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STATE OF CALIFORNIA | ELECTIONS

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## California Secretary of State's Guide to Creating a Local Voting Accessibility Advisory Committee (VAAC)



**2014**

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## Introduction

While the Secretary of State is the chief elections officer for California, county elections officials are responsible for conducting elections. County officials are responsible for providing ballots and important election information to voters, ensuring polling places are accessible, and providing voting systems that allow for independent and private voting.

Many laws and standards are designed to ensure polling places are accessible to people with disabilities.

- The federal Voting Accessibility for the Elderly and Handicapped Act requires polling place access for senior voters and voters with disabilities.
- California Elections Code section 12280 states, “When designating polling places, the elections official shall undertake necessary measures in the locating of polling places to ensure that polling places meet the guidelines promulgated by the Secretary of State for accessibility by the physically handicapped.”
- The federal Help America Vote Act (HAVA) requires accessible, independent, and private voting for all eligible voters by ensuring 1) equal access to polling places that are accessible to all, and 2) voting systems that allow for independent and private voting.

To provide guidance in interpreting federal and state requirements for accessible polling places, the Secretary of State contracted with the California Department of Rehabilitation (DOR) to update the Polling Place Accessibility Guidelines and the Polling Place Accessibility Checklist at [www.sos.ca.gov/elections/polling-place-accessibility](http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/polling-place-accessibility). The Secretary of State also coordinates with DOR to provide training on surveying polling places for accessibility.

In 2005, the Secretary of State established the state Voting Accessibility Advisory Committee (VAAC) to advise, assist, and provide recommendations on how best to implement federal and state laws regarding access to the electoral process for voters with disabilities. The state VAAC is composed of eight members representing disability advocacy groups and county elections offices (see Appendix I). Through the years, the state VAAC has provided input on many voting-related projects and issues, including the polling place accessibility guidelines, checklist, and training video; voting system accessibility; a confidential voter accessibility survey; and the online voter registration application system.

This guide is designed to share ideas and best practices for creating and maintaining a voting accessibility advisory committee at the city, county, or regional level.

## What a VAAC Can Do

A local VAAC can benefit your county in many ways, including providing a forum for the disability and senior communities in your county to voice their concerns and provide advice and opportunities for collaboration and outreach with your community.

### *Feedback*

A local VAAC provides a forum for those who represent the disability and senior communities to discuss issues they encounter in the voting process. VAAC members can recommend accessibility improvements to polling place websites, voter materials, and county election procedures. Local VAAC members can also provide feedback on polling locations, voting systems, and other accessible matters like voter outreach and Americans with Disabilities Act compliance.

### *Collaboration*

A local VAAC opens lines of communication and fosters cooperation with community groups, ensuring elections officials can address issues directly and minimize misunderstandings. A local VAAC is also a great resource for recruiting poll workers.

### *Outreach*

A local VAAC provides outreach to individuals and organizations that promote awareness of individuals with disabilities and seniors. Reaching out to these people and organizations can provide opportunities for the county to work with the community as a whole to understand the diverse array of challenges these communities face, as well as recruiting potential poll workers or VAAC members.

## **Creating a VAAC**

The Secretary of State recommends that each county elections official establish a local VAAC to help address voting accessibility needs (please see CCROV # 10234, [www.sos.ca.gov/elections/ccrov/pdf/2010/july/10234jh.pdf](http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/ccrov/pdf/2010/july/10234jh.pdf)). If a local VAAC within one county is not practical, counties may consider forming a regional VAAC to pool resources and ideas. Another option would be to establish regional VAACs encompassing the five areas of the state established by the California Association of Clerks and Election Officials (CACEO): Bay Area, Central Area, Motherlode Area, Northern Area, and Southern Area.

The first step to creating any committee is determining the number of members needed. The Secretary of State recommends:

- In a county with less than 50,000 registered voters, the local VAAC should have a minimum of three members.
- In a county with 50,000 to 500,000 registered voters, the local VAAC should have a minimum of five members.
- In a county with 500,000 to 1,000,000 registered voters, the local VAAC should have a minimum of seven members.

- In a county with more than 1,000,000 registered voters, a local VAAC should have a minimum of nine members.

When appropriate, existing county boards or committees, which focus on accessibility matters and meet the representational guidelines above, could assume the functions of a local VAAC.

Participation and varied experience are essential to a successful VAAC. Representatives from the disability community as well as people with a background in accessibility issues often contribute ideas from first-hand knowledge of challenges for some voters. People of differing backgrounds, ages, and who speak different languages that are representative of the disability community within their county as a whole may also contribute to the VAAC. People from county government have an in-depth understanding of elections processes and laws. County elections officials are encouraged to reach out to their local disability agencies and independent living centers to recruit VAAC members with differing disabilities, including cognitive, mental health, and sensory (see Appendix II and Appendix III).

Alameda County found an effective way to recruit members for its VAAC by contacting local disability agencies to ask if the county could give in-person presentations about the functions of their county's VAAC. The county's presentations were so effective that VAAC membership increased from two members in 2012 to 10 members in 2013.

Santa Cruz County's VAAC is led by its County Clerk and internal staff. It includes a program coordinator for polling places, precinct operations, accessibility and voting equipment, and a program coordinator for election officers/training and voter registration/outreach. In the past the Assistant County Clerk participated on the committee. Santa Cruz County elections staff members contacted their local independent living center in order to find VAAC members. They have had members from the County Commission on Disabilities, local service providers, Disability Rights California, and other local disability commissions, as well as a voter who used the county audio voting unit and was blind from birth, a webmaster from a site for people with disabilities, and a former member of the County Planning Department.

## **Planning for Successful Meetings**

Soon after establishing a local VAAC, the county elections official should schedule the first meeting. The frequency of meetings depends on the needs of the county and availability of members. A VAAC may choose to meet on a monthly basis, however a VAAC may also choose to meet less frequently. For example, the state VAAC meets approximately six times per year. To bolster participation it is important to establish alternatives to attending the meetings in person. Examples of an alternative method for participation are holding the meeting via a conference call or web conference.

An agenda is essential to every VAAC meeting (see Appendix IV for examples). The agenda helps to ensure a meeting stays on topic and can cover an array of subject matters. Distribute the agenda prior to the meeting day.

At the first local VAAC meeting, nominate a chairperson who will lead meetings. Establish operating procedures such as how often the VAAC should meet, a reliable and accessible meeting location, and a standard meeting time and length.

Create a local VAAC mission statement. The state VAAC mission statement is to “advise, assist, and provide recommendations to the Secretary of State’s Office regarding the implementation of federal and state laws relating to access to the electoral process by voters with disabilities, so that all persons can vote independently and privately.”

Establish goals. Local VAAC goals may include:

- Assisting and advising county elections officials on existing programs to reach people with disabilities, and also provide advice on whether to create new programs.
- Advising county elections officials on where to set up voting equipment and how to recognize barriers to participation for senior voters and voters with disabilities.
- Assisting county elections officials in surveying polling places for compliance with state and federal accessibility guidelines. Evaluating an inaccessible polling place or voting area to determine if – with the use of temporary modifying equipment or measures – it can be modified to permit use by senior voters and voters with disabilities.
- Assisting and advising county elections officials in training poll workers to assist senior voters and voters with disabilities.
- Assisting in the recruitment of poll workers or precinct officials with disabilities or who are seniors.
- Assisting county elections officials to enhance website accessibility, including establishing a county website accessibility statement.

County elections officials may also wish to create a polling place accessibility plan with the help of their local VAAC. Polling place accessibility plans serve as a guide to establishing polling places in the county that meet accessibility requirements. Santa Cruz County, for example, received valuable input after asking its local VAAC to review a draft polling place plan and included the VAAC mission statement in the final plan, which is available on CACEO’s website at [www.caceo58.org](http://www.caceo58.org).

## **Maintaining Membership**

Once a local VAAC is established, maintaining active membership may be one of the most challenging issues. It is important for the county elections staff to communicate to VAAC members how their continued participation benefits the election process. Options for sustaining an active VAAC membership include:

- Implementing attendance requirements, such as requiring members to attend a specified percentage of meetings each year.
- Requesting regular feedback from members, perhaps including a confidential annual satisfaction survey.
- Continuing advertisement for new membership after the VAAC has been formed in order to find new replacements quickly.
- Diversifying the agenda topics so people of different backgrounds and expertise remain interested. While some VAAC members may be especially interested in voting systems, others may be more focused on polling place accessibility or voter outreach. Encouraging diversity in membership will also contribute to diverse agenda topics. For example, people who use wheelchairs may have different voting experiences than people who can walk but cannot see ballots and polling place signs. Prospective members may be staff or volunteers of local disability organizations. Such organizations may include Independent Living Centers (ILC), Aging and Disabled Resource Connection (ADRC), Family Empowerment Centers, or other local boards or organizations.
- Engaging VAAC members in community outreach. VAAC members will want to promote the opportunities for access they helped create. This will allow the VAAC to have a sense of ownership and increase their desire to be a positive part of creating solutions for voter accessibility in your county.

## More Information

Forming a VAAC in your county or region may help strengthen your county's attention to voting accessibility matters along with fostering a more cooperative relationship with the local disability community.

The Secretary of State encourages each county elections official to connect with officials in other counties and states to share best practices on how to form and sustain an active VAAC. For more information about VAACs and polling place accessibility requirements, visit the Secretary of State's website at [www.sos.ca.gov/elections/polling-place-accessibility/overview.htm](http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/polling-place-accessibility/overview.htm).

To share accomplishments and best practices for an updated version of this guide, contact Secretary of State staff Todd Wallace at (916) 657-2376 or Angela Beane at (916) 653-2744.

# Appendix I

## State VAAC Member Contacts

<p><b>Ana Acton</b>          Executive Director          FREED Center for Independent Living          Aging &amp; Disability Resource          Connection          2059 Nevada City Hwy, Suite 102          Grass Valley, CA 95945          (530) 477-3333 – work  <a href="mailto:ana@freed.org">ana@freed.org</a></p>	<p><b>Tim McNamara</b>          Assistant Registrar-Recorder/County          Clerk/Election Services          Los Angeles County          12400 Imperial Highway, Suite 7020B          Norwalk, CA 90650          (562) 462-2722 – work  <a href="mailto:tmcnamara@rrcc.lacounty.gov">tmcnamara@rrcc.lacounty.gov</a></p>
<p><b>Ardis Bazyn</b>          Blind Speaker, Author and Coach          Bazyn Communications          2121 Scott Road, No. 105          Burbank, CA 91504          (818) 238-9321 – work and fax  <a href="mailto:abazyn@bazyncommunications.com">abazyn@bazyncommunications.com</a></p>	<p><b>Maria Monte de Rey</b>          31031 Sunset Avenue          Nuevo, CA 92567          (818) 356-8215          (818) 943-4295 – text  <a href="mailto:bluebeach3@gmail.com">bluebeach3@gmail.com</a>  <a href="mailto:blueocean80@hotmail.com">blueocean80@hotmail.com</a></p>
<p><b>Elaine Ginnold</b>          Registrar of Voters          Marin County          3501 Civic Center Drive, Room 121          San Rafael, CA 94903          (415) 473-6401– work  <a href="mailto:eginnold@marincounty.org">eginnold@marincounty.org</a></p>	<p><b>Gail Pellerin</b>          County Clerk          Santa Cruz County          701 Ocean Street, Room 210          Santa Cruz, CA 95060-4076          (831) 454-2419 – work  <a href="mailto:gail.pellerin@co.santa-cruz.ca.us">gail.pellerin@co.santa-cruz.ca.us</a></p>
<p><b>Margaret Johnson</b>          Advocacy Director          Disability Rights California          1831 K Street          Sacramento, CA 95811          (916) 504-5800 – work          (916) 504-5807 – fax  <a href="mailto:Margaret.Jakobson@disabilityrightsca.org">Margaret.Jakobson@disabilityrightsca.org</a></p>	<p><b>Larry D. Smith</b>          Elections Tech III          Riverside County Registrar of Voters          2724 Gateway Drive          Riverside, CA 92507          (951) 486-7202 – work          (951) 486-7272 – fax  <a href="mailto:ladsmith@co.riverside.ca.us">ladsmith@co.riverside.ca.us</a></p>

**Ted Jackson**

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(805) 963-1350 – fax  
[jlesner@ilrc-trico.org](mailto:jlesner@ilrc-trico.org)

# Appendix II

## Independent Living Centers

You may find local independent living centers through the California Foundation for Independent Living Centers:

[http://www.cfilc.org/site/c.fnJFKLNnFmG/b.5192429/k.2734/List\\_of\\_California\\_Independent\\_Living\\_Centers.htm](http://www.cfilc.org/site/c.fnJFKLNnFmG/b.5192429/k.2734/List_of_California_Independent_Living_Centers.htm)

The California Department of Rehabilitation is also an excellent resource for all independent living centers in the state:

<http://www.rehab.cahwnet.gov/ILS/ILC-List.html>

# Appendix III

## State and National Disability Agencies

Americans with Disabilities Act, United State Department of Justice Civil Rights Division, (800) 514 - 0301 / TTY (800) 514-0383, <http://www.ada.gov>

National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities, 1825 K Street, NW, Suite 600, Washington, DC 20006, (202) 506-5813, [info@naccdd.org](mailto:info@naccdd.org), <http://www.nacdd.org/>

Disability Rights California, (800) 776-5746 / TTY (800) 719-5798, <http://www.disabilityrightsca.org>

The California Council of the Blind, 1303 J Street, Suite 400, Sacramento, CA 95814-2900, (800) 221-6359, outside CA (916) 441-2100 <http://www.ccbnet.org>

National Disability Rights Network, 900 Second Street, NE, Suite 211 Washington, DC 20002, (202) 408-9514 / TTY (220) 408-9521, <http://www.ndrn.org/index.php>

National Council on Disability, an independent U.S. government agency, 1331 F Street, NW, Suite 850, Washington, DC 20004, (202) 272-2004 / TTY (202) 272-2074, [ncd@ncd.gov](mailto:ncd@ncd.gov) and <http://www.ncd.gov>

National Federation of the Blind, 200 East Wells Street, Baltimore, MD 21230, (410) 659-9314, <https://nfb.org/contact-us>

American Council of the Blind, 2200 Wilson Boulevard, Suite 650, Arlington, VA 22201-3354, (202) 467-5081, (800) 424-8666, [info@acb.org](mailto:info@acb.org) and <http://acb.org/node/6>

American Foundation for the Blind, 2 Penn Plaza, Suite 1102 New York, NY 10121, (212) 502-7600, <http://www.afb.org/default.aspx>

National Association of the Deaf (NAD), 8630 Fenton Street, Suite 820 Silver Spring, MD 20910, (301) 587-1788 or (301) 328-1443 / TTY (301) 587-1789, <http://www.nad.org>

Hearing Loss Association of America, 7910 Woodmont Ave, Suite 1200, Bethesda, MD 20814, (301) 657-2248, <http://www.hearingloss.org/content/hlaa-chapters-and-state-organizations>

Youth Organizing! Disabled and Proud, 1234 H Street, Suite 100, Sacramento, CA 95814, (866) 296-9753 or (800) 900-0706 (TDD), <http://yodisabledproud.org>

State Council on Developmental Disabilities, Area Boards on Developmental Disabilities, <http://www.scdd.ca.gov/areaboards.htm>

Easter Seals, 233 South Wacker Drive, Suite 2400, Chicago, IL 60606, (800) 221-6827, <http://www.easterseals.com/>

The Arc, 1825 K Street, NW, Suite 1200, Washington, DC 20006, (800) 433-5255,  
<http://www.thearc.org/>

Learning Disabilities Association of America, 4156 Library Road, Pittsburgh, PA 15234-1349,  
(412) 341-1515, <http://ldaamerica.org/>

# **Appendix IV**

**Sample of County and State VAAC Agendas**

**SANTA CRUZ COUNTY  
VOTING ACCESSIBILITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

Thursday, August 8, 2013  
10 a.m.  
701 Ocean St. Basement – Cafeteria

**AGENDA**

- I. **Introductions**
- II. **Polling Places**
  - A. November 2013 polling places
  - B. Polling place canvassing and resurveys
  - C. Polling place recognition program
  - D. Site specific binder revamp project
  - E. Update on HAVA
- III. **State VAAC**
  - A. Polling Place survey training video
  - B. Survey of voters with disabilities
- IV. **Future of California Elections**
  - A. Minority language access
  - B. Voting options
  - C. Voter registration
  - D. Voting information
- V. **New Language Requirements for Santa Cruz**
  - A. Chinese & Tagalog – AB 817
- VI. **Voter Registration Updates**
  - A. VoteCal
  - B. Incarcerated voters eligibility
  - C. Online VR
- VII. **Future Agenda Items**

***Secretary of State***

***Voting Accessibility Advisory Committee***

Secretary of State's Office  
6<sup>th</sup> Floor Law Library  
1500 – 11<sup>th</sup> Street, Sacramento, CA

Wednesday, May 23, 2012

1:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.

***AGENDA***

- I. Review and Approval of February 15, 2012, Meeting Minutes
- II. Status Report on County VAACs
- III. Survey of Voting Accessibility Experiences
- IV. Polling Place Accessibility Surveyor Training Video
- V. June 5, 2012, Presidential Primary Election
- VI. Vote-by-Mail Issues and Recommendations
- VII. Follow-up on February 24, 2012, Meeting with Agencies Serving the Deaf and Hard of Hearing re: Voter Outreach Ideas
- VIII. Legislative Initiatives
- IX. Future Agenda Items
- X. Questions/Comments from the Committee
- XI. Meeting Adjournment