accessible label?
- Can a user with a cognitive, psychiatric or mental health, and/or intellectual and developmental disability (or all of the above) understand your website? Checklist for cognitive accessibility:
- Does the website use plain language or Easy Read for most of its content? Plain language and Easy Read use simple language easily understood by someone with a 6th-8th grade reading level and below. For examples of how to do Easy Read, review ASAN’s toolkit on Easy Read, “One Idea Per Line”. For examples of how to do plain language in general, review AUCD’s Plain Language Toolkit or Green Mountain Self Advocates’ plain language resources page.
 - Do you say the same thing in multiple ways? For example, do you explain how to register to vote using both words and pictures, or using both a video and a form with instructions?
 - Do you minimize the number of tabs and sub-headings the viewer needs to click to get to key information or website features?
 - Is the website’s content organized consistently? Does one page look similar to the next in terms of tabs and navigation elements?
 - Do you avoid using extravagant visual elements and flashing lights?

Creating Accessible Online Documents

Disclaimer: These resources are not intended as legal advice, and do not necessarily ensure nor are intended as a substitute for full compliance with federal or state law, including the ADA.

Online accessibility is not just a website feature! Online documents, such as PDFs and Excel spreadsheets, are often inaccessible even if the website is accessible.

These documents often contain critical features or content. For example, an inaccessible sample ballot cannot tell a disabled voter what is on their ballot before Election Day. Online forms can be used to register to vote or to request an absentee ballot. An inaccessible online form is useless to

voters with disabilities. We provide steps for creating accessible online forms in the “[Registering to Vote](#)” section of the Guide.

This Guide section provides you with checklists and recommendations that help you or your web designers ensure voters with disabilities can use your online documents. We also advise consulting with at least a few of the organizations, resources, and consultants on the “General Resources and Consultants” page. Some advocacy organizations have a lot of experience testing online document accessibility.

Features of an Accessible Document

An accessible document usually has:

- Features that allow keyboard users to use “Tab” to move between sections
- A way to search the document for specific words and phrases
- Logical organization
- Titles
- Document structure tags, such as for headings and paragraphs
- Alt text for images
- Screen reader-accessible tables.

Making Microsoft Word, PDFs, and Excel Accessible

A good rule of thumb is to create documents in a format that is more accessible to begin with. For example, Microsoft Word is generally more screen reader accessible than a PDF is.

The Guide provides links to resources for making documents accessible in three common document formats: Microsoft Word, PDFs, and Excel. The National Disability Rights Network’s [Accessibility Guidelines](#) also describe the basics of document accessibility.

Making Microsoft Word Documents Accessible

The best way to make Microsoft Word documents accessible is to use the program’s built-in accessibility tools. Microsoft Word’s webpage has a “Support” section, which has [step-by-step instructions](#) on how to use its accessibility tools. The website WebAIM has [instructions](#) for up to Word 2019 and Word 365.

Making PDFs Accessible

NCIL’s [Sample Ballot Toolkit](#) is a good place to start. It provides web designers and election officials with resources and instructions for creating accessible PDF sample ballots, which work for all PDFs. Many of our recommendations are from the Sample Ballot Toolkit. This Guide offers the following recommendations.

- Some programs can be used to create PDFs that are accessible from the very beginning. WebAIM provides [guides on how to make PDFs accessible in Adobe Acrobat Pro](#). [Adobe's website provides instructions on how to do it in Adobe InDesign](#).
- W3C's [Techniques page for WCAG 2.1](#) gives web designers examples on how to meet its requirements, including examples on how to create accessible PDFs.
- You can create an accessible PDF by using the "Save to PDF" option in Microsoft Word and adding accessibility features. Microsoft Support provides [instructions](#) on how to use Microsoft Office's Accessibility Checker to create accessibility tags in a PDF file. It is always best to start with an accessible Word document. Some accessibility features will be carried over into the PDF.
- You can always ask someone else to make your PDF accessible. There are companies who will fix your PDF's accessibility for a fee. We do not endorse paid content in this Guide. If you want to find a company to pay to fix your PDF, search "PDF accessibility remediation" online.
- This Guide provides lists created by advocacy organizations of the best paid consultants on our "General Resources, Accessibility Consultants, and Acknowledgments" page.

Making Excel Spreadsheets Accessible

We recommend using a different format for providing key information on voting, such as Microsoft Word or PDF for lists of polling places or drop boxes. If you have to use an Excel spreadsheet, this Guide recommends the following.

- Use Microsoft Support. Microsoft Support has [instructions](#) on how to use Excel's accessibility checker and tools.
- Check the resources on WebAIM. WebAIM has [high-level instructions for Excel](#).

Section508.gov has a [video series and other resources](#) on how to create an accessible Excel spreadsheet.

Creating Accessible Videos and Presentations

Disclaimer: Following our recommendations is not intended as legal advice and does not necessarily ensure nor is intended as a substitute for full compliance with federal or state law, including the ADA.

Creating Accessible Videos

We recommend creating and sharing videos on your website and social media. Videos can provide voters with information on how or where to vote, or teach them how to register to vote, or even share information on how to read or review their ballot. Videos can be valuable tools for information-sharing. They are very helpful for people with disabilities who process information better in spoken words and images than they do information on paper.

Accessible videos:

- Include captions in multiple languages
- Have content in plain language or Easy Read
- Use simple, easy-to-understand, iconographic imagery like thumbs-up signs, checkboxes, and ballots
- Include a cued language transliterator
- Provide an alternative video in American Sign Language.

Rooted in Rights has an excellent [guide on how to create accessible videos](#). Their guide covers captions, audio descriptions, transcripts, and accessible video players.

Check ASAN's "[One Idea Per Line](#)" [guide](#) for instructions on how to create Easy Read documents and [AUCD's Plain Language Toolkit](#) for instructions on how to create plain language documents. Some of their advice also applies to any accessible videos you make.

The content should at least meet Level AA WCAG 2.1 standards for "Time-Based Media." They are available at: <https://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG21/>. The "Web Content Accessibility Guidelines" section of our Guide, in "Creating Accessible Election Websites," has more information on the WCAG.

Make sure that the information in the video is also available in other formats. This helps people with many different kinds of disabilities get the same information.

Creating Accessible PowerPoint Presentations

PowerPoint presentations are a good way to present information to an audience. Many audience members prefer having access to the PowerPoint they view during the presentation. If it is available, the PowerPoint must be accessible.

Microsoft has accessibility checkers that are specific to PowerPoint. Microsoft has [instructions on how to use these checkers available on its "Support" page](#). If you save your PowerPoint into a new format, make sure to check the PowerPoint's accessibility in the new format.

Whenever possible, provide the PowerPoint in accessible formats to your attendees in advance.

Creating Accessible Live Presentations and Webinars

Sometimes your office may decide to hold a live presentation or webinar. This Guide references NDRN's [Accessibility Guidelines](#). The Guidelines have a section on in-person meetings. To ensure your event is accessible to people with disabilities, the Guide offers the recommendations that follow.

- Live presentations, including recorded live presentations, should have live captioning, a cued language transliterator, and a sign language interpreter. People who are Deaf, DeafBlind, DeafDisabled, Hard of Hearing, Late-Deafened, and people with hearing disabilities in your jurisdiction may need these accommodations to access your event.

- Have your speakers use a microphone during live events.
- Ensure that your speakers speak clearly and at a normal volume.
- Set up your physical space for a live event in advance for accessibility. For example, ensure that all walkways are at least three feet across, including spaces between chairs at nearby tables. If using theater or classroom-style seating, designate spaces throughout the room for attendees who use wheelchairs or power wheelchairs. Ensure the rows are spaced properly.
- Accessibility-related services are available from many different companies. While this Guide does not endorse any paid content, we do recommend that you “shop around” for the best services possible.
- For more information on the different types of captioning and what they can be used for, contact the Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA) or the National Association of the Deaf (NAD). [NAD's](#) and [HLAA's](#) websites have detailed information on where (and when) captioning needs to be used.
- If you intend to present a PowerPoint or other presentation during the event, recommend that you give the presentation, in a screen reader accessible format, to all attendees in advance. For example, you could give all attendees a copy of the presentation in an accessible PDF, PowerPoint, or Microsoft Word document.
 - If your webinar or live presentation has visual elements, make sure that the captions and interpreters describe these visual elements. Speakers should avoid using “this,” “that,” and “those,” unless they specifically indicate what these words mean. Attendees with vision disabilities cannot see, for example, what the word “this” refers to when it is used in a phrase like “This example here...”
 - Make sure your speakers speak slowly enough that the sign language interpreters and captioners can catch up. Make sure that your sign-language interpreters also have a copy of the presentation in advance. Allow extra time for the sign-language or other interpreters to sign and explain visual elements.

[Rooted in Rights](#) has information on how to make video calls (such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams calls) accessible.

Creating Accessible Social Media Posts

Disclaimer: Following our recommendations is not intended as legal advice and does not necessarily ensure nor is intended as a substitute for full compliance with federal or state law, including the ADA. Social media posts are covered by the Department of Justice’s Title II rule on web accessibility. Review [the rule](#) and [the Department of Justice’s fact sheet](#) for more information.

Social media is an emergent way to reach voters. Social media is ideal for circulating time-sensitive, quick “bites” of information, such as a “get-out-the-vote” drive during primary season.

Accessible, effective social media content could reach hundreds or thousands of voters, who could then share your content themselves and spread your message far and wide.

Third Party Content: Make sure that you do not share inaccessible third-party social media content! This is a common mistake. Check whether third-party content has basic accessibility features, such as alt text and captions, before you post it.

Resources for Creating Accessible Social Media Posts

Most social media platforms have built-in accessibility features.

- X/Twitter has [an explanation available](#) on its website describing best practices for writing accessible Twitter posts, as well as a [resource on how to create image descriptions](#) in X/Twitter.
- Instagram has a few accessibility features, which Instagram describes on its ["Help" pages](#). The [blog](#) Accessibility.com also has good rules of thumb for creating accessible Instagram posts.
- Facebook has extensive accessibility features. [Facebook's Help Center](#) describes how to use them.
- Tiktok has [four accessibility features for its content](#): auto-captions, text-to-speech, animated thumbnails and photosensitivity epilepsy trigger warnings.

Creating Accessible Emails

The most popular email clients are Gmail and Outlook, and they both have built-in accessibility features.

Gmail has buttons-to-text, keyboard shortcuts, screen reader compatibility, and talk back. Check Google's [accessibility features page](#) for more information.

Microsoft's accessibility tools are compatible with Microsoft Outlook. [Microsoft's support page on Outlook](#) has more information.

The primary source of inaccessibility when sending emails are attached, inaccessible documents. Reference the Guide's page on "Creating Accessible Online Documents" for more information on how to make them accessible.

Using Accessibility Checkers and Accessibility Tools for Online Content

Accessibility checkers are electronic tools that allow web developers and content creators to run an accessibility "scan" or "simulation" for content they have created. For example, if you hire web developers, they could use an accessibility tool to check the color contrast of the images on your website. The tool would tell the developers in advance if the color contrast between the text and the background is too low for a screen reader to read the text. Accessibility checkers and other

accessibility tools can be of great help to those who are new to either accessibility or web development.

This section of the Guide lists the best free accessibility checkers available in one place so election officials can get to them easily. Accessibility checkers can be either free or paid. We do not recommend any tools that you have to pay for in this Guide, although high-quality paid programs do exist.

Acknowledgments and Citations

NCIL's [Sample Ballot Toolkit](#) is the source for many of the accessibility checkers we list, especially those we include under "Simulation" and "Color Contrast." W3C, the creators of the WCAG, have an [extensive list](#) of web accessibility checkers and tools.

The Guide also references accessibility checkers that were first collected by:

- [Ann Wylie's Medium article "10 free readability checkers"](#)
- [Justin Mifsud's UsabilityGeek article "8 Free Web-Based Website Accessibility Evaluation Tools"](#)
- [Sam Stemler & Erica Statly's AccessibleMetrics article "The 25 Best Free Accessibility Tools to Test Your Site"](#)
- [Nicole Flynn's Cielo24 article "10 Document and Web Accessibility Checkers to Get You Started"](#)

Free General Web Accessibility Checkers

We recommend using these checkers if you want a general look at multiple aspects of the accessibility of a website or document.

- [WebAIM's WAVE](#) tools are well-known and well-respected. WAVE's tool has been cited by multiple lists of the best free accessibility checkers.
- [AChecker](#) checks for compliance with the WCAG.
- [Accessibility Checker](#) checks for compliance with Title II of the ADA and the WCAG.
- [TPGI's free ARC Toolkit](#) uses the WCAG 2.1 Level AA to quickly evaluate how accessible any document scanned into it is.
- [Microsoft](#) Support explains in the linked page how to use the built-in accessibility checkers in Microsoft products.

Free "Simulation" Accessibility Checkers

These accessibility checkers allow the user to either simulate a screen reader or some other aspect of having a disability.

- The [Chrome/Chrome Vox Screen Reader extension](#) simulates having a screen reader and reads web content. It is not a proficient, fully featured screen reader, but it can be used by web developers to determine whether their content can be understood by someone using a screen reader.
- [Funkify simulators](#) simulate various vision, motor, and cognition disabilities. This allows you or your web developers to get an idea of what your website might look like to someone with one of the simulated disabilities.
- [Toptal's Colorblind Web page filter](#) simulates what your website would look like to someone who has a particular form of colorblindness. The filter may help you or your web developers determine what colors to use to avoid confusing a colorblind person.

Free Specific Accessibility Checkers/Tools

These accessibility checkers, rather than checking for multiple errors, instead check for one specific error, such as insufficient color contrast.

Color Contrast Checkers

This list is derived from NCIL's [Sample Ballot toolkit](#).

- [WebAIM's Contrast Checker](#) tells you the "color contrast ratio" between the foreground and background of what it checks.
- AccessibleWeb's [WCAG Color Contrast Checker](#) checks for your color contrast's compliance with the WCAG, which has standards for the degree of color contrast required for accessibility.
- [A11Y Color Contrast Accessibility Validator](#) is a standard color contrast checker that uses color Hex Codes to check for compliance with WCAG 2.1.
- [Digital A11Y](#) also has a list of most of the free color contrast checkers available online.

Readability Checkers

Readability checkers score text for readability based on the complexity of the sentences and words used in the text. You can use them to help you determine whether something is in plain language.

Reading level is usually determined by grade level. For example, text that is at an 8th grade reading level can be read by the average 8th grader.

In general, aim for a 3rd-6th grade reading level when writing in plain language. AUCD's [Plain Language toolkit](#) is a useful resource, as is ASAN's "[One Idea Per Line](#)" toolkit.

Most readability checkers use scoring systems to evaluate a document's readability. The four most common are the Flesch Reading Ease, the Gunning Fog Scale Level, the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level, and the SMOG Score.

- Flesch Reading Base: A score of 60 means “plain easy to understand language,” so between 60-70 is 8th-9th grade reading level (aim for 8th max), between 50-60 is 10th-12th grade, and below 30 is college graduate level.
- Gunning Fog - The Gunning Fog test is looking at syllable numbers and sentence length to determine sentence readability. It helps you determine whether a sentence is too long or “unwieldy.” Using this scoring system, 5 is “ideal,” 10 is “hard,” 15 is “really hard,” and 20 is “extraordinarily hard.”
- Flesch-Kincaid - This scoring system gives the user the grade level. You are looking for a 3rd-8th grade reading level.
- SMOG Score - The SMOG Score represents the number of years of education needed to understand the passage.

This Guide recommends two free readability checkers.

- The [Free Readability Analyzer](#) analyzes your text according to five readability scoring systems. It is best used on short paragraphs of text.
- [WebFx’s Readability Test Tool](#) calculates the readability score of an entire website. It can give you a very general picture of how complex the sentences on your webpages are.

When using a readability checker, ASAN recommends in its “[One Idea Per Line](#)” guide that you replace or remove technical terms when you define the term in the resource. For example, if you explain what a “ballot” is, you should replace ballot with a more common word when checking for readability so that repeatedly using “ballot” does not “throw off” the checker. You should do the same for words you know the intended reader already knows, like “President” or “disability.”

There are many high-quality paid-for or subscription-based readability checkers. We do not endorse any paid content in this Guide. However, we do not recommend that you and your web designers rely on only free readability checkers. Free readability checkers are best for situations where you want to quickly check a sentence or phrase. They are not a replacement for human review.

We recommend that you consult with an advocacy organization whose members or staff are people with cognitive disabilities, people with psychiatric or mental health disabilities, or people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. It is best practice to pay any advocacy organizations for their work. The [Autistic Self Advocacy Network](#), the [Association of University Centers on Disabilities](#) (AUCD), [Self Advocates Becoming Empowered \(SABE\)](#), and [TASH](#) have the most experience with readability and plain language.

Miscellaneous Specific Accessibility Checkers

These checkers are useful for specific accessibility issues and there are few checkers of a similar type.

- The University of Maryland’s [Photosensitive Epilepsy Analysis Tool](#) checks whether animations or videos are likely to cause seizures.
- SEO Site Checkup’s [Image Alt Text Checker](#) quickly checks whether all the images on your webpage are using “alt attributes” in their HTML. This is one way to implement alt text in your websites.

Providing Information at the Office

Some people with disabilities gather information by speaking to election officials at their offices. This section of the Guide provides a list of resources and recommendations for serving voters with disabilities in person.

Employee Training

Disclaimer: Following our recommendations is not intended as legal advice and does not necessarily ensure nor is intended as a substitute for full compliance with federal or state law, including the ADA.

Your employees will have to serve people with disabilities. They should be aware of the basic rules of disability etiquette and interaction.

Disability Etiquette

Each person with a disability is different, but there may be rules of thumb for categories of disability. For example, there are specific forms of disability etiquette for blind people, people with low vision, and people with vision-related disabilities. The National Federation of the Blind (NFB) has “[Courtesy Rules of Blindness](#),” and the American Council of the Blind (ACB) also posts [on blindness etiquette](#). We recommend that you defer to etiquette rules created by the disability community before using general rules described by people without disabilities.

Names for Disabilities

Use a person’s preferred term for their disability. If the community is known to prefer a specific term, and you do not know the term the person prefers, use that term for the disability first. See our list of [terminology](#) that is commonly used.

There are a few free general etiquette guides available online. Searching “disability etiquette” will help you find them. For example, the United Spinal Association has a [good general guide](#).

Keep in mind that a person may use different etiquette, may not think of themselves as having a disability, or may not associate with a specific disability community. When you are aware of a person’s preferences, defer to the person.

When in doubt, employees should treat all people with courtesy and respect. A person with a disability is just a kind of person!

Accommodations and Assistance

Each person with a disability will require different kinds of assistance and accommodations. This Guide recommends that you defer to the person with a disability who is requesting assistance. People with disabilities are well aware of their own needs and will make their requests clear.

Under the ADA, you may require reasonable advance notice of a person with a disability's accommodations request. For example, you could require that a person with a disability request a sign language interpreter in advance of the event rather than on the same day. However, you must honor "walk-ins" to the extent you can and cannot impose unreasonable advance notice requirements. [The ADA's Effective Communication guidance](#) and [Communicating Effectively with People with Disabilities resource](#) have more information.

Employee Training Sessions

Disability-related employee training is a growing field. Eddy lists [four types of disability training for employees](#): disability awareness, training on assistive technology, legal or compliance training, and training on specific disabilities. There are many companies that offer paid disability training sessions that cover some or all of this content.

This Guide does not endorse any paid content. We do recommend longer training sessions that cover multiple types of disability, instead of short training sessions that cover "disability" as a general topic. TPGI provides some [good general tips on how to create a plan for training your employees](#).

Disability Rights Advocacy Organizations

The best people to ask about disability etiquette, assistance, employee training, and accommodations are advocacy organizations, including the organizations that are [active members of the NCAV](#). Advocacy organizations are experts in the disabilities of their members and constituents. Their staff may even have a disability themselves.

We also encourage you to review the Consortium for Constituents with Disabilities' [list of member organizations](#). CCD is not related to the NCAV, but its members sometimes collaborate with us or attend our meetings as non-members.

Office Physical Accessibility

All election agency offices are required to comply with Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act. They must be physically accessible to people with disabilities. For a comprehensive Title II physical accessibility checklist, read the [2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design](#) and [ADA.gov's accessibility resources for state and local government agencies](#).

Checklist for Providing In-Person Services to Voters

Following our recommendations is not intended as legal advice and does not necessarily ensure nor is intended as a substitute for full compliance with federal or state law.

If your office has forms, pamphlets, and flyers available:

- Can people who cannot read or handle paper get access to the information or service on a paper form?
- Is the information or form available in a Braille booklet?
- Is the information or form scannable into a screen reader or assistive technology device?
- Is it available to a voter using an assistive communication (AC) device?
- Are employees trained to communicate with someone using an AC device?
- Are employees familiar with AAC etiquette? The Autistic Self Advocacy Network’s “Inclusion of AAC Users: Best Practices” guide, the University of Montana’s Etiquette Essentials guide, and AssistiveWare’s article provide general advice.
- Can a voter fill out a form by speaking to an employee?
- Can an employee read the information on a form, pamphlet, or flyer to the voter?
- Are there plain language versions of forms, pamphlets, and flyers? Are there Easy Read versions?
- Can an employee explain the information on a form or pamphlet in simpler language?
- Is there a way for people with mobility disabilities to enter information on a paper form or to read information on a form without manipulating paper?
- Is voter registration from the office accessible? See the section “Registering to Vote.”
- Are staff trained to assist voters who want to register to vote from the office?

On Election Day:

- Are accessible voting machines available at your office?
- Are staff trained to assist voters who come to the office to vote on Election Day?
- Are your employees trained to interact with and support people with disabilities? See [“Employee Training.”](#)

Providing Information over the Phone

If your office has a telephone line, people with disabilities may call it to request information on voting. This Guide section provides recommendations for providing accessible phone service to constituents with disabilities.

Disclaimer: Following our recommendations is not intended as legal advice and does not necessarily ensure nor is intended as a substitute for full compliance with federal law, including Title IV of the ADA or any other state or federal law.

Telecommunications Relay Services (TRS)

Title IV of the Americans with Disabilities Act requires phone and Internet companies to create and maintain a TRS. The TRS allows Deaf, DeafBlind, DeafDisabled, Hard of Hearing, Late-Deafened, and people with hearing disabilities to make phone calls with interpreter support. Each relay service sounds and looks different. We recommend that you familiarize yourself with how TRS look and sound. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) provides a list of the different TRS at: <https://www.fcc.gov/consumers/guides/telecommunications-relay-service-trs>.

Do not hang up the phone the second you hear a robotic voice!

According to the FCC: “If you hear, ‘Hello. This is the relay service...’ when you pick up the phone, please don’t hang up! You are about to talk, through a TRS provider, to a person who is deaf, hard-of-hearing, or has a speech disability.”

Some people with disabilities may use video relay service (VRS) calls instead. The FCC explains how VRS calls work at: <https://www.fcc.gov/consumers/guides/video-relay-services>.

General Tips for Accessible Service Over the Phone

Disclaimer: Following our recommendations is not intended as legal advice and does not necessarily ensure nor is intended as a substitute for full compliance with federal or state law.

- Be prepared to speak with people who use augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) devices. The Autistic Self Advocacy Network’s “Inclusion of AAC Users: Best Practices” guide and the University of Montana’s Etiquette Essentials guide both provide some advice that can be applied to phone conversations.
- Be prepared to speak with people who have cognitive, psychiatric or mental health, and intellectual and developmental disabilities. Good general tips and etiquette are available online. For example, Accessibility.com’s article “Accessible Customer Service: Tips for Communicating by Phone with People with Cognitive Disabilities” and the University of Windsor’s customer service brochure have good general advice.
- Be respectful and presume competence. Do not assume that the caller does not understand you. If a caller says they do not understand something you said, that may just mean you need to explain it differently. For example, you could explain it using words that are easier to understand. Let the caller know if you cannot figure out a way to communicate.
- If you do not understand what a caller said, say “I did not get that” or “Can you repeat that” or “Can you repeat __; I understood the __ part but missed __ part.” It is usually not rude to ask people with disabilities to repeat themselves. It is generally rude to tell someone “Never mind” when a breakdown in communication has occurred.
- If a person with a disability asks you whether something they said makes sense, let them know if it does or does not. Most people with disabilities are aware they have difficulty communicating. They are using this question to ask you if they are communicating clearly.

Chapter 3

Accessible Voting in Person

In Chapter 3

- [Early voting](#)
- [Curbside voting](#)
- [Accessibility at the polling place](#)
- [Accessibility of voting machines](#)
- [Poll worker training and safety](#)

Many people, including people with disabilities, vote in person. Ways to vote that are “in person” include early voting, curbside voting, voting at the polling place or vote center, and voting at your office.

Every form of voting must be accessible.

For example, you cannot require people with disabilities to vote by mail because your polling places are inaccessible.

Accessible in-person voting requires attentive elections personnel who prioritize people with disabilities’ needs. Common accessibility barriers include physically inaccessible polling places and voting centers, inaccessible voting machines, inaccessible ballots, and poorly trained poll workers and staff.

This Guide section provides election officials with recommendations for improving the accessibility of in-person voting. It also provides you with resources you can consult for more information on in-person voting accessibility.

Early Voting

Acknowledgements: We used the materials on [early voting at USA.gov](#) and the National Conference on State Legislatures' [Early Voting page](#).

Early voting means that voters can cast their ballot before Election Day. As of March 2024, forty-six states, the District of Columbia, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands allow all voters to vote early and in person¹⁷. Four states do not offer early in-person voting, although some absentee voters (or those voting by mail) might be able to vote early or before Election Day.

All states have different rules for early voting. States have different eligibility requirements, early voting methods, and early voting periods. Some restrict early voting to weekdays and others do not.

Recommendations for early voting

Disclaimer: Following our recommendations is not intended as legal advice and does not necessarily ensure nor is intended as a substitute for full compliance with federal or state law.

- Advocate for changes to your state's laws on early voting to the extent you can. The most accessible early voting is available far in advance of Election Day, which gives voters with disabilities time to learn about it and plan their trip to a polling place, office, or early voting center.
- Give voters more than one way to vote early. Let voters use ballot drop boxes and curbside voting. Ballot drop boxes can help supplement sparse early voting locations. Curbside voting can help some voters with disabilities who find it easier than going inside the early voting location.
- Do not require voters to give your employees or poll workers more documents or stricter proof of identity than they need to vote on Election Day.
- Let voters register at the same time. "[Registering to Vote](#)" has more information on voter registration.
- Make early in-person voting as physically accessible as voting on Election Day. All signs and building modifications, such as accessible parking spaces and entrances, should be present.

¹⁷ Nat'l Conference on State Legislatures, *Early Voting*, <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/early-in-person-voting> (last updated Mar. 2024)

- Accessible voting machines should be available at polling places and/or early voting centers. **You must have at least one accessible voting machine available at all times to voters, per precinct.**¹⁸
- Your employees and poll workers should be trained to assist voters with disabilities during in-person early voting.
- Thoroughly advertise early voting. Social media posts website advertisements, pamphlets, and notices at election offices should describe how to vote early.

¹⁸ Nat'l Disability Rts. Network, *Accessible Voting Systems Are Required by Federal Law and Are Vital to Our Democracy* (Jun. 29, 2022), <https://www.ndrn.org/resource/accessible-voting-systems-are-required-by-federal-law-and-are-vital-to-our-democracy/>.

Curbside Voting

Acknowledgments: We used the Election Assistance Commission (EAC)'s [quick start guide for curbside voting](#). We also thank Sarah Blahovec for speaking with us on in-person voting accessibility.

Curbside voting should be an option that is available to voters. It is not a replacement for an accessible polling place.

Curbside voting allows voters with disabilities to cast their ballots outside the polling place. In curbside voting, a person with a disability calls an election official or poll worker to their car or to another location nearby.

There must be accessible signs that show voters how to request curbside voting, if it is available. There is usually a curbside voting location. The person with a disability must be able to notify poll workers that they are there and want to use curbside voting.

Once a poll worker is notified, they bring any items necessary for the voter with a disability to mark their ballot privately and independently. This can include an e-pollbook or poll book copy, a ballot, a pen and paper, a notepad, a ballot sleeve or envelope, a portable electronic voting application or device, or other materials. Paper ballots are inaccessible to people with print disabilities; they cannot be the only method available¹⁹.

After the voter is finished filling out the ballot and the ballot has been returned, an election official will confirm it for the voter.

The exact specifics of curbside voting are difficult to generalize and differ between states and counties. The Department of Justice's [voting guidance for Title II of the ADA](#) has legal requirements for accessible curbside voting. We recommend that you review it.

The Guide's recommendations help you make curbside voting more accessible and easier to use.

¹⁹ Nat'l Disability Rts. Network and Am. Assoc. People with Disabilities, Making Voting Accessible to Voters with Print Disabilities 2 (Jul. 24, 2021), <https://www.aapd.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Making-Voting-Accessible-to-Voters-with-Print-Disabilities-1.pdf>.

Recommendations for curbside voting

Disclaimer: Following our recommendations is not intended as legal advice and does not necessarily ensure nor is intended as a substitute for full compliance with federal or state law, including the ADA.

- Do not assume that a voter needs (or does not need) curbside voting from their disability. During curbside voting, the poll worker should not ask about the voter's disability.
- Curbside voting should be advertised. Some counties and states in the past had curbside voting, but no flyers or advertisements that told voters about it. Accessible information on curbside voting should be available on the state and county's website (if the county has a website).
- Poll workers should know their polling place offers curbside voting.
- Poll workers should understand how curbside voting works.
- Poll workers should know how to help voters cast a private and independent ballot legally in the state. Ensure strict chain of custody and privacy rules apply.
- Hire enough poll workers or volunteers to continuously man curbside voting
- Signs that direct voters with disabilities to curbside voting and provide instructions are required by law.²⁰ Ensure that the signs are accessible. Create Braille signs if possible. Write your instructions in plain language.
- Poll workers should bring more than one way to mark, verify, and return ballots to the curbside voting location. Poll workers should bring at least one electronic method.
- Poll workers should be prepared to communicate with voters who are , blind voters, low-vision voters, and voters with vision disabilities, voters with psychiatric or mental health disabilities, and voters with intellectual and developmental disabilities and other cognitive disabilities.
- Poll workers should be familiar with augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) devices.

²⁰ U.S. Dep't of Justice Civ. Rts. Div. Disability Rts. Section, The Americans with Disabilities Act and Other Federal Laws Protecting the Rights of Voters with Disabilities, <https://www.ada.gov/resources/protecting-voter-rights/> (last updated Apr. 18, 2024).

Accessibility at the Polling Place

Acknowledgments. This Guide uses or derives best practices from the the Department of Justice (DOJ)'s [ADA Checklist for Polling Places](#), the [2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design](#), the EAC's [Best Practices for Accessible In-Person Voting Guide](#), the EAC's [voting accessibility video series](#), [ADA.gov's page and resources on polling places](#), the Access Board's [Guide to the ADA Accessibility Standards](#), and the [AccessibilityOnline 2018 webinar on accessible polling places](#).

The accessibility of polling places involves both physical and programmatic accessibility. Physical accessibility is whether people with disabilities can enter the polling place and use facilities like bathrooms, lines, voting machines, and kiosks. Programmatic accessibility is whether people with disabilities can understand how to vote from the information you provide, and whether your policies and practices make voting easier or harder for them.²¹

This Guide section provides best practices and recommendations for making your polling place and in-person voting more accessible. It focuses mainly on physical accessibility but does touch on programmatic accessibility.

Compliance and Location Planning

Polling places must comply with Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). We recommend that you pick a polling place that already does comply with the ADA. Libraries, businesses that must comply with Title III, and state agencies are good options. Prepare to survey the polling place for accessibility in advance even if it is required to comply with Title II. Conditions at polling places can change over time.

Not all polling places are ADA-compliant. This can happen, for example, when you decide to make a church your polling place.²² Churches are not required to comply with the ADA. Private homes also do not have to comply with the ADA.²³ In this situation, you will have to make the polling place temporarily accessible.

The [ADA Standards for Accessible Design](#) are the minimum standards for an accessible building. They cover everything related to physical accessibility. They can be referenced to determine both what needs to be fixed and what an accessible building looks like. The Access Board released a [Guide to the ADA Accessibility Standards](#). We recommend that you familiarize yourself with these resources.

²¹ See United Way of South Central Michigan, *Day 8: Accessibility: Physical and Programmatic* (Aug. 15, 2022), <https://unitedforscmi.org/day-8-accessibility-physical-and-programmatic/> (describing the difference between physical and programmatic accessibility).

²² Daniel Silliman and Jared Boggess, *20% of Polling Places Are in Churches. We Mapped Them*. Christianity Today (Oct. 3, 2022), <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2022/october/church-polling-place-election-democracy.html>.

²³ ADA National Network, *Religious Entities Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (2018)*, available at <https://adata.org/factsheet/religious-entities-under-americans-disabilities-act>.

There are a few resources specific to polling place physical accessibility. DOJ’s “[ADA Checklist for Polling Places](#)” offers a list of elements needed for a polling place to be accessible. Familiarize yourself with DOJ’s list of requirements. DOJ covers parking and passenger drop-off, ramps, signage, entrances, lifts and elevators, voting area accessibility, and other topics.

ADA.gov’s resource “[Solutions for Five Common ADA Access Problems at Polling Places](#)” describes temporary solutions that election administrators can use to make an inaccessible polling place more accessible. Some of their solutions are using traffic cones and signs to create accessible parking spaces, covering uneven walkways with metal plates, and propping open doors and adding temporary ramps to create accessible entrances.

This Guide strongly recommends that you use temporary fixes instead of closing polling places. In January 2020, NDRN published a policy brief, [Blocking the Ballot Box: Ending Misuse of the ADA to Close Polling Places](#). In the brief, NDRN explains that the ADA has been used as a pretext to close polling places in areas with financial constraints or a high minority population.²⁴ NDRN’s report [describes additional temporary fixes](#) that you can use to make a polling place temporarily accessible.

If a polling place can never comply with the ADA, you may be able to consolidate or relocate it.²⁵

Recommendations for Consolidating Polling Places

- Make sure the consolidated polling place can handle the increased traffic.
- Carefully consider where to place the consolidated polling place, to ensure it is close enough to accessible public transit and all areas served by the prior polling places.
- Make sure relocation is undertaken after consulting with the local disability rights community. The local disability rights community will tell you whether a proposed new polling place location adequately serves their needs.

About Voter ID Laws

Acknowledgments: This section is derived from the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)’s July 16, 2021 comments to the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) on “Executive Order Promoting Access to Voting (NIST-2021-0003); Request for Information regarding Executive Order 14019 § 7 (Ensuring Equal Access for Voters with Disabilities); Docket Number 210608-0123.” The

²⁴ See Erika Hudson and Michelle Bishop, Nat’l Disability Rts. Network, *Blocking the Ballot Box: Ending Misuse of the ADA to Close Polling Places* 9, 15-16, 37-38 (Jan. 2020), available at https://www.ndrn.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/NDRN_Blocking_the_Ballot_Box_2020.pdf (“Not all voices are being heard on Election Day, and worse, they are being deliberately silenced ... In 2018, the state of Georgia was undergoing a heated, historic gubernatorial election with the state’s first-ever female African American candidate to run for governor, Stacy Abrams”).

²⁵ Erika Hudson and Michelle Bishop, Nat’l Disability Rts. Network, *Polling Place Accessibility: The Recommendations* 3 (Jan. 2020), available at https://www.ndrn.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/NDRN_Blocking_the_Ballot_Box_2020_PracticalSolutions.pdf.

ACLU is a member of the NCAV and provided us with their comments. We cite them as “ACLU Brief.”

Polling places may routinely require voters to have a photo ID in order to vote.²⁶ However, people with disabilities are less likely to have a photo ID. Some reasons people with disabilities are less likely to have a photo ID may be their poverty or inability to drive.²⁷ Although some states do offer free photo ID cards, voters may have to obtain those cards from locations that are themselves inaccessible.²⁸

Recommendations about voter ID

- We recommend that you eliminate the need to present specifically a photo ID. We recommend that you allow people with disabilities to present other documents, or to provide an on-the-spot sworn affidavit, as proof of identity instead of a photo ID. Requiring only one document as proof of identity is recommended.
- We recommend that you provide opportunities to obtain free photo ID cards. These opportunities should be as accessible as possible and should include providing “door-to-door” services if you have the resources or staff time.²⁹
- It can be expensive to acquire what’s needed to get a free photo ID. One Harvard law school review in 2014 found that a “free” photo ID could actually cost between \$75 to \$175, and far more if the applicant needed to pay for an attorney.³⁰ Voters were still facing costs, such as payments for birth certificates, in 2022.³¹ We recommend that you provide opportunities to acquire free documentation, such as free proof of citizenship and birth certificates.

²⁶ ACLU Brief at 5-6; S.E. Smith, *Voting is already hard for people with disabilities. Voter ID laws make it even harder.*, Vox, (Apr.1, 2016, 2:10 PM), <https://www.vox.com/2016/4/1/11346714/voter-id-laws-disabilities>.

²⁷ ACLU Brief at 5-6

²⁸ S.E. Smith, *supra* note 7.

²⁹ ACLU Brief at 6

³⁰ Richard Sobel, Charles Hamilton Houston Institute for Race and Justice, Harvard Law School, *The High Cost of ‘Free’ Photo Voter Identification Cards* 2, 15-23, 31 (Jun. 2014), <https://charleshamiltonhouston.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/FullReportVoterIDJune2014.pdf>.

³¹ Ileana Garnand, *Costs to vote considered modern “poll taxes”*, Center for Public Integrity (Oct. 31, 2022), <https://publicintegrity.org/politics/elections/who-counts/costs-to-vote-considered-modern-poll-taxes/>.

Checklists for Physical Polling Place Accessibility

Disclaimer: Following our recommendations is not intended as legal advice and does not necessarily ensure nor is intended as a substitute for full compliance with federal or state law.

Acknowledgements: We derived the checklist from the recommendations and statements listed in “Acknowledgements” in the “Accessibility at the Polling Place” section of the Guide. These checklists identify the most common accessibility needs in polling places so that you know where to begin when planning for Election Day.

Parking and Arrival

- Is the parking space’s gravel/pavement suitable for wheelchairs? Would a person using a cane or wheelchair slip on the surface? The DOJ’s ADA Checklist for Polling Places’ description of appropriate surfaces is “stable, firm, slip-resistant.”
- How many accessible parking spaces are there?
- Are there both non-van and van-accessible parking spaces?
- Are enough accessible parking spaces available to voters entering the polling place? Are the spaces open and not taken up by election workers?
- Is there enough aisle space?
- Is there a sign for each parking space?
- If you created temporary accessible parking: Did you create a temporary sign?
- Are the accessible parking spaces on a slope or other wheelchair-inaccessible area?
- Are the accessible parking spaces near the accessible entrance to the polling place?
- Is there an easy, accessible way to get from parking to the accessible entrance?
- Are there accessible signs (in Braille) leading Blind people or people with vision disabilities to the entrance?
- Are there personnel on call/poll workers?
- Are drop-off areas accessible to people with disabilities?
- Is the way to the polling place clear of obstructions and vehicles?

Entrances and Inner Signage

- Are there ramps or other ways to reach the accessible entrance?
- Is the door accessible? Can a person with a wheelchair enter through the door? The 2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design describe standards for doors.
- If the entrance is not accessible, can it be made accessible?
- Can a person with a disability get the door open?
- Is there an accessible route from the door to the hallways leading to the voting area?

- Is the route level and free of obstructions?
- If the route is not free of obstructions, can a Blind person, a person with low-vision, or person with other vision-related disabilities determine where the obstructions are? For example, do traffic cones “show” a blind, low-vision, or person with vision-related disabilities what areas to avoid?
- Is the route wide enough?
- Can a person in a wheelchair comfortably wait in line along the route?
- Is it possible for them to leave the line and go to the bathroom?
- Is the accessible route relatively near to or the same route used by other voters?
- If the accessible route is in a different location for accessibility reasons, do signs tell voters where to find the accessible route?
- If the voting area is on a different floor: Do people with disabilities have an elevator that leads to the floor where the voting room is? Is the elevator functional and unlocked?
- If there is no elevator: Is there another accessible way up to a higher floor, such as a wheelchair-accessible ramp wide enough to accommodate all types of wheelchairs (power chairs, etc.)?
- Are there personnel available who are trained to help voters with disabilities?

Signs

- Are there accessible signs showing voters where to go inside the building?
- Are the signs in plain language?
- Are there signs in Braille?
- Are there signs that use large print?
- Do the signs feature appropriate color contrast between text and background?

Voting Area

- Is the entrance to the voting area accessible?
- Does the entrance comply with the ADA Accessible Design Standards?
- Does the entrance comply with the guidelines in the DOJ Polling Place Checklist?
- If not, have temporary measures been taken to make the entrance accessible?
- Can a person with a disability get between the different lines and sections of the voting area? The DOJ Polling Place Checklist description is “adequate circulation and maneuvering space for voters who use wheelchairs or scooters, or mobility devices.”

Voting Machines (including non-accessible voting machines and kiosks):

- Does the voting equipment (including non-accessible voting machines and kiosks) have enough space/clearance for a person with a wheelchair, including enough space to turn around?
- Are all voting machines situated for privacy? For example, can a person waiting in line see a voter's selections? Can a poll or election worker? If they can, the voting machines have not been situated for privacy.
- Are all voting machines unboxed, including accessible voting machines?
- Are all voting machines set up, including accessible voting machines?
- Are all voting machines turned on, including accessible voting machines?

Voting Area

- Are there signs in the voting area that say what each line or location is for?
- Are there signs for:
 - same-day registration?
 - check-in?
 - ballot casting?
 - Early voting, if it happens in the polling place?
- Are the signs in plain language?
- In Braille?
- Are there trained staff who can direct voters and read the signs aloud?
- If a person with a disability needs an audio ballot read aloud by a machine: Can you reduce or cancel noise so that only the person with a disability can hear their ballot being read?
- Are there headphones available at all polling places?
- Are the headphones nearby the voting machines?
- Have all headphones been tested? Are they ready for use?
- Is there a way to reduce echoes and other audio for people with disabilities using headphones?
- Is there a way to reduce echoes and audio for people with disabilities using assistive hearing-related technology, such as hearing aids and cochlear implants?

Check-in and Same-Day Registration

- Is same-day registration available at the polling place? We recommend that same-day registration be available at the same location as voting.

- Are the same accommodations available for same day registration that are available for check-in and voting?
- Are there signs showing where check-in and same-day registration (if available) are?
 - Are they in Braille?
 - Plain language?
 - Are the signs audible?
 - Can the signs be read aloud by trained poll workers?
- Can poll workers communicate effectively with people with disabilities?
 - Are they trained in disability etiquette?
 - Are they trained on how AAC works?
 - Are there poll workers who can speak ASL fluently? Poll workers who are trained to use a single-page document with a few signs are not speaking ASL.
 - Are there poll workers who can communicate using cued speech?
- Do poll workers use clear, plain language to communicate with voters?

Can poll workers help people with disabilities who do not know where to go figure out where to go?

- Can they help people with intellectual and developmental disabilities?
- People with psychiatric or mental health disabilities?
- Can they help voters who are Deaf, DeafBlind, DeafDisabled, Hard of Hearing, Late-Deafened, and/or people with hearing disabilities?
- Blind people, people with low-vision, or people who have other vision-related disabilities?

People with physical disabilities?

- Can you check in or register to vote using assistive technology and AAC?
- Can you check in or register to vote using assistive apps on an iPad or tablet?
- If there is an e-pollbook: Do all poll workers know how to use it?
- Is the e-pollbook accessible for poll workers with disabilities?
- If there is a signature requirement for voting or same-day registration in the county or state: Are there accessible options for signatures? Accessible options might include small marks that stand in for a signature, electronic signatures, stamps, and affidavits stating that the person authorized another's signature as their own.
- Are alternative formats of instructions and forms available for same-day registration?
 - Are the instructions and forms clear?

Accessibility of Voting Machines

Under the Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA), every polling place must have at least one accessible voting machine.³² “Accessible voting machines” is a term we use to refer to machines designed to have accessibility features. We do not endorse or oppose the use of any specific brand of voting machine, and our statements do not imply that any brand of machine is guaranteed to be accessible to all voters.

Accessible voting machines are usually Ballot Marking Devices (BMDs), which means that voters fill out the ballot electronically, but the machine prints a paper ballot.³³ They may also be Direct-recording Electronic (DRE) voting machines, which are more accessible because they allow voters with disabilities to cast the ballot directly from the voting machine.³⁴ Some DREs produce a paper ballot that allows voters or election officials to verify the ballot, known as a voter-verified paper audit trail (VVPAT) system.³⁵

Recommendations for Accessible Voting Machines

Disclaimer: Following our recommendations is not intended as legal advice and does not necessarily ensure nor is intended as a substitute for full compliance with federal or state law.

- Determine what kind of machines you have available, including their accessibility and functions.
- Consider whether you’ve made the machines easy for people with physical disabilities to get to and use.
- Make sure to train your poll workers and employees on accessible voting machines. Poll worker training should include knowledge of the features that the machines offer, information on how to help voters use the machines (including all features), and knowledge of how to take down and set up the machines.

Most states and counties try to follow the EAC’s [Voluntary Voting System Guidelines \(VVSG\)](#), which govern voting machines. Some states are required by state law to follow the VVSG.³⁶ Familiarize yourself with these guidelines and follow their recommendations to improve the accessibility of your voting machines.

³² Help America Vote Act, 52 U.S.C. § 21081(a)(3)(B)(2022).

³³ Verified Voting, *Voting Equipment*, <https://verifiedvoting.org/votingequipment/> (last visited Mar. 13, 2024).

³⁴ *Id*

³⁵ Congressional Research Service, *The Direct Recording Electronic Voting Machine (DRE) Controversy FAQs and Misperceptions 1* (Mar. 7, 2007), *available at* <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/RL/RL33190/6>; *Voting methods and equipment by state*, Ballotpedia, https://ballotpedia.org/Voting_methods_and_equipment_by_state#cite_note-verify-1 (last visited Mar. 13, 2024).

³⁶ U.S. Election Assistance Commission, *Voluntary Voting System Guidelines*, <https://www.eac.gov/voting-equipment/voluntary-voting-system-guidelines> (last updated Feb. 5, 2024).

It is particularly hard to make ballot verification accessible. Printed paper ballots do not allow voters with print disabilities to confirm what is on their ballot. Newer machines automate paper handling or have other accessible features that improve accessibility. We recommend that you keep your voting machines as up-to-date as possible.

Our checklists and recommendations describe features of your voting area, poll worker training, and voting machines that would make voting machines more accessible to people with disabilities.

Checklist for Training Poll Workers in the Voting Area

Disclaimer: Following our recommendations is not intended as legal advice, and does not necessarily ensure nor is intended as a substitute for full compliance with federal or state law.

Acknowledgments: This Guide thanks Diane Golden for speaking with us during the Guide's development. The Guide also thanks Sarah Blahovec for discussing in-person physical accessibility with us in depth. This Guide used NDRN's [comments on VVSG 2.0](#) and the [EAC's Checklist for In-Person Voting](#) to write this section.

- Are headphones and touchpad pens available to all voters?
 - Can the poll workers operate all voting machines, including accessible voting machines?
 - Can the poll workers instruct people with disabilities on how to use the voting machine?
 - Can they instruct Blind and low-vision voters, and voters with other vision-related disabilities?
 - Voters with physical disabilities?
 - Voters with cognitive disabilities?
 - Voters with psychiatric or mental health disabilities?
 - Are they fluent in ASL?
 - Can they communicate using cued speech?
- Are the poll workers aware that accessible voting machines exist?
- Are poll workers trained to tell all voters where the accessible voting machine is?
- Is the accessible voting machine turned on and operational?
- Are the voting machines compatible with assistive technology (AT)?
- Are the voting machines compatible with iPads or tablets?
- AAC devices?

- Are headphones and technologies related to the machines plugged in and operational? Are these technologies nearby the voting machines?
- Are the voting machines arranged for secrecy?
- Do the poll workers use proper disability etiquette when assisting voters? “Providing Information In Person” has more information.
- Do the poll workers ask all voters whether they plan to hand mark their ballot or use a voting machine, when both options are available?
- When more than one kind of voting machines is available: Do the poll workers explain which types of machines are available (including their features and accessibility if asked about) without directing the voter to use a specific machine?
- Do they presume all people are competent to vote? Poll workers should presume all voters are competent. Only a judge can determine whether a voter is competent to vote or not.
- Do they only disqualify voters when they have documents showing that specific person cannot vote?
- Does the poll worker stand off to the side unless they are being asked to mark the ballot?
- Does the poll worker stand on the opposite side of any service animal?
- Do they let the voter know if they have to look at the machine in order to help them? Do they ask for permission first?
- Do poll workers preserve privacy and independence as much as possible?

Recommendations on Accessible Voting Machines and Voting Systems

Acknowledgments: We thank Diane Golden for consulting with us on voting machine and voting system accessibility. We also used NDRN’s [comments on VVSG 2.0](#) to write this section of the Guide.

All voting machines must comply with federal and state law and regulations governing accessible voting systems. Review your state’s policies and federal and state disability and voting rights law first.

- We recommend that you get machines that are certified for compliance with VVSG 2.0 even if you are not required to comply with the VVSG in your state. The current VVSG are minimum accessibility standards.
- Use voting systems that provide accessible paper ballot marking, verification, and return. Consider the needs of people with print disabilities, especially those who cannot handle paper, when determining which voting systems to replace or purchase. A person who

requires the help of a poll worker to remove the ballot from a machine to place it into a scanner is not voting privately and independently, even if a privacy sleeve is used.

- Use universal design and accessibility features in all voting machines. Standard, built-in accessibility is better for voters than segregated BMDs.
- Upgrade your voting machines regularly as accessible voting technology improves.
- Use accessible voting machines with common, standard AT features, such as:
 - Speech output, with adjustments available for speech speed, loudness, etc.
 - Screen enlargement with adjustments available for color, contrast, size, and other features needed by people with vision disabilities
 - Full touchscreen control support, including when the screen is enlarged
 - Audio navigation with a keypad used to make selections
 - Alternative controls (such as a switch, or “sip-and-puff” air-based controls) not used in conjunction with audio navigation
 - The ability for the voter to select the access features they need.
- If the ballot is read aloud to the voter by the machine, this should not be audible to any other voter or to election officials. Headphones must be functional, including for voters using hearing-related assistive technology such as cochlear implants and hearing aids.
- Stay on the “cutting edge” of voting machine technology to help make voting more accessible for people with disabilities! We recommend machines with the following features, if (or when) they exist.
 - Acquire voting machines that allow users with disabilities to verify printed paper ballots. For example, machines could use encoding (such as a QR code or use of optical scan markings, which are two kinds of encoding) on the paper ballot. Voters could scan the code and then verify their ballot on an AT device, computer, iPad, or phone.
 - If optical scan marks are used to verify marked paper ballot content, it may be possible to develop voting machines that “read back” write-in content, such as the name of a “written in” candidate. Look for future machines with this characteristic.
- If the voting machine creates a paper ballot, we recommend the voting machine have an attached ballot box where the marked and verified ballot is automatically sent. Voting machines that do this do exist and have been deployed in some jurisdictions.
- Accessible voting machines frequently produce ballots that do not look like the ballots used by other voters. Dissimilar ballots make it too easy to determine who used the accessible voting machine. We recommend that you use more than one accessible voting machine, enough for voters without disabilities to use them. Another option is to use voting systems that produce ballots that are tabulated and look exactly the same as handwritten paper ballots.

Poll Worker Training and Safety

Trained poll workers can be the difference between an accessible voting experience and an inaccessible one.

Recommendations

- This Guide discusses disability etiquette and training in other contexts. Our recommendations in these sections also apply to poll workers. Reference our “Checklist for Poll Worker Training for the Voting Area,” “Checklists for Physical Polling Place Accessibility,” “Checklist” under “Registering to Vote In Person,” and “Providing Information In Person” sections for more information.
- Engage with advocacy organizations who are recruiting diverse poll workers, including poll workers with disabilities. For example, [NDRN partnered with Power The Polls](#) to recruit poll workers with disabilities in 2023.
- Poll workers, other election workers, and election administrators are facing unprecedented threats to their safety nationwide.³⁷ We recommend that you provide security for yourselves and your poll workers at the polls to the extent that you are able to. Your safety is vital for the preservation of secure and free elections.
- Make sure that your polling place is prepared in case of an emergency. Emergency events, including natural disasters and pandemics, can and have impacted elections. Make sure that your poll workers are aware of nearby shelters, or that the polling place is prepared if it is also designated as a shelter. Make sure that your emergency exits, walkways, and entrances are accessible. If an incoming natural disaster closes a polling place, make sure that there are accessible notices available online, at the polling place, and at your office.

³⁷ Lindsay Whitehurst, Associated Press, *Election workers are being bombarded with death threats, the U.S. government says*, PBS News Hour (Aug. 31, 2023, 6:49PM EDT), <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/election-workers-are-being-bombarded-with-death-threats-the-u-s-government-says>.

Chapter 4

Registering to Vote

In Chapter 4

- [Registering to vote online](#)
- [Registering to vote in person](#)
- [Same-day voter registration](#)
- [Automatic voter registration](#)
- [Voter registration drives](#)
- [E-pollbooks](#)

Voters with disabilities register to vote by: (1) registering online; (2) registering in person; (3) mailing in a voter registration form, or (4) participating in a voter registration drive. Every jurisdiction has different rules for voter registration. As of May 2024:

- [Forty-one states and DC offer online voter registration.](#)
- Twenty-two states and DC have “same-day voter registration,” which allows for voter registration on Election Day or during the early voting period.
- Twenty-four states and DC have “automatic voter registration.” This means that visitors to the DMV (and sometimes other agencies, depending on the state’s law) are either given the opportunity to register at the same time, or are automatically registered to vote unless they “opt out.” If your state offers online automatic voter registration, we recommend you advise and collaborate with all participating agencies to ensure their websites are accessible.

This Guide section offers recommendations for improving voter registration accessibility.

Registering to Vote Online

Some jurisdictions offer voter registration forms online. Depending on the jurisdiction, these forms may be printed and sent by mail, email, fax, or submitted using an online “portal” or “submit” option. The form may be in a PDF format, or it may be a website.

These forms and their instructions must be accessible. Our checklists and recommendations help you (or your web designers) review your online forms for accessibility.

Registration Forms as Websites

Disclaimer: Following our recommendations is not intended as legal advice, and does not necessarily ensure nor is intended as a substitute for full compliance with federal or state law.

The “[Creating Accessible Election Websites](#)” section of the Guide has more information on creating accessible documents.

W3C offers a [tutorial](#) for creating online forms. The Guide’s checklist is based on this tutorial, as well as the sources described on the “[General Resources, Accessibility Consultants, and Acknowledgements](#)” page.

Checklist for voter registration forms online

- Is there alt text for all images? For example, if your voter registration form has a “Submit” button, does that button have alt text?
- Are all form elements correctly labeled? Example: Is the form entry box for “Street Address” labeled “Street Address” both in front of it and in an alt text description?
- Can you navigate the form using only the “Tab” and arrow keys?
- Do your labels tell the user the purpose of the form elements? For example: the words “opt into automatic registration” would tell a user what the checkbox means, but a checkbox that says “Opt-in” is ambiguous.
- Are the form instructions:
 - Simple?
 - Short?
 - In plain language or Easy Read?
 - Accessible by a screen reader?
 - Available in multiple languages, including ASL?
 - Available by video with captions in multiple languages and with cued language transliteration?
- Do you include a glossary?

- Is the form free of elements that require the user to be able to see or hear?
- Does submitting the form require only a few button clicks or keyboard presses?
- Can the user use a screen magnifier on all parts of the form?
- Can the user make the form's text size bigger?

Everyone makes mistakes when filling out forms. Users with disabilities need a way to determine that they've made a mistake while filling out a form and a way to fix their mistakes. The ability to do this is called "validating" or "checking" the form. W3C has a page on form validation at: <https://www.w3.org/WAI/tutorials/forms/validation/>.

Is this process accessible?

- Can you check your work using a screen reader and text magnifier?
- Can the form be reviewed on a personal AT device?
- Has the form grouped related controls and form elements? For example, are all address entry text boxes in the same spot on the form?
- Have you divided longer forms into shorter multi-page forms?
- For multi-page forms: have you created section headings and accessible text that indicates the user's progress?
- Have you minimized or eliminated time limits?
- If you have to submit a filled-out online form in document form to a portal: Is the portal accessible?
- Are forms that allow you to update your registration information (such as your address) equally accessible?

Form Security and Verification Tools

Many web designers use online security and verification tools. The tools help verify that a user submitting data is human because some computer programs ("bots") can auto-fill online forms. Election officials may also want to verify that the user has only registered once. This Guide recommends that your web designers use only limited verification. Verification tools are rarely accessible.

If you do use verification, use the most accessible tools available. For a security feature to be "viable," it must allow people with disabilities to both use it and make mistakes.

Standard CAPTCHA is nearly always inaccessible. For example, asking a blind user, a user with low-vision, a Deafblind, dyslexic, or colorblind user, or a user with vision disabilities to separate text characters from a distorted image is asking them to do something impossible or incredibly

difficult. The same is true of audio CAPTCHA for users who are Deaf, DeafBlind, DeafDisabled, Hard of Hearing, Late-Deafened, or people with hearing disabilities. Simple logic puzzles create barriers for users with cognitive disabilities, psychiatric or mental health disabilities, and intellectual and developmental disabilities.

We support the recommendations in W3C’s brief, [Inaccessibility of CAPTCHA: Alternatives to Visual Turing Tests on the Web](#). The brief is a detailed resource where you can learn more about the different forms of CAPTCHA and the alternatives available.

Additional Recommendations for Web Designers and IT Staff

- Use a click or input-based CAPTCHA, such as Google’s “Are you human?” reCAPTCHA. (3.2.1 of W3C’s Inaccessibility of CAPTCHA provides more information on how this method works)
- Use two-factor authentication or multiple-modality authentication. This form of authentication relies on the user having multiple devices instead of being able to see or hear.

Registering Using Documents Available Online

Disclaimer: Following our recommendations is not intended as legal advice, and does not necessarily ensure nor is intended as a substitute for full compliance with federal or state law.

Many jurisdictions make voter registration forms available as online documents, typically PDFs. For general information on document accessibility, reference “[Creating Accessible Online Documents](#).” These verification forms are usually submitted by mail.

Examples of Voter Registration Forms Available Online

- [National Mail Voter Registration Form](#) (available online at the EAC’s website)
- [Maryland Voter Registration Form](#)
- [New York’s Voter Registration Form](#)

Recommendations for online voter registration forms

Many registration forms are online, but few are accessible. We offer the recommendations that follow.

- Create forms that are accessible for people with disabilities (“the Creating Accessible Online Documents” section of the Guide has more resources and recommendations).
- Create forms and instructions at a 3rd-8th grade reading level.
- Create ways to submit the forms by email or online portal, if you have the resources to do so.

We recommend that you hire people with disabilities as accessibility testers and consultants. People with disabilities can review your online form to determine its accessibility.

Sending Forms by Mail

Many voter registration forms are sent by mail. This Guide recommends requiring minimal proof of identity, to the extent allowed by state or local law. If possible, do not require the voter to specifically provide a driver's license as proof of identity. We recommend that you allow the voter to use more than one form of documentation proving their identity. We also recommend that you do not require the voter to sign the form physically.

For more information on how to make mailing documents as accessible as possible, reference the Guide section "[Ballots Sent by Mail.](#)" Our recommendations for voter registration forms are the same as those for ballots, except for recommendations specific to ballot verification (notaries, witnesses, etc.).

Registering to Vote in Person

The National Voter Registration Act (or “Motor Voter Act”) requires DMVs, public assistance programs, and state-funded programs serving people with disabilities to offer in-person voter registration. Election offices also register voters.

Our checklist helps you identify the accessibility needs of voters who arrive at your office to register in person.

The checklist can benefit other agencies that are required to register voters. We recommend that election agencies collaborate with other agencies that are required to offer voter registration.

Checklist for registering to vote in person

Disclaimer: Following our recommendations is not intended as legal advice, and does not necessarily ensure nor is intended as a substitute for full compliance with federal or state law.

- Are the voter registration forms available in accessible formats?
- Is there a Braille version available?
- Are there large-print voter registration forms?
- Is there a form in plain language?
- Easy Read?
- Can you submit the form without physically handling paper?
- Are forms that allow you to update your registration information (such as your address) equally accessible?
 - Are any online alternatives available?
 - Is an identical form available in an accessible format online?
 - Is the form WCAG 2.1-compliant?
 - Are employees at the office trained to help voters with disabilities in the office submit online voter registration forms?
 - Is there a device or computer on location that can be used to register? Is the device accessible?
- Are your employees trained to assist people with disabilities?
 - Are employees trained on disability etiquette?
 - For multiple different types of disability and disability community? For example, blind people, people with low-vision, and people with vision-related disabilities are in one broad category of disability. People with psychiatric or mental health disabilities are in another broad category. However, etiquette may differ between

communities within the same broad disability category. You and your employees should be aware of as many forms as possible.

- Are the employees aware of how service animals work?
- Are they trained on service animal etiquette?
- Are they trained on awareness of how people with disabilities use supporters?
- Are they trained on how to communicate with people with many different types of disabilities? For example, people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) are in one broad disability category. However, while some general rules exist for communicating with people with IDD, communication styles may differ significantly between even people with the same disability. You and your employees should learn as many ways to communicate as possible.
- Are they trained to interpret the communication of people who use AAC devices?
- Are they trained to recognize assistive technology?
- Can they communicate in ASL?
- Can they communicate using cued speech?
- Are employees trained to use any assistive or accessibility technology available in the office to help with voter registration?
- Can they teach a person with a disability how to use these devices?
- Are employees aware of what accessible forms are at their offices?
- Are these forms prominently displayed or hidden?
- Are employees routinely trained on where they are?
- Are employees trained to inform voters that accessible forms are available?

Same Day Voter Registration

Acknowledgments: This section of the Guide is based on information from the National Conference on State Legislatures' "[Same-Day Voter Registration](#)" page.

[Twenty-two states and Washington DC](#) have same-day voter registration. Each state with same-day registration has slightly different laws.

States have time frames for “same-day voter registration.” In some states, voting during the early voting period is “same-day registration.” In Montana and North Carolina, you can only perform “same-day registration” during early voting and not on Election Day.

State laws usually require the voters to provide specific documents to register. Proof of residency is usually (but not always) required. An ID card or driver’s license is always enough documentation; other accepted documents vary between states.

Some states may require one or all of the following:

- Sworn affidavits
- Casting of provisional ballots
- Requirements to appear at a specific location for same-day voting (such as in person).

We recommend that same-day registration occur in the same locations that voting is available, such as at your office on Election Day, at the polling place, or at a vote center.

Our checklist helps you make same-day registration as accessible as possible.

Checklist for same day voter registration

Disclaimer: Following our recommendations is not intended as legal advice, and does not necessarily ensure nor is intended as a substitute for full compliance with federal or state law.

- Can you register at the same locations that you can vote at on Election Day?
- Are poll workers trained to help voters with disabilities register on Election Day?
- Are poll workers familiar with the accessible versions of voter registration forms?
- Are instructions on what documents are needed for same-day voter registration available and accessible?
- Are there instructions online?
- Are instructions in an accessible format online?
- Do poll workers and election officials know how to provide voters with instructions on registering in person?

- Do poll workers know how to instruct voters with disabilities?
- If oaths and affidavits are necessary in your state: Can the poll workers help a person with a disability perform the oaths and affidavits?
- Can some poll workers communicate in ASL?
- Can some poll workers communicate in cued speech?
- Can poll workers use spoken languages other than English?
- Has same-day voter registration been prominently advertised by your office?
 - At the physical office?
 - Online on agency websites?
 - On social media posts?
 - Do images advertising same-day registration online have alt text?
 - Is the information accessible?
- Can you perform same-day voter registration online or postmarked by mail?
- Is same-day voter registration also advertised outside the polling place during the early voting period and on Election Day?
- Is the line and location for voter registration prominently displayed at the polling place, at your office, or at another location where it is available?
- Is this line accessible? The “Accessibility At the Polling Place” section of the Guide has more recommendations on how to make lines accessible.

Automatic Voter Registration (AVR)

Acknowledgments: This section of the Guide is based on information from the [Brennan Center's Automatic Voter Registration](#) materials (especially its 2016 report, "[The Case for Automatic Voter Registration](#)" and the article "[Automatic Voter Registration: A Summary](#)") the [National Conference on State Legislatures](#)' page, and the [Harvard Political Review](#) article by Mary Cipperman, "[An Automatic Solution: Voter Registration and the Oregon Model](#)."

24 states and the District of Columbia have automatic voter registration. There are two kinds of AVR: "front-end opt-out" and "back-end opt-out." "Front-end opt-out" asks the customer whether they would like to register to vote during the transaction with the agency. Some states with front-end opt out ask the customer to affirmatively decide to register to vote, while others register the customer unless they affirmatively decline. "Back-end opt-out" systems send the customer's voter registration information to state officials, and they are registered to vote unless they decline to by responding to post-transaction mail.

AVR is triggered by a visit to the DMV in all states with AVR. Some states extend AVR to other locations or give the Secretary of State the power to extend AVR.

The [National Conference on State Legislatures' page](#) has more information on the specific rules for voter registration in each state.

Automatic voter registration improves registration rates. A [2019 study by the Brennan Center](#) found that AVR increases voter registration rates from 9 to 94 percent.

Recommendations for AVR

Disclaimer: Following our recommendations is not intended as legal advice, and does not necessarily ensure nor is intended as a substitute for full compliance with federal or state law.

- We recommend that you provide voters with information on AVR. The information should be accessible. If the information is online, there should be screen reader-accessible and plain language versions.
- Some forms of AVR involve mailing a post-interaction notice that the person must respond to "opt-out." If you are a state official in a state that uses a notice, make it and its instructions accessible and available in languages other than English, especially in the minority languages spoken most often in your state.
- We recommend that you offer to collaborate with and provide support to DMVs and other agencies offering AVR, to the extent you can.
- People with disabilities may have a harder time understanding how AVR works. We recommend that you propose that the DMV (and other agencies offering AVR, if any) consult with disability rights advocacy organizations on how to communicate with voters with disabilities.

Voter Registration Drives

Acknowledgments: This section of the Guide references: the Brennan Center’s [2012 report State Restrictions on Voter Registration Drives](#), Ballotpedia’s [article on voter registration drives](#), League of Women Voters’ article “[Planning a Voter Registration Drive](#),” the work of [AAPD’s REV Up coalition](#), and [NDRN’s efforts to drive disabled voter turnout](#).

Voter registration drives are public events and campaigns in which people are encouraged to register to vote. The organizers usually help people register in accordance with their state’s laws. Many drives collect and submit voter registration applications. Voter registration drives in the United States are usually conducted by third-party nonprofits or partisan organizations.

Voter registration drives help register underrepresented demographics. A 2012 report by the Brennan Center for Justice found that Black and Hispanic voters are [much more likely to use voter registration drives](#) and are more likely to go to the polls when they register using a drive.

Voter registration drives drive up overall voter registration. According to [data from 2004](#), more than 20 percent of all new voter registrations that year were submitted by nonprofit organizations. Voter registration drives were involved.³⁸

People with disabilities use voter registration drives. The American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD)’ [REV Up campaign](#) registers people with disabilities through drives and helps organize the disability rights community. The National Disability Rights Network (NDRN) [collaborates with other groups](#), such as Rooted in Rights.

Some states have limitations on who can conduct a voter registration drive, when they can conduct one, and when voter registration applications must be submitted after the drive. These limitations can be burdensome; the Brennan Center found³⁹ that the restrictions could limit efforts by nonprofits to register people of color in the state.

Recommendations for voter registration drives

Disclaimer: Following our recommendations is not intended as legal advice, and does not necessarily ensure nor is intended as a substitute for full compliance with federal or state law.

We recommend that elected officials and agencies support voter registration drives in their jurisdiction. Election officials can do this in several ways.

- Streamline the clearance process for volunteers by simplifying or eliminating the documentation and training requirements needed to register voters.

³⁸ Diana Kasdan, Brennan Ctr. for Justice, *State Restrictions on Voter Registration Drives 3* (Nov. 30, 2012), available at <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/state-restrictions-voter-registration-drives>.

³⁹ *State Restrictions on Voter Registration Drives* at 2.

- Streamline the application process for the organizer. Make it easy to allocate physical space and schedule times for voter registration drives.
- Ensure your voter registration forms are accessible and widely available to voter registration drive organizers.
- Allow organizers ample time to submit the voter registration forms collected from drive participants.

E-Poll Books

Electronic poll books (e-poll books) are software that act as digital records of voter registration information. Election officials use them to check voter registration. They can also be used to get voters' signatures, identify voters' preferred language, determine which registered voters are ineligible, and for other functions.

Recommendations for e-poll books

Disclaimer: Following our recommendations is not intended as legal advice, and does not necessarily ensure nor is intended as a substitute for full compliance with federal or state law.

These recommendations are based on the work of Diane Golden, a member of the NCAV. The EAC [updated its own Voluntary E-Poll Book Certification Requirements](#) and its [Election Supporting Technology Evaluation Program Manual Version 1.0](#) in April 2024. The adoptions marked the launch of the Voluntary Electronic Poll Book Certification Program.⁴⁰

- Use E-poll books that comply with the January 18, 2018 “Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Final Standards and Guidelines” for Section 508.
- Use E-poll books that comply with the EAC’s voluntary certification requirements.
- Use E-poll book applications that comply with WCAG 2.1.
- Elections personnel may have disabilities. Use e-poll book applications that have been tested for at least keyboard navigation functionality and compatibility with existing assistive technology.

⁴⁰ U.S. Election Assistance Commission, *Electronic Poll Books* (May 21, 2024), <https://www.eac.gov/estep-program/electronic-poll-books>.

Chapter 5

Voting by Mail and Absentee

In Chapter 5

- [Requesting a mail ballot](#)
- [Making the ballot accessible](#)
 - [Ballots sent electronically](#)
 - [Ballots sent by mail](#)
- [Ballot review and verification](#)
- [Casting the ballot](#)
- [All-mail elections](#)
- [Ballot curing](#)
- [Ballot tracking](#)

To vote by mail or absentee, voters request a ballot by mail or electronically and then receive, mark, verify, and return the ballot. People with disabilities must be able to vote privately and independently, whether they vote by mail or absentee.

Voters with disabilities frequently vote by mail. According to the [Election Assistance Commission](#) (EAC)'s 2022 report, only 44% of people with disabilities voted in person on Election Day, compared to 51% of people without disabilities. Voter engagement for people with disabilities was higher in states with greater mail voting accessibility.

Voting by mail is sometimes less accessible to people with disabilities. People with print disabilities find it hard or impossible to mark, verify, or return the paper ballots often used for voting by mail.

Some states have laws and policies that make it harder to vote. For example, some states as of 2024 have laws that limit who can help voters return mail ballots. It is important for you to ensure that voters are aware of these laws and the options available to them.

This Guide provides recommendations that would improve vote by mail accessibility. We encourage election administrators to advocate for better laws and policies in their state.

Requesting a Mail Ballot

Most states require voters to request a ballot to vote by mail. In some states, you have to make a request for each election. Voters use a form to request their ballots.

All-Mail States: In “all-mail” states, an actual ballot is mailed to all registered voters. For these states, consult “Ballots Sent Electronically” and “Ballots Sent by Mail,” since similar recommendations will apply. Make sure your ballot request forms are as accessible as possible!

About “Excuse” and “No Excuse” : Voting by mail or online is either “excuse” or “no excuse.” “Excuse” states limit mail voting to only some kinds of voters. Voters who can vote with an “excuse” may include voters with disabilities, voters who are not in their voting jurisdiction on Election Day, and voters who are sick on Election Day. “No excuse” states let anyone request a mail ballot. We recommend that you advocate to make your state “no excuse,” since states had higher disability turnout when they switched from an “excuse” to “no excuse” system.

We recommend that election administrators prioritize the forms’ accessibility. People with disabilities cannot vote without them. This Guide section provides recommendations for creating accessible ballot request forms.

Online Ballot Request Forms

Disclaimer: Following our recommendations is not intended as legal advice, and does not necessarily ensure nor is intended as a substitute for full compliance with federal or state law.

Our recommendations for online forms are similar to our recommendations in “[Providing Information Online](#).”

- If the online ballot request form is a website and a portal: Use our recommendations in “[Making Online Voter Registration Forms Accessible](#)” in “Registering to Vote” and “[Creating Accessible Election Websites](#)” in “Providing Information Online.”
- If the online ballot request form is an accessible online document, use our recommendations in “[Creating Accessible Online Documents](#)” in “Providing Information Online” and “[Registering Using Documents Available Online](#)” in “Registering to Vote.”
- Use advocacy organizations, accessibility testers, consultants, or all of the above to review the forms.
- Use as few online security and user verification tools as possible. “[Form Security and Verification Tools](#)” in “Registering to Vote” has more information.

If your ballot request form is inaccessible, it may violate federal law. Nonetheless, a [2020 study](#) found that 43 states had inaccessible online ballot request forms. If your ballot request form is highly accessible, you will be ahead of the curve.

Providing Ballot Request Forms In-Person

Disclaimer: Following our recommendations is not intended as legal advice, and does not necessarily ensure nor is intended as a substitute for full compliance with federal or state law.

The “Providing Information at the Office” and “Registering to Vote in Person” sections of the Guide have recommendations for making in-person services more accessible.

- We recommend that you employ staff trained to help people with disabilities fill out the form.
- We recommend that you provide multiple accessible formats, including forms on tablets, in plain language, in large print, and in Braille.
- We recommend that you advertise that you allow people to fill out the ballot request form in person.

Making the Ballot Accessible

This section provides recommendations for creating accessible ballots. The “Ballot Verification” and “Electronic Ballot Return” sections of this Guide have more information on ballot verification and ballot casting.

Ballots Sent Electronically

Disclaimer: Following our recommendations is not intended as legal advice, and does not necessarily ensure nor is intended as a substitute for full compliance with federal or state law.

Ballots sent electronically are more accessible than ballots sent by mail, as they better serve voters with print disabilities. As long as the ballot is compatible with assistive technology (AT) and operating system (OS) accessibility features, many people with disabilities will be able to mark the ballot at home.

Most states use systems that allow voters to fill out a ballot with an electronic tool or interface. For example, [Maryland’s mail-in voting system](#) allows users to retrieve and mark their ballots electronically, but not to return them electronically. This is often called a “remote access-vote by mail” or an “accessible vote by mail” system.

Electronic ballot delivery, without electronic ballot return, is not accessible to all people with disabilities. Systems that require voters to retrieve, verify, and return a paper ballot are inaccessible to people with print disabilities. Therefore, our resources and recommendations improve the accessibility of electronic ballot delivery but cannot make it fully accessible.

Remember that voters have differing circumstances from one another. A method that is accessible to one voter with a disability may not be accessible to another voter who has the same disability. For example, some voters lack regular access to a computer. Therefore, election administrators should offer multiple ways to vote and ensure that each system they offer is accessible.

Recommendations for Accessible Electronic Ballot Delivery

- Prioritize compliance with [WCAG 2.1](#), federal, and state law. If you are required to comply with Section 508, visit [Section508.gov](#) for more information.
- Write ballots and ballot referendums in plain language or simple language equivalent to a 6th- 8th grade reading level. This includes instructions on how to receive, mark, and return the electronic ballot. If you are not able to put ballots in plain language due to state or local law, advocate for plain language ballots in your state.
- Our “Providing Information Online” and “Registering to Vote Online” sections of the Guide have general information on online and assistive technology accessibility.
- Consult with IT staff and remote voting system developers. Make sure you consult with accessibility experts as well, such as disability rights advocacy organizations.

- Consult with disability rights advocacy organizations for more information on accessibility. Our “[Accessibility Consultants](#)” section in “Gathering Information on Voting” has a list of advocacy organizations.
- The [VVSG 2.0 guidelines](#) are voluntary and created by the EAC. They do not apply to ballot marking devices used outside the polling place, but we still recommend reviewing them. Their recommendations, especially Principle 7, describe accessibility features your electronic ballot should have (text enlargement, color contrast, etc.). Disability rights organizations support expanding the VVSG to apply to electronic ballots and mail voting.
 - We support the National Disability Rights Network (NDRN)’s criticism of the VVSG 2.0 in their [Jun. 19, 2020 public comments](#). For the VVSG 2.0, we do not support mandating voter-verified paper ballots as the only accepted final cast ballot or “ballot of record.” We do not support the VVSG 2.0’s removal of nondiscrimination provisions that were originally in the VVSG.
- The Center for Civic Design created a [list of design principles for electronic remote balloting systems](#). These design principles represent best practices and are based partially on the work of a disability-led advocacy organization (the National Federation of the Blind). We recommend reviewing the principles. They recommend some of the following.
 - Make your system “trusted and transparent,” so it is easy for voters to understand how it works.
 - Ensure the system has no special rules different from other absentee ballots.
 - Make the system accessible to all voters, not just specific classes of voters.
 - Make the system comply with the WCAG and Section 508.
 - Minimize security risks by ensuring the ballot only takes the information it needs to identify the voter.
 - Ensure that the system is robustly tested for accessibility.
- The National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), in its brief “[Administering Accessible Vote by Mail Systems Challenges and Innovations in Elections Offices](#),” describes how to administer an “accessible vote-by-mail” (AVBM) system. We recommend that you review pages 9-13. Pages 9-13 cover administering electronic ballot delivery systems, differences between systems, differences between voting by mail and voting using electronically delivered ballots, and other issues.

Ballots Sent by Mail

Ballots sent by mail are less accessible than ballots sent electronically. This is because people with print disabilities either cannot read or review paper ballots (due to being blind, or having low-vision or another vision-related disability) and therefore cannot vote privately and independently, or cannot handle paper.

Many ballots are still sent by mail. This Guide's recommendations help you make paper ballots as accessible as possible, but they are not a substitute for offering an electronic vote by mail system.

Recommendations for Ballots Sent by Mail

Disclaimer: Following our recommendations is not intended as legal advice, and does not necessarily ensure nor is intended as a substitute for full compliance with federal or state law.

- Write ballots and ballot referendums in plain language or simple language equivalent to a 6th to 8th grade reading level. This includes instructions on how to receive, mark, and return the mailed ballot. If you are not able to put ballots in plain language due to state or local law, advocate for plain language ballots in your state!
- Waive requirements for witnesses, notarizations, affidavits, or signature matching to the extent you are able to by law.

Ballot Review and Verification

Before casting, the voter needs to be able to review the ballot to confirm that the marked selections are correct. In other words: the voter has to be able to: (1) tell whether they voted for, for example, “Jane Doe” or “John Smith”; (2) change their vote if the ballot is marked for the wrong person (John Smith, but they wanted Jane Doe). Voters must be able to verify the ballot “privately and independently.”

Accessibility barriers are common, particularly if only paper ballots are used. People with print disabilities cannot privately and independently verify paper ballots.

As of 2024, very few jurisdictions, if any, have implemented a fully private and independent, accessible way to verify paper ballots, let alone by mail. Fully electronic voting is the most accessible way to enable voters to verify their ballots. The NCAV is fully committed to improving mail ballot verification. We will update this Guide with new methods as they appear.

Recommendations for Accessible Ballot Verification

Disclaimer: Following our recommendations is not intended as legal advice, and does not necessarily ensure nor is intended as a substitute for full compliance with federal or state law.

- Include a ballot verification step for electronic ballots. The ballot verification step should have the same accessibility features as the ballot marking step.
- If your state has electronic ballot return, make the forms for requesting it as accessible as the rest of your electronic voting system. If the form is a document, consult our “Creating Accessible Online Documents” and “Making Online Voter Registration Forms Accessible” sections for recommendations. If the form is a website, consult “Creating Accessible Election Websites.”
- Consider advocating for fully electronic ballot return in your state. Thirteen states as of 2024 allow people with disabilities to return ballots electronically.

Casting the Ballot

Electronic Ballot Return

Disclaimer: Following our recommendations is not intended as legal advice and does not necessarily ensure nor is intended as a substitute for full compliance with federal or state law.

Thirty-one states as of 2024 allow some voters to return ballots electronically. Most are Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA) voters, but people with disabilities can use electronic ballot return in thirteen states.

The security community has raised concerns with electronically returned ballots. All methods of electronic ballot return - whether by fax, email, or online portal - are considered vulnerable to cyberattack. However, the development of fully electronic voting is the only way to make voting accessible to some people with disabilities.

We recommend that the states offer electronic ballot return to people with disabilities to the same extent that they offer it to UOCAVA voters. If you are not one of the states that offers electronic ballot return to people with disabilities, advocate (if you can) for changes to your state laws. If electronic ballot return is sufficiently secure to be used by UOCAVA voters, it is secure enough to be used by voters with print disabilities. Disability rights advocates have also successfully sued states for access to electronic ballots. This suggests it is possible to create a secure system for the small number of voters with disabilities who need it to vote privately and independently.

You can prioritize accessibility and compliance with federal law over security without disregarding security. We recommend that you offer electronic ballot return and information on how it works to voters with disabilities. You or your tech support can research existing systems and use the most secure options. You can use the information you collect to inform your voters.

We recommend that you support the research and development of more secure accessible electronic ballot return. Security will only improve if it is researched, with the goal of deploying more secure accessible systems for voters.

If your jurisdiction does have an electronic ballot return option, the electronic return system should comply with WCAG 2.1 and all federal laws, including Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act (to the extent applicable). For more information on compliance, visit [WCAG 2.1's website](#) and [Section 508.gov](#).

Our “Recommendations and Resources for Accessible Electronic Ballot Delivery” has more information on how to create accessible online ballots. Our suggestions also apply to the ballot return system.

Ballots Returned by Mail

“Ballots Sent by Mail” has more information on how to make physical paper ballots as accessible as possible.

Recommendations for ballots sent and returned by mail

Disclaimer: Following our recommendations is not intended as legal advice, and does not necessarily ensure nor is intended as a substitute for full compliance with federal or state law.

- Send paper ballots with self-sealing, prepaid envelopes for ballot return that are easy to handle.
- The ACLU, in its article [“Voting by Mail is Essential for Voters with Disabilities, but it’s Not Enough,”](#) derived from [Let People With Disabilities Vote](#), a brief written by the ACLU and NDRN, offers the following recommendations.
 - Create an “opt-out” mail-in ballot system where mail-in ballots are automatically sent to all registered voters.
 - Allow all voters to request mail-in ballots electronically if it is impossible to create a system where ballots are automatically sent to all voters.
 - Provide virtual training to poll and other election workers on how to assist voters who ask for help filling out their ballots.
 - Allow voters to mark ballots electronically.
 - [The article](#) and [Let People With Disabilities Vote](#) have more recommendations.
- NDRN has useful recommendations in their article [“Vote by Mail Must Be Accessible to Voters with Disabilities.”](#)
- If you have an online presence, describe how to mail ballots online, either on your website or on social media.
- Create a way for people with disabilities to request instructions that explain how to mail your ballot. Write the instructions in plain language or Easy Read. We also recommend that you create a video explaining how to mail ballots.
- Create envelopes that are easy to seal and mark correctly. Long multi-step processes are accessibility barriers for people with disabilities.
- Verify the voter’s identity using only one form of documentation. Do not use signature matching unless you are required to by state law.
- Allow voters with disabilities to deliver the sealed and marked envelope in person.
- Use ballot drop boxes that are designed accessibly and placed on accessible paths of travel. The “Ballot Drop Boxes” section of the Guide has more information on ballot drop box accessibility.

Ballot Drop Boxes

Acknowledgments: We wrote this section using the EAC's [brief on ballot drop boxes](#) (created by the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) Elections Infrastructure Government Coordinating Council and Sector Coordinating Council's Joint COVID Working Group) and ADA.gov's [page on ballot drop boxes](#). We also used the Elections Group's [Guide to Ballot Drop Boxes](#).

Ballot drop boxes are NOT a replacement or substitute for accessible voting. They are another option available to your voters. You are required to make all options that are available to voters accessible.

Ballot drop boxes are locations where voters can drop off mail ballots instead of sending the ballot through the postal service. There are different kinds of ballot drop boxes. Some drop boxes are attached to the ground or wall and are not monitored. Some drop boxes are monitored via video camera. Some boxes are only available during regular business hours and are monitored by election workers.

Ballot drop boxes come in different shapes and sizes. Some are cardboard boxes and others are made of metal. Some ballot drop boxes are “drive-through.” This means that the voter drops off the ballot while driving.

Ballot drop boxes are used for many reasons. Some voters do not trust the security of the postal service. Other voters may be casting their ballots “last minute” or are afraid they’ll miss their state’s deadline. Ballot drop boxes can also be placed in rural areas that lack postal service.

Ballot Drop Box Accessibility Resources

[ADA.gov's “Ballot Box Accessibility” page](#) has guidelines on ballot drop box accessibility.

The EAC website has a [general guide on ballot drop boxes](#), created by the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) Elections Infrastructure Government Coordinating Council and Sector Coordinating Council's Joint COVID Working Group. The guide explains how security for ballot drop boxes works, how to determine how many boxes you need, where you should put them, what you should do on Election Day, and other topics.

The Elections Group, which was created by former elections officials familiar with the challenges of election administration, also created a [guide to ballot drop boxes](#).

Election officials who use “drive-through” ballot drop boxes should make sure that a non-“drive through” ballot drop box is available for voters who cannot drive.

All-Mail Elections

Acknowledgments. This Guide section is based on information from [NFB's Accessible Vote-by-Mail Toolkit](#), the National Conference of State Legislatures' "[Voting Outside the Polling Place: Absentee, All-Mail and Other Voting at Home Options](#)" and its "[Table 18: States With All-Mail Elections](#)," and Ballotpedia's "[All-Mail Voting](#)" page.

Seven states and the District of Columbia (DC) conduct elections by mail only. In these jurisdictions, there is a "voting period" instead of an Election Day. Voters in "all-mail" jurisdictions can also travel to a voting center to return their ballot, but there are fewer in-person locations than in non-all-mail states.

Recommendations

Disclaimer: Following our recommendations is not intended as legal advice and does not necessarily ensure nor is intended as a substitute for full compliance with federal or state law.

We recommend that election officials use (or advocate for, when it is not permitted by state law) electronic ballot delivery and return for people with disabilities who cannot handle paper ballots. Reference the [Center for Civic Design's "Principles and guidelines for remote ballot marking systems"](#) and our Guide's "Ballots Returned by Mail" and "Electronic Ballot Return" sections if you will send electronic ballots to voters who request them which must be mailed in. Inaccessible mail voting may violate federal and/or state law.

Ballot Curing

It is easy for voters to make mistakes when sending mail ballots. Common mistakes are: missing signatures, signatures that do not match the signatures used during voter registration (or on other personal information), incorrectly marked envelopes, missing photo IDs, and missing required documents such as sworn affidavits. According to NPR, more than 560,000 people made mistakes on their 2020 ballots.

In 30 states, election officials must notify the voter if their ballot has been rejected and give the voter an opportunity to fix their ballot. This is called ballot curing. Voters can correct their ballots during a span of time called the cure period.

The curing process has two parts: notification and correction. Jurisdictions may notify the voter in different ways, such as by texting, calling, or emailing them. Once the voter is notified, they can correct their ballot during the cure period. The cure period can be as short as one day before or after Election Day, as long as twenty-one days, or it can be dependent on how the ballot was delivered.

Our recommendations describe the most accessible ballot curing processes.

Recommendations

Disclaimer: Following our recommendations is not intended as legal advice and does not necessarily ensure nor is intended as a substitute for full compliance with federal or state law.

- Notify voters using more than one method. For example, you could send an email and a text message to the same voter. This makes it less likely that the notification will be inaccessible.
- Our “Providing Information Over the Phone” and “Providing Information at the Office” sections of the Guide have more tips on interacting with voters with disabilities.
- A few states have a digital curing system that allows the voter to cure the ballot using text messages, emails, or websites. Colorado’s “TXT2Cure” system is an example. We recommend that you use a similar system if you are allowed to under state law.
- If your state has a ballot curing system with an extremely short cure period, we recommend that you advocate for changes to your state’s law.
- If your state has very strict requirements for ballot curing, advocate for changes to your state’s laws or policies to the extent you can.
- Avoid racial and ethnic disparities to the extent their cause is understood. Black, Latino, Asian, and African-American voters have their ballots rejected at three to five times the rate of white voters.
- If your state has strict signature matching requirements for your ballots, advocate for changes to your state’s laws or policies to the extent you are allowed to by law. People with

disabilities and elderly people (especially those with degenerative disabilities or disabilities with periodic “flare-ups”) may not sign their signature the same way they did when they first registered to vote. Signature matching is not the only reason a voter may need to cure their ballot. People with disabilities benefit when there are fewer signature matching requirements.

Ballot Tracking

As of May 2024, forty-seven states and the District of Columbia allow voters to track their mail and absentee ballots online. Ballot tracking reduces voter uncertainty and helps prevent voters from accidentally voting again by letting them know their ballot was counted.

If you are in one of the three states that does not allow voters to track their ballots online, we recommend that you advocate for changes to state law to the extent you can. Ballot tracking systems must be accessible. Our “Providing Information Online” section has more information on making online websites and portals accessible.