

Compass Points

Information Key

Supporting Oregon Voters Who Have Disabilities

Tips for Families and Support Professionals

It's great to be an Oregonian. We have this knack for doing things *our* way. One example of this is how we vote: by mail. Every election in Oregon is a vote-by-mail election. This means most of the resources available about supporting people with disabilities in the voting process do not apply to voters in Oregon. For the past two weeks, the staff at *Disability Compass* has been doing what we do best: uncovering resources and information specific to Oregonians on this topic. We have been inspired by our discoveries. Here is a summary of what we have learned and links to some important tools now included on Disability Compass. We hope you find them useful, too.

Providing Voting Assistance

Voting assistance is available to everyone who needs it. This includes people with disabilities, the elderly, and those with limited reading or English skills. Every county elections office has a Voter Assistance Team that has been trained to support people with disabilities in filling out their ballot. The contact information for county election offices in Oregon are listed on Disability Compass. You can find them by typing, "County Election Office" in the search box or using this link:

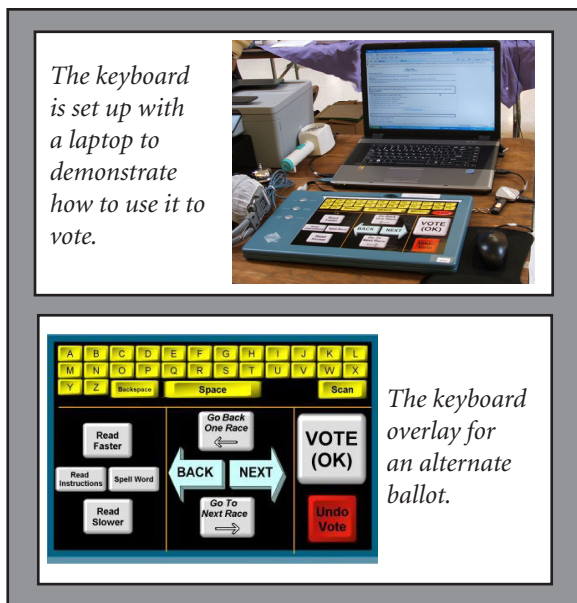
<http://tinyurl.com/OR-Election>

Types of Assistance Available

Every County Elections Office has a variety of tools to assist voters. They include, but are not limited to:

- A dedicated computer.
- A variety of access devices for the computer including screen readers, adaptive mouse, intellikeys keyboard, and more.
- Large print ballot.
- Audio versions of the *Voters' Pamphlet*.
- Individuals to provide assistance as requested.

If you watch the videos available about assisting voters with disabilities, you may not get a feel for the variety of tools the state has gathered to make voting accessible. Be sure to call to find out what is available for the people you support.



Photos courtesy of John Montoya and the Washington County Elections Voter Assistance Team



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Disability Compass is supported by community partners. To see a list of partners, visit our website:

www.DisabilityCompass.org

To become a partner or to support the work of Disability Compass, please email Joan@DisabilityCompass.org.

One-on-One Support to Provide Information About Election Topics

The person you support may ask you to help them learn about the candidates or issues on the ballot. This is a more difficult role than providing support in filling out the ballot in many ways. And yet, to make an informed decision, many people who have disabilities need help finding the information they need in an useful format. It is important that the person you support make an informed decision about their vote. Although there is no guide available, here are some suggestions for providing support in the information gathering process.

- Ask the person you support what they would like to learn more about.
- Consider using the audio version of the Voters' Pamphlet for providing information (see page 3).
- Install screen readers so they can hear the information on web sites they choose about election information. This is a more direct way for the person to receive information.
- Do not share your opinion about the topic.
- Do not summarize or edit the information.
- Use nonpartisan websites to gather information about candidates to share.
- Check in with the person to see if they understand the information.
- Use the *Easy Voters' Guide* available from the League of Women's Voters to begin to understand the issues for Oregon.
- Allow plenty of time.
- Encourage the person you are supporting to ask others for their opinions. Tell them you want to help them understand the information, but not share your opinion.
- Remind the person you support that the vote they cast is their decision. No one else's.
- If you are uncomfortable in this role, tell the person you support and ask them to consider calling the Voter's Assistance Team at their county election office.

Providing One-on-One Support to Cast a Ballot

Some people with disability will want to choose someone they know to help them fill out their ballot. It is their right to choose! However, some people cannot assist a person with a disability to vote because they may sway the voter's decision. They are:

- The voter's employer
- An agent of the voter's employer such as the person's boss or supervisor, or
- Or an officer or person who works for the voter's union.

If you provide direct support provider to the voter, you are their employee and can assist them with voting. If you are uncomfortable assisting them with this task, ask if you can call the Voter Assistance Team for your county or another qualified person they trust. Tell them you are uncomfortable assisting them and offer to help them access the help they need.

If you do help the person you support, remember that just as with any other decision making, it is your job only to *record* their vote. You may *not* sway them in any way.

For some tips on how to provide support, download the brochure, *How to Assist Voters with Disabilities* available from the Election Division web site (<http://tinyurl.com/vote-assist>).

Remember – if you assist someone in filling out their ballot, **do not share how they cast their vote!** Their vote, like yours, is private.

If you are a direct support provider or manager of a group living situation, tell the people you support that assistance is available.

This is going to be a great election. Every vote counts, so **start support early** to for informed votes.

Easy Voters' Guides & Audio Voters' Pamphlet

The League of Women's Voters has published an *Easy Voters' Guide* for those with limited reading skills. The guide is designed to be nonpartisan. This means the writers' worked to provide information in a way that shares information, not opinions. There are two *Easy Voters' Guides* available on the Internet. One for candidates and one for the Oregon Ballot Measures. There is no easy guide for the national election issues. An MP3 version of the entire Voters' Pamphlet is also available.

Here are the links to those web pages:

- *Easy Voters' Guide* for candidates:
<http://tinyurl.com/EVG-candidates>
- *Easy Voters' Guide* for Oregon Ballot Measures:
<http://tinyurl.com/EVG-measures>
- *Audio Voters' Pamphlet*:
<http://tinyurl.com/audio-vote>

Screen Reader Information

Do you need a screen reader to help support someone? Many screen readers are free. Some work only for the Internet, others read all types of files. For a list of screen readers, go to:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_screen_readers

Information on using screen readers with pdf files in Adobe Reader 9 is available here:

- <http://tinyurl.com/5tdwu8>

Adobe has put together information about using screen readers with pdf files here:

- <http://tinyurl.com/645a3p>

Using a screen reader is not without work. Take the time to set it up with the person you support.

A screen reader can be a powerful tool for supporting self-determination and informed decisions.

Voting and Election Resources on Disability Compass

This edition of Compass Points: Information Key highlights a specific topic about voting: supporting Oregon voters with disabilities. There are other resources available in our database related to voting that may be helpful to you. Here are some examples:

The Oregon Council on Developmental Disabilities.
<http://www.tinyurl.com/ddcouncil>

The Oregon Council on Developmental Disabilities is a long-term partner of Disability Compass. They provide many services, including an accurate list of Oregon legislators and how to contact them.

The Oregon Developmental Disabilities Coalition.
<http://www.tinyurl.com/ddcoalition>

The Oregon Developmental Disabilities Coalition keeps a running list of federal and state issues related to disabilities to help voters interested in these issues make informed decisions.

The Washington County Elections Voter Assistance Team. <http://www.tinyurl.com/washvat>

The Washington County Election VAT web site has updated information available on their website of interest to all Oregon voters. The site lists a few of the tools available to voters who need modifications and accommodations.

Disability Rights Oregon (formerly Oregon Advocacy Center). <http://www.tinyurl.com/DRO-Vote>

Disability Rights Oregon, a Disability Compass Partner, is an independent non-profit organization which provides legal advocacy services for people with disabilities anywhere in Oregon. The web site has information regarding voting as well as a contact for assistance on their staff.

For more information or to add valuable resources to our growing database for Oregonians, visit:

www.DisabilityCompass.org

Stay Connected

Compass Points: Information Keys is a periodic, electronic publication of Disability Compass. If you would like to receive this publication, please send us the following information by US Mail, Phone, Fax, or E-mail (Info@DisabilityCompass.org).

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