

# Development of an Online Course to Assist Voters with Different Needs



**Frances Harris, PhD**

**Karen Milchus, MS**

**Caroline J. Bell, MS**

# Project Goal

Develop an online course to assist voters with different needs. We had two goals:

- Provide poll workers with a more in-depth understanding of voters who have special needs.
- Help poll workers to find practical solutions to the types of problems voters may confront on Election Day.



Source: [@depositphotos.com/lisafx](https://www.depositphotos.com/lisafx)

# Need for Online Course

- This project continued work from a previous study, which identified poll workers as a key influence on the voting experiences of people with disabilities.
- Poll worker assistance and attitudes served as both a key facilitator and barrier to a positive experience for voters.

Sanford JA, Harris FH, Yang H, Bell CJ, Endicott S, Salisbury L, Baranak A. (2013) Understanding Voting Experiences of People with Disabilities. The Information Technology and Innovation Foundation, Accessible Voting Technology Initiative Working Paper Series, Working Paper #5.

# Impact of Poll Workers on Voting Experiences

## Facilitators

- Friendliness and courtesy
- Ability to anticipate voters' needs
- Knowledge about voting procedures and technologies

## Barriers

- Lack of poll workers to support voters throughout the voting process
- Inability to recognize needs of persons with disabilities and provide assistance
- Lack of knowledge about voting procedures and technologies

# Methods for Current Study

- Conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews with poll workers, poll worker trainers, and Election Officials.
- Observed poll worker courses, both in-person and online.

# Interview questions examined:

- Poll worker training
- Experiences with voters with disabilities
- Poll worker responsibilities to assist voters with different needs. (accessibility to polling site, registration, etc.)
- Poll worker experiences with voting machines & their accessibility features

# Participants

- Poll workers, poll worker trainers, and Election Officials were recruited through:
  - The CATEA Consumer Network (CCN)
  - Referrals from participants in the Accessible Voting Technology Initiative Design

Over 30 people were interviewed from 11 states including:

Arizona

California

Florida

Georgia

Illinois

Kansas

Massachusetts

New York

Ohio

Oregon

Texas

# We learned that:

- Different states assign poll workers different responsibilities.
- Most courses focus on teaching poll workers etiquette for interacting with voters with different needs.
- It is often difficult to recognize a particular need or disability,( e.g., a “hidden” disability such as hearing loss)
- That voters often had a combination of different needs, (e.g., vision, mobility, & fatigue)

# Interviews identified 3 key issues poll workers confront on Election Day

**1. The need for better interaction with voters with different problems (e.g., unsure of etiquette or fear of doing something wrong)**



*Source: @iStock.com/fstop123*

# Interviews identified 3 key issues poll workers confront on Election Day

**2. Difficulty in understanding voting technologies**  
(e.g., difficulty troubleshooting problems with voting technologies)



Source: Hart InterCivic Inc.

# Interviews identified 3 key issues poll workers confront on Election Day



Source: @iStock.com/YinYang

**3. Lack of access to polling places**  
(e.g., inaccessible parking or inability to find polling place)

# Course Development



www.accessiblevoting.gatech.edu



## Accessible Voting

### Available courses



#### Assisting Voters with Different Needs

The purpose of this course is to help poll workers learn how to assist voters with different kinds of needs.

# We identified 3 broad principles for development of the course

1. Voters must be able to cast their ballots privately and independently.
2. The course needs to address the needs of all voters who have different abilities and needs.
3. The course should provide practical solutions to common problems poll workers confront in the polling place.

# Learning Objectives

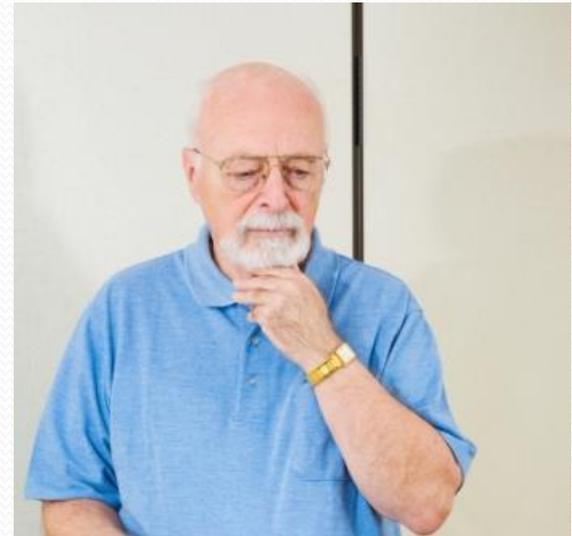
1. Know standard etiquette guidelines for interacting with voters who have different needs.
2. Understand the voting rights of voters with disabilities.
3. Be able to recognize common problems that voters with disabilities face at the polling place and to describe solutions for them.
4. Know how to find and use information for setting up and using the accessibility features for your state's voting system.
5. Understand the tradeoffs between different solutions (where more than one exists) to best preserve a voter's independence and privacy.

# Course Structure

- **Five voter scenarios**
- **Information about accessible voting systems**
- **Resource list (inc. equipment cheat sheets)**
- **Discussion board for sharing ideas**
- **Complete sequentially or skip to a particular topic**
- **Can return to course later to look up information**
- **May pass a quiz for a certificate of completion**
- **Best used in conjunction with other training (e.g., opportunity to try out the equipment)**

# Sample Scenario

George, an older man who you know has arrived to vote. ... He uses a cane and shuffles his feet when he walks. When he reaches the sign-in table, he seems to have trouble reading the forms that he needs to fill out. You would like to help, but are also aware that he takes pride in his independence. What can you do to assist him while preserving his sense of independence?



*Source: @depositphotos.com/lisafx*

# Scenarios Include

- **Tips for interacting with the voter**
- **Common problems / solutions**
- **What would you do question**
- **Discussion questions**

Problem	Possible Solutions	Comments and Considerations
The voter can't stand for long periods.	Provide chairs along the line that voters can use while waiting.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Advantage: Other voters who are waiting, for example, people who tire easily or who are accompanied by children, may also appreciate the chairs.</li><li>•Disadvantage: The chairs might block the path of travel. Place them where this will not be a problem.</li></ul>

# Scenario Voters

1. Senior with low vision who uses a cane
2. Woman who uses a wheelchair and who also has upper extremity limitations
3. Man who is hard of hearing (and perhaps is not a native English speaker)
4. Woman who is blind
5. Veteran with TBI and who has a service dog

# Accessible Voting Systems

- General information (e.g., description of types of features)
- Information about specific systems
  - Setup instructions if available
  - Access features / instructions for audio voting, etc.
  - Troubleshooting tips
  - **We are finishing up this part of the course**



*Source: Election Systems & Software (ES&S)*

# Help Us Improve the Course

- **Access the course at:**
  - **[www.accessiblevoting.gatech.edu](http://www.accessiblevoting.gatech.edu)**
  - **Create a login**
  - **Confirm that you want to enroll in the course**
- **Provide feedback via our evaluation form at the end of the course**

# Thank You for Your Attention

Karen Milchus

[karen.milchus@coa.gatech.edu](mailto:karen.milchus@coa.gatech.edu)

This material is based upon work supported by the U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC) by a grant from the Information Technology and Innovation Foundation (ITIF). Opinions or points of view expressed in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official position of, or a position that is endorsed by, EAC, the federal government, or ITIF.

