

Request for Information

National Institute of Standards and Technology

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1. Concerns regarding accessing the right to vote privately and independently for people with disabilities: Washington State is a vote by mail state. Since ballots are paper, people who are blind or partially sighted must receive help from others to complete their ballot. They must have someone read the ballot and fill in their selections. Not only could this lead to helper entering a choice on the ballot that is not what the voter would choose, but it also creates a situation where the person's vote is not private. People have described conflict with caregivers when they choose a vote that is different than the one that the caregiver would have chosen and having that be known because they are reliant on the assistance of the caregiver to help with the voting process. This same issue occurs for those who have mobility issues that impact their ability to write, people who have intellectual and developmental disabilities. These same issues are compounded for the deafblind community. There are polling stations available, however voters would need to be able to travel to those locations which is not possible for people who do not have access to transportation, do not have funds for transportation or live in rural communities. Communication access is a challenge for voters who are deaf or hard of hearing and need to access the polling place. Interpreting services are not available.
2. Describe effective strategies, techniques, and technologies for addressing the barriers faced by voters with disabilities throughout the voting process. Voters with disabilities would appreciate the ability to vote electronically. A secure, accessible web portal easily accessed by screen readers could be effective for people affected by sensory disabilities. This approach also works for people who lack a regular, fixed address to receive ballots and cannot go to a polling place. Having the ability to vote electronically would allow people with disabilities to vote independently and privately.
3. Describe Effective Strategies: Washington State had a virtual voter's ballot for statewide issues this year which was very helpful for statewide races. This practice could be enhanced by including descriptive video captioning. Virtual ballots for county, city and regional issues are needed. Additionally, having election items described in plain language is helpful for those who have language access needs or who have developmental/intellectual disabilities. Creating straightforward, simple explanations can benefit many groups and ensure that votes cast reflect the wishes of the voter with disabilities.
4. Describe the accessibility of the polling places: A common concern we hear from constituents is that polling places are accessible themselves but the route of travel to the site is not. The ingress and egress may not have been considered in the selection of the polling place or the ballot drop box. Common issues we have heard are that the bus may stop at the bottom of a steep hill with the polling place at the top creating a safety issue for those who are in wheelchairs, walkers or using other mobility aids. We also often hear that the path from public transit may not have curb cuts or other accessibility necessities for those who are coming to vote. Drop boxes may be placed in such a way that they assume a person is in a vehicle or able to navigate a sidewalk with no curb cuts.
5. Voting by mail is problematic for people who are blind or partially sighted. Paper is not accessible for this group and they must have assistance to complete their ballot. It should also

be noted that vote by mail is not accessible for those who are unstably housed or homeless and want to exercise their right to vote. This population lacks a regular, fixed address to receive ballots and therefore are unable to vote. Getting to a polling place is difficult for this group as well since they lack resources to travel.