

**Testimony to the Election Assistance Commission  
Clearinghouses for Dissemination of Information Related to  
Disability and Rehabilitation  
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My name is Pimjai Sudsawad, and I am the Knowledge Translation Program Coordinator at the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR), Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, U.S. Department of Education. We are a research- funding institute whose mission is to generate new knowledge on disability and rehabilitation as well as to promote the effective use of such knowledge in order to improve the lives of individuals with disabilities and to maximize their participation in society.

I am pleased to be here today to share information on our experience with information clearinghouses. It is within our mandate of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, to widely disseminate information related to disability and rehabilitation to the public. Presently, we have two information clearinghouses for that purpose. The first one is AbleData, available at <http://www.abledata.com>, and the second one is the National Rehabilitation Information Center, or NARIC, available at <http://www.NARIC.com>.

AbleData provides information on more than 36,000 assistive technology products ranging from commonly known products, such as walkers and shower chairs, to lesser-known products, such as the vibrating paper money identifier and the voice output voting machine. AbleData provides services to the public through its Web site, a toll-free number, and e-mail contact.

AbleData houses an assistive technology product database whereby the public can directly search for information. The products are categorized into such groups as blind and low vision, computer, aids for daily living, and so on. The user can simply click on a group link, and follow additional links to more refined categorizations under each group as needed. In addition, the user also can search for products with user-defined search terms, which will then be automatically matched with the existing indexing terms that connect to products. All search terms are listed on the Web site and fully clickable, and also available for download in both PDF and text formats. The terms are continually updated based on availability of new products and user feedback.

In addition, there is an information center that includes information and links to Internet-based resources both in the U.S. and abroad. This information center also includes links to upcoming meetings, conferences, workshops and other educational opportunities, as well as links to assistive technology

companies. AbleData staff have a process to determine whether each resource is appropriate for posting, taking into consideration such factors as content, authority, credential, and affiliation. AbleData also produces its own publications, and provides links to other publications and news items related to assistive technology.

Recently, the AbleData Web site underwent an extensive evaluation and testing for usability and accessibility. Usability refers to how well users can use the Web site to achieve their goals and how satisfied they are with that process. Accessibility refers to how well users with disabilities can use a Web site to perform the same tasks as those performed by users without disabilities. As a result, the site underwent a major redesign, and is currently fully accessible to and usable by all members of the public.

Our second clearinghouse, NARIC, provides access to both research-based and non-research based information on disability and rehabilitation. It also provides access to information on projects funded by NIDRR. NARIC presently contains more than 90,000 records, and provides services to the public through its Web site, toll-free number, e-mail contact, chat function, and social media, including Facebook and Twitter.

NARIC collects information in two broad categories: information generated from NIDRR-funded projects and information generated from other sources. NARIC collects information directly from our grantees for publications, tools, and consumer material. For other sources, NARIC obtains information by searching through the existing publications related to disability and rehabilitation. NARIC collects textbooks, consumer books, and training curricula for rehabilitation professionals and NARIC also subscribes to different journals and provides articles for free or at a nominal cost to the public. Over 10,000 documents are available to the public, either directly posted on the Web or through NARIC's document delivery.

NARIC also has a search function to help users find information they need. Similar to AbleData, NARIC has a thesaurus to categorize each record of information. They have also established a wiki site where the public can comment on the thesaurus and suggest changes, which NARIC will consider for the thesaurus revisions. It can be accessed at <http://rehabdatathesaurus.pbworks.com>.

Both clearinghouses track Web site usage and inquiries. AbleData has recently developed a system to solicit users' feedback. NARIC obtains feedback more informally when communicating with patrons in response to their requests. Both have a formal outreach and marketing plan to ensure that the target users know about the project.

In conclusion, the following features may be worth considering when developing the EAC Web site:

- User service channels, such as a toll-free number, e-mail contact, and chat room and other social media channels;
- Categorization of information and search functions;
- Information acquisition, vetting, and updating;
- Accessibility and usability evaluation and testing of the Web site;
- User feedback system and suggestions regarding information to be included on the Web site;
- Reporting of usage via a tracking system for number and types of inquiries;
- Marketing and networking plan to promote the site; and
- Specific product development and distribution (newsletter, listserv, etc.)

We believe that the EAC's plan to establish an information clearinghouse to make available election-related information to the public is a highly valuable and important initiative. If NIDRR can be of any further assistance, please let us know. I am happy to answer any questions that may come up any time after this presentation. Thank you.