

## **Accessibility in Elections is a Continuous Concern Affected by Policies, Politics, Technology and Administration**

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### **Abstract**

Since the passage of the Voting Accessibility of the Elderly and Handicapped Act in 1984 through the passage of ADA and the Help American Vote Act of 2002, accessible elections has been a thrust of legislation, enforcement and administrative practice. Finding ways to improve voting for citizens with accessibility needs has been a major challenge for American democracy.

The use of technology to accomplish the goals of accessible voting has been the promise to people with disabilities. Our ability to know truly what works to allow and enhance accessible voting is why we are studying it for the US Election Assistance Commission. Finding the way to balance the effective technologies with concerns for usability, security, and accuracy, and which permits voters to achieve a secret ballot and to vote independently is the challenge.

The work of the Research Alliance for Accessible Voting (RAAV), through funding by the United States Election Assistance Commission, is to look at all the factors which can affect a voter's success in voting independently and privately. While not all of that is affected by available technology, a major portion of it is. What is the success rate for voters with current technology? How can technology be adapted to permit more successful voting? Does education about a specific technology or a specific voting device have a major impact on success? How does election administration impact voters with accessibility needs? Are techniques successful in providing assistive aids? Which ones? What technology works best for voters with disabilities? What restrictions are placed on the use of technology that may affect voting and voters' rights?

The role of The Election Center in discussions and studies of accessible voting is to listen to the experts on technology and the experts on accessibility issues and to find methodologies that improve the administration of elections for voters with access issues.

Our participation in the NIST/EAC seminar on Accessible Voting Technology Research Workshop and the RAAV study is to work with the ideas and findings of experts to translate that into potential administrative practices that can be applied in local elections throughout the nation. Additionally, our function is equally to foster a level of elections administration expertise that helps technology and accessibility experts know what is realistically achievable in elections with resources that exist.