

Accessibility of Elections Campaigns for Deaf and Hard-of- Hearing and DeafBlind Participants

Alternative formats are available upon request and include Braille, large print, and electronic formats.

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Introduction

Vermont has approximately 62,000 to 125,000 Vermonters of all ages experiencing some degree of hearing loss.ⁱ This guide is intended to provide potential candidates with easy to implement tips to assure that their political message, whether in written format, digital or in person, will reach every Vermonter with hearing loss.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires governments and businesses to provide effective communication for Deaf, Hard-of-Hearing, and DeafBlind people. That simply means information must be provided in a manner that is be easily understood. For people who are Deaf, Hard-of-Hearing, or DeafBlind, that can range from American Sign Language (ASL) interpreting services to captioning services to auxiliary aids.

Every individual's accommodation needs are different. It is quite possible one might work for some but not all. Be mindful of what you can or cannot do to accommodate your audience.

This Guide was developed in consultation with the Elections Division of the Office for the Vermont Secretary of State. We're like to thank the Secretary of State's Office for promoting the use of this Guide among candidates for office at all levels in the State of Vermont.

ASL Interpreting Services

Under the ADA, qualified interpreters are those who are able to interpret effectively, accurately, and impartially both receptively and expressively. Someone who is not trained as an interpreter and knows only a little sign language is not qualified.

To find interpreters in Vermont, you can either contact Vancro Integrated Interpreting Services (VIIS) or search under the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID).

- [Vancro, Inc. \(vancroiis.com\)](http://vancroiis.com)
- [Registry of Interpreters of the Deaf \(rid.org\)](http://rid.org)

Audio

- Provide transcripts or sign language interpretation of radio programs and podcasts.

Captioning Services

Captioning is the process of converting the audio content of a television broadcast, podcast, film, video, CD-ROM, DVD, live event, or other productions into text and displaying the text on a screen, monitor, or other visual display system. To find local or remote captioning services, search the National Association of Court Reporters and Captioners (NCRA) directory:

- [NCRA PROLink | NCRA](#)

Be sure to select "Professional Type" and then select "CART Captioning" for service. However, if you choose not to add captioning on your own after making videos, it is recommended that you use:

- [Rev Speech-to-Text Services | Convert Audio & Video to Text](#)

Document

- [Make your Word documents accessible to people with disabilities \(microsoft.com\)](#)
- Videos: [Documents Training Videos | Section508.gov](#)

- It is recommended documents are in a word document format for those who are visually impaired. PDF documents are not user friendly for screen readers¹ unless it is an [accessible PDF document](#).
 - [Create Accessible PDFs | Section508.gov](#)

Email

- [Make your Outlook email accessible to people with disabilities \(microsoft.com\)](#)
- Video tutorial: [Creating Accessible Emails - YouTube](#)

Events

- In your promotions, state what accommodations you will already have available and a contact if a person needs additional accommodations.
- The invitation should be accessible and easy to understand.
- The venue should be accessible and have features needed such as
 - Assistive listening system such as:
 - [FM²/DM³](#): The speaker wears a microphone and the signal is then sent via the transmitter to the receiver (hearing aids).
 - [Infrared System⁴](#)
 - Induction Loop known as [hearing loops⁵](#)
 - Physical accommodations such as accessible bathrooms, ramps, lifts, etc.
 - [Expanding Your Market: Maintaining Accessible Features in Retail Establishments \(ada.gov\)](#)
 - [ADA-Checklist for Existing Facilities](#)
 - [ADA Checklist for Polling Places](#)
- Spaces and/or wide rooms for wheelchair users, blind, DeafBlind, and partially sighted persons should be available.
- Reserve front rows for Deaf, Hard-of-Hearing, and DeafBlind participants.

¹ A screen reader is a form of assistive technology that renders text and image content as speech or braille output.

² FM stands for frequency modulation. FM systems are transmitted using radio waves.

³ DM stands for digital modulation. DM systems are transmitted using digital signals.

⁴ Infrared systems use infrared light to transmit sound. A transmitter converts sound into a light signal and beams it to a receiver that is worn by a listener.

⁵ See the provided link for further explanation.

- Provide real time captioning, not automated speech recognition (ASR)⁶ captioning.
- Provide ASL interpreters.
- Provide [audio description](#) and/or explain graphics and visuals for those with limited vision.

Microsoft Excel Documents

- [How to make an accessible Excel template \(microsoft.com\)](#)
- [Create Accessible Spreadsheets | Section508.gov](#)

Microsoft PowerPoint Presentations

- [Make your PowerPoint presentations accessible to people with disabilities \(microsoft.com\)](#)
- Video tutorial: [Creating Accessible PowerPoint Presentations - YouTube](#)
- [Create Accessible Presentations | Section508.gov](#)

Resources

- [National Association of the Deaf – \(NAD\) ASL Voter Hotline](#)
- [The Americans with Disabilities Act and Other Federal Laws Protecting the Rights of Voters with Disabilities \(ada.gov\)](#)
- [SignVote: Creating and Sharing Election Resources in ASL](#)

Social Media

- Potential social media accommodations and how to include alternative texts and/or image descriptions.
 - [Captions on Facebook, Alt Text on Facebook Photos](#)
 - [Alt Text on Instagram, Captions on Instagram](#)
 - [Alt Text on LinkedIn, Captions on LinkedIn](#)
 - [Captions and Video Description on TikTok](#)
 - [Alt Text on Twitter, Captions on Twitter](#)
 - [Captions on YouTube](#)
 - [Video tutorial for alt text on Facebook and Twitter](#)
- Make sure your video content has open or closed captioning⁷.

⁶ ASR is an automated generated AI version of captioning. It is only 85-90% accurate.

⁷ Captions are either open or closed. Closed captions can be turned on and off by the viewer. Open captions always are in view and cannot be turned off.

- Write hashtags in CamelCase⁸. These make it easier for screen readers to read the hashtags for those with visual or reading disabilities.
- Avoid ableist language. Some examples are phrases such as “tone deaf” or “falling on deaf ears”.

Video

- Add subtitles and sign language interpretation to all your videos.
 - Written tutorial on how to [add subtitles and captions](#) via YouTube.
 - TechSmith tutorials on [How to Add Captions or Subtitles to a Video](#)
- Provide a transcript for the videos – a copy of the subtitles with clear marking of who is speaking and relevant background sounds. Make sure a transcript is in an easy-to-read format.
- Provide printed text description if present during an event.
- Add audio description
 - Written tutorial on how to add [audio descriptions](#).
 - Video on how to add [audio descriptions](#).
- Non-decorative visual information needs to be read out loud in the video or by the audio describer⁹.
- Large font printed text or Braille should be provided upon request. Reach out to Vermont Association of the Blind and Visually Impaired ([VABVI](#)) to inquire how to make your context accessible for those with limited to no vision.
- Videos: [Create Accessible Video, Audio and Social Media | Section508.gov](#)

Visual Aids

- Provide Pen and Paper.
- Provide an easel for written announcements. This is only effective for those who read/understand English and doesn’t work for those with low to no vision.
- Provide a Communication Card¹⁰.
- Information should be kept short, simple, and written in [plain language](#).
- Use images, pictures and graphics in publications or signage.

⁸ CamelCase is a practice of writing phrases without spaces or punctuation, indicating the separation of words with a single capitalized letter, and the first word starting with either case. Examples would be “iPad” or “iPhone”.

⁹ A person who describes and gives context for essential visual information.

¹⁰ A communication card is a simple print card, usually laminated, that list items both iconic and written format for brief exchanges.

- Present context visually and verbally.
- Include alternative texts and audio descriptions.

Virtual Platforms

- [How to Make Your Virtual Meetings Accessible \(vermont.gov\)](#)

Website and Mobile Apps

- Follow the [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines](#) for technical standard.
- Use the [Web Accessibility Evaluation Tool](#) to ensure your web content are accessible.

ⁱ [Final DHHDB Council Report December 2020.pdf \(vermont.gov\)](#)