DISABILITY LAW CENTER
OF · ALASKA

Creating an Accessible Political Campaign:

Practical Tips for Reaching Voters who have Disabilities

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People with Disabilities Vote

Did you know that approximately 1 in 10 individuals in Alaska have a disability?[1] Or that 15.6 million people with disabilities reported voting in the November 2012 Presidential elections?

Candidates may forget about the importance of making their campaigns accessible to people with disabilities, however their votes can make a significant impact in an election. This booklet suggests tips and tools to make your campaign more accessible. Taking the small steps described in this guide can make a big difference.

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[1] Erickson, W., Lee, C., von Schrader, S. (2013). Disability Statistics from the 2011 American Community Survey (ACS). Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Employment and Disability Institute (EDI). Retrieved Jan 09, 2014 from www.disabilitystatistics.org

Technology and Mass Communication

Television
Scrolling text across a television set is called closed captioning. Closed captioning provides access to information you are distributing, not only to people who are deaf or hard-of-hearing, but also to those whose first language is not English. It can also help in crowded places such as bars or airports where background noise may make it difficult for anyone to hear the content.

Captioning is sometimes required by law; but even when it is not, it may be a smart idea because it is a way of getting your message across to people who may not otherwise have access to that information without it.

Resource: The Described and Captioned Media Program (DCMP) is funded by the U.S. Department of Education and administered by the National Association of the Deaf. The DCMP website (http://www.dcmp.org) offers information about captioning.

Public Events
If you and your opponent(s) are planning a debate, forum, or other event that is open to the public, make sure the meeting space is physically accessible and that participants can request accommodations.

Before scheduling the event, call ahead to make sure that the location is accessible. Here are some questions you can ask:

- Is accessible parking available close to the entrance?
- Is the route from the parking spaces or the drop off/pick up area to the front door at least 36 inches wide?
- Is the route inside the building from the accessible entrance to the bathrooms and to the event room at least 36 inches wide including doorways?
- Are the bathrooms accessible? Is there a stall that is wide enough for someone in a wheelchair to turn around?

Visit the site if possible to ensure that it is, in fact, accessible.

If the accessible entrance is different from the main entrance, make sure that signs (even temporary signs, if necessary) are set up to direct a person to the accessible entrance.

Make sure that on the day of the event the route from the parking area or sidewalk to the room where the event is held remains accessible.

Contract with a sign language interpreter who can be available to "sign" during the entire event.

If the event is being filmed for television, make sure that it will be closed captioned.

Email
Avoid using images in e-mails because automated screen reader programs used by people who have a vision impairment will not be able to tell what the image is. If you must do so, provide proper labeling of the images.   E-mail is a great way to communicate with many individuals who have sensory impairments. If you make a phone line available to the general public, make an e-mail address available as well.

Communicating with PDFs: While many types of assistive technology are now able to access PDFs, it is a good idea to check out this web site for tips on making your PDFs more accessible:

http://www.adobe.com/accessibility.html

Best Practice: Make a text document version readily available or have it available upon request.

Mail
Mail campaigns have a long proven history of gaining more votes. Be sure that your staff knows how to handle a request for accessible materials such as Braille materials and large print. If the individual with a disability has a computer and screen reader, you may consider asking them if you can e-mail the document to them or provide the materials on a CD.

Large Print material can be created using a standard office printer. Use sans serifs fonts, such as Arial or Helvetica, and make sure the font is 18 points or larger.

Radio
Radio advertising is an effective method for reaching out to many people. If your political campaign chooses this media method, an easy and cost-effective way to ensure that the radio announcement is accessible is by posting a copy of the transcript on your web site or on the Internet before the broadcast.

Web Sites
Web sites are a great way to get information to all voters, including voters with disabilities.

There are two places to go to better understand the standards and best practices in web site accessibility:
- Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973; and,
- World Wide Web Consortium (W3C).

Section 508 creates standards for Federal agencies to follow when they provide information on the Internet. The U.S. Access Board publishes specific guidelines to comply with this law called the Electronic and Information Technology Accessibility Standards.

Subpart B – Technical Standards 1194.22 of this publication lists 16 requirements that Federal Agencies must adhere to in order to make their web sites accessible.

http://www.section508.gov/beaccessible

Other parts of the publication discuss the requirements for telecommunication products, software applications, video and multimedia products, etc. This publication can be useful when looking for tips on making your web site and other types of electronic information accessible.

The **World Wide Web Consortium (W3C)** is the international consortium that is responsible for creating standards in the language development of the World Wide Web (WWW). Using such standards, almost any web site can be supported on any computer and browser in the world.

The W3C has created the Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) which publishes information on standards for Internet accessibility.

http://www.w3.org/WAI

Four types of functional disabilities may impact a person's ability to use the web:

1. Visual;
2. Auditory;
3. Physical; and,
4. Cognitive.

Visual - How do people who are blind read web sites? In general, people who are blind mostly use either screen reader software or screen magnification software to access the web. Screen readers read text aloud. Screen magnifiers do just what the name implies: make text larger. A screen reader can only "view" approximately one word at a time. The screen reader looks for text to convert into a format that is spoken or fed to a Braille display.

People who are blind cannot simply visually scan an entire page to find what they are looking for. Thus, when building an accessible website, it is important to clearly label sections so that the blind person can go right to the section that interests them. Another type of visual disability to take into consideration is color blindness. A green map with a red dot on it is not going to tell someone with color blindness where your office is located.

Auditory - People who are deaf, hard-of-hearing or deaf-blind may not have access to information that is provided through online multimedia. Closed captioning and video transcripts are ways to overcome this limitation.

Physical - Sometimes a mouse can be difficult to use for someone who has limited use of his or her hands. Certain types of assistive technology such as keyboard alternatives for mouse commands and voice recognition software can help. Avoid using settings that offer time-limited responses or restrict activities to the mouse only. Be sure that items on the page can be "reached" using the tab key – such as hyperlinks. By being able to tab or reach items on the page using the keyboard, you are also helping those who prefer keyboard shortcuts to the mouse.

Cognitive –A great way to reach people with cognitive disabilities is to offer graphics on your web page that convey meaning and it is also good to use simple language so that more people can understand your message.

Best Practice: It is often easier to build an accessible web site from the ground up, rather than trying to change an established web site. Make knowledge of and ability to implement web site accessibility for people with disabilities essential qualifications for your web site developer.

10 Tips for Making Your Web Site Accessible

1. Label your images.
As web site developers, it is easy to get into the habit of saving a photo without changing the name of the file. The software that goes with the camera usually labels the photo with a jumble of letters and numbers:

> Jc10385.jpg

Left like this, a screen reader would tell someone who is blind something like this:

> Image jc10385.jpg

This does not tell anything about the photo, except that it is an image. There are two ways to make this more accessible.

1. Change the file name. An example would be:

> Personwhouseswheelchairvoting.jpg

2. Add an "ALT" attribute. If you use an "ALT" attribute, generally nothing else is read by the screen reader except the "ALT" attribute.

> <img src="jc10385.jpg" alt="Person who uses wheelchair voting">

Best Practice: D-Linking
The file name and 'ALT' attribute are intended to be short because some browsers will only let the screen reader read so many characters. Sometimes we need more information to describe what information the image conveys. An example might be a chart or graph. A D-link would accomplish this. Simply offer a link to a new page behind a graphic or text of a "[D]". This "[D]" should be located close to the graphic it is describing on the page. On a new page offer a more detailed description of the graphic.

2. Label hyperlinks with useful information.
Sometimes a person who is blind simply wants to "tab" through all of the hyperlinks on a page and not bother with text to get the information they need faster. Tabbing also helps people who use keyboard short cuts.

You can add the <title> attribute to hyperlinks as well as tables and individual table rows to better describe what is being viewed.

>
> Schedule Which looks like: <u>Schedule</u>

3. Do not use <a target="_blank"> or force hyperlinks to open in a new window.
If you do this, the user is not able to use the "Back" function on his or her browser. This would be a problem when using screen magnification software, which zooms to a point where it can be difficult to find the other window. Screen readers may not announce that the page has been opened in a new window. If the "Back" function is enabled then you simply push a key such as the "Delete" button on your keyboard to return to the previous page.

4. Use the headings tag.
Screen reading software can create a table of contents listing all of the headings in a page, if the headings are labeled in HTML properly. This table of contents can help the individual who is blind navigate the text on a page; it can also help a search engine prioritize content on your page for the purpose of improving search results. To label your headings, use H1 (headline), H2 (sub-heading) or H3 (sub-sub-heading), etc.

        example: <h1>Vote for me</h1>

Best Practice: Avoid hyperlink titles such as "click here" or "here". A person who is blind may not know what the "here" hyperlink means, and may have to start over at the beginning of the document to find the meaning.

5. Avoid using JavaScript.
JavaScript does not always work with screen readers or certain web browsers. However, if you choose to include JavaScript, here is some information on how to make it more accessible:

http://webaim.org/techniques/javascript

6. Check for color issues in graphics.
Define hyperlinks by more than just color. You can help a viewer detect the hyperlink by underlining it.

You can check your web site for color issues by using a color blindness stimulator, such as:

http://www.vischeck.com

7. Make videos accessible.
Captioning videos online is great for people who are deaf or hard of hearing, and also for those who may be in a situation where they do not want to use sound, or background noise makes it difficult to hear. To add captioning yourself:

http://www.dcmp.org/ciy

Best Practice: Include a transcript on the same page as your embedded captioned video. By providing a transcript you are making your information accessible to those

who are deaf-blind and to those who have difficulty with your video software. This also makes the content of your video searchable by search engines.

8. Do not provide materials that may induce seizures.
The W3C recommends that nothing on the web page flashes more than three times per second. Section 508 recommends that nothing flicker with a "frequency greater than 2 Hz and lower than 55 Hz."

9. Use CSS.
Cascading Style Sheets (CSS) is a type of language sometimes used in conjunction with (X) HTML. CSS allows you to define the style of an entire web site without having to individually style each tag. CSS is also great for providing an accessible, yet visually-exciting web site.

You can check your CSS for issues: http://jigsaw.w3.org/css-validator
But before doing so, you may want to check for (X)HTML issues: http://validator.w3.org

Web sites with CSS are easier to change and new content is more easily added. With CSS, websites can offer buttons that allow viewers to change the size of the text or change the colors and contrast for the entire web site.

10. Add a "Skip to Main Content" link.
This allows the viewer to skip over the menu. Without this option, viewers who use screen readers are forced to listen to the same menu repeatedly again on each page of a web site.

Web Site Accessibility Validators

Use a search engine to find the many accessibility validators online to help spot mistakes and accessibility issues. Be aware, though, they are not a "catch all."

You can check to see what your web site looks like when viewed with text only: http://www.delorie.com/web/lynxview.html or download Lynx: http://lynx.isc.org.

You may want to try one of these screen readers to check for accessibility issues:

- JAWS - http://www.freedomscientific.com/jaws-hq.asp
- Windows – Eyes - http://www.gwmicro.com/Window-Eyes
- Zoom Text - http://www.aisquared.com/products
- Orca - http://live.gnome.org/Orca

Providing Assistance to Individual Voters

Telephone

Many people who are deaf, hard-of-hearing, deaf-blind, or who have speech impediments, use telecommunications services. In TTY and Relay calls, a relay operator reads what the individual is typing or signing.

If you receive a call from a person who uses relay, the first thing you will hear when you answer the phone is, "This is Alaska Relay" or something similar. Relay Operators are happy to explain how the process works.

To call someone who is deaf, hard of hearing, or deaf/blind, first try to use the telephone number they provide. If that doesn't work, use Alaska Relay at 7-1-1.

Telecommunication relay services are free.

Best Practice: You may find yourself or your staff in the position where you are receiving a TTY call. If you have a TTY, place the phone on the acoustic cups. The phone cord goes on the left side.

Don't forget to practice with your staff members on how to answer and make a TTY call.

Here are some basic acronyms used in a TTY call, and how they are used:

GA = Go Ahead

This signals to the other person that it's their turn to respond.

Caller 1: Hello GA
Caller 2: Hi! How are you? GA

SK = Stop Key – this means you are getting ready to hang up. It works like this:

Caller 1: Good bye GA to SK
Caller 2: Bye! SKSK
(Hang up)

If you have a TTY, a person who is deaf or hard-of-hearing will call your TTY directly. If you do not have a TTY, a person who is deaf or hard-of-hearing can contact you through a relay service. You will speak to the communication assistant (CA), who will relay the message (usually by typing or signing, depending on the type of relay service) to the person who is deaf or hard-of hearing.

If you receive a relay call, always identify yourself. If the person calling you is using a TTY, remember to say "Go ahead" when you have finished your statement. (If you forget, the CA will eventually prompt you.)

Internet
Let visitors to your website know how to make accessibility suggestions or request information in alternate formats by creating a specific contact email.

Events
Let attendees know in advance to contact a designated staff person about reasonable accommodations by placing a sentence or two about it on invitations or on publications about the debate, fund raiser, or other campaign event.

Here's an example:

For more information or to request an accommodation, contact John Doe at (XXX) XXX-XXXX or email johndoe@xxx.xxx.

Be prepared to provide a sign-language interpreter, written materials in an alternate format, such as large-print, or other accommodations as requested.

Preparing Your Staff

While you may be well versed on how to interact with people with disabilities, you will want to make sure your staff is as well. Prepare your staff on how to address situations such as how to answer a relay call, how to interact with someone in a wheelchair and how to offer guidance to someone who is blind. Here are some tips on disability etiquette that may be useful when training staff.

Disability Etiquette Tips

- When talking with a person with a disability, speak directly to that person rather than through a companion or sign language interpreter.

- When introduced to a person with a disability, it is appropriate to offer to shake hands. People with limited hand use or who wear an artificial limb can usually shake hands.

- When meeting a person who is visually impaired, always identify yourself and others who may be with you. When conversing in a group, remember to identify the person to whom you are addressing.

- If you offer assistance, wait until the offer is accepted. Then listen or ask for instructions.

- Treat adults as adults. Address people with disabilities by their first names only when extending the same familiarity to all others. (Never patronize people with disabilities by patting them on the head or shoulders.)

- Leaning or hanging on to a person's wheelchair is similar to leaning on or hanging on to a person and is generally considered annoying. The chair is part of the personal body space of the person who uses it.

- Listen attentively when you are interacting with a person who has difficulty speaking. Be patient and wait for the person to finish rather than correcting or speaking for the person. If necessary, ask short questions that require short answers, a nod, or a shake of the head. Never pretend to understand if you are having difficulty doing so. Instead, repeat what you have understood and allow the person to respond. The response will clue you in and guide your understanding.

- When speaking with a person who uses a wheelchair or a person who uses crutches, place yourself at eye level in front of the person to facilitate conversation.

- To get the attention of a person who is deaf, tap the person on the shoulder or wave your hand. Look directly at the person and speak clearly, slowly, and expressively to determine if the person can read your lips. Not all people can read lips. For those who do lip-read, be sensitive to their needs by placing yourself so that you face the light source and keep hands, cigarettes, and food away from your mouth when speaking.

- Relax. Don't be embarrassed if you happen to use accepted common expressions such as "See you later," or "Did you hear about that?" that seem to relate to the person's disability. Don't be afraid to ask questions when you are unsure of what to do.

People with Disabilities as Employees or Volunteers

By hiring someone with a disability, you are adding diversity to your team and an individual who can help you weigh in on issues that are important to people with disabilities in your community– because they often have first-hand experience. People with disabilities are looking for the same opportunities, no more or less, as other people in society. They are looking for the chance to work and volunteer in meaningful ways and thereby enhance the quality of their lives and their communities. If you have questions about how to accommodate a volunteer with a disability, it is best just to ask them.

Resources

Alaska Relay Services
1-800-676-3777 (TTY/Voice) for Customer Service, 7-1-1 to place a call
http://www.alaskarelay.com

Closed Captioning (TV)
For a list of companies that provide this service, as approved by the U.S. Department of Education:
http://www.dcmp.org/ai/10

Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART)
For a list of companies that provide this service:
http://www.cartwheel.cc/

Described Media
For a list of companies that provide this service:
http://www.dcmp.org/ai/179

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