

Promising Practices for Accessible Voting

Voter Turnout in the 2012 Presidential Election

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 79.4% of those aged 65 and older registered to vote in the 2012 presidential election.¹ Of these registered voters, 90.65% voted in November 2012.² Similarly, 69.2% of those citizens with any disability registered to vote in 2012.³ Of these registered voters, 56.8% voted in November 2012.⁴

While youth voter turnout rates declined from 2008 to 2012, the turnout rates for the elderly increased by 1.6%.⁵ There is a general trend in recent presidential elections with the elderly population having higher voting rates than all other age groups.⁶ However, the voter turnout for disabled voters decreased by 0.5% from 2008 to 2012.⁷ Overall, the voter turnout rate of people with disabilities in the 2012 presidential election was 5.7% lower than that of people without any disabilities.⁸

While the trend in voter turnout for the elderly is encouraging, these statistics indicate that more could be done to encourage people with disabilities to vote. The promising practices described below can be utilized to encourage high voter turnout for both demographics.

Practices Implemented in the 2012 Presidential Election

Some promising practices implemented in the 2012 Presidential Election to make voting easier for the elderly and disabled population include:

- Allowing adults with cognitive disabilities, and elderly voters living in long-term care facilities to mark their ballots using iPads brought by poll workers to their residences
- Presenting voter information in simple, plain language in multiple formats

¹ United States Census Bureau, *Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2012, Table 1. Reported Voting and Registration, by Sex and Single Years of Age: November 2012.*

<https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2012/demo/voting-and-registration/p20-568.html>

² Census Bureau, *Table 1.*

³ United States Census Bureau, *Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2012, Table 6. Reported Voting and Registration, by Sex, Employment Status, Class of Worker, and Disability Status: November 2012.*

<https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2012/demo/voting-and-registration/p20-568.html>

⁴ Census Bureau, *Table 6.*

⁵ Taylor, Paul, and Mark Hugo Lopez. "Six take-aways from the Census Bureau's voting report." *Pew Research Center.* 08 May 2013. <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2013/05/08/six-take-aways-from-the-census-bureaus-voting-report/>.

⁶ Taylor.

⁷ United States Census Bureau, *Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2008, Table 7. Reported Voting and Registration by Sex, Employment Status, and Class of Worker: November 2008.*

<https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2008/demo/voting-and-registration/p20-562-rv.html>

⁸ *Disability, Voter Turnout, and Voting Difficulties in the 2012 Election*, report to the U.S. Election Assistance Commission and Research Alliance for Accessible Voting, by Lisa Schur, Meera Adya, and Douglas Kruse, June 2013, (page 1).

- Providing a sample ballot before Election Day so voters are familiar with the information on the ballot⁹
- Expanding early in person voting (providing extended voting hours before Election Day)¹⁰

Practices to Implement in the Next Election

- **Prepare voters early**
 - Provide a run-through of the voting procedures and what the polling place will look like will be invaluable training for those who aren't familiar with the process or are going to a new voting place for the first time. Be sure to educate voters on how to use the voting technology.
 - Host a Q&A session with elderly and disabled voters in long-term care facilities 2-3 months before Election Day will allow polling places to answer any questions and make adjustments to the accessibility of their polling place as new concerns are raised.
 - Schedule time with residents in a long-term care facility to register them early.¹¹
- **Encourage early in person voting**
 - Begin early in person voting a full two weeks before Election Day.
 - Provide weekend voting the weekend before Election Day.
 - Extend hours outside of business hours so that a family member may take a resident after work to vote.
 - Ensure that early in person polling places are distributed equally throughout your state.¹²
- **Bring the election to your local long-term care facility**
 - Bring election officials or poll workers to the facility before Election Day, or even on Election Day, if possible.
 - Ensure there is enough staff to manage all of the residents by making appointments, answering questions, and explaining the process.
 - Have an audio version of the ballot available for those that may not see well. Use larger fonts on paper and reduce screen glare on iPads by utilizing matte screen protectors.¹³
- **Encourage the use of absentee ballots**
 - Absentee ballots can be helpful for voters who do not have severe visual or dexterity challenges. However, since an absentee ballot requires the voter to handwrite his

⁹ *Innovation in Accessible Elections*, Accessible Voting Technology Initiative by the Information and Technology and Innovation Foundation. <http://elections.itif.org/resources/report-innovations-in-accessible-elections/>.

¹⁰ *Early Voting: What Works* by Diana Kasdan, Brennan Center for Justice, (page 1). https://www.brennancenter.org/sites/default/files/publications/VotingReport_Web.pdf.

¹¹ *Innovation in Accessible Elections*.

¹² *Early Voting* (page 1).

¹³ *Innovation in Accessible Elections*.

choices, be sure that this method is not the only one offered as many elderly and disabled voters will have difficulty with marking their choices.¹⁴

- **Make simple and easy to read ballots**
 - Be sure the ballot has a clear design and has plain language instructions.
- **Provide specific training to poll workers concerning the general issues the elderly and disabled voters will face during Election Day**
 - Consider creating a webinar and presenting the material to poll workers a month before Election Day.
- **As always, ensure there are accessibility ramps, enough seating, voter call buttons, and someone managing the voting lines**
 - Ensure there are easy, accessible ways to get into the voting place
 - Having a dedicated poll worker to manage the voting line will help keep the line moving along and prevent anyone from having to wait for an unreasonably long period, especially if the line extends outside in the cold or rain.¹⁵
 - The Civil Rights Division of the Justice Department has published a pamphlet and checklist with general recommendations to make a polling place accessible to voters with disabilities: <http://www.ada.gov/votingchecklist.htm>.¹⁶

Additional Resources

For fact sheets that are geared directly toward consumers, please visit our website:
<http://theconsumervoice.org/issues/other-issues-and-resources/voting-rights>.

For more information, visit www.theconsumervoice.org
Direct questions to: info@theconsumervoice.org or (202) 332-2275.

¹⁴ *The American Voting Experience: Report and Recommendation of the Presidential Election Commission*, January 2014 (page 56). <https://www.supportthevoter.gov/files/2014/01/Amer-Voting-Exper-final-draft-01-09-14-508.pdf>.

¹⁵ *The American Voting Experience* (page 33).

¹⁶ *ADA Checklist for Polling Places*, U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, Disability Rights Section. <http://www.ada.gov/votingchecklist.htm>.