

## Suggested Practices to Improve Accessible Voting

*The following suggestions were identified using focus groups, interviews with election administrators, poll worker evaluations, and Election Day pilots during the 2012 election cycle. Using these practices could lead to a more successful accessible voting experience for administrators and voters. This material is based upon work supported by the U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC). Opinions or points of view expressed in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official position of, or a position that is endorsed by, EAC or the Federal government.*

### If You Can Only Do Three Things:

- Work with community members with disabilities and disability advocacy groups year-round.
- Consider basing poll worker training on teaching workers how to use job aids instead of information memorization.
- Train poll workers on how to use accessible features of voting machines, in addition to training on voting equipment set-up.

### Regarding Polling Place Accessibility:

- Troubleshoot accessibility issues well before the Election.
- Integrate information on accessibility, accommodations, and disability as much as possible into regular training materials.
- Utilize well-designed and accessible signage at the polling place.
- Keep yourself and your staff up to date on ADA and HAVA Guidelines.

### For Continued Growth and Improvement:

- Hire people with disabilities as poll workers and election staff.
- Evaluate yourself, your staff, and poll workers!
- Create and utilize networking and problem solving opportunities with other administrators and disability advocacy groups.

## Suggested Practices: If You Can Only Do Three Things...

### **Work with community members with disabilities and disability advocacy groups year round:**

Studies show that people with disabilities vote at lower levels, register to vote at lower levels, and expect difficulties at their polling place at higher levels than those who do not have a disability. Building relationships with groups that touch this population and working to ensure that any barriers are identified and addressed could go a long way in closing this gap. Every state has a Center for Independent Living (CIL) and Protection and Advocacy organization. These organizations can offer valuable insight and assistance regarding accessible voting.

- Find your local CIL: <http://www.ilru.org/html/publications/directory/index.html>
- Find your state Protection and Advocacy agency: <http://www.ndrn.org/en/ndrn-member-agencies.html>

Suggested activities: Take advocates to assess and troubleshoot solutions for inaccessible polling places; Perform voting equipment demonstrations and practice sessions to familiarize people with voting technology; Hold focus groups with people with disabilities to identify accessibility issues and concerns and brainstorm possible solutions; Include representatives from disability organizations on any planning councils or boards; and Invite disability organizations to participate in and help plan community education fairs.

### **Consider basing your training on teaching workers how to use job aids instead of information**

**memorization:** Using job aids has been found to be a best practice in training adults. Giving workers job aids (visual aids, checklists, picture guides, route maps) can do a great deal to increase poll worker information retention. This is especially true for accessibility and accommodation related information and use of the accessible voting equipment. Training on accessibility features on voting machines includes technical information that many elderly poll workers find intimidating. Job aids prove to be a more successful training approach in these aspects than the traditional lecture and PowerPoint style presentation.

By training poll workers on how to use the job aids at their polling place you will be preparing them to use the tools they need to address many questions that come up on Election Day. It will also allow you to fit a growing amount of Election Day information into a smaller amount of time while ensuring that poll workers have access to all of the pertinent information they need in order to run a successful polling place.

Through the Research Alliance on Accessible Voting, Paraquad developed a model job aid which was successfully piloted in the August 2012 elections. For a copy of this job aid [contact Paraquad at \(314\)289-4200](#).

### **Train poll workers on how to use commonly used accessible features of voting machines, in**

**addition to training on voting equipment set-up:** Poll workers may be called upon to help voters with accessibility needs use the machine. If the worker is unfamiliar with the machine, they could make the voter feel insecure with the voting process. They also won't be able to properly educate voters on all of their accessibility options. In order to properly prepare poll workers to interact with voters who wish to use accessible voting equipment, poll workers need to understand how to actually *use* the equipment, accessibility features and all.

When training on accessible voting equipment, make sure you allow poll workers to practice using the voting machine. Poll workers should know how the machines can be height adjusted, how to tilt screens, how the audio option works, how to make the print large, and how to change the contrast of the screen. When creating job aids, this information should be represented as well.

## Suggested Practices: Regarding Polling Place Accessibility...

**Troubleshoot accessibility issues well before the Election:** Administrators likely already know which polling places are going to have physical barriers for people with disabilities. At the very least, make a commitment to assess polling places that received accessibility complaints during the previous election. Bringing disability advocates with you can be very beneficial. Advocates will be able to quickly identify where the problem areas are and come with solutions in mind which people who do not have a disability may be unfamiliar with. For very problematic polling places, this will at least allow you to inform voters ahead of time that the polling place is not accessible and voters should consider voting at an accessible central polling location.

- For an easy to follow checklist of ADA Guidelines: <http://www.ada.gov/votingprt.pdf>

**Integrate information on accessibility, accommodations, and disability as much as possible into regular training materials:** By setting voters with disabilities apart from voters without disabilities, you might set poll workers up for potentially challenging situations. Some poll workers may feel extra pressure to carry out “special tasks” for voters with disabilities and fear consequences of making a mistake. Some poll workers might even take it upon themselves to make sure a voter qualifies to be in this “special group” of voters who can have an accommodation. This leads to challenging situations for voters and poll workers alike. Approaching access and accommodation as part of interaction with all voters who might need support and not special “disability exceptions” could lead to more successful voting experiences for poll workers and voters.

- Example: Instead of telling poll workers that voting machines are available only to voters with disabilities, inform poll workers that machines are available to all voters who wish to use their features.

**Utilize well-designed and accessible signage at the polling place:** Well-designed signage would improve the voting experience for some voters with disabilities. People with disabilities are used to asking for specific accommodations when needed. Since it is nearly impossible to reach every single voter with a disability before the election to inform them of available accommodations, well designed signage and equipment placement can take care of this need on Election Day. Use signage not only to direct voters to doorways and accessible pathways, but also to inform them of their voting options, available accommodations, and encourage them to ask for assistance when needed. Make sure signs aren’t overwhelming and cluttered. Signs should be easy to read with large print and pictures

**Keep up to date on ADA Guidelines:** All elections staff should have a basic working knowledge of accessibility guidelines to ensure they are creating inclusive voting materials and experiences. This information can get technical and can be difficult to remember in everyday elections processes. Therefore, it is important that administrators refresh themselves and their staff annually. Keeping up to date on this information does not have to be time consuming or expensive. There are many resources online that you can look at to educate yourself or your staff on these guidelines. Consider the following websites:

- For an ADA Checklist for Polling Places: <http://www.ada.gov/votingck.htm>
- For various elections related accessibility information, including accessible polling places, US laws, assistive technology, and accessible voting systems: <http://elections.itif.org/resources/> or [www.accessiblevoting.org](http://www.accessiblevoting.org)
- Centers for Independent Living or local disability groups can also provide this service to your office

## Suggested Practices: For Continued Growth and Improvement...

**Hire people with disabilities as poll workers and elections staff:** People with disabilities are familiar with accommodations and accessibility and will think about such things throughout the entirety of the planning process. When recruiting poll workers, staff for your office, or advisory board members be sure to work with your local Center for Independent Living (CIL) or other disability specific organizations to recruit. Many CILs have volunteer and employment programs full of people with disabilities who would make excellent poll workers. Centers for Independent Living can also help you effectively think through and plan for accommodations for poll workers with disabilities.

- To find your local CIL visit: <http://www.ilru.org/html/publications/directory/index.html>

**Evaluate!** Evaluation should not just be an afterthought or optional but should be seen as one of the most important parts of an election administration strategy. It does not have to be extremely formal and paper based. Some Election Administrators use games during training to assess whether poll workers are grasping what they need to learn. All other professions are subject to evaluation to test for knowledge, strengths, and needs. We cannot overlook this step for voting, one of our country's most important functions.

There are several different places to incorporate evaluation in order to improve accessibility and overall election administration:

Evaluate Poll Workers after Training: This should focus both on evaluating the training methodology as well as assessing whether poll workers understood the information and are prepared to administer accommodations on Election Day.

Evaluate poll workers on Election Day: This is a true test of how well the training and job aids work. On Election Day, poll workers will have a better grasp on what they were prepared for and what they could have used more information on. Election Day evaluations can also alert you to situations happening at polling places of which you were previously unaware.

**Create and utilize networking and problem solving opportunities:** Most accessibility problems are not new problems. A lot of unique strategies are being developed with the help of community members and advocacy groups. Many opportunities exist for Election administrators and staff to network and engage in idea sharing and mutual problem solving which should be utilized.

- The Election Center is one organization which specializes in hosting conferences and events to encourage continuing professional development and networking. To see a list of upcoming opportunities, visit their website at <https://www.electioncenter.org>.
- Use local disability groups and Centers for Independent Living for focus groups. Be sure to ask what the major complaints are from the disability community, what technology and innovations exist to help with these issues, and what strategies other businesses have used to create an accessible, inclusive environment. To find your local Center for Independent Living, visit <http://www.ilru.org/html/publications/directory/index.html>