

## National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) Survey

Question 1: What barriers have you or voters with disabilities in your community encountered while voting?

While I haven't had any experiences in not being able to vote I have seen a number of potential issues that prevent people from voting. There is a lack of assistive technology tools that can be critical in allowing someone to vote. In addition, I remember one of the local places I vote in my home town the space was a bit tight. This can make it harder for someone with limited mobility or someone in a wheel chair to move around. Another issue is the lack of outreach to voters who have a disability. The lack of drive through voting is another serious issue as this can prevent from people voting who rely on a wheelchair or scooter. Poll workers need to receive better training as their knowledge on disabilities and accessibility machines can be and is often limited. In Sonoma County and the surrounding counties in particular the more rural ones have registration staff that lack knowledge in the registration process, legalization and the Voters Choice Act. Finally, and perhaps the biggest issue is the massive mistrust in the government. This comes from the issues many faces while trying to get on Social Security and other benefits or have issues while they are on benefits. This mistrust can cause people to not vote as they may believe that their vote won't count, as the system has failed them numerous times before.

Question 2 What systems or processes help voters with disabilities vote privately and independently?

Being able to vote independent and privately is a key part in voting in this country unfortunately this is much harder for people with disabilities to do. Voting places do some provide accessibility technology to help those who may be hard at hearing and/or seeing. However, the number of these tools available can be limited which can make it harder for people to vote or discourage them from voting at all. A system in place is having drop off boxes placed around cities allowing voters to drop off their ballot. This can make it easier for people to vote as it could be more convenient or easier to access than going to their polling place. California has created a Voters Choice Act (VCA) which aims to make voting more accessible for everyone. It also aims to make outreach more transparent while providing information on polling places, drop

boxes and service for people with disabilities. The VCA works to increase vote by mail, early voting and most importantly allowing voters to vote anywhere in their county. This system has worked well for the 2020 election. Sonoma County implemented the VCA and resulted in the county having the highest turnout in the state. Sonoma County has implemented a change to the system where they increase the number of voting centers a week and a half before then another increase 4 day before the election. This can help make locations more accessible and reduce the number of voters at a polling place. If someone has limited mobility or is in a wheel chair this can make it easier for them to access and move around in a polling place.

Question 3: How can the United States improve voter access for people with disabilities?

While the U.S has made good and important improvements to increase voting accessibility more can and should be done. The recent commitment made by the President to combat voter suppression in Republican states needs to also to help protect voters that have a disability. While voting centers are already required to adhere to ADA codes they should be checked before each election to make sure they comply with ADA regulations. If they are not then changes should be made or move the location to ensure compliance. This should include making sure if voters wait in line they can do so comfortably with their disability, or be allowed to bypass the line. Education/training on disabilities and accessibility machines of poll workers and other voting related staff needs to be implemented. This is because it will help voters with a disability feel more comfortable in voting. Technology is a huge part of our daily lives and assistive technology needs to be better incorporated in voting. The assistive technology should help everyone regardless of their disability. This should include an increase Accessibility Tools at polling places, to help inform voters on what they are voting on if they are using paper ballots. For voters using a paper ballot they should have the option to use a tool that will help mark their ballot. If a polling place has an electronic these machines need to be able to have accessibility features such as audio and closed captions. Voters who vote at polling place should also be allowed to bring their own assistive technology. Voting at home can be harder for people with disabilities as the mail/absentee ballots are paper. The federal government needs make Remote Assessable Vote by Mail (RAVMB) more common throughout the nation. There should be accessible on nation website(s). For voters who use this they should be able to voter a computer

or tablet with accessibility features and be able to work with personal assistive technology. In addition, ballot marking devices like the ones available at polling places should also be available for a voter to use at home. If a voter is blind or has limited seeing then brail ballots, if they chose not to vote online should be created so they can vote independently. Assistive technology should also be available to help inform voters on candidates and ballot measures and to help guide them through the registration process. In addition, cities or counties should implement workshops to help get people registered. For outreach there should be a national toll-free number with TTY capabilities and a dedicated web page (if there is not one already). The information should help voters to find out where resources are available and where they can go for help. Finally, after an election a survey should be sent made available for voters even if they don't have a disability to comment on ways to improve the process.