

Voting toolkit



It is essential to understand how disabled people are able to access the polls in local, state, and federal elections. This tool will help your organization analyze and prioritize voting policies that improve voting access, particularly for disabled voters.

This toolkit is divided into four main sections—voter registration, voting information, voting in-person, and voting by mail—with a mix of yes/no and open-ended questions for your organization to consider. The toolkit concludes with an invitation to identify five policy priorities that your organization can tackle to enhance voting access in the next two years.

If you have any questions about the toolkit, need more information, or would like the toolkit in another format, please contact Mia Ives-Rublee at mivesrublee@americanprogress.org

Voter registration

For each response, click the most appropriate answer for the counties in which you work. Then, go to part “b” of the question and provide an explanation for your answer.

1a. Are voter registration forms available in accessible formats both online and in print? (See more on [web accessibility here.](#))

Yes

No

1b. Please explain the formats through which people can register to vote:

2a. Does the state have automatic voter registration?

Yes

No

2b. Please explain what voter registration looks like in the state in which you work:

3a. Does the state allow disabled people to register for a permanent absentee voter list? (Use [this resource](#) to check state laws.)

Yes

No

3b. Please explain if and how people in the state register to vote via absentee or mail-in ballot:

4a. How many voter registration events or specific registration efforts does the state have for disabled communities? For example, does the state provide election information or voter registration forms to nursing homes, psychiatric hospitals, or disability service providers?

1 2 3 4 5

No registration events

A lot of registration events

4b. Please explain what types of events the state hosts around registering to vote:

5a. Does the state have voting restrictions for individuals under guardianship/conservatorship? (Use [this chart](#) to check state guardianship laws.)

Yes, and it is automatic.

Some people under guardianships/conservatorships may be restricted from voting.

No one is restricted on the basis of guardianship/conservatorship.

5b. Please explain the state's voting restrictions for individuals under guardianship:

Voting information

For each response, click the most appropriate answer for the counties in which you work. Then, go to part “b” of the question and provide an explanation for your answer.

6a. Is all candidate information available in accessible formats, including multiple languages, larger font, and plain language?

1 2 3 4 5

No, only one nonaccessible format

Yes, in the top languages and formats needed in the county

6b. What formats and languages are provided, and what formats and languages are needed?

7a. Is information on elections and voting, including sample ballots, available in accessible formats both in print and online?

1 2 3 4 5

No, it is only provided in nonaccessible formats.

Yes, it is provided in multiple accessible formats.

7b. What formats are provided, and what formats are needed?

Voting in-person

For each response, click the most appropriate answer for the counties in which you work.
Then, go to part “b” of the question and provide an explanation for your answer.

8a. Is public transportation accessible or is state-funded transportation available for people to take to the polls?

1 2 3 4 5

All transportation is private.

Multiple free or reduced-cost accessible transportation options are available.

8b. What types of free accessible transportation options are available?

9a. Is early voting offered as an option for everyone?

1 2 3 4 5

No early voting options are offered.

At least 14 days of early voting are offered.

9b. How many days of early voting are offered? Are they provided on Saturday and Sunday?

Polling location accessibility

Sample 3–5 locations in the counties you serve. For further details to inform your answers to the following questions, utilize the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) [polling place physical accessibility checklist](#).

10a. Are the insides of polling locations physically accessible?

1 2 3 4 5

None of the sites meet ADA guidelines.

All the sites meet ADA guidelines.

10b. Please provide further details as necessary:

11a. Are there seats available if people have to wait in line, or is there a policy allowing individuals who can't stand for long periods to go to the front of the line?

1 2 3 4 5

None of the sites meet ADA guidelines.

All the sites meet ADA guidelines.

11b. Please provide further details as necessary:

12a. Are lowered, private voting booths available for people who are either short of stature or in wheelchairs?

1 2 3 4 5

None of the sites meet ADA guidelines.

All the sites meet ADA guidelines.

12b. Please provide further details as necessary:

13a. Are the outsides of polling locations physically accessible?

1 2 3 4 5

None of the sites meet ADA guidelines.

All the sites meet ADA guidelines.

13b. Please provide further details as necessary:

14a. Are all doorways at least 32 inches wide, and are all pathways to voting locations at least 36 inches wide?

1 2 3 4 5

None of the sites meet ADA guidelines.

All the sites meet ADA guidelines.

14b. Please provide further details as necessary:

15a. Are there any stairs to polling locations?

1 2 3 4 5

All sites have stairs.

None of the sites have stairs.

15b. Please provide further details as necessary:

16a. Do all ramps meet ADA standards?

1 2 3 4 5

None of the sites meet standards.

All sites meet standards.

16b. Please provide further details as necessary:

17a. Is curbside (drive-thru) voting available?

Yes **No**

17b. Please detail availability:

18a. Are election workers trained in how to use accessible voting systems?

No, they are not trained. **1 2 3 4 5** **Yes, they are trained and well-prepared.**

18b. Please detail the level of training provided:

19a. Are accessible voting machines set up and functional when polling locations open?

No accessible voting machines are functional. **1 2 3 4 5** **There are multiple accessible voting machines, and they are functional.**

19b. Please provide more detail as necessary:

Voting by mail

For each response, click the most appropriate answer for the counties in which you work.
Then, go to part “b” of the question and provide an explanation for your answer.

20a. Does the state allow voters to request a mail-in ballot without meeting burdensome requirements, such as submitting a copy of an ID or notarized signature?

1 2 3 4 5

It's extremely difficult to request a mail-in ballot.

It's simple to request a mail-in ballot.

20b. Please explain the process for requesting a mail-in ballot:

21a. Does the state allow voters to submit a mail-in or absentee ballot without a witness signature or a notarized signature?

Yes

No

21b. Please explain the process:

22. Is prepaid postage provided for returning ballots?

Yes

No

23a. Are people provided ample time to request a mail-in ballot?

1 2 3 4 5

Less than a month

More than two months

23b. Please detail how much time people have to request a ballot:

24a. Are mail-in ballot materials available in accessible formats, including Braille and large print?

Materials are not available in accessible formats.	1 2 3 4 5	Materials are provided in multiple accessible formats.
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24b. Please explain what formats are provided and how people can request them:

25a. Are people allowed to provide assistance to disabled voters in completing or returning a mail-in ballot without having to sign the ballot or other documents under penalty of perjury?

Yes No

25b. Please explain:

26. Is there any additional information you'd like to share that wasn't captured in the previous questions?

Taking action

Top five policies to address in next two years utilizing [SMART Goals](#)

Policy Issue	Key decision-makers	Timeline

Resources

- [2022 state-by-state voting guides](#) (American Association of People with Disabilities)
- [REV UP voting campaign](#) (American Association of People with Disabilities)
- [“ADA Checklist for Polling Places”](#) (U.S. Department of Justice)

Appendix

Federal protections:

This section provides a summary of federal legislation that provides protections for disabled voters. This information is not meant to—and should not be—used as legal advice. Contact your local, federally designated [disability protection and advocacy agency](#) or the [U.S. Election Assistance Commission](#) for more information.

Voting Rights Act (VRA) of 1965:

The Voting Rights Act does two things for disabled people. First, it prohibits [competency tests](#) and states that disabled people cannot be singled out for such tests. Second, Section 208 states that individuals who need [assistance to vote](#) have a right to that assistance as long as the assistant isn't an employer, an agent of an employer, or an officer or agent of the voter's union.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973

Section 504 [prohibits any public entity receiving federal dollars](#), including state and local governments, from discriminating against disabled people. Thus, state and local access to voter registration and elections must not discriminate against disabled people.

Voting Accessibility for the Elderly and Handicapped Act of 1984

This act requires that all polling sites for federal elections be [physically accessible](#) and that alternative modes of voting be provided if they are not. It also requires that [voter registration](#) be accessible.

Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990

The ADA bars discrimination of disabled people across all state and local government services, programs, and activities, including all aspects of voter registration and voting. State and local laws cannot take away an individual's right to vote based on broad disability categories, and states must conduct [individualized assessments](#) of an individual's capacity to meet essential requirements for voting. There are specific requirements for what meets ADA standards around accessibility at a polling location. The ADA also bars [long-term care facilities](#) from blocking individuals' access to the polls.

National Voter Registration Act of 1993

This act requires [all public assistance programs](#) that specifically serve disabled people to provide clients assistance in [registering to vote](#) in a way that is “uniform, nondiscriminatory, and in compliance with the Voting Rights Act of 1965.” It also states that any laws authorizing the removal of voters [due to failure to vote](#). However, it does permit states to enact laws that remove voters from rolls on the grounds of [mental capacity](#).

Help America Vote Act of 2002

The Help America Vote Act (HAVA) includes numerous standards to ensure that disabled people have access to the polls. It requires that [every precinct](#) have a minimum of one accessible voting machine or system for disabled voters. The law also provides disabled voters the right to vote secretly and independently. It also established the [U.S. Election Assistance Commission](#) to improve voting access through voluntary voting system guidelines, and it helps fund and track research. HAVA also reinforces that [overbroad competency standards](#) around being able to vote discriminate against disabled people.

Definitions

Accessible formats (online and print):

- **Plain language** consists of clear and concise wording and structure, particularly for individuals with intellectual and developmental or cognitive disabilities.
- **Mail-in ballots** are accessible ballots that may use plain language, be available in multiple formats, or include instructions in larger font or Braille.

Accessible voting systems and technology are specific features of ballot boxes and polls that enable people with disabilities to vote. They include:

- **High contrast**, a setting of increased color contrast to assist people with vision disabilities.
- **Text to speech**, a setting that reads written text out loud.
- **Braille**, a tactile system of raised dots that allows individuals who are blind or have low vision to be able to read.

Accessible transportation includes public transportation options that are physically accessible to disabled people, such as buses with a ramp or lift, paratransit options, audio announcements or American Sign Language (ASL) in metros. It could also include accessible materials about transit options—in plain language, multiple languages, or ASL—and other options.

Curbside voting, also known as “drive-through voting,” allows disabled individuals to vote inside a vehicle (or sometimes at a walk-up location) outside a polling place.

Disability service providers are organizations—either public or private—that run programs or services for disabled people. Some examples include direct support professionals in a disabled person’s home, community engagement programs, or work placement programs.

Guardianship provides an approved adult the legal authority to make decisions for someone deemed “incapacitated.” This arrangement disproportionately affects disabled people, especially people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Some states may [take away the right to vote](#) if an individual is under guardianship.