



ELECTION CENTER BACKGROUND

The Election Center's purpose is to promote, preserve and improve democracy. The Center is also known as the National Association of Election Officials.

The Center provides its members an alert service which informs and updates state, city and other elections and voter registration officials regarding legislation, regulations, court decisions and Justice Department rulings which affect the conduct of voter registration or elections administration. Additionally, the Center performs research for such governmental units concerning the similarities and differences in state or local laws, regulations or practices concerning voter registration and elections administration.

As the election profession's premier organization for training and certification of election and voter registration administrators, The Center also conducts annual events such as national conferences and several regional workshops and seminars throughout each year. These are designed specifically for government elections units. Each of these programs is designed to improve the methods of operation and efficiency of the affected offices. The result is improved service to voters, the public, taxpayers and to the government. The Center trains between 600 and 1,000 election and voter registration administrators every year.

Continuing professional education is the cornerstone of continuous improvement of democracy through The Election Center's Professional Education Program. A joint effort of The Center and Auburn University's public administration faculty, the Professional Education Program offers college level instruction for professional growth and development of government officials in the elections and voter registration process.

With more than 1,000 members nationwide, The Election Center has the largest number of state, local election, and voter registration administrators as members of any elections-related organization in America.

RESEARCH ALLIANCE FOR ACCESSIBLE VOTING (RAAV) FOCUS GROUP

The Election Center formed a focus group of state and local election officials to review and provide feedback to the other members of The Research Alliance for Accessible Voting. The focus group met seven times in cities across the nation.

RESEARCH ALLIANCE FOR ACCESSIBLE VOTING (RAAV) TRAINING SEMINARS

In addition, The Election Center conducted two sets of seminars to educate election officials. The first, a set of four, were a review of all current law and litigation impacting voter accessibility. The second, a set of six, were conducted to highlight the work of The Research Alliance for Accessible Voting.

The election officials who attended these training sessions completed an evaluation form that was used to improve subsequent trainings. The evaluations were extremely positive; each election official reported that their understanding of accessible voting, post seminar, grew significantly.

Noteworthy takeaways from these training sessions were: a revelation by the election officials that there are two kinds of disabilities, one type is the visual disability and the second is the invisible disability. Most election officials are aware of the disabilities that one can see such as a person in a wheelchair or a person who has vision issues and comes to the polling place with a guide dog or cane. However, not everyone was sensitive too or even thought about the invisible disabilities. Namely those with developmental disabilities such as cognitive disabilities, visual comprehension disabilities, Dyslexia or other reading disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), auditory processing disorders, to name a few. What we fail to realize is that the number of the invisible disabilities is greater than the number of visual disabilities.

Also a significant takeaway was the positive reaction from the disability groups regarding the imparting of the developmental disability component of the training. Some of the disability group members who were part of the RAAV team commented that the developmental disability portion of the training was the one of the best they had ever seen. As a result, some of these state disability organization members shared the information from the training with their colleagues at the federal level who in turn were so impressed by the content presented that they sent notice to their respective state agencies making sure they were aware of this training and that it had been offered to all local election officials at 6 training sessions offered throughout the United States.

Federal disability organizations in addition to the election officials being affected by the training sessions in a positive way was an unexpected takeaway.

RESEARCH ALLIANCE FOR ACCESSIBLE VOTING (RAAV) TRAINING TOOLS

Prior to this training session, election officials didn't have a training resource available that pointed out the visible versus invisible disabilities and also provided tools to understand all types of disabilities. These tools also got rave reviews from the disability groups from around the country. One of the 6 training sessions was also videotaped and all of the presentations that were presented in the one day seminar are available on the [Election Center Website](#) as well as [YouTube](#).

OTHER LESSONS LEARNED

Other lessons learned: the aging of the baby boom will result in nearly 40% of all voters having a disability, the need for more enhanced accessibility training of poll workers, particularly the need for poll workers to know how to use the magnification capacity of the accessible voting machines. Some election officials were not aware that there are approximately ten million voters who need to use magnification in order to vote accurately, efficiently, and with confidence.

RESEARCH ALLIANCE FOR ACCESSIBLE VOTING (RAAV) TRAINING ATTENDEES

The overwhelming majority of attendees came from jurisdictions with hundreds of thousands of voters. These large jurisdictions have staffs and budgets that allowed the attendees to travel to the training site and be out of the office for a day or two. Small jurisdictions, with fewer than a hundred thousand voters have very limited staffs and often have non-voting related responsibilities. It is common for these jurisdictions to have at best one full-time employee and many have only one or two part-time employees. Unfortunately, inquiries about accessibility to the Election Center and disability advocates from small jurisdictions often include a belief that their jurisdiction is exempt from laws requiring accessible voting. These jurisdictions often have no travel budgets.

ELECTION CENTER RECOMMENDATIONS

The Election Center recommends in order to provide training to these jurisdictions, funds will be needed so that trainers can attend state election official meetings. In some cases, there will be a need to provide funding so that small town and rural election officials can attend.

In order to improve the public's confidence in our nation's elections, there is a need for additional research and development. Some of this work will need to continue in order to improve accessibility but research and development is necessary to improve other parts of our complex voting processes. This work needs to involve election officials in order to prioritize the research and provide feedback so that the developments meet election officials' needs. Currently, voting system manufacturers develop software and hardware with the advice of some of their customers. Most of the time, this research involves adjustments to existing products. As a result of these grants several universities are continuing to design improvements to our voting systems and processes. This work will be most useful if election officials are able to work in tandem with designers helping to prioritize the research and development providing real world feedback to the researchers.