

Research report:

Practical steps towards full accessibility for voters with disabilities

November 30, 2025

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Executive Summary

Voting is a cornerstone of democracy, yet people with disabilities consistently face greater barriers and lower participation rates than their non-disabled peers. People with disabilities are a large and growing segment of the population, comprising over 40 million eligible voters in 2024. While the disability turnout gap has decreased since passage of the Help America Vote Act in 2002, a significant turnout gap persists (almost 10 percentage points in 2024).

The lower turnout is due in part to barriers faced by a significant number of people with disabilities in the voting process, including:

- information difficulties that lead to problems in registration and voting, magnified by social isolation and lack of internet access for many people with disabilities;
- difficulties voting in person, such as getting to and inside the polling place, knowing how to operate the machine, communicating with poll workers, and anxiety;
- difficulties voting with a mail ballot, including problems in requesting, reading, filling out, or returning the ballot.

While voting difficulties have decreased since 2012, close to one-sixth of voters with disabilities reported difficulties voting in the 2024 elections, which was twice the rate of voters without disabilities. In addition, only 39% of voters with disabilities report that the voting process met their access needs very well in the 2024 election.

In this report we analyze new evidence on voting difficulties, potential solutions, and ideas for a new center from data using surveys, focus groups, and interviews with four groups of key stakeholders:

- People with disabilities
- Leaders of disability support and advocacy organizations
- State and local election officials, and
- Commissioners at the U.S. Election Assistance Commission

We first review evidence on voter turnout among people with disabilities in Chapter 1, then present the views of the above stakeholders on voting difficulties in Chapter 2, suggested solutions in Chapter 3, finishing thoughts about creating a new Center on Disability and Voting in Chapter 4.

Themes from Past and Current Research

Our research—spanning national surveys, qualitative studies, and interviews—found that people with disabilities encounter barriers through the entire voting process: registering to vote, getting information about elections, getting to and into polling places, and marking and casting ballots. These barriers require people with disabilities to invest more time and energy in planning and strategizing than other voters do. Some of the planning needed to vote with a disability can include arranging transportation, ensuring ballot marking devices are operational at polling places, managing interactions with poll workers, learning about mail ballot procedures, and gaining access to technology needed to vote by mail.

Improving voting access for people with disabilities can be a win-win for all voters and the American political system. Universal design offers a compelling framework for addressing these issues: election systems engineered to be accessible, intuitive, and inclusive for people with disabilities will also improve usability and trust for voters in general. By reducing complexity, enhancing accessibility, and ensuring that all voting methods accommodate diverse needs, universal design strengthens democratic legitimacy and expands equitable participation. For example, accessible ballots and other materials help voters in general process and understand procedures, instructions, and ballot questions. Tools for blind and low vision voters, such as ballot marking devices and magnifiers, also support voters who need slightly larger text or do not have their glasses with them. Ensuring all eligible voters can easily and confidently vote increases trust in elections. For voters with disabilities, ensuring the ability to vote privately and independently is a crucial element in building trust in elections.

Our research informs the goals for a center dedicated to accessible voting. Some of the issues raised in the surveys, focus groups, and interviews are:

- **The value of multiple options for voting**, including the availability of voting in person or by mail, extended voting hours, including Sundays and outside of typical work hours, and curbside voting.
- **The need for accessible plain-language formats** for information from candidates and on ballots, government websites, and mailers.
- **Addressing logistical challenges** such as scarce transportation resources and broken printers.
- **Physical accessibility at polling places** including lack of adequate parking, inaccessible entrances, hard to navigate spaces, long lines with no seating, and anxiety due to a stressful, chaotic environment.
- **The need to train poll workers to support voters with disabilities**, creating a positive voting experience.

Why We Need a New Center on Disability and Voting

A center for improving the voting experience of people with disabilities would be dedicated to identifying and supporting research-based accessible voting by bringing the opportunity to generate, test, and apply evidence-backed solutions to voting barriers. Including people with disabilities and representatives of local and national disability advocacy organizations meets the disability right slogan of “nothing about us, without us.” Including active participation from elections offices ensures that center research and projects will be focused on activities with the highest impact. Bringing these groups – and individual voters – into the process will not only make the work of a center more attuned to the needs of different groups, but will also facilitate communication and create relationships that can build trust in elections.

Drawing on extensive stakeholder engagement—including voters with disabilities, disability leaders, election officials, and U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC) Commissioners—we conclude that a new Center on Disability and Voting should pursue four overarching goals:

- **Advance evidence-based understanding** of voting barriers, turnout patterns, and voter experiences for people with disabilities.
- **Promote accessible voting practices, technologies, and policies** through research, evaluation, pilot projects, and partnerships with election jurisdictions.
- **Translate and disseminate research with practical tools** and guidance for election officials, disability organizations, and policymakers.
- **Elevate disability perspectives** in election administration through sustained advisory structures, collaboration, leadership opportunities, and public-facing dissemination.

Proposed Research Activities

Election officials and disability leaders requested data to support voter turnout efforts and other advocacy initiatives. Our research activities will focus on filling in gaps in the current research.

Impact of policies. We will conduct research to see how policies function in tandem and what effects they have on voting access. Current policy concerns about accessible voting focus on a specific set of policies, including accessible vote by mail, same day voter registration, and voting centers that allow voting anywhere in the district. Although policy change is a slow process, a center can support effective policy by creating a map of policies and effects on voting access. This work includes:

- Trends in turnout and voting difficulties across disability types using national surveys.
- Impact of election policies, technologies, and physical environments on disabled voters.

- Accessibility of different voting methods (in-person, early, curbside, mail, remote ballot marking).
- Use of accessible voting options, such as mail voting and ballot marking devices.

Needs of voters with disabilities. We will expand knowledge about voters with disabilities, especially those with less-understood disabilities and contexts, including:

- User-experience research on anxiety, cognitive load, and sensory barriers, along with efforts to reduce these barriers.
- Voters in congregate settings, rural areas, and communities with limited transportation.
- Voters from marginalized communities who may face additional voting barriers.

Impacts of election administration practices. This is the ‘last mile’ for any policy or program to make voting more accessible to all. It includes:

- Best practices for training poll workers, based on the skills that would be useful to improve interactions and support in polling places.
- Designs for messages, in-person and virtual guided tours, or new technologies
- Pilot projects and experiments with elections offices that would test policy and election administration ideas that may reduce barriers or increase trust
- Convenings between elections offices and local disability support groups to create a more effective ecosystem and increase communication and information sharing with one another
- Ensuring people with disabilities are included more broadly in development of any new policies and practices

Proposed Outreach and Dissemination Activities

Knowledge sharing activities and creating a set of best practices is equally important. New information about disability voting trends and ideas to reduce barriers are often slow to reach general practice.

We will test these practices through pilot programs in election offices. This will provide a set of benchmarks for election officials and advisory groups to work towards.

The Center would ensure broad and practical outreach and dissemination through:

- Plain-language research summaries, tools, and resources to be distributed to election officials, disability organizations, and the general public, distributed directly and through a public website.

- Webinars, presentations, and collaborative events with disability organizations and election officials.
- Peer-reviewed academic publications, policy briefs, and conference presentations.
- Mass-communication strategies, including social media, to elevate research findings in media and public discourse.

Many of the stakeholders expressed a need for relationships and communication with other people working on accessible voting to share ideas and offer support. To create these connections, one focus area for the center would be to create opportunities for collaboration. This would include two overarching types of network building activities:

- We would help create state or local advisory committees consisting of local election officials, leaders in local disability support organizations, and voters with disabilities. These groups will investigate avenues for making voting more accessible in their states, set goals, and make a plan for reaching these. Incorporating all types of stakeholders from the beginning ensures election officials and people with disabilities are part of solutions, and facilitate greater learning and trust.
- The second type of collaboration would be creating support networks for disability organizations to share and generate strategies for facilitating accessible voting. Sharing knowledge across states will allow stakeholders with experience with different policies and issue areas to foster a creative approach. We will offer the same opportunities for election offices.

Collaboration

Collaboration with stakeholder partners will be built into all of the Center’s activities. This will include an advisory board with representatives from major stakeholders. The stakeholder partners include:

- People with disabilities.
- Disability organizations, including advocacy groups and Centers for Independent Living.
- Election officials across jurisdictions with varying voting systems.
- EAC Commissioners and staff, who offer national-level insight into policy, standards, and emerging challenges.
- Academic and nonprofit partners contributing expertise in survey research, policy evaluation, accessibility, and civic design.

Together, these partners ensure a wide range of perspectives that will help guide, evaluate, and validate the Center’s work.

We conclude there is a strong case for a dedicated center on disability and voting to help create a sustained national infrastructure for identifying barriers, testing solutions, and driving evidence-based reforms that individual jurisdictions cannot undertake alone. It would also elevate the lived experiences of disabled voters, ensuring that their perspectives shape election policy, technology design, and public understanding. Over time, the center could become part of a trusted hub that strengthens democratic participation by making accessibility an integral—not optional—feature of election administration nationwide.

Chapter 1

Introduction

“Democracy’s dilemma” is the recurrent theme of unequal participation and unequal engagement of groups with misunderstood political needs, or worse, silenced political voices.¹ To ensure an effective democracy that represents the will of the people, all citizens should be easily able to have a voice, and trust the process by which decisions are made. People with disabilities often face challenges in voting, and it is important that all phases of the voting process are accessible so that their views are fully represented in policy choices. A fully accessible voting system would not only make it easier to vote for people with disabilities but would also help build trust and confidence that their views are fully heard.

The importance of this issue is heightened by the large size of the disability population: there were 40.2 million citizens with disabilities who were eligible to vote in 2024, or one-sixth (16.7%) of the eligible electorate.² As will be seen, people with disabilities have lower voter turnout and face greater challenges in voting than do their fellow citizens without disabilities, raising concerns about whether their perspectives are fully represented in policy decisions and the broader political process.

How Does Disability Affect Voter Turnout?

The data clearly show that people with disabilities are less likely to vote than people without disabilities, with a possible narrowing of the disability gap in Presidential elections in the past three decades.

There is a consistent time series of representative national data only since 2008 when the U.S. Census Bureau began asking disability questions in their biennial surveys, but we can make cautious comparisons to two national surveys coordinated by the Rutgers Program for Disability Research in 1998 and 2000 that used slightly different disability measures and methods. These data sources are described in Appendix A.

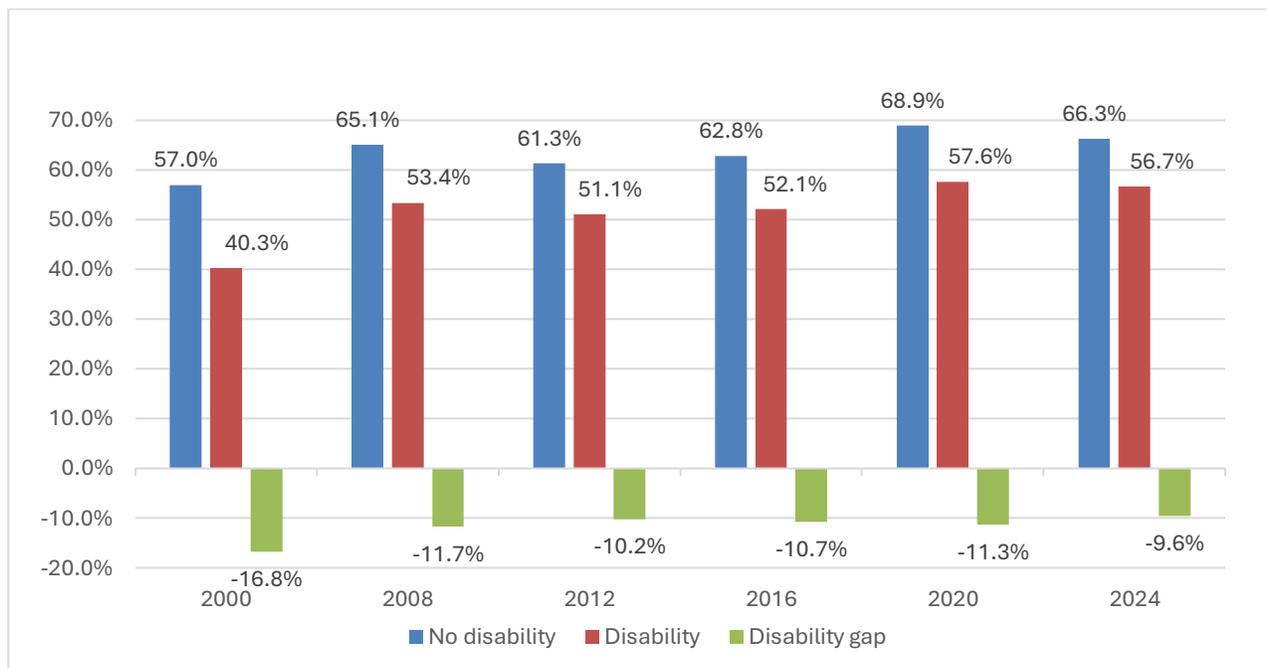
¹ Arend Lijphart, “Unequal Participation: Democracy’s Unresolved Dilemma; Presidential Address, American Political Science Association,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 91, March 1997, pp. 1-14.

² Lisa Schur and Douglas Kruse, “[Projecting the Number of Eligible Voters with Disabilities in the November 2024 Elections.](#)” Rutgers Program for Disability Research, September 24, 2024.

People with disabilities are less likely than people without disabilities to vote across all elections, but the gap seems to have narrowed somewhat for Presidential elections.

Disability voter turnout 1998 – 2024

Figure 1: Turnout in presidential elections, 2000-2024



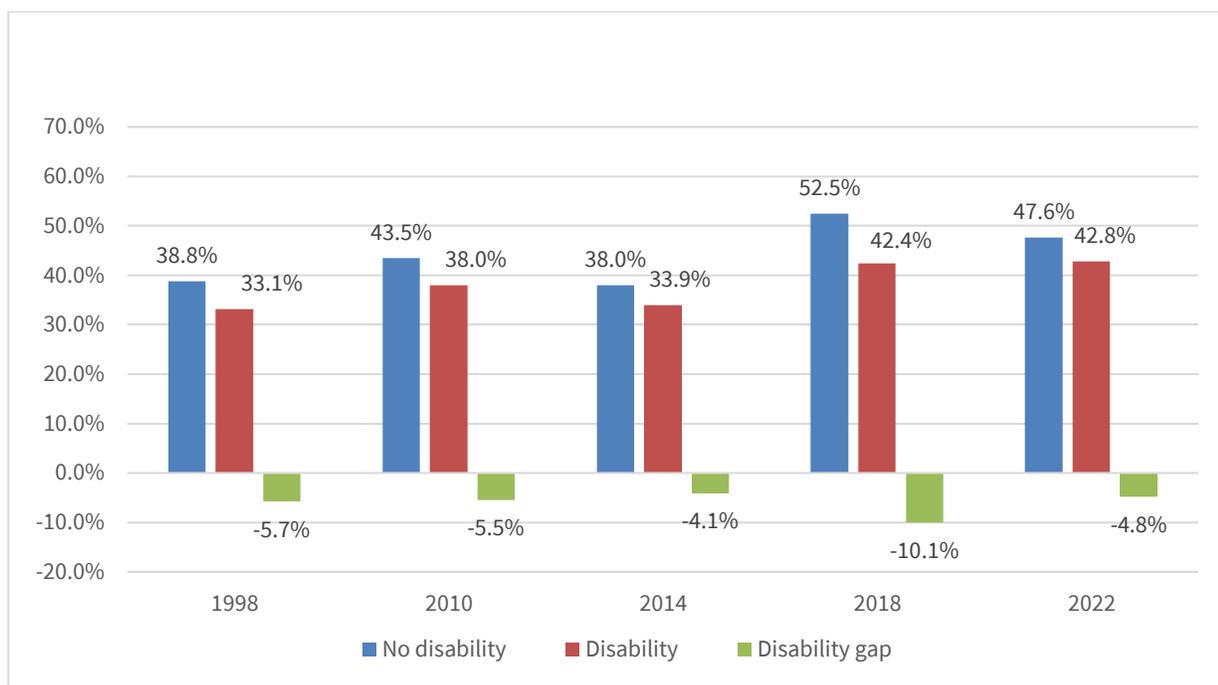
The overall turnout of people with disabilities in Presidential elections:

- Rose from 2000 (40%) to 2008 (53%),
- Declined slightly in 2012 and 2016,
- Rose again in 2020 (58%)
- And declined slightly in 2024 (57%).

The disability turnout gap in Presidential elections decreased from

- 17% in 2000
- To between 10% and 12% in 2012 to 2020
- And narrowed slightly to 9.6% in 2024.

Figure 2: Turnout in midterm elections, 1998-2022



The turnout gap has not obviously changed in midterms. It declined from -5.7 points in 1998

- To -5.5% in 2010
- Then declined to -4.1% in 2014
- Increased to -10.1 points in 2018,
- And declined to -4.8 points in 2022.

The increased gap in 2018 did not represent decreased turnout of people with disabilities in that year; there was a strong overall surge in turnout relative to 2014, but the surge was stronger among people without disabilities, which increased the gap.

The disability turnout gap is affected by multiple factors—in particular, people with disabilities tend to be older, and older people are more likely to vote in general, while those with more education are more likely to vote but people with disabilities have less education on average. When adjusted for age, gender, race, education, and marital status, the adjusted disability

gaps in the presidential election years are fairly close to the simple gaps reported in Figure 1,³ but in midterm elections the adjusted disability gaps are larger than the simple gaps. When making these demographic adjustments for the midterms, the trend looks more favorable for the disability turnout gaps, decreasing from -15.8% in 1998 to between -9.4% and -11.5% in 2010 to 2018, with the smallest gap of -8.6% in 2022.⁴

Why do people with disabilities remain less likely to vote than people without disabilities? Prior research finds this is partly explained by their lower levels of income, lower levels of political recruitment due to social isolation, and lower feelings of political efficacy (in particular, external efficacy which is the belief that the political system is responsive to the concerns of people like oneself).⁵ Some of the lower turnout of people with disabilities is also tied to difficulties in voting, as shown by research that voter turnout is lower among people with predicted voting difficulties and people with mobility limitations in areas with streets in poor condition.⁶ As will be seen in Chapter 2 through our review of prior evidence and presentation of new evidence, people with disabilities are more likely than those without disabilities to face difficulties in the voting process. An inaccessible voting system both makes the act of voting more difficult, but can also send the message that the political system puts less value on your vote, and this can decrease trust and confidence in the voting system.

How Can We Understand and Address Voting Difficulties?

This report presents new data on voting difficulties faced by people with disabilities in Chapter 3, and what a new center could do to address voting difficulties and develop and promote solutions in Chapter 4. We make the case that a new center on disability and voting could help increase our knowledge of voting barriers and evidence-based solutions to increase access

³ The adjusted disability gaps in presidential elections were -14.7% in 2000, -9.4% in 2008, -11.2% in 2012, -10.4% in 2016, -9.9% in 2020, and -8.9% in 2024.

⁴ The adjusted disability gaps in midterm elections were -15.8% in 1998, -9.7% in 2010, -9.2% in 2014, -11.5% in 2018, and -8.3% in 2022.

⁵ The prior findings are summarized in Lisa Schur, Todd Shields, and Kay Schriener, "Voting," in Gary Albrecht, ed., *Encyclopedia of Disability* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2005), and Lisa Schur and Meera Adya, "Sideline or Mainstreamed? Political Participation and Attitudes of People with Disabilities in the United States," *Social Science Quarterly*, 94(3), 2013, pp. 811-839.

⁶ Lisa Schur, Douglas Kruse, Mason Ameri, and Meera Adya, "Disability, Voter Accessibility, and Turnout 1998 to 2022," paper presented at annual APSA conference, August 26, 2024; Clarke, Philippa J., Jennifer A. Ailshire, Els R. Nieuwenhuijsen, and Marijke W de Kleijn-de Vrankrijker. 2011. "Participation among Adults with Disability: The Role of the Urban Environment." *Social Science & Medicine* 72 (10): 1674-84.

and facilitate better voting experiences and higher turnout and trust not just among citizens with disabilities, but among all citizens.

This report is based on a wide variety of information and input from major stakeholders. We have collected both quantitative and qualitative data that provide complementary information and allow triangulation to better identify and understand the underlying issues. Our data sources, which are described more in Appendix A, include:

People with disabilities. We use three data sources to discover and analyze the experiences and views of people with disabilities who are eligible to vote:

- **Three focus groups** we conducted with 14 voters with disabilities to gather in-depth qualitative data on their voting experiences, which included people with invisible disabilities (cognitive disabilities, emotional disabilities, and low literacy) as well as those with visible disabilities (e.g., mobility and vision impairments).
- **A purposive survey** of 254 eligible voters with disabilities that we conducted in August 2025 on the online Prolific platform, designed to gather both quantitative and qualitative data on voting experiences, preferred solutions, and goals for a potential new center.
- **Nationally representative post-election surveys** of citizens with and without disabilities, including surveys we developed that were sponsored by the U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC) following elections in 2012, 2020, 2022, and 2024 with samples of 2000 or more in each survey, along with a YouGov survey conducted in April and May of 2025 with 29,431 total respondents. People with disabilities were oversampled in these surveys to ensure a large sample size for reliable analysis of their views and experiences. Both the EAC and YouGov surveys contain questions on voting difficulties, and the YouGov survey also has questions on preferred solutions and improvements to the voting system.

Disability leaders. We interviewed 10 participants in leadership roles at organizations that support and advocate for people with disabilities. Participants were from a mix of national and local organizations. Areas of expertise were community organizing, policy and legal advocacy, plain language, accessible voting technology, and independent living. We used structured, open-ended interviews to collect data on current areas of concern around accessible voting, successful strategies for improving voting access, and future priorities for accessible voting.

State and local election officials. For perspectives from election officials, we interviewed 10 officials including both heads of the office – either a county clerk or election director – and staff in charge of outreach. They were a purposeful sample, representing a range of jurisdiction size and location. Our primary goal, however, was to speak with officials who believed they had robust programs for accessibility and outreach to voters with disabilities. We facilitated the conversation through a list of open-ended prompts and follow-up questions

to gather more specific information on each topic. These questions asked about the state of voting accessibility in the most recent election, any difficulties they faced, the factors that make it hard for them to ensure voting is accessible, and how they address those issues.

U.S. Election Assistance Commission Commissioners. Our final source of information comes from interviews with two Commissioners of the U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC), a federal agency which was created by the 2002 Help America Vote Act (HAVA) to be an [“independent, bipartisan commission whose mission is to help election officials improve the administration of elections and help Americans participate in the voting process.”](#) The Commissioners discussed their views on voting challenges faced by people with disabilities, overall progress and what more can be done to address those challenges, and the role that a new center on disability and voting could play in improving voter turnout and experiences among people with disabilities.

Chapter 2

Voting Difficulties

People with disabilities face a wide array of voting challenges that span the entire election process. Voting with a disability can involve a high amount of labor, strategizing, and effort, as well as a need for resilience and a high tolerance for frustration. Survey data show that one-fourth of people with disabilities report that their disability limits their ability to vote, and one-sixth reported some type of voting difficulty in 2024. While the number reporting difficulty has come down since 2012, it is still twice that of voters without disabilities.

The accumulation of multiple difficulties throughout the voting process can result in a cascade effect that deters or even prevents people from voting. For example, physical barriers at the polling place combine with confusing ballot language, poorly trained poll workers, and inconsistent setup or operation of accessible voting equipment to create substantial burdens.

Not surprisingly, the views on the details of these issues and their relative importance vary depending on who we asked. Individual voters provide a first-hand view of their immediate experiences and are less concerned about the source of the problem. Election officials are also concerned with meeting the law; in this research we wanted to hear their perspectives about the specific challenges they are working on, so their views represented in this report are also personal. Disability rights leaders add a view informed by their roles as advocates for compliance with the laws meant to ensure that people with disabilities can vote with the same independence and privacy as others. Finally, the two Election Assistance Commissioners we interviewed had the broadest view of the ecosystem in an under-resourced part of government and the long history from the Help America Vote Act in 2002 to now.

Overview Across Stakeholders

Across all of the data from surveys and interviews, participants identified some common barriers, showing that there is some consensus about the nature of the difficulties voters with disabilities face.

Information barriers pose an initial difficulty for many voters. Language on government websites, candidate websites and materials, and ballots is often inaccessible and confusing. Voters face unclear instructions and complicated explanations for procedures like registering to vote, satisfying identification requirements, and returning mail ballots. The result is difficulty in understanding how and where to vote, the meanings of ballot questions and candidate platforms, and in remembering who and what to vote for. Election officials struggle to know the best way to reach voters with disabilities and with the constraints they face when

using management systems for voting technology and interpreting complex policies with limited budgets.

Inaccessibility of polling places includes lack of accessible parking, pathways, and entrances, and experiencing long lines without seating. Parking lots and sidewalks may be unpaved, in poor condition, or too hilly for easy navigation. Inaccessible entrances are too common, including doors that are locked or blocked by equipment. Polling places may not have enough space to navigate with a walker or wheelchair. Long wait times and lack of seating affects many voters, with some trying to keep track of how full parking lots are to time their trip to the polling place. Election officials report using both the federal checklist for polling place accessibility, and their own checklists – one as long as 400 questions – to assess buildings as polling places. But in small and rural jurisdictions finding accessible spaces is a challenge. Even public government buildings may not be fully meet ADA requirements and other needs for elections.

Logistical and planning challenges pose another hurdle. Transportation is a major issue for many voters with disabilities. Arranging rides to polling places involves coordinating schedules and long wait times (over an hour in some cases) to be picked up, both to get to polling places and back home after voting. Polling place location changes compound the transportation issue, especially in areas where districts change regularly. Work schedules of voters and people who can assist them make it difficult to find time to vote in-person. Election officials in our interviews were aware of the follow-on effects of making changes but did not have a solution to the constant problem of finding suitable locations for in-person voting.

Emotional and cognitive strain—including anxiety, sensory overload, and fear of negative interactions—intensifies these difficulties. These may be heightened in a polarized political environment. Together, these findings illustrate that voting with a disability often requires significantly more planning, effort, and resilience than voting without one. This is a new area for election officials to consider.

Perspectives from People with Disabilities

Focus groups of people with disabilities

Voters with disabilities in the focus groups reported barriers in five areas of voting

- Physical accessibility at polling places
- Confusing ballots,
- Unprepared and/or disrespectful poll workers
- Challenging logistics
- Cognitive and emotional load

Polling place accessibility is a common barrier. This includes inadequate handicapped parking spaces, or spaces far from the polling entrance. Inaccessible pathways leading to polling places from parking areas are an issue, including poorly maintained sidewalks and hilly areas. Entrances are regularly inaccessible due to being locked, blocked by equipment, or confusing to navigate. The combination of long lines and a lack of seating in polling places is a major problem that results in decisions to vote by mail or to skip voting in an election if mail voting is not available. These frustrations were expressed by three focus group participants:

“The only accessible way in was blocked by some equipment, and they had to move that... I couldn’t enter the door that everyone else entered.”

“Volunteers were backing their vehicle into me as I was standing in line... I didn’t have a space to go to get out of the way.”

“When I tried to get back in, the door was locked, and somebody noticed I was trying to open it.”

Voters with disabilities face issues with the **lack of plain language in ballot questions** and in **remembering who to vote for in elections with multiple contests**. Contests with many candidates are particularly challenging. A typical strategy voters use is printing a sample ballot with their selections, but some report being questioned by poll workers when they bring paper into the polling place. Four participants said:

“I would like the wording on the ballots to be concise... it would make it a lot easier for me to read.”

“Proposition One... was 65 pages in the book. Nobody’s reading that... it was really hard to understand.”

“Sometimes those questions are written in a very leading way that is misleading... so being able to understand what I plan to vote for is very helpful.”

“It felt like I was taking a test... trying to memorize and keep names in my head was difficult.”

Poll workers lack training in accessible voting, so equipment is sometimes not set up when voters arrive at the polling place. Poll workers do not always know how to operate accessible equipment. A lack of training in disability etiquette is a related issue. Voters with disabilities reported being treated with hostility or being patronized by poll workers. Poll workers also do not enforce accessibility laws. Reflecting their problems with poll workers, three participants said:

“It was really uncomfortable to be talked to like that... very placating and overly nice, sort of like I was a child.”

“Poll workers once said, ‘Oh, you can’t have that [sample ballot].’ And I had to tell them actually I can... someone had to tell them.”

“I took support with me... but was told that support couldn’t help me with the technology... it took a while [to get approval].”

The logistics of getting to polling places and predicting optimal times to vote are challenging. Arranging transportation is a major hurdle. Accessible rides may have long waits or be unpredictable in their availability. This is compounded by wait times at polling places. Voters undertake a great deal of effort to find out when polling places are less busy and which polling places have fewer accessibility issues. The variation across polling places, counties, and states and lack of available information make this processing more time and labor intensive. Four participants illustrated logistical and transportation difficulties:

“I had to arrange a ride... give my ride company a 45-minute leeway. I couldn’t schedule a ride back—it could be 10 minutes or two hours [waiting].”

“The polling place was changed at the last minute, which is burdensome for people who don’t drive... I kept thinking, am I at the right place?”

“There are a lot of rural areas that face unique challenges... how can we increase funding to help with transportation?”

“I’ve had to plan ahead... checking if the polling place is accessible, figuring out transportation, or getting there early because the accessible machine isn’t set up right away.”

“I’ve literally driven by, saw cars, and said okay—maybe later. I try to early vote so that I don’t have to deal with standing in line too long... They should have chairs.”

Stress and anxiety are barriers to voting, particularly when voting in-person. The unpredictability of issues that may arise, negative experiences with poll workers and other voters, and the high amount of information to process particularly affect voters with cognitive and emotional disabilities. As noted by four participants:

“The three words that came to mind first were anxiety, uncomfortability and confusing.”

“I like the convenience of voting by mail... but I tore something and worried, are they going to accept that?”

“I kept reminding myself, it’s not a test, and it felt like that.”

“From a sensory perspective, it was very overwhelming... the space was small, not enough booths or tables.”

Purposive Survey of People with Disabilities

To gain richer data on the views and experiences of voters with disabilities, we used the online Prolific platform to survey 254 people with disabilities who had voted at least once in the past 20 years.

Respondents answered a series of open-ended questions about their health conditions and disabilities, challenges they encountered when voting, positive experiences, the most difficult aspect of voting, and changes that would make voting easier. They described a wide range of impairments and health conditions, including mobility and physical disabilities, mental health conditions, neurodivergence, hearing and vision impairments, chronic health conditions, and neurological disorders. Mobility limitations and mental-health conditions were the most common, followed by neurodivergence and hearing impairments. Many responses highlighted the complexity and compounding nature of chronic disability.

Challenges or Problems While Voting:

Participants described numerous barriers related to voting accessibility, including physical constraints, anxiety and sensory overload, crowding and long wait times, transportation barriers, and inconsistent access to mail-in voting. The diversity of challenges indicates that voting difficulties span both physical and procedural areas.

The survey also asked participants to identify the single factor that makes voting most difficult. The findings (shown in the second column below) suggest that logistical constraints (time, transportation) and procedural complexity, combined with health-related and emotional factors, pose substantial barriers to voting.

Table 1: Categories of challenges

Challenge type	# as single most difficult	Description
Personal or contextual barriers	59	Disability or health related issues. External conditions such as limited transportation, conflict with work or personal schedules, or unhelpful poll workers. Some respondents needed assistance but did not receive it.
Mail-in or absentee ballot issues	43	Problems receiving, returning or understanding mail-in ballots; for example, ballots that never arrived or difficulties completing or returning them.
Disability/health related	31	Physical pain, illness or mobility limitations that make standing in line or accessing the polling place difficult

Challenge type	# as single most difficult	Description
Anxiety / mental-health factors	25	Stress and emotional overwhelm, including panic attacks, anxiety about being rushed, and feeling overwhelmed by the number of items on the ballot.
Polling-location confusion	21	Difficulty locating polling places, unclear directions, inaccessible transportation routes and confusing election websites. Some also mentioned communication barriers when hearing instructions from poll workers.
Crowding, wait time and environment	20	Long lines, crowded spaces and lack of seating created fatigue and discomfort, sometimes triggering anxiety or physical pain.
Accessibility / disability barriers	20	Physical obstacles such as inaccessible parking, long distances from accessible parking to the polling room, narrow hallways, or voting machines positioned at uncomfortable heights. Respondents noted that moving around the polling place caused pain or required assistance.

Positive Aspects of the Voting Process

Despite difficulties, many respondents highlighted positive experiences while voting. The table below summarizes the main positive themes and their frequency. These responses show that mail-in voting and supportive poll staff significantly enhance the voting experience for people with disabilities.

Table 2: Categories of positive experiences

Positive category	Number of single most positive	Description
Mail-in / absentee voting convenience	80	Appreciating the ability to vote by mail or absentee ballot, which reduces physical strain and anxiety

Helpful / friendly staff	63	Praising volunteers and poll workers who were courteous, provided clear instructions and offered assistance
Ease / efficiency of process	24	Describing the process as smooth, organized and quick
Civic pride / freedom of choice	4	Expressing pride in participating in democracy and having a voice
Short wait time / no lines	4	Noting minimal waiting and quick voting experiences
Accessibility / accommodations	1	Positive remarks about accessible polling stations or accommodations such as ramps and available seating
Technology / voting machines	1	Satisfaction with accessible technology or paper ballots

Nationally Representative Surveys of People with Disabilities

The representative survey data indicate that voters with disabilities are more likely than voters without disabilities to report voting difficulties, although voting accessibility has improved since 2012.

YouGov 2025 Survey

Survey S (in the Appendix) presents a variety of the barriers and challenges reported by people with disabilities, with comparisons to people without disabilities and by disability type. This table draws on the YouGov survey conducted in April and May of 2025. Figures are reported both for those who respond “yes” to one of the six Census questions, and those who responded “yes” to one or more to a wider set of disability questions measuring additional disabling conditions.⁷

⁷ In addition to the 6 Census questions, the Yougov survey included one broad question on limitations in major life activities, 12 questions from the Survey of Income and Program Participation on specific conditions and receipt of disability income, and 4 questions on long Covid, pain, episodic, and unpredictable health conditions. The broader Yougov disability measure is based on a “yes” response to any of these questions or the 6 Census questions.

Focusing on those who responded yes to one of the Census disability questions, the key findings in Survey Table 1 in Appendix B include:

Table 3: Survey results for different challenges

Challenge type	% reporting	Description
Disability/health	25%	Voters with disabilities who say their disability makes it somewhat or much harder to obtain the necessary ID to vote
Voter ID	20%	Voters with disabilities who their disability makes it somewhat or much harder to obtain the necessary ID to vote
Prevented / unable to vote	19%	Non-voters with disabilities in 2024 said their disability prevented voting, and one-sixth (16%) said they were unable to vote because they received no assistance (higher than the 5% figure among non-voters without disabilities)
Needed assistance	17%	In-person voters with disabilities, and 8% of mail voters with disabilities, reported requiring assistance in voting (higher than the respective 4% and 1% figures among voters without disabilities)
Accommodations provided	39%	In 2024, voters with disabilities who said the voting process accommodated their disability “very well”
Easy voting process	63%	Voters with disabilities were less likely to say the voting process was “very easy” in 2024 (63%) compared to voters without disabilities (79%).

Looking at breakdowns by major type of disability, columns 6-9 of Survey Table 1 in Appendix B show that:

People with cognitive disabilities (column 8) had the lowest voter turnout (45%), while the turnout of people with hearing impairments was almost identical to that people without disabilities (66%)

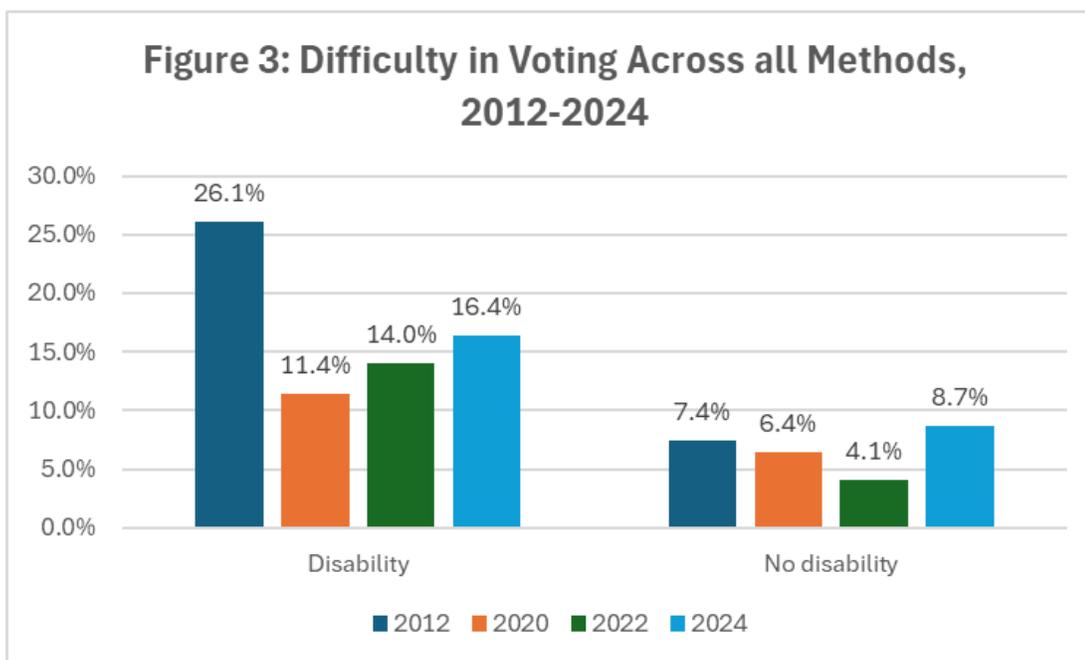
- People with **cognitive** impairments were also the least likely to say the voting process accommodated their disability “very well” (31%) and that voting was “very easy” (55%)
- People **with vision impairments** (column 7) were the most likely to say they required assistance in voting in person (28%) or by mail (13%)
- People with **mobility impairments** (column 9) were the most likely to say their condition limits voting (36%), while among non-voters they were the most likely to say their condition prevented voting (30%), and among mail voters they were the most likely to say their condition contributed to their decision to vote by mail (60%).

EAC Post-election surveys, 2012-2024

Data on voting difficulties also come from post-election surveys sponsored by the EAC after the 2012, 2020, 2022, and 2024 elections.⁸ These surveys have measured a variety of specific difficulties people may have had in voting either at a polling place (including problems finding or getting to the polling place, getting inside the polling place, waiting in line, understand how to vote, reading the ballot, using the voting equipment, or communicating with poll workers) or using a mail ballot (including problems in requesting, receiving, reading, understanding, filling out, or returning a mail ballot).

Figure 3 shows that in the EAC surveys, just over one-fourth (26.1%) of people with disabilities reported some type of voting difficulty in 2012, which decreased significantly to 11.4% in 2020 and ticked up to 16.4% in 2024. In all four years the reported difficulties were much lower among people without disabilities; most recently, the 16.4% rate of difficulties among voters with disabilities in 2024 was about twice the 8.7% rate among voters without disabilities.

⁸ Lisa Schur and Douglas Kruse, “[Disability and Voting Accessibility in the 2020 Elections](#),” Election Assistance Commission, 2021; Lisa Schur, Douglas Kruse, and Mason Ameri, “[Disability and Voting Accessibility in the 2022 Elections](#).” Election Assistance Commission, 2023; Lisa Schur et al., “Accessible Voting and Election Supporting Technology,” Election Assistance Commission, forthcoming 2025.



People who voted in person had the highest rate of difficulties. In 2012, 30.1% of voters with disabilities reported difficulties voting in a polling place, which decreased significantly to 18.0% in 2020 and increased slightly to 21.3% in 2024. About half of the improvement since 2012 reflected a changed composition of in-person voters, as those with more significant disabilities became more likely to vote by mail in 2020 and later. The other half of the improvement appears to be due to success in improving polling place accessibility since 2012.

People with disabilities who voted by mail also reported fewer difficulties over this time. In 2012, 13.4% of people with disabilities who voted by mail reported difficulty reading, understanding, or filling out the mail ballot, which decreased to 2.3% in 2020. The disability figure expands to 5.4% in 2020 and 8.4% in 2024 when also including people who had difficulty receiving or returning the ballot. All of these percentages are much lower among people without disabilities, among whom 3.9% reported any difficulties voting with a mail ballot in 2024.

YouGov survey date from 2024

The YouGov survey asked similar questions about the 2024 elections in their 2025 survey. As will be seen, the reported difficulty rates are higher in the YouGov survey than in the EAC survey among voters both with and without disabilities. This very likely reflects differences in

the samples and methods of the two surveys.⁹ While they have different methods, the pattern of results is similar: both surveys show that voters with disabilities are more likely than voters without disabilities to experience voting difficulties. Here we present numbers from the YouGov survey since it has a larger sample for documenting specific voting difficulties and doing comparisons by disability status. As seen in Survey Table 2 of Appendix B:

- Just under half (46%) of in-person voters with disabilities in the YouGov survey reported any voting difficulties in 2024, which is almost twice the rate of voters without disabilities (27%).
- The most commonly expressed problem among in-person voters with disabilities was waiting in line (29%), followed by communicating with poll workers (9%), getting to the polling place (9%), getting inside the polling place (8%), and using the voting equipment or ballot (7%)
- Among mail voters, about one-sixth of those with disabilities reported voting difficulties (16%), which is again about twice the rate among voters without disabilities (7%).
- The most commonly expressed problem among mail voters with disabilities was returning the ballot (5%), closely followed by applying for or receiving a ballot (5%), and completing or filling out the ballot (4%).
- All of the specific difficulties were more likely to be expressed by voters with disabilities than by those without disabilities.
- People with vision impairments were the most likely to report difficulties voting both in person (57%) and by mail (25%)
- Among the major types of disability, voters with hearing impairments were the least likely to report difficulties voting in person (45%) or by mail (11%), but their figures were still significantly higher than among voters without disabilities (27% and 7% respectively).

Access to voting information may also constrain some people with disabilities. A 2022 EAC report documented a “digital divide” between people with and without disabilities in access to voting information.¹⁰ People with disabilities are less likely than people without disabilities to

⁹ The EAC survey is done by SSRS Inc. using a probability-based panel built on random sampling of mail addresses, while the Yougov survey uses a non-probability online panel built on opt-in solicitation of potential respondents. Both SSRS and Yougov are well-established pollsters. Both surveys use incentives to encourage participation, and both adjust their samples with weights to make the sample representative of the U.S. population using Census demographic data. Apart from respondent characteristics, question placement may help account for differences in responses to similar questions. While opt-in surveys can perform similarly to standard representative surveys on election polling, they appear to overestimate rare attitudes and behaviors ([Pew Research Center, March 5, 2024](#)).

¹⁰ [Disability, the Voting Process, and the Digital Divide](#) | U.S. Election Assistance Commission (eac.gov)

have access to computers and the internet for information on how or where to vote, and are more likely to use non-internet sources such as printed mailings from the election office, television, and talking to family members, friends, neighbors, or colleagues.

Perspectives from Disability Leaders

Although many of the disability leaders also live with a disability, in our conversations, we asked them to speak from their role as a leader in the community or the priorities of their organization.

Disability organizations are currently focused on four main issues that affect accessible voting:

- mail voting policies and the ability to choose voting in person or by mail
- the lack of accessible information for people with disabilities
- challenges in building networks to work on accessible voting
- the large amount of variation in laws and procedures across states and local districts
- maintaining funding levels for education and support through future elections

These issues have a large effect on accessible voting across jurisdictions and affect the ability of organizations to address the needs of voters. These issues are also where organization leaders see the potential for impactful changes in access to voting.

Disability leaders emphasized the need to maintain the current level of accessible voting. They see a recent series of restrictive laws around mail ballots and absentee voting as particularly concerning. Voter fraud narratives around mail ballots have also made it more difficult to rally support behind mail voting. In addition to allowing mail ballots, a number of policies make voting more accessible, including permanent vote by mail lists, automatic reminders to voters to request mail ballots, and less restrictive witness requirements.

While policy change is a slower process, disability leaders are interested in ways to mitigate issues through building connections and sharing ideas with other organizations and election officials to shore up accessible voting. Ongoing dialogue with these other stakeholders helps develop ways to make voting more accessible. Working together to find ways to help voters allows for smart strategies that take into account local issues and gets people in communities motivated to expand accessible voting.

Disability leaders also want to see more publicity for accessible voting and the issues faced by people with disabilities. Wider awareness of the number of voters with disabilities and the effects of accessible voting on a wider public would help with marshalling support for policies that expand accessible voting.

Table 4: Challenges identified by more than half the disability leaders

Challenge type	Description
Voting in person	Getting to a polling place and casting a ballot in person presents a myriad of challenges, including transportation access, inaccessible buildings, unempathetic poll workers, and accessible equipment that is not set up.
Mail-in or absentee ballot issues	<p>The lack of electronic return requires voters to have access to a working printer. Blind and low vision voters have to get another person to confirm their ballots printed correctly, making it impossible to vote privately and independently.</p> <p>Ballot signature requirements mean voters have to coordinate with someone else to sign their ballots before mailing.</p>
Restrictive mail voting policies	Recent laws passed in multiple states have rolled back the availability of voting by mail. In particular, new laws that make it a crime to assist people with mail ballots have had a profound effect. Friends, family, and caregivers are no longer able to deliver ballots or help with marking ballots. Some of these laws are confusing and have resulted in caregivers declining to offer assistance in any form to ensure they are not charged with a crime.
Communications	<p>Unclear and confusing language is a major impediment to voting at every stage of the voting process.</p> <p>Many disability organizations devote resources to creating plain language versions of voter guides and ballot questions. Creating plain language versions is not simply a matter of simplifying language, but requires understanding of access needs and the nuances of ballot questions to ensure voters get accurate information.</p>

Challenge type	Description
Relationships with other organizations	Relationships across organizations and communities are a crucial part of building knowledge and mobilizing support for policies that expand accessible voting. Building and maintaining these networks requires ongoing work. These relationships allow people to share knowledge for developing voting advocacy strategies and for making voting more accessible on a day to day basis. These relationships also help people understand and adapt to policies and procedures in different jurisdictions.
Relationships with election officials	Disability leaders also want more dialogue with election officials to collaborate on creating achievable solutions to barriers.
Variation in policies	<p>Differences across states and jurisdictions cause confusion for voters and require organizations to tailor strategy for local issues. Voters who move often are unsure about policies in their new area. This can result in assuming accessible voting avenues are not available or missing deadlines because of differing timelines for voter registration and requesting mail ballots.</p> <p>Differences in laws lead to poll worker misunderstandings of what is allowed.</p> <p>The need to ensure education on accurate policy information creates an additional load on organizations and voters in understanding how to vote.</p>
Funding	Current funding issues for non-profits may prevent organizations from providing plain language materials or other expanded services to voters for future elections.

Perspectives from Election Officials

The interviews with elections officials was a purposive group of participants, recruited through direct outreach through elections organizations¹¹ and direct contacts. We carefully recruited offices representing a range of:

- Geography: the size, type, and region of the office
- Voting methods: rules for mail voting, early voting, and election day
- Roles: the clerks, election directors, or someone in an accessibility outreach role

We aimed for an open and in-depth conversation, rather than a survey of their accessibility practices. Providing a space to talk about their successes, challenges, and goals. Even officials who shared effective programs and activities that they were proud of also said that they had a list of things they wished they could do, given time, budget, resources, or policy changes.

They would also like to see a change in how support for people with disabilities and other groups with lower access to voting is viewed. As one put it, a change from starting by serving “the masses and then finding the little solutions.” Instead, she wanted to “cater to those that have the hardest time first.”

It was not surprising to hear that there are strong differences in the kind and amount of outreach they do based on their state election policy and procedures. This suggests that it is critical to understand these constraints and characteristics in tailoring recommendations for them.

They also shared a wide variation in their approach and programs to providing accessible elections. Some of this was attributable to differences in how elections are administered:

- **In places with limited or centralized absentee voting:** Officials in states with limited or centralized absentee voting were most concerned about the accessibility of polling places, with a high priority on finding appropriate locations for polling places and early voting. This was especially true in smaller, older cities, where parking space is often at a premium.
- **In states where most voting is done by mail:** Perhaps as a result of not having polling places, officials paid more attention to the groups most likely to need assistance,

¹¹ We thank the U.S. Alliance for Election Excellence and the Partnership for Large Election Jurisdictions for their assistance in recruiting. We also drew on our list of officials from [research for NIST and the EAC](#) to help inform the usability and accessibility of voting systems

including voters with disabilities, overseas voters, and those needing language access assistance. Offices that supported several languages tended to have larger outreach staffs that also managed translations. Two of them included disability access in a combined department.

- **In states with early voting:** Officials often had opportunities to use early voting as a place to focus on programs to make voting easier, from providing more accessible voting systems (using ballot marking devices, or BMDs) to offering curbside voting. Some reported a slowly growing acceptance of BMDs for all voters, describing them as faster to use and easier to manage in multi-day early voting periods. One official reported that 90% of all in-person voters used their ExpressVote BMD, saying that the number had grown organically as voters tried it and liked it.
- **In jurisdictions with an accessible vote-by-mail program:** Officials acknowledged the frustrations of voters with disabilities at not having a fully-electronic solution, including electronic return. But they also recognized the long-running debates about security vs. accessibility and the constraints of state laws. Those without a current program would like state policy to allow them to provide the systems for overseas and military (UOCAVA) voting to voters with disabilities.

In general, however, no matter how limited or extensive their accessibility program, they all wanted to take what they saw as the next steps. This was more true of the officials who worked in outreach than those who headed the office because they saw the problems first hand as a primary responsibility of their job.

Funding, and the resources that come with it, were also universal issues. Election offices are habitually underfunded in general, and several reported fluctuations in funding for accessible programs that made it difficult to maintain consistent services:

- They compete with other county departments for funding. They also rely on schools, libraries, and other office buildings for polling places, but have to spend their own budget on accessibility needs.
- Some of their needs for accessible voting are relatively small, which can make them difficult to place in a budget.
- They always want to be able to add staff, even temporary staff around the election, to provide more services.

Despite this, we also collected a robust list of successful programs and the officials' wish lists for the future. Many of their priorities reflected the priorities of voters and disability rights leaders, seen through the lens of election administration. The table below included the top programs mentioned in the interviews, not a comprehensive list.

Table 5: Projects and programs in elections offices today

Jurisdiction	Programs they are proud of
Maryland	<p>Programs are run at the county level, but three that they mentioned that the state is working on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• They have been working on a problem with their drop boxes that makes it look like they are locked, when they are really open• Updating procedures for voting from corrections facilities• State-managed accessible mail voting program
SoCal, CA	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• At a DRC summit, they learned about writing messages in plain language and getting out of an ableist mindset• They have seen a steady increase in curbside voting and RAVBM voting as word is getting out• High school voter education week with pre-registration• They have a tablet at every vote center that connects to language and ASL interpreters• Thinking about making voting equitable as a goal
King County, WA	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bringing disability and language access together into one team. “ASL is disability, but also a language. Plain language is both.”• There is a requirement for all counties to have a Disability Advisory Group. Someone from the voting services team is part of that committee.• They took the accessible voting systems to a downtown library to make a pop-up center.• They piloted an alternative to a signature that will be useful in the future, but the pilot did not work well for the disability community.
Multnomah, OR	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Outreach to people with invisible disabilities is an important part of the work• Coaching and home visits on voting• Created a large print version of the voter guide for one voter through Disability Rights Oregon• They have a home visit program with portable printers they can take to anyone, with a hot spot to be able to download the voter’s ballot• They have a list of 180 large elder homes where they do a train-the-trainer so staff there can help residents with their mail ballot

Jurisdiction	Programs they are proud of
Shelby County, TN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Just started working with a group for Veterans with TBI. It's hard to reach them because there are lots of rules for engagement and the office can't ask about their disability • They went to homeless shelters and Vets Stand Down
St. Charles, MO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 98% of her voters use the ballot marking device (with an option for paper) • They have a system for voters with print disabilities throughout the state. It is not well known; out of 12,000 absentee voters in the county, only 7 used the system. • They have a great ballot remake system for the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA) that she would like to expand to voters with disabilities. • They use color-coded tablecloths to identify tables for specific functions. • They try to set polling places up so that longer lines are outside of the room to keep the space quiet.
Charleston, SC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They have a very successful and widely used curbside program, but had to adjust it because so many people without disabilities wanted to use it. Now you get served curbside in the same order as if you came into the early voting location.
Madison, WI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They have a new Voting Assistance Advisory Committee (VAAC). This year, they are putting the first priority recommendations in place, including better information about what's offered, a neurodiversity kit at each early voting location, and a focus on neurodiversity • Polling place kits have signage, headphones, signature guides, headphone covers, JustBee sensory bags with fidget toys, and noise-cancelling headphones. • They have a "special voting deputy" program in the state that trains pairs of people for home or facility visits. • Successful outreach on campus

Jurisdiction	Programs they are proud of
Cranston, RI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Used some of his budget for polling places to partner with the schools to fix this such as adding ramps to entrances, or creating permanent handicapped parking places near the area used for voting so they don't have to bring in temporary fixes
Newport, RI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seeing the number of people using the BMD increase each year. When people have used it once, they go back to it - they will even wait for it.

Perspectives from EAC Commissioners

The two Commissioners interviewed for this report emphasized many of the same voting problems faced by people with disabilities. One noted that the highly diverse nature of the disability creates a wide spectrum of needs, and that “persistent challenges” exist because different disabilities create different obstacles.

The problems identified by the Commissioners include:

- Persistent Physical and Environmental Barriers:** Both Commissioners stated that physical accessibility has improved “a great deal” since HAVA, including improvements in entering polling places, curbside access, parking availability, and reducing reliance on private homes as polling places. However, obstacles remain, as many polling places still lack appropriate entrances, ramps, or parking, especially in older schools or community buildings. Physical access varies dramatically between jurisdictions due to limited funding and local constraints.
- Stigma and Misunderstanding, Especially Regarding People with Intellectual Disabilities:** Both Commissioners also discussed problems of ongoing stigma against voters with intellectual and developmental disabilities: Poll workers sometimes wrongly assume such voters “don’t know what they’re doing” and require voting advice—undermining privacy, dignity, and independence. These voters may also feel rushed or judged if they take longer to vote. Commissioners emphasized that “not all disabilities are visual,” and poll workers often lack training to recognize or appropriately support such voters.

- **Anxiety, Intimidation, and Safety Concerns:** The Commissioners discussed problems of anxiety in the voting environment, occurring due to issues such as confusion about polling-place processes, sensory overload, difficulty processing ballot language, stress related to long lines or crowds, and possibly fear of armed individuals or uniformed officials. One noted that problems have increased in this area.
- **Information and Communication Barriers:** The Commissioners noted several problems facing people with disabilities related to information and communication, including that some voters with disabilities may struggle to navigate inaccessible or outdated county websites, understand complex ballot language, know where and when to vote, and know what if any ID may be required to vote. They also noted that these problems may be greater in small jurisdictions, where accessible website templates, plain-language materials, and alt-text-ready communications are often beyond the capacity of small jurisdictions due to lack of staff capacity and skills to produce accessible materials.
- **Barriers in Mail Voting and Technology:** While vote-by-mail is highly accessible and “super useful” for many people with disabilities, it presents “a particularly difficult challenge” for blind voters because paper ballots are inherently inaccessible. At-home ballot completion also creates risks of coercion, privacy violations, and inconsistent paper standards. The Commissioners described this as an unresolved national challenge; election systems have not solved how to make mailed ballots independently accessible in a secure, scalable manner.

Chapter 3

Suggestions for Voting Improvements

What improvements can make the voting process easier and more accessible, and build trust in elections, not only for people with disabilities but for all voters? We start with an overview of the findings across all stakeholder groups, then present specific findings from each group.

Summary of recommendations

People with disabilities identified a range of solutions that would make voting more accessible, emphasizing clearer information, better-designed voting environments, and more flexible voting options. Focus group participants highlighted the need for plain-language ballots and voter guides, fully accessible entrances, available seating, and well-trained poll workers who understand disability etiquette and how to operate accessible equipment. They also supported expanded curbside and early voting, as well as accessible mail voting with options like electronic return or secure online ballot marking.

Survey results confirm broad support for reforms such as same-day registration, accessible transportation, shorter wait times, more accessible machines, permanent vote-by-mail, and digital or smartphone-based voting methods. Respondents also favored extended voting hours, calmer polling environments, and additional polling locations.

Disability leaders stressed structural reforms including permanent mail-ballot lists, electronic ballot return, comprehensive poll-worker training, accessibility coordinators, and mobile or online voting pilot programs. They also underscored the importance of strong partnerships with election officials, trusted messengers for voter education, and sustained outreach.

Election officials and EAC Commissioners echoed these priorities, emphasizing better poll worker training, improved polling place design, accessibility audits, more accessible equipment, expanded mail-voting options, plug-and-play tools for local offices, and long-term innovation in remote voting technology.

Recommendations from People with Disabilities

In both the surveys and focus groups, we asked questions about what changes would make voting easier. These suggestions highlight the importance of expanding flexible voting options (such as mail in / absentee voting, online / digital voting, and even transportation assistance), improving accessibility, and providing clear information.

In the nationally representative survey of voters both with and without disabilities, all of the recommendations were selected more by those with disabilities than without.

These expressed preferences by people with disabilities support the idea that voting difficulties are an important factor in the lower turnout of people with disabilities, and that there is good potential for increasing voter turnout by increasing accessibility in the voting process.

Table 6: Changes suggested by voters

Source	What voters want
<p>Focus groups of people with disabilities (open ended discussion questions)</p>	<p>Accessible information in plain language, specifically ballots, voter guides, and information about candidates. One noted the value of plain language: “I want plain language to be universal... it would make it easier for me to read and vote.”</p> <p>Early online ballot access before voting, so, “We can go online and look at the ballot beforehand... that helps me understand referendums that are written in a leading way.”</p> <p>Expanded accessible in-person voting, curbside voting and early voting (especially Sunday voting)</p> <p>For in-person voting: Entrances should be fully accessible, equipment set up when voters arrive, and seating should be available.</p> <p>Training for poll workers in interacting with people with disabilities and navigators to help voters understand the polling place and know where to ask for help.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I’d like to see a navigator for people who need more one-on-one help... someone neutral who can answer plain-language questions.” • “What if there were poll workers with additional training... something like the hidden disabilities sunflower program?” • Inclusive design using “an example like the DMV—check in, sit down, get a number, then it’s your turn.” <p>Make voting by mail with online voting or e-return compatible with assistive technologies and secure confirmation systems. Mobile voting is the next step in accessible voting because it would reduce the need for voters to navigate the logistics of voting and allow them to vote from home when ready.</p>

Source	What voters want
<p>Purposive Survey (summary of open ended answers from 254 participants)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requests for more mail-in or home-voting options, including permanent vote-by-mail (99) • Desire for secure online or electronic voting systems (28) • Need for transportation support, such as drive-up voting or easier access to polling stations (19) • Calls for longer polling hours or earlier-voting options (17) • Suggestions to limit crowding or create calmer polling environments (13) • Requests for clearer, simpler information about candidates, issues and voting procedures (11) • Desire for additional or more conveniently located polling places (10) • Physical accommodations such as ramps, seating or improved entrances (6) • Calls to simplify election rules and ID laws (2)
<p>YouGov nationally representative survey of people with disabilities (closed choice answers from voters with disabilities from Survey Table 3)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve voter registration or access to election information <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Same day and polling-place registration (34%) ○ More time to register before election (26%) ○ More opportunities to register automatically (37%) ○ More communications from elections officials about deadlines (31%) • Improve ability to get to the polls <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Polling places closer to home (24%) ○ Getting an accessible ride to the polls (29%) ○ Providing or extending an early voting period (34%) ○ Making election day a holiday or fall on a weekend (38%) • Improving the voting process at the polls <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ “Not having to wait more than a few minutes at the polls” (40%) ○ Allowing curbside or drive-through voting (30%) ○ Increasing the number of accessible voting machines (30%) • Improving the process of voting by mail

Source	What voters want
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ “Having a mail ballot automatically sent to me” (39%) ○ Voting entirely by smartphone or computer (38%) ○ Making it easier to ask for a mail-in ballot (31%) ○ Making it possible to ask for a mail ballot without an excuse (31%).

Recommendations from Disability Leaders

Like voters, leaders of disability organizations highlight the need for accessible vote by mail options. In addition to policies that permit mail ballots, voting would be more accessible with electronic return methods, permanent mail voting lists that allow voters to automatically receive ballots for each election, and removal of signature requirements. Assistance for voters less adept with technology or without access to technology or the internet would fill in gaps in access where electronic return is not available. Where electronic return is used, assistance would solve issues with uploading documents to online portals. There is also interest in online and mobile voting methods. Security concerns are the top argument against mobile voting. Disability leaders recommended getting an understanding from security experts on the security landscape and what solutions might be created in order to talk to policy makers about secure mobile voting protocols.

For voting in person, curbside voting is a necessity. In areas that already have curbside voting, poll workers should ensure it is clear to voters that this is available and that there are directions for where to go. Arranging transportation to polling places and taking voting equipment to congregate settings would help erase barriers.

Disability leaders want to work with election officials to create solutions, which can build trust on both sides. Increased and more comprehensive poll worker training would ensure polling places are more accessible for a range of access needs. Disability leaders also suggested making polling place accessibility coordinators a recruited, paid position and hiring people with disabilities as poll workers and election officials. To prepare voters, practice sessions that allow voters to get comfortable with accessible voting equipment—either virtually or in person—make voting run more smoothly and help voters learn to advocate for themselves.

Relationship building and knowledge sharing is an area where disability organizations need support. State Protection and Advocacy organizations and Centers for Independent Living need more opportunities to share ideas and best practices. This would be useful within and

across states. For voter education, cultivating trusted messengers is essential for liaising between national or state disability groups and specific communities such as bilingual groups.

Outreach activities are another solution area. Organizations want to see research findings on voting with a disability to get traction in the media. They also want support with mass education campaigns around voting with a disability. This also includes helping the public and policy makers understand that there are barriers in states with relatively better records around voting access.

Recommendations from Elections Officials

The table below collects some of their ideas for expanding their programs. Like the recommendations from voters, some of these are broad ideas that will take time to develop, but others are specific steps to improve existing programs. They also reflect some of the challenges for officials working to implement a broad social mandate with few resources or clear evidence of what will have real impact. Figure 3 shows a steep drop in the number of voters with disabilities experiencing difficulty voting, but the numbers have remained stubbornly stuck at around 15%. It is telling that the lowest level of difficulty was in the 2020 election, when elections received a great deal of national attention and resources from all levels of government and private philanthropy.

Table 7: What election officials would like to do to make voting more accessible

Challenge type	Description
Voting in person	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sample resources for training her staff and poll workers • Better training for poll workers to serve voters with disabilities more effectively and consistently • Ideas for making voting locations more accessible, including partnerships with other government offices to fix problems permanently • Better support for voters with hidden disabilities in a polling place. • More visits to congregate living facilities. • Pop-up locations for voting locations
Communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To be able to expand their lists of “trusted messengers” for their accessibility programs and general election outreach • Help making, or access to videos with ASL • Better ways to work with disability groups for outreach and education

Challenge type	Description
Relationships with other organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better relationships with local disability groups so they can learn from and support each other, including formal or informal committees • Connection to student disability centers at local colleges • Train the trainer programs for libraries and others with legal responsibility for voter outreach. • Building relationships to help them reach voters with invisible disabilities, cognitive disabilities, or TBI, where outreach rules are strict • Better ways to engage staff at facilities (nursing homes, veterans' homes, shelters) to help serve voters living there more effectively.
Relationships with election officials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities to share programs and procedures and learn from each other or collaborate on implementation. • A way to benchmark the effectiveness of their access programs, especially within their state.
Training or learning opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ways for the officials and staff in their office to learn more about the needs of voters with disabilities
Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget for interpreters and ASL, printing in Braille • More accessible voting systems in each polling place • Supplies for neurodiversity support.
Policy changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow drop boxes and drop-off at polling places to reduce reliance on mail. • Allow use of the U.S. Postal Service Intelligent Mail Barcode¹² that enables an office to track mail ballots when they are sent to voters.

¹² The Intelligent Mail Barcode (IMB) used to sort and route envelopes. It contains addressing information that allowed an individual mail piece to be tracked through the system. There is also a data element within the IMB that identifies the envelope as election mail. Typically an office uses a mailing vendor to create these codes and include them on the outgoing vote-by-mail packets. Some states do not allow vendors to have access to voter information, making it impossible for officials in those states to use this free postal feature.

Challenge type	Description
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve voting by mail by moving away from “strict excuse” systems, or creating permanent absentee lists. They want to end underuse or lack of awareness of accessible remote ballot marking systems.
Research gaps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What works in reaching people with disabilities with the information they need? • How well does their program compare with other offices? • How many people with disabilities are they serving (for example, how many people are using the BMDs, curbside voting, or other programs)

Recommendations from EAC Commissioners

Following are a number of short-term and long-term solutions to voting problems suggested by the two Commissioners.

- **Better Training for Poll Workers:** This includes enhanced training on invisible disabilities—especially intellectual disabilities—appropriate assistance (without influencing voting), and respectfully addressing voters who need more time or support. Training is seen as low-cost and high-impact.
- **Recruiting Poll Workers with Disabilities:** One Commissioner noted that seeing few poll workers with disabilities can increase voter anxiety and reduce trust. Seeing disabled poll workers could materially improve turnout and experiences of voters with disabilities: “If I see someone who looks like me ... I might feel less anxious.”
- **“Plug-and-Play” Tools for Election Officials:** Election officials are stretched thin. Commissioners stressed that they need easy-to-use material such as: templates with built-in alt text, 508-compliant website modules, accessible social media posts, polling-place accessibility checklists, and clear equipment standards. They emphasized turnkey tools that reduce burden—not aspirational guidance requiring expert staff or extra time.
- **Better Polling-Place Design and Site Selection:** One Commissioner suggested using accessible malls, fire stations, or public buildings rather than private homes; ensuring sufficient parking and convenient drop-off areas; and offering curbside voting where appropriate.

- **Systematic Accessibility Audits:** One Commissioner praised Colorado’s statewide accessibility auditing model and encouraged expansion of similar tools nationwide. Jurisdictions need easy-to-use, scalable ways to assess polling-place accessibility.
- **Better Standards for Accessible Voting Equipment:** Current HAVA standards require only one accessible machine per polling place, which is insufficient for large vote centers. Commissioners recommend new formulas (e.g., 1 accessible device per 750–1000 voters) to reduce wait times and improve independence for voters who benefit from such machines.
- **Innovation in Remote and Technology-Enabled Voting:** Both Commissioners discussed the value of, and security concerns about, accessible remote voting. Neither advocated immediate online voting, since the U.S. is not yet close to this technologically or legally, but they want research and experimentation to continue. Promising technologies include smartphone-based ballot marking and QR-code systems, including printing verified ballots at home or bringing a smartphone code to be scanned and printed at a polling place. They noted that technology must be secure, nonpartisan, and carefully tested, but could dramatically expand independence for disabled voters.
- **Ballot Simplification and AI-Assisted Accessibility:** One Commissioner spoke of the ways in which AI could help voters understand complex ballot questions, translate legalistic text into plain language, and potentially provide real-time explanations. However, he also noted concerns about bias across different AI platforms.
- **Reducing anxiety and intimidation:** One Commissioner noted that voter anxiety can be increased by seeing uniformed officers at the polling place, and said states should avoid placing uniformed National Guard near polling places, using trained but de-uniformed personnel if needed (as was done in 2020 when many elderly poll workers stayed home due to the pandemic and were replaced by non-uniformed National Guard).
- **Building Trust Through Transparency:** Strategies that could build trust include virtual or in-person tours of vote centers, ads or PSAs using low-cost platforms (e.g., Hulu, Spotify, online ads), videos demonstrating the voting process, and clear communication tailored to community needs.
- **Listening to the voting needs and concerns** of people with disabilities from underserved and marginalized communities.
- **Increased Funding and Grants:** Both Commissioners were emphatic that meaningful accessibility improvements require funding. Federal grants—modeled on earlier HHS/HAVA accessibility grants—are needed for equipment, staff, training,

communication, and research. There should be increased funding both for grants to states and localities, and for research funding to explore new technologies, processes, and communications tools.

Chapter 4

Proposed Activities of a New Center on Disability and Voting

A new Center on Disability and Voting could play a transformative role in addressing the widespread voting barriers documented across surveys, focus groups, and interviews. In the research conducted during this planning grant, we included explicit questions about what stakeholders would value from a Center on Disability and Voting. We propose a range of outreach, research, evaluation, and dissemination activities in conjunction with stakeholders. The views of people with disabilities in our purposive survey about the most important topics a new center should pursue are summarized in Survey Table 4 in Appendix B.

We incorporate themes – and specific input – about how a new center could set priorities to develop a “roadmap” for reducing the disability turnout gap by 5% over 10–20 years, as suggested by an EAC Commissioner. Key Center activities would include:

- Conducting ground-up, lived-experience research that documents real challenges and solutions that policy discussions alone can miss. The disability slogan, “Nothing about us, without us,” guides our commitment to inclusion in all of the Center activities.
- Providing practical, ready-to-use tools for election officials, including design templates, plain language guides, virtual training tools.
- Supporting election officials in justifying resources for accessible voting to county commissions, states or legislators. And, use the tools to provide guidance how to ask for funding for accessibility improvements.
- Seeding innovation through pilot studies with diverse jurisdictions (urban, rural, centralized, decentralized). The Center could work with large jurisdictions that have staff and capacity to pilot advanced accessibility strategies, and then evaluate results and create replicable models that other jurisdictions can adopt it.
- Facilitating dialogue to meet a desire for more communication between election officials and people with disabilities. This desire was clearly expressed, but no structure exists to facilitate it. The Center could help convene listening sessions, working groups, and community consultations. One Commissioner emphasized that real progress often happens informally—“solving problems sitting in a bar”—and the Center could replicate this dynamic through informal and formal meetings.
- Use research and pilot projects to help define: standard accessibility expectations, model polling-place layouts, accessible parking places, equipment ratios, and communication

templates. Developing empirically-based standards could help set norms or expectations that maintain state flexibility while improving equity and consistency nationwide.

- Helping explore long-term solutions—such as secure remote voting or advanced assistive technologies—that are beyond the capacity of state and local offices or the EAC alone.

The challenge will be to find the “sweet spot” between voter needs, what election officials can do quickly, and working within the complex policy map in the United States to find ways to have long-term lasting impact. That is to find the solutions that are not just “easy to do” but which have the promise of helping more people with disabilities to take part in elections with ease and confidence. As one election official put it, we too often design elections for the majority, but instead, we should make those who have the hardest time voting a priority.

We have grouped these ideas to roughly match both the priorities we heard in our research and what has a good chance of at early success. They are:

- Outreach activities to foster collaboration
- Research to fill information gaps
- Dissemination to ensure that outcomes are widely shared

Outreach Activities to Foster Collaboration

Disability rights groups, election officials, and voters with disabilities all have different perspectives on voting challenges and possible solutions, but there are also large areas of overlap. There are, however, few structural opportunities for them to work together and to develop respectful, collaborative relationships. At the same time, there are isolated pockets of local innovation around the country that can be evaluated and promoted as best practices.

Foster information sharing among election offices. Pilot a series of convenings (IRL or remote) with the goal of promoting sharing. Election offices are eager to hear about innovations. They would welcome a way to share what they are doing and to learn from their colleagues how to make new ideas work, so they don’t all have to “re-invent the wheel.” We could start with convenings that allow election officials to share their programs, both for general discussion, but also with a space for a deep dive into the nitty-gritty of implementation. These convenings might lead to:

- A more permanent channel for discussions—online or at national conferences—or made part of state elections conferences.
- Best-practices guides similar to those published by CCD, The Elections Group, and the US Alliance for Election Excellence, that support offices in trying these ideas.
- Pilots, in which 2-3 offices try out an idea that has worked well in another.

Help election offices and advocates collaborate. Explore what a formal or informal disability advisory group might do for election offices. Some states already require disability or voting access advisory groups. California, for example has both state and county groups and a manual for how to run them. However, these can sometimes be little more than quarterly meetings rather than an opportunity for true collaboration.

Some ideas for effective first steps and ways to create safe places for dialogue:

- Start with an information-sharing convening that focuses on information exchange with speakers or discussions.
- Ask the group to set priorities each year, engaging them in directing and participating in implementation.
- Arrange for in-person or virtual visits or tours. For example, election offices could facilitate tours of their facilities, and both groups could attend each other's conferences to learn.

Help election offices promote disability services more effectively through community groups. There are organizations in any community that could be partners in promoting disability services. However, even successful collaborations have not been published in ways that help officials replicate the program. Some ideas for groups that could be approached for collaboration to include outreach for and about accessible voting include:

- There are many opportunities on college campuses:
 - Offices for students with disabilities should be including voting information in their services.
 - General student voting groups, like Students Learn, Students Vote could be approached about including outreach to students with disabilities.
 - The informal networks of ESRA and STEM4Elections can be encouraged to include disability considerations in their research and teaching.
- Libraries have long played a role in disseminating voting and voter registration information. They are an excellent target for “train the trainer” materials so their staff can support people with disabilities more effectively.

Research to Fill Information Gaps

There are several different kinds of research activities that can address the recommendations we collected during this planning grant.

Research to measure voting turnout and experiences of voters with disabilities

Throughout the interviews with election officials and disability rights groups, we heard about the need for better data to understand what might improve turnout and the voting experience for voters with disabilities.

Proposed research activities include collecting and analyzing new data through surveys, pilot projects, focus groups, and experiments. Research activities can be structured around the following questions by analyzing existing datasets or conducting new research:

- What are the levels and trends in voter turnout among people with disabilities?
- What are the levels and trends in voting difficulties and accessibility?
- What messages and other strategies help improve turnout, trust, and the voting experience?

Collaborative research or pilots to explore recommendations for accessible voting

This research would be conducted in election jurisdictions to test out new ideas and create new outreach materials, training or other procedures. They would start with the list of ideas discussed in Chapter 3, including:

- What is the most effective way to train poll workers to interact with voters with disabilities?
- What are best practices in implementing curbside voting, ballot tracking, home-visit programs, advisory committees, or other innovations?
- What is the best way to format and communicate information about accessible voting options?
- What changes to polling places can make them more inviting to people with neurodiversity or other hidden disabilities?
- Could “voting appointments” help ensure that voters receive the assistance they need?
- What is the best way to set up a program to bring voting to congregate living facilities, county jails, and centers for independent living?

The research formats for these ideas could include:

- Gathering best practices from election officials already working on these issues.
- Conducting new, targeted quantitative and qualitative research to answer these questions.
- Experiments to test ideas, including new technology, messaging, or other activities.
- Pilot projects that explore ideas or test a program that has been used in another location.
- Are there opportunities for progress on the technological challenges of providing both security and accessibility in online voting/electronic return?

Some of these can be more modest projects; others can be steps in a larger question. For example, some may test concepts before running a pilot. Others might be focused on data collection, gathering election data and qualitative details from election offices as a baseline to understand, for example, an aspect of the current state of accessible voting, or the challenges faced by underserved communities or rural versus urban areas.

Mapping Policies that Improve Access and Turnout

Although our aim is not primarily advocacy for specific policies, there is a need for research to understand what policies are the most effective – alone or in combination with other election policies – in encouraging trust and turnout among voters with disabilities. This research question can be broadly stated as:

- What election practices, policies, and technologies are available to people with disabilities, and how do these affect turnout and the voting experience?
- How many voters know about and use the available accessible options and what disabilities do they serve best?
- Are there ideas for how to get more funding?

This data gathering could be used to create a map of policies and evidence of their impact. Having this data would instigate more productive and realistic conversations about how to implement election policies and procedures to increase participation and trust in elections by people with disabilities.

This would require a multi-year project starting with baseline research to understand the current state, exploring high priority recommendations, and then evaluating the outcomes.

For example, an issue that all of the stakeholders recognize is the importance of good training for poll workers in creating a welcoming, trustworthy in-person voting experience or other interaction with elections.

The initial research could combine a survey of poll workers with data on complaints and compliance. Ideally, several different counties would participate, so there is comparative data. This project might also make use of work at the US Alliance for Election Excellence where improved poll worker training and management is one part of the standards.

In addition to identifying and piloting best practices, training could be developed in collaboration with local disability groups, bringing their perspectives into the curriculum and perhaps including trainers with disabilities or videos from people with disabilities to humanize the issue. Outcomes might include:

- A better experience for voters through a more informed election workforce

- Fewer complaints for election officials to handle
- Increased turnout as word of changes in the atmosphere in polling places gets out

Dissemination to Ensure that Outcomes are Widely Shared

Too often, projects that are successful in one election office are not shared with the rest of the world, limiting their overall effectiveness. This is especially true of the many small election administration programs that we believe could have a cumulative effect if adopted more widely. We would spread the lessons learned from research in a variety of dissemination activities:

- Being a resource center for people with disabilities, disability organizations, election officials, and policy-makers, with articles and reports in plain language for election officials, disability groups, and the general public, and links to other voting centers
- Website including links to public and private resources, with plain-language research summaries
- Webinars and presentations to stakeholder groups including disability organizations, election officials, and policy-makers
- Making presentations at elections conferences and publishing in peer-reviewed journal publications
- Convening groups to bring together election officials, disability support organizations, and voters with disabilities. These groups will explore and create solutions to local problems by incorporating the perspectives of multiple stakeholders.
- Assisting in training organizations to do their own research in the spirit of action research in education

Conclusion

By institutionalizing research, communication, collaboration, practical innovation, and dissemination, the proposed Center on Disability and Voting could help ensure that accessibility advances are not episodic but continuous and cumulative. Ultimately, it could help move the nation closer to a democracy in which every voter—regardless of disability—can participate fully, independently, and confidently.

Appendixes

A – Methodology

B – Survey Data

C – Data from Election Officials

Appendix A

Methodology

Focus Groups with Voters

Three focus groups were conducted in August and September 2025 with 14 voters with disabilities to gather in-depth qualitative data on their voting experiences, which included people with invisible disabilities (cognitive disabilities, emotional disabilities, and low literacy) as well as those with visible disabilities (e.g., mobility and vision impairments). The focus groups were recruited through networks provided by disability organizations. The focus group research was approved by the Rutgers IRB under Protocol Pro2025001225.

Purposive survey of people with disabilities

A purposive survey of 254 eligible voters with disabilities was conducted in August 2025 on the online Prolific platform, which was restricted only to those who answered yes to the Prolific screener question identifying a person with a disability, and who had voted at least once in the past 20 years. This survey gathered both quantitative and qualitative data on voting experiences, preferred solutions, and goals for a potential new center. The survey was approved by the Rutgers IRB under Protocol Pro2025001225.

Surveys on Voting Difficulties and Potential Solutions

Nationally representative surveys of citizens with and without disabilities, sponsored by the U.S. Election Assistance Commission, were completed following elections in 2012, 2020, 2022, and 2024 with samples of 3022 in 2012, 2569 in 2000, 2001 in 2022, and 2000 in 2024. People with disabilities were oversampled in these surveys to ensure a large sample size for reliable analysis of their views and experiences.

A YouGov survey was conducted in April and May of 2025 with 29,431 total respondents. In addition to questions on voting difficulties, this survey also has questions on preferred solutions and improvements to the voting system.

Voter Turnout Surveys

The Current Population Survey Voting and Registration Supplement is conducted by the Census Bureau every November in even-numbered years, asking respondents about registration and turnout in the just-completed general election. The sample sizes of eligible voters (number with disabilities in parentheses) were 92,360 (12,027) in 2008, 94,208 (12,064) in 2010, 94,311 (12,456) in 2012, 96,267 (13,220) in 2014, 93,794 (12,791) in 2016, 88,749 (12,085) in 2018, 81,898 (11,000) in 2000, and 73,083 (10,712) in 2022. See [Voting and Registration \(census.gov\)](#) for further information on these surveys.

The 1998 and 2000 surveys were conducted by the Rutgers Center for Public Interest Polling. People with disabilities were oversampled to decrease the margins of error for disability estimates. The 1998 sample contained 1242 respondents, of whom 700 had disabilities, and the 2000 sample contained 1002 respondents, of whom 432 had disabilities. Results were published in Schur, L., Shields, T., Kruse, D., & Schriener, K. ("Enabling democracy: Disability and voter turnout," *Political Research Quarterly*, 55(1), 2002, 167-190) and Schur, L., Shields, T., & Schriener, K. ("Generational cohorts, group membership, and political participation by people with disabilities," *Political Research Quarterly*, 2005, 487-496).

Both of the above surveys use questions that allow the identification of four major types of impairment (vision, hearing, cognitive, and mobility) as well as activity limitations inside and outside the home. The results are adjusted to make calculations of turnout comparable across the surveys.

The U.S. Census Bureau calculates voter turnout under the assumption that people who did not respond to the supplement did not vote. An alternative method is to only consider the responses of people who answered the voting question, and adjust the totals to correspond to election records on the number who actually voted, and who were eligible to vote, in each state (Hur, A., & Achen, C. H. "Coding voter turnout responses in the Current Population Survey," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 77(4), 2013, 985-993). Since the 1998 and 2000 surveys used methods that led to different counts of non-respondents relative to the Census methods, here we use the alternative method based only on respondent data matched to election records in order to make the results as comparable as possible across years. This method results in larger disability gaps than reported in previous estimates on disability and voter turnout that use the Census method (e.g., [Fact Sheet on Disability and Voter Turnout in 2020 \(eac.gov\)](#)

Disability Leaders

We interviewed 10 people in leadership positions in disability support and advocacy organizations, including a combination of national, regional, and local organizations.

Organizations included advocacy non-profits focused on policy and centers for independent living. Participants' areas of expertise included community organizing, policy and legal advocacy, plain language, accessible voting technology, and independent living.

We conducted structured, open-ended interviews lasting an hour. We asked questions about current areas of focus and concern around accessible voting, successful strategies for improving voting access, the effects of policies on voting access, and future priorities for accessible voting. The interviews were approved by the Rutgers IRB under Protocol Pro2025001225.

Election Officials

We interviewed 10 election officials from around the country who either lead their office or are in charge of voter outreach, with an emphasis on their work in providing accessible elections. The purpose of these interviews was to learn about the priorities and needs of election offices, including what is currently feasible and what would require new resources or policy changes. As we said in the introduction to the sessions, we aimed for an open and in-depth conversation:

“This is not a survey of accessible voting practices, but a chance to take some time to hear from you - working election administrators - about what works, what you are trying out, what you wish you could do, and if there's anything you hear from voters with disabilities that you simply can't do.”

We facilitated the conversation through a list of open-ended prompts and follow-up questions to gather more specific information on each topic. These questions addressed the state of voting accessibility in the most recent election, any issues they faced, the factors that made it difficult for them to ensure voting was accessible, and how they addressed those issues.

We offered participants a \$50 payment, but several chose not to accept it, either because they were not allowed to accept cash gifts or because it would require more paperwork than the payment's value.

We recruited the 10 participants through social media and election mailing lists, including direct outreach to offices in the U.S. Alliance for Election Excellence (USAEE), members of the Partnership for Large Election Jurisdictions (PLEJ), and some direct emails to contacts.

The officials included both heads of the office – either a county clerk or election director – and staff in charge of outreach. They were a purposeful sample, representing a range of jurisdiction size and location. Our primary goal, however, was to speak with officials who believed they had robust programs for accessibility and outreach to voters with disabilities. There may be greater problems in other jurisdictions.

We were also looking for a good mix of different locations and sizes of offices, which also produced a broad range of voting methods - or rules for mail voting, early voting and election day.

The interviews were approved by the Rutgers IRB under Protocol Pro2025001225.

U.S. Election Assistance Commission

We interviewed two Commissioners in November 2025. Each interview lasted one hour and included questions about their perspectives on the progress made in ensuring accessibility of elections, remaining barriers faced by people with disabilities, what solutions hold the greatest promise for reducing these barriers, what types of activities that should be pursued by a Disability and Voting Center, and anything else they felt was important on the topic of disability and voting. The interviews were approved by the Rutgers IRB under Protocol Pro2025001225.

Appendix B

Survey Tables

Survey Table 1. Disability in the Voting Process

	Disability status				
	No disability	Disability using 6 Census questions	Disability Gap (2) - (1)	Disability using broader Yougov measure	Disability Gap (4) - (1)
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Census data:					
Voter turnout 2024	66.3%	56.7%	-9.6% *	--	--
Yougov data 2024:					
Have condition or impairment that limits voting	1.8%	24.5%	22.7% *	14.6%	12.8% *
Disability makes it much or somewhat more difficult to obtain needed ID to vote	--	20.4%	--	13.4%	--
If did not vote in 2024					
Disability prevented voting	--	19.4%	--	12.6%	--
Unable to vote because no assistance	4.6%	15.6%	11.0% *	11.5%	7.0% *
If voted in person in 2024					
Required assistance voting in person	3.6%	14.5%	10.9% *	9.3%	5.7% *
Received assistance voting in person	14.3%	25.7%	11.4% *	20.7%	6.4% *
If voted by mail in 2024					
Disability contributed to decision to vote by mail	--	46.2%	--	31.0%	--
Required assistance voting by mail	0.6%	7.8%	7.2% *	4.6%	3.9% *
Received assistance voting by mail	1.3%	10.8%	9.5% *	7.0%	5.8% *
How well voting process accommodated disability in 2024					
Very well	--	39.4%	--	42.2%	--
Somewhat well	--	23.0%	--	19.7%	--
Not very well	--	8.9%	--	6.7%	--
No accommodation is provided	--	18.7%	--	20.5%	--
Overall ease of voting in 2024					
Very easy	78.7%	63.1%	-15.6% *	69.2%	-9.5% *
Somewhat easy	19.7%	30.8%	11.1% *	26.6%	6.9% *
Somewhat hard	1.4%	5.3%	3.8% *	3.7%	2.3% *
Very hard	0.2%	0.8%	0.6% *	0.5%	0.3% *
Sample size					
Census data: Voter turnout 2024	52,832	9,562			
Yougov data:					
All	11,142	9,360		18,289	
If did not vote in 2024	2,653	2,623		4,720	
If voted in person in 2024	5,671	4,034		8,311	
If voted by mail in 2024	2,637	2,515		4,949	

* Difference from "No disability" is significant at 95% level.

Survey Table 1 (continued)				
	Type of disability			
	Hearing (6)	Vision (7)	Cognitive (8)	Mobility (9)
Census data:				
Voter turnout 2024	66.1%	55.3% *	45.1% *	57.2% *
Yougov data 2024:				
Have condition or impairment that limits voting	21.8% *	29.4% *	26.1% *	36.2% *
Disability makes it much or somewhat more difficult to obtain needed ID to vote	20.7%	29.7%	24.9%	23.7%
If did not vote in 2024				
Disability prevented voting	26.0%	23.2%	19.9%	29.7%
Unable to vote because no assistance	17.4% *	20.1% *	16.2% *	22.0% *
If voted in person in 2024				
Required assistance voting in person	16.9% *	27.7% *	15.8% *	18.5% *
Received assistance voting in person	27.1% *	40.5% *	26.8% *	29.8% *
If voted by mail in 2024				
Disability contributed to decision to vote by mail	36.2%	46.3%	44.2%	60.4%
Required assistance voting by mail	5.7% *	13.4% *	9.6% *	10.0% *
Received assistance voting by mail	7.5% *	16.1% *	12.8% *	12.7% *
How well voting process accommodated disability in 2024				
Very well	47.7%	36.6%	31.1%	46.3%
Somewhat well	20.0%	22.6%	24.8%	24.1%
Not very well	7.3%	11.2%	11.1%	8.5%
No accommodation is provided	18.0%	18.7%	21.6%	14.3%
Overall ease of voting in 2024				
Very easy	69.2% *	59.5% *	54.9% *	64.1% *
Somewhat easy	24.2% *	31.3% *	36.7% *	30.0% *
Somewhat hard	5.9% *	7.3% *	7.2% *	5.1% *
Very hard	0.7% *	2.0% *	1.2% *	0.7% *
Sample size				
Census data: Voter turnout 2024	3,045	1,320	3,096	5,215
Yougov data:				
All	2,018	1,284	4,177	4,158
If did not vote in 2024	401	480	1,560	920
If voted in person in 2024	1,077	532	1,756	1,858
If voted by mail in 2024	555	278	896	1,432

* Difference from "No disability" is significant at 95% level.

Survey Table 2. Specific Difficulties in Voting

Based on Yougov data				
	No disability (3)	Disability using 6 Census questions (4)	Disability using broader Yougov measure (5)	
Difficulties if voted in person in 2024				
Any difficulty voting in person	26.9%	45.5% *	36.6% *	
1 Difficulty registering to vote	1.9%	4.9% *	3.2% *	
2 Wrong polling place	2.6%	4.9% *	3.7% *	
3 Getting to the polling place	3.3%	8.8% *	5.9% *	
4 Getting inside the polling place	3.2%	8.4% *	5.7% *	
5 Waiting in line	18.4%	29.3% *	23.8% *	
6 Reading or seeing the ballot	2.7%	6.6% *	4.8% *	
7 Using the voting equipment or ballot	3.2%	7.2% *	5.3% *	
8 Communicating with poll workers	3.2%	9.0% *	5.9% *	
9 Other	2.2%	2.9% *	2.8% *	
Difficulties if voted by mail in 2024				
Any difficulty voting by mail	7.0%	15.7% *	11.8% *	
1 Difficulty registering to vote	0.4%	1.9% *	1.2% *	
2 Difficulty applying for or receiving a mail ballot	1.4%	4.5% *	3.3% *	
3 Difficulty reading or seeing the ballot	0.5%	2.6% *	1.7% *	
4 Difficulty completing or filling out the ballot	1.1%	3.7% *	2.5% *	
5 Difficulty returning the ballot	1.1%	5.3% *	3.7% *	
6 Other	4.1%	3.9%	3.2%	
Sample size				
Voted in person	5,694	4,083	8,393	
Voted by mail	2,645	2,540	4,982	

* Difference from "No disability" is significant at 95% level.

Survey Table 2 (continued)

All figures come from Yougov data

	Type of Disability			
	Hearing (1)	Vision (2)	e (3)	Mobility (4)
Difficulties if voted in person in 2024				
Any difficulty voting in person	44.7% *	57.2% *	51.1% *	45.4% *
1 Difficulty registering to vote	6.5% *	7.4% *	6.4% *	3.6%
2 Wrong polling place	6.2% *	8.4% *	6.6% *	3.6% *
3 Getting to the polling place	10.1% *	15.3% *	10.5% *	9.0% *
4 Getting inside the polling place	9.9% *	9.9% *	8.8% *	9.8% *
5 Waiting in line	27.5% *	30.3% *	32.3% *	31.2% *
6 Reading or seeing the ballot	8.1% *	18.6% *	8.4% *	6.8% *
7 Using the voting equipment or ballot	8.1% *	13.1% *	9.3% *	6.3% *
8 Communicating with poll workers	11.9% *	12.3% *	11.4% *	6.6% *
9 Other	2.1%	1.5%	3.1%	2.6%
Difficulties if voted by mail in 2024				
Any difficulty voting by mail	11.4% *	24.7% *	21.4% *	13.8% *
1 Difficulty registering to vote	2.0% *	2.5%	3.2% *	1.4% *
2 Difficulty applying for or receiving a mail ballot	3.1%	6.2% *	7.4% *	3.7% *
3 Difficulty reading or seeing the ballot	2.6% *	11.7% *	3.0% *	2.8% *
Reading, filling, or returning ballot	4.6%	12.3% *	11.7% *	6.9% *
4 Difficulty completing or filling out the ballot	2.6%	7.9% *	6.7% *	2.9% *
5 Difficulty returning the ballot	2.8%	6.9% *	7.2% *	5.3% *
6 Other	3.4%	4.1%	4.0%	3.6%
Sample size				
Voted in person	1,086	541	1,786	1,878
Voted by mail	558	282	906	1,445

* Difference from "No disability" is significant at 95% level.

Survey Table 3 – Desired Improvements in the Election System

All figures based on Yougov survey				
	No disability	Disability using 6 Census questions	Disability using broader Yougov measure	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	
Desired improvements in voter registration or access to election info				
1 Same-day and polling place registration	30.2%	33.6% *	33.4% *	
2 More time to register to vote	22.5%	25.8% *	24.5% *	
3 More opportunities to register automatically with state agencies like the DMV	30.2%	36.5% *	35.8% *	
4 More communication from election officials about deadlines to register and vote	25.7%	30.7% *	30.0% *	
5 None of the above	40.8%	34.3% *	35.7% *	
Desired improvements in getting to the polls				
1 Making the polling place closer to my home	20.9%	24.0% *	22.2% *	
2 Getting an accessible ride to the polls	17.4%	29.3% *	24.5% *	
3 Providing or extending the early voting period	29.4%	33.5% *	32.9% *	
4 Making Election Day a holiday or fall on a weekend	39.2%	37.9%	40.2%	
5 None of the above	36.3%	29.9% *	31.5% *	
Desired improvements in voting at the polls				
1 Allowing me to get help from anyone I like at the polling place	11.4%	19.2% *	16.6% *	
2 Allowing curbside or drive-thru voting	19.5%	30.4% *	27.2% *	
3 Not having to wait more than a few minutes at the polls	30.7%	39.6% *	38.0% *	
4 Making it easier to read and understand the ballot	22.1%	27.7% *	25.8% *	
5 Making voting machines easier to use	20.8%	23.2% *	21.6%	
6 Increasing the number of accessible voting machines	25.6%	30.0% *	28.0% *	
7 Making sure poll workers are trained to work with people like me	16.7%	27.3% *	23.4% *	
8 None of the above	36.7%	24.2% *	28.0% *	
Desired improvements in voting by mail				
1 Making it easier to ask for a mail-in ballot	23.8%	30.5% *	29.1% *	
2 Making it possible to ask for a mail-in ballot without an excuse	23.1%	30.9% *	30.3% *	
3 Having a mail ballot automatically sent to me	28.7%	39.3% *	37.5% *	
4 Allowing me to get help from anyone I like	10.1%	16.4% *	14.1% *	
5 Receiving a ballot that I can mark electronically, print, then mail or d	20.3%	25.0% *	24.2% *	
6 Voting entirely from my smartphone or computer	29.1%	37.8% *	35.3% *	
7 None of the above	38.8%	26.3% *	29.2% *	
Sample size	11,142	9,360	18,289	
* Difference from "No disability" is significant at 95% level.				

Survey Table 3 (continued)

All figures based on Yougov survey

	Type of Disability			
	Hearing (4)	Vision (5)	Deaf (6)	Mobility (7)
info				
1 Same-day and polling place registration	31.0%	35.8% *	40.7% *	28.9%
2 More time to register to vote	23.1%	28.3% *	31.2% *	21.1%
3 More opportunities to register automatically with state agencies like the DMV	34.2% *	36.5% *	41.7% *	33.7% *
4 More communication from election officials about deadlines to register and vote	28.9% *	32.9% *	36.1% *	26.7%
5 None of the above	37.5% *	28.6% *	26.6% *	39.4%
Desired improvements in getting to the polls				
1 Making the polling place closer to my home	23.3%	27.1% *	27.7% *	21.6%
2 Getting an accessible ride to the polls	25.9% *	37.7% *	33.2% *	31.3% *
3 Providing or extending the early voting period	31.5%	32.8% *	38.0% *	30.5%
4 Making Election Day a holiday or fall on a weekend	36.4% *	35.5% *	44.0% *	32.8% *
5 None of the above	34.0%	25.7% *	23.1% *	33.7% *
Desired improvements in voting at the polls				
1 Allowing me to get help from anyone I like at the polling place	18.1% *	22.6% *	21.6% *	19.8% *
2 Allowing curbside or drive-thru voting	25.6% *	29.8% *	32.0% *	34.0% *
3 Not having to wait more than a few minutes at the polls	36.4% *	34.6% *	40.0% *	45.2% *
4 Making it easier to read and understand the ballot	29.2% *	31.4% *	31.6% *	25.5% *
5 Making voting machines easier to use	23.1%	27.7% *	26.9% *	21.7%
6 Increasing the number of accessible voting machines	29.5% *	32.8% *	32.7% *	28.9% *
7 Making sure poll workers are trained to work with people like me	27.3% *	28.4% *	29.7% *	28.6% *
8 None of the above	27.3% *	19.7% *	20.8% *	22.5% *
Desired improvements in voting by mail				
1 Making it easier to ask for a mail-in ballot	26.1% *	32.7% *	34.5% *	28.6% *
2 Making it possible to ask for a mail-in ballot without an excuse	26.8% *	27.9% *	34.2% *	29.7% *
3 Having a mail ballot automatically sent to me	36.5% *	38.5% *	41.2% *	42.2% *
4 Allowing me to get help from anyone I like	16.5% *	20.0% *	19.7% *	14.8% *
5 Receiving a ballot that I can mark electronically, print, then mail	24.1% *	26.3% *	28.3% *	22.9% *
6 Voting entirely from my smartphone or computer	32.3% *	40.1% *	42.9% *	35.3% *
7 None of the above	32.7% *	23.3% *	20.7% *	27.8% *
Sample size	2,057	1,328	4,328	4,275
* Difference from "No disability" is significant at 95% level.				

Survey Table 4. What a New Center Should Do

Based on purposive survey

"If there were a new center focused on ways to make it easier for people with disabilities to vote, what topics would you want this center to research or explore? (Choose up to five)" - responses ranked highest to lowest	
Making in-person voting more accessible	60.2%
Educating election officials about disability and inclusion	44.9%
Digital accessibility of voter registration tools	43.3%
Making vote-by-mail more accessible	11.8%
Ways to create accessible voting information and guides	9.8%
Making the voting process less overwhelming	8.7%
Learning more about what people with different kinds of disabilities need to succeed in voting	7.9%
Learning more about experiences of caregivers or support people in the voting process	6.7%
Learning more about people with disabilities from different backgrounds (e.g., by race, gender, income)	5.9%
Barriers specific to rural areas or public transit deserts	5.1%
Building tools for mental health and anxiety-free voting (e.g., sensory-friendly)	3.1%
Sample size	254

Appendix C

Data from Election Officials

Titles of the participants

Role	Titles
State Elections Staff	Director of Election Reform, Maryland Director of Mail-in Voting, Maryland
County Clerk	St. Charles County, Missouri Shelby County, Missouri
Election Director (stand-alone office)	Election Director, Multnomah County Registrar and Election Administrator, Rhode Island (2)
Community Outreach	Community Outreach Supervisor, King County, Washington Outreach, Southern California County HAVA Coordinator, Multnomah County Community Outreach, Charleston, SC Community Outreach, Madison, WI

Election policies in the state

Jurisdiction	Mail Voting	Early Voting	Election Day Voting	Same Day Registration
Maryland	No Excuse	Vote Centers	Polling Places	Yes
SoCal County, CA	All Mail	Vote Centers	Vote Centers	Yes
King County, WA	All Mail	Mail only	Mail only	Yes

Jurisdiction	Mail Voting	Early Voting	Election Day Voting	Same Day Registration
Multnomah, OR	All Mail	Mail only	Mail only	No
Shelby County, TN	Medical excuse	In-Person Absentee	Polling Places	No
St. Charles, MO	Strict excuse	In-Person Absentee	Polling Places	No
Charleston, SC	No Excuse	In-Person Absentee	Polling Places	Yes
Madison, WI	Strict excuse	Vote Centers	Polling Places	No
Cranston, RI	No Excuse	In-Person Absentee	Polling Places	No
Newport, RI	No Excuse	In-Person Absentee	Polling Places	No

Geography and size of jurisdiction

Voters in Jurisdiction	Jurisdiction	Geography	Permanent Elections Administration Staff
4,300,000 (state)	Maryland	Eastern state	NA
1,900,000	SoCal County, CA	Urban area	60 (elections only)
1,400,000	King County, WA	Urban (Seattle)	75 (clerk's office)
564,589	Multnomah, OR	Urban (Portland)	15 (clerk's office)
600,000	Shelby County, TN	Urban (Memphis)	17 (clerk's office)
300,000	St. Charles, MO	Suburban (St. Louis)	13 (clerk's office)

Voters in Jurisdiction	Jurisdiction	Geography	Permanent Elections Administration Staff
270,000	Charleston, SC	Small city	20 (clerk's office)
200,000	Madison, WI	Small city (Dane County)	11 (clerk's office)
47,000	Cranston, RI	Suburb (Providence)	4 (elections only)
15,000	Newport, RI	Small City	2 (elections only)

Relationships with Disability Rights Groups

This is not an exhaustive list, but names of organizations mentioned in the interview.

Jurisdiction	Groups they work with on election administration
Maryland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disability Rights MD • NFB (headquarters in the state) • University of Baltimore (lab does research)
SoCal, CA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They have a Voting Accessibility Advisory Committee with members are from the major disability rights groups in the area, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Disability Rights CA ○ Braille Institute
King County, WA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hearing and Deaf Center • NFB • ACB • Disability Rights WA
Multnomah, OR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disability Rights OR • Local community college student disability office • OR Community Visions • Centers for Independent Living

Jurisdiction	Groups they work with on election administration
Shelby County, TN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disability Rights TN (does polling place surveys) • A low vision group
St. Charles, MO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The disability groups don't talk to him as all, although he has reached out.
Charleston, SC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New VAAC that includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Disability Rights SC ○ JustBee (autism and neurodiversity) ○ AccessAbility (blind/low vision)
Madison, WI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disability Rights WI • WI ACB • University of Wisconsin Disability Cultural Center
Cranston, RI Newport, RI (interviewed separately)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disability Rights RI • State Government Commission on Disabilities (reviews websites, inspects polling places)

Appendix D

About the Disability Leaders

About the organizations

Organization	Scope of the Organization	Participant Role	Activities Supporting Voting
1	National	Various, technology accessibility	Consulting with election offices on accessible voting equipment; testing equipment
2	Regional	Executive leadership	Voter education; visits to congregate settings for voter education; connecting state P&As to congregate settings; GOTV; legislative advocacy
3	National	Director of voting programs	Voter registration; candidate engagement; funding for local groups; convening groups across jurisdictions; connecting advocates with legislators
4	State chapter of national org	Producing voter material	Creating plain language voter guides; voter information in multiple languages
5	National	Various accessibility consulting roles	Creating plain language materials; voter education on laws and procedures
6	National	Policy advocacy	Creating plain language materials; legal advocacy

Organization	Scope of the Organization	Participant Role	Activities Supporting Voting
7	Local independent living center	Executive leadership	Polling place accessibility audits; voter registration; voter education
8	Local independent living center	Organizing and advocacy	Voter education; promoting voting; polling place accessibility audits; practice sessions with voting machines
9	National	Various; accessible voting specialist	Policy advocacy; voter education; connecting advocacy groups
10	Local with a few national projects	Executive leadership	GOTV canvassing and phone banking; organizing around city council budget; polling place and drop box accessibility audits; recommendations to pressure clerks and other election officials