

Liberty and Justice For All Means All: A Guide On Civic Engagement For Disabled Women and Girls

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Dedication

I want to dedicate this guide to all the strong, diligent, and amazing women who have helped me become the woman I am today. Thank you for teaching me that I can be anything!

To any young women with disabilities reading this guide: Please know your voice has power! It only takes one person to make a difference. Never be afraid to let your voice be heard

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Introduction

Hello, and thank you for taking the time to read the All Means All Guide! This guide was created as part of the SARTAC Fellowship Program. This guide was created after conducting extensive research and interviews with civic engagement experts with disabilities. This guide covers various topics, from voting to accessibility on the campaign trail. As the creator of this guide, I recognize that not everyone will read this guide in its entirety, and that's okay! Feel free to look at the table of contents section and determine which parts of the guide will be most helpful for you! This guide was created for YOU, so use it in whatever way helps you to gain more experience! My hope with this guide is that women and girls with disabilities become more interested in participating in civic engagement, or if this is your first time becoming involved, then this guide will give you a good place to start! Remember, in this great country, liberty and justice for all means all, and that includes you!

How Do Elections Work

Elections are a way for local citizens to vote to make decisions about their city, state, and federal government. The result of an election is based on what the majority of the population votes for. Elections are important because they let people have a say in their own government. In fact, the United States House of Representatives is often called “The People's House” because of the understanding that people advocate for the laws that they want in our government.

There are five types of elections for people to participate in: primary, general, special local, and runoff.¹

- **Primary elections** are how political parties choose who gets to represent them in the general elections. The reason why it is important to participate in primary elections is because voters can choose the candidates that they think best represent their party.
- **General Elections** are elections held in the whole state to elect a candidate instead of one that is limited to voters in a particular party to select a nominee or those held in a specific locality. These elections are for any state or nationwide office.²
- **Special Elections** take place outside of the normal timeline to fulfill a special time-sensitive purpose like filling a vacant position.³
- **Local Elections** are elections where citizens vote for local officials like City Council and other local offices.
- **Run-off Elections** occur when none of the candidates get the required votes in the election to win. “In some elections, a candidate must win a plurality — the most votes — AND the majority of votes — earning more than 50% of the vote — to be certified as the winner.”⁴ If no one meets this requirement then a second election takes place. In the second election, only the top two candidates run for the position. With only two candidates running, it makes sure a majority of the votes go to one candidate.

¹ League of Women Voters of California Education Fund (n.d.). *Types of Elections*. Retrieved February 28, 2024, from <https://cavotes.org/types-elections/>

² League of Women Voters of California Education Fund (n.d.). *Types of Elections*. Retrieved February 28, 2024, from <https://cavotes.org/types-elections/>

³ League of Women Voters of California Education Fund (n.d.). *Types of Elections*. Retrieved February 28, 2024, from <https://cavotes.org/types-elections/>

⁴ Rock the Vote (2022, December 2). *Runoff Election: An Explainer*. Rock the Vote Democracy Explainers. Retrieved February 28, 2024, from <https://rockthevote.org/explainers/runoff-elections-an-explainer/>

The different elections are held at different times. General elections happen on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November also known as Election Day. Some local and some special elections also occur on Election Day. Primary, some special, and run-off elections are held on different days depending on what state the voter lives in. In states where there is early voting or absentee voting, the election takes place over several days or weeks and ends on election day. Citizens vote on the day of the election by casting their ballot for the candidate or issue they want to vote for. Their vote is then counted and when the results are in, a winner is announced.

In most elections, the winner is decided based on popular vote, which means the person with the most votes. Presidential elections are a bit more complicated. In presidential elections, the winner is the person who wins the majority of the electoral college votes. The electoral college is a process where each person's vote is tallied, and then (in most states), the winner gets all the electoral votes for the state. The number of electoral votes a state has is the same as the number of members it has in Congress. The candidate with at least 270 electors (or half of the electoral votes) wins the presidential election. This process was set in the Constitution as a way to compromise between having the president elected by the people and Congress. Not often, but sometimes the winner of the most popular votes or votes from people is not the winner of the Electoral College.

The time leading up to elections is called campaign season because different candidates and political parties campaign for people's vote. Before election day, voters need to decide their political party affiliation. Political

parties are groups of people who have the same beliefs on a variety of political issues. Some political parties are Democrats, Republicans, Green, and Libertarian. If there is a political party that you agree with their beliefs or stances then you might choose to be part of that party which means you have a party affiliation. A political party affiliation can help voters to identify which political party or candidate they wish to support. In many states, you must establish party affiliation to vote in primaries. This does not mean that you must always vote for the candidate that is from your party.

Voters should be familiar with candidates that are on the ballot. You can become familiar with who is on the ballot by looking at a sample ballot ahead of time. Sample ballots are a tool that gives voters a clear picture of what the actual ballot will look like on Election Day. It will have the issues that people will vote on as well as the candidates if any candidates are being elected. To learn more about sample ballots, check out our subsection on sample ballots on page 12. Sometimes the candidate you want to vote for is not on the ballot, but you can still vote for them as a “write-in”. Write-in candidates are people who are not on the ballot but can still be considered for a person’s vote. It is important to note that writing in anyone’s name does not count in many states. If someone wants to be considered a write-in candidate, they have to fill out specific paperwork.⁵

Voting

Voting may seem like a simple task for some people to participate in but, in reality, it is not uncommon to experience barriers and difficulties while

⁵ USA.gov (2024, February 20). Write-in candidates for federal and state elections. USA.gov. Retrieved February 28, 2024, from <https://www.usa.gov/write-in-candidates>

voting, especially if it is your first time. Still, it is one of the most impactful ways that someone could get involved in civic engagement. Consider this, “If people with disabilities voted at the same rate as people without disabilities who have the same demographic characteristics, there would be about 1.75 million more voters.”⁶

To be able to vote, a person must be a U.S. citizen, and the person must meet the requirements to be considered a resident of their state (even if the person is considered unhoused, they can still meet this requirement). The person must also be 18 years or older by Election Day to vote.⁷ However, even if someone is not 18 and still wants to get involved they can encourage friends and family members to vote! Every single vote counts so it's important to encourage everyone to vote, who knows, your encouragement might change their mind about voting.

If someone has not registered to vote before, they need to register to vote first. Everyone who wants to have the opportunity to vote needs to be registered. In every state, the rules and regulations about voter registration are different. In order to see what you need to do to register in your home state you can do a Google search for “register to vote” and enter your state’s name. There are several websites you can look at to find out how to register to vote in your state. Some examples of these websites are the United States Election Assistance Commission (<https://www.eac.gov/voters/register-and-vote-in-your-state>), and Vote.Gov (<https://vote.gov/>). One barrier that potential voters may experience is that

⁶ Schur, L., & Kruse, D. (n.d.). Fact sheet: Disability and Voter Turnout in the 2020 Elections. https://smlr.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/Documents/Centers/Program_Disability_Research/FactSheet_Disability_Voter_Turnout_2020.pdf

⁷ Voter ID Requirements | USA.gov. (2019). Usa.gov. <https://www.usa.gov/voter-id>

they may be ineligible to vote in certain elections if they are not U.S. citizens. However, it is important to share that in some local elections, they will still let people who are not U.S. citizens participate, depending on the location (usa.gov, 2020).⁸

“People with disabilities make up the largest minority group in the United States, and we are a part of every single community, and we are affected by every issue... So, this makes us a really powerful voting bloc in my opinion, and it is something that REV UP is helping to promote.” - Alexia Kemerling (REV UP Voting Campaign)

Ways to Vote

There are two ways a person can participate in “getting out the vote!”

(GOTV):

- Voting in person
- Voting by mail/absentee ballot

If you decide to **vote in person**, keep several things in mind. The first thing you should plan for is if your state requires any type of ID to be able to vote. Some states require a voter ID, and some states do not, so it's important to look up the qualifications for your state.⁹ If your state requires an ID make sure you bring that with you. If you are voting for the very first time it is required that you bring some sort of ID to identify yourself. Some examples of identification could be current and valid photo identification, current utility bill, bank statement, government check, or paycheck.¹⁰ If you don't have any identification, you may still be able to vote. The poll workers

⁸USAGov (2024, February 20). *Who can and cannot vote*. Retrieved February 28, 2024, from <https://www.usa.gov/who-can-vote>

⁹ Voter ID Requirements | USAGov. (2019). Usa.gov. <https://www.usa.gov/voter-id>

¹⁰ Voter ID Requirements | USAGov. (2019). Usa.gov. <https://www.usa.gov/voter-id>

may ask you to sign a form affirming your identity.¹¹

You may be wondering how to locate the polling place address which you will need to be in the correct place to vote. The correct polling location for each person is based on your residential address.¹² Typically, you cannot change the location of your polling place. However, if the polling place you are assigned to is not accessible

you have every right to ask for a new polling location that is accessible.¹³

In some states, you can vote in person early. If you are interested in doing this, you must check with your city/town about where and when you can vote early as it is often different from the voting hours and location on election day.

You can also vote via mail. Voting by mail looks different in each state, so I recommend you research your own state and the rules for voting by mail. This is very helpful for people who cannot vote in person because of their disability. This option means people can vote early and still be part of the election process.

“We might need to plan to vote in a different way than non-disabled voters.” So making sure that we are coordinating the accessible transportation that we need or making sure that we go with a group of friends to the polling place so that we feel confident and supported.... And even just preparing in advance knowing our rights as voters.” -Alexia Kemerling REV UP Voting Campaign Coordinator

¹¹ Voter ID Requirements | USAGov. (2019). Usa.gov. <https://www.usa.gov/voter-id>

¹² Find your polling place | USAGov. (n.d.). Www.usa.gov. <https://www.usa.gov/find-polling-place>

¹³ Find your polling place | USAGov. (n.d.). Www.usa.gov. <https://www.usa.gov/find-polling-place>

Accessible voting machines can be used for people with multiple different disabilities. “An accessible voting machine is an electronic tool that allows users with disabilities to vote using assistive technology.”¹⁴ Anyone, no matter their disability, can ask to use the accessible voting machine. It is helpful for people with disabilities that impact their dexterity or their ability to read or understand printed language. Using an accessible voting machine may be a good option for folks with low vision who prefer to use assistive technology and want to ensure their vote is sacred (or private).¹⁵

Sample Ballots & Voter Guides

if you are new to voting or like to plan out how you will vote, you may want to use a tool called a sample ballot. Sample ballots are documents that show the voter what the actual ballot you use when voting may look like, including what issues and candidates you are voting on. Sample ballots may also have information about the voter’s polling place and hours. In some states, you will get a sample ballot mailed to you, but in many states, you will need to find it yourself by going to your state elections website. It is important to know that sample ballots do not have information about the candidate or issue, just who or what you vote on. If you are looking for information about the candidate, you can find that information by looking for a voter guide for your area. “Voter guides list who you can vote for and offer details on each candidate's experience and goals.”¹⁶

¹⁴ How I Use Accessible Voting Machines with Low Vision. (n.d.). Perkins School for the Blind. <https://www.perkins.org/resource/how-i-use-accessible-voting-machines-low-vision/>

¹⁵ How I Use Accessible Voting Machines with Low Vision. (n.d.). Perkins School for the Blind. <https://www.perkins.org/resource/how-i-use-accessible-voting-machines-low-vision/>

¹⁶ Use voter guides and sample ballots to learn about candidates | USAGov. (n.d.). [Www.usa.gov. https://www.usa.gov/who-you-can-vote-for](https://www.usa.gov/who-you-can-vote-for)

Barriers and Discrimination in Voting

There also can be many barriers and discrimination for people with disabilities when it comes to voting. Our hope with this guide is to bring awareness to this issue so the chances of these issues not happening as much. One example of discrimination is not maintaining the accessibility of the location for people with disabilities. Not being able to enter your polling location because of access barriers is discrimination against people with disabilities and is extremely frustrating. There are many different accessibility measures to take into consideration such as if there is a no-step entrance or ramp so people who are wheelchair users or have other physical disabilities can access the area safely. Additional considerations include making sure accessible parking is readily available, propping heavy doors open, and providing clear and safe walkways throughout the space. If you find that your polling place isn't accessible to you for some reason, you can request accommodation to go to a location that is accessible to you.

Another reason you could experience voter discrimination is if you are unable to physically mark who you want to vote for on the ballot. In this case, you can bring a scribe to help or have someone at the polling location read for you and mark who or what you want to vote for. It is important to remember that the person marking your ballot cannot influence you on who to vote for. Make sure you vote for that candidate because you want to give them your vote, not because anyone else is making you! Unfortunately, some people with mental disabilities do not always get to vote. "Despite federal law protections, people with mental disabilities sometimes lose the

right to vote because of state voter competence laws, or because election officials, poll workers, or service providers improperly impose their own voter competence requirements.”¹⁷ (Stein et al., n.d.) Competence means reading and understanding information about the issues

If you experience difficulties acquiring your ballot, you can request a **provisional ballot**. “Provisional ballots are a backup voting method intended to allow voters who cannot establish their eligibility at the polling place to cast their ballot and have it counted.”¹⁸ Suppose you experience issues voting and cannot get your official ballot due to concerns about residency, citizenship, or another factor. In that case, you may request a provisional ballot so your vote is counted once the difficulties are cleared up. It is important to note that some states, such as Idaho, Minnesota, New Hampshire, and North Dakota, do not dispense provisional ballots at this time.¹⁹ “Provisional ballots are kept separate from regular ballots until after the polls close and are only counted if election officials determine the voter was eligible to vote in the election.”²⁰

Another barrier to voting may come as a result of incarceration.

Incarceration is when you are in prison and in many cases if you are

¹⁷ Mathis, J., Bossing, L., Crane, S., Israel, K., Bishop, M., Stein, C., Suh, J., Ziser, B., Buonocore, A. J., Joshi, A. ., Locklear, S. D., Mertl, R., Prewitt, S. B., Teigman, W., Wentworth, J. B., & Whang, A. S. (2018). A Guide to the Voting Rights of People with Mental Disabilities. Bazelon. Retrieved February 28, 2024, from <https://www.bazelon.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/2018-Voter-Guide-Updated.pdf>

¹⁸ Democracy Maps | Provisional Ballot Availability & Counting Procedures. (2024). Advancingacceptance.org.

https://www.advancingacceptance.org/democracy-maps/provisional_ballot_policies

¹⁹ Democracy Maps | Provisional Ballot Availability & Counting Procedures. (2024). Advancingacceptance.org.

https://www.advancingacceptance.org/democracy-maps/provisional_ballot_policies

²⁰ Handed a Provisional Ballot? Know What it Means. (2020, October 6). Democracy Docket. <https://www.democracymaps.com/analysis/handed-a-provisional-ballot-know-what-it-means/>

incarcerated you may lose the ability to vote. “In 23 states, felons lose their voting rights only while incarcerated, and receive automatic restoration upon release.

Note that in Maryland, convictions for buying or selling votes can only be restored through pardon.” (National Conference of State Legislators, 2023)²¹ However, rules are different according to the law in your state. For example, “In 11 states, felons lose their voting rights indefinitely for some crimes, or require a governor’s pardon for voting rights to be restored, face an additional waiting period after completion of sentence (including parole and probation) or require additional action before voting rights can be restored.”²² However, in some states, voters who have been incarcerated might lose their privilege to vote but only for a certain period of time. “In 14 states, felons lose their voting rights during incarceration, and for some time after, typically while on parole or probation. Voting rights are automatically restored after this time period. Former felons may also have to pay any outstanding fines, fees, or restitution before their rights are restored.”²³ It is important to understand the laws in your state if you have been or are in prison.

Voting Resources

The U.S. Election Assistance Commission or EAC has created video guides for election workers on creating accessible elections. These resources have helpful tips for anyone who is looking to make elections

²¹ National Conference of State Legislators. (2023, March 7). Felon Voting Rights. Www.ncsl.org. <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/felon-voting-rights>

²² National Conference of State Legislators. (2023, March 7). Felon Voting Rights. Www.ncsl.org. <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/felon-voting-rights>

²³ National Conference of State Legislators. (2023, March 7). Felon Voting Rights. Www.ncsl.org. <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/felon-voting-rights>

more accessible. Please check them out:

<https://www.eac.gov/election-officials/accessible-elections-information-election-officials>

Working As A Poll Worker

Many people think they have to have a big position of power to make a difference in elections. However, that is certainly not the case. Becoming a poll worker is one of the most effective ways to make a difference in elections. If you have ever voted in person in an election, then you have interacted with poll workers. These individuals answer any questions voters may have, keep track of ballots, and ensure the election runs smoothly.²⁴ Poll workers are trained and paid to support voters on election day.

If you are interested in becoming a poll worker then the first step is to contact your local election office and see how you can become involved. Each local elections office has its own training program for people who want to become poll workers. You can contact the local elections office and ask when the next training is near you.

It is important to be on time when you arrive at your poll worker training as it shows the trainers that you are taking this role seriously. Listen to everything the trainers share, but make sure to ask any questions of your own, so you can feel confident and ready for whatever problems come up at the polling location. Power The Polls works to empower people to be poll

²⁴ So You Want to be a Poll Worker... But You Have Some Questions... We Have Answers! Being a Poll Worker FAQ. (n.d.). <https://allvotingislocal.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Poll-Worker-FAQ.pdf>

workers, one way they do this is through resources. One resource includes a list of questions to ask at your poll worker training. Some of the questions they ask include:

- “Who do I call if a polling machine breaks or stops working?”
- “What do I do if there's a shortage of supplies or some other unforeseen occurrence (Power goes out, Wi-Fi doesn't work, etc.)?”
- “What type of assistance can be offered to a voter who speaks another language or is having difficulty communicating with me in English?”
- “What type of assistance may I provide to ensure people have access to vote if someone has a disability?”
- And many more!²⁵

On election day, you must arrive promptly at your location to ensure that the polls open on time, and everything runs smoothly. Poll worker shifts differ and depend on how your local election office runs elections. In some states, they have 6-hour shifts in other states it can be much longer or sometimes shorter! If you need a break or cannot work a full day because of your disability, don't be afraid to ask for accommodations. Your lived experience as a person with a disability is valuable in a poll worker role, and getting the accommodations you need to be successful is important.

Author's Experience as a Poll Worker

I personally have experience working as a poll worker. The opportunity came when I was a junior in high school. As a bonus for signing up to

²⁵ Power to the Polls (n.d.). *25 Questions to Ask at Your Poll Worker training*. Retrieved February 28, 2024, from <https://www.powerthepolls.org/assets/documents/25-questions-to-ask.pdf>

become a poll worker, I received extra credit in the history class. But I later found out that there was more to gain that day than extra credit. I learned about civic responsibility and how being involved in election processes and having the freedom to vote how we see fit is truly what makes this country great!

First, I attended the poll worker training at my local Board of Elections. The trainers discussed what poll workers do and explained that each person working would have a role to play. They went over each role in detail and what they expected each person to do. My role was to make sure that each voter was voting in the right voting precinct and to answer any questions that anyone may have had. A voting precinct is the portion of the town or city you live in that votes at a given polling place. If a person was unaware of what voting precinct they were in we would help them to identify which precinct they belonged to and whether they had to go elsewhere. It's important to make sure the voter knows what precinct they are in and that they are in the right polling place because your ballot may be different depending on where you vote or your vote may not be counted at all.

On the day of the election, I headed to the location I was assigned to work at about 5:00 AM that morning! Once I was situated, I started to help people who needed my assistance and do my part making sure everyone was in the right precinct. It was a long day since the polls stayed open for a long period of time to adjust to people's schedules. However, it is worth it to make sure people are engaging in voting.

Resources to Make Polling Places Accessible

If you get involved with organizing and setting up polling places, the ADA website provides a guide to ensure that the polling place is physically accessible. You can find it at:

[archive.ada.gov/ada_voting/voting_solutions_ta/polling_place_solutions.htm](https://www.archive.ada.gov/ada_voting/voting_solutions_ta/polling_place_solutions.htm)

Getting Involved With a Campaign

Another way to get involved in civic engagement is by working on campaigns. “A political campaign is an organized series of actions that aims to sway public opinion within a particular group.”²⁶ An example of campaigns that we most commonly see is presidential campaigns. However, there are campaigns at the state and local level as well. There are a lot of different roles that go into running a campaign. It takes many people to commit to the work and make a difference. There are many different levels of work for a campaign, and everyone has a different role in helping their candidate or issue succeed! Some of the roles the campaign staffers may have include speechwriters, campaign managers, and schedulers.²⁷ Outside of these particular roles, there are four main areas of work in a campaign, they are:

- The **Communications** department helps control the kind of messages that the campaign wants to send out to the general public.

²⁶ A Quick Guide to Working on Political Campaigns. (2022, April 19). <https://bau.edu/blog/guide-on-political-campaigns/>

²⁷ Guide to Working on Political Campaigns. (n.d.). Harvard Law School. <https://hls.harvard.edu/bernard-koteen-office-of-public-interest-advising/a-quick-guide-to-working-on-political-campaigns/>

- The **Digital** department helps distribute the message through things like social media, websites, newsletters, and digital ads
- The **Finance** department works on tracking expenses and revenue like fundraising.
- The **Political** department works with communities and the local people to help get candidate support in that area by learning about concerns and determining how the candidate would address those concerns.²⁸

If you want to get involved in a campaign and don't know where to start - don't be discouraged! There are plenty of ways to get involved, whether or not you know anyone personally who's been involved in a campaign or is running for office. If you personally know a candidate who is running for office or someone who works in the campaign, don't be afraid to use that to your advantage and ask how you can help.²⁹ If you don't have any connections and want to get more involved you can reach out to a campaign via social media and ask how you can help. Going to a campaign event might be another great way to meet new people and make connections to get involved in the campaign in the future. Lastly, you can go on the campaign's website to find out how to get involved

It is important to be prepared for any opportunity but especially to be prepared with materials you need when you are interested in volunteering or interning on a campaign. If you are applying for a job on a campaign, it is important that you have a resume and cover letter prepared; when

²⁸ The Secret to Getting Started on Working for Political Campaigns. (2022, November 9). CallHub. <https://callhub.io/blog/political-campaign/6-ways-work-political-campaign/>

²⁹ The Secret to Getting Started on Working for Political Campaigns. (2022, November 9). CallHub. <https://callhub.io/blog/political-campaign/6-ways-work-political-campaign/>

volunteering for campaigns, those materials are not required, and most campaigns will accept you without those materials. Some things you can include on your resume are any previous work experience, committees you are a part of, and any unique skills that you wish to highlight. For your cover letter, you should make sure you list why you would be a good fit for this specific campaign and any particular draw it has for you. If you are applying to an internship for the first time, a good thing to talk about would be the strengths and skills you would bring that would be helpful to the campaign.³⁰ After you put together your resume and cover letter then, you can reach out to the campaign that you wish to work or volunteer for via email or on the campaign's website.

Volunteering & Interning For Campaigns

Many volunteers work on campaigns to help them run smoothly. Anyone can volunteer for a campaign if they are supporters of a campaign that want to help their candidate win the election. There are many different things to think about when volunteering for a campaign.

- Would you like to work on a smaller local campaign or a bigger national campaign?
- Where is the campaign located?
- Do you want to volunteer locally, or are you willing to travel?
- Does the candidate's ideas and beliefs match up with your beliefs?
 - Every candidate has policy positions on certain issues that they share with their constituents, whether that be online or on other platforms. If you have issues that are important to you and that

³⁰ How to Apply for a Campaign Internship. (2020, June 27). Blue Ripple Politics. <https://blueripplepolitics.org/blog/apply-campaign-internship>

you believe in, you should find the candidate that matches your position on those issues and beliefs.

- Do you and the candidate have things in common or a shared interest?
 - For example, if you and the candidate both grew up with the same religious background/beliefs, this may be something that brings you together and compels you to work for the candidate.³¹

As a volunteer for a campaign, there are many ways you can participate in voter turnout efforts, such as making calls on behalf of the candidate (also known as phone banking), writing content for the campaign, or going door-to-door canvassing, writing content for the campaign.³²

Phone banking is a volunteering activity that can be accessible for people with multiple different types of disabilities.³³ For example, if the campaign that you're working on allows you to phone bank through text messaging this may be a great option for people who are deaf or hard of hearing.³⁴

Phone banking is also a good idea for people who do not have easy access to transportation. As a volunteer or a staff member of a campaign if you

³¹ How to Apply for a Campaign Internship. (2020, June 27). Blue Ripple Politics. <https://blueripplepolitics.org/blog/apply-campaign-internship>

³² Which Task do Volunteers for a Political Campaign Usually do? (2023, January 10). Purposefulpolitics.com.

<https://purposefulpolitics.com/which-task-do-volunteers-for-a-political-campaign-usually-do/>

³³ National Council on Independent Living (2018, April 13). *Including People with Disabilities in Your Political Campaign: A Guide for Campaign Staff*. Retrieved February 28, 2024, from <https://ncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/4-13-18-Resource-for-Campaign-Staff-on-Disabled-Volunteers.pdf>

³⁴ National Council on Independent Living (2018, April 13). *Including People with Disabilities in Your Political Campaign: A Guide for Campaign Staff*. Retrieved February 28, 2024, from <https://ncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/4-13-18-Resource-for-Campaign-Staff-on-Disabled-Volunteers.pdf>

“Several years ago, about 2010, I worked with then Congressman Keith Ellison when he ran for Congress for the very first time, he put together a number of disabled advocates from around the state (Minnesota), and he asked, ‘How do I reach people with disabilities?’ And so we came up with a plan to intentionally door-knock to people with disabilities in low-income buildings... And when we did that we in turn increased the vote for the whole election and we did it in a matter of time that no other door knocker could do.” -Nikki Villavicencio, Maplewood Minnesota City Council

have a script that you have volunteers follow make sure it is in plain language and something that people with cognitive disabilities can understand Internships are another good option for people who want to get involved in campaigns. Many internships are volunteer only, but some interns can get paid or school credit. Some campaign websites have sections where an individual interested in interning can fill in their information and someone from the campaign will contact them. However, not all campaigns have this on their website,³⁵ in which case you will want to send an email that is professional, not too long, and very clear to the campaign you are interested in interning for. If you have them, make sure you attach your resume and cover letter that is specific to the campaign to the email.³⁶

Working On A Campaign

When deciding if you want to work for a political campaign, it is important to take into consideration the reality of the work that may not often be discussed. For example, if you decide to take a role working on a

³⁵ How to Apply for a Campaign Internship. (2020, June 27). Blue Ripple Politics. <https://blueripplepolitics.org/blog/apply-campaign-internship>

³⁶ How to Apply for a Campaign Internship. (2020, June 27). Blue Ripple Politics. <https://blueripplepolitics.org/blog/apply-campaign-internship>

campaign, that means you may be traveling constantly. There's also a chance that you will work a lot of overtime while working on a campaign, especially closer to election season. If you decide to work on a smaller campaign, it is important to note that the staff does not earn big salaries or many benefits because of the campaign size. In many cases, with smaller campaigns, you may only work part-time. If they have paid positions at all. Another thing that may happen when working on campaigns is that your work could lead to strains on or even the loss of connections or long-term relationships. For example, if someone is against a particular candidate that person could get defensive, and the relationship could never be the same. Others could be against politics in general and choose not to associate with you due to your political work.³⁷ It is important, when working for a campaign, that you take care of yourself by prioritizing time to step away from the work and do some form of self-care. Overall, working on a campaign is a rewarding experience. You can say you contributed to helping make our country better by developing those policies for the campaign and creating a better world.

Running For Office

If you want to run for office, it's important to know why you're running for office. Do you want to make a difference in your community on a local, state, or national government level? If the answer is yes, then by all means, run for office. If you are running for office for attention or to become famous., then it probably is not a good idea to run for office.

³⁷ What is it Like to Work on a Political Campaign. (2023, March 7). Purposefulpolitics.com. <https://purposefulpolitics.com/what-is-it-like-to-work-on-a-political-campaign/>

“Acquiring my disability is what ultimately led me to run for office... I was politically engaged all of my life, I paid attention to what was going on, I could name presidents and their entire cabinet, I could name Supreme Court justices, I knew who senators and Congress members were because it interested me... I donated, and I voted, but I wasn't as engaged in policy as I am at this moment.... Nineteen years ago I acquired my disability...I was shot in a random shooting and paralyzed and so I have a spinal cord injury and it changed my life completely.”
- Jennifer Longdon (State Representative for Arizona LD24)

There are a variety of different positions that people run for. You could run for local office meaning you could have a position in your own community.

The positions people run for in local government include:

- The school boards: oversee the local schools in the area.
- The county government: oversees many things, including the infrastructure, emergency management, and more. Also, the county government is responsible for issuing things such as birth certificates, driver's licenses, and marriage certificates.³⁸
- Special district positions: manage only certain areas for example, there will be a special district just for parks or the library.³⁹
- Municipalities are local self-government bodies such as a city or town with several elected positions such as city council, mayor, and more.

³⁸ What Local Offices Can I Run for? - Numero Blog. (2021, August 16). <https://numero.ai/blog/local-offices-to-run-for/>

³⁹ What Local Offices Can I Run for? - Numero Blog. (2021, August 16). <https://numero.ai/blog/local-offices-to-run-for/>

“Of course, when everyone thinks about running for office, they think about Congress and things like that, but there are over 500,000 elected positions in the United States and over 493,000 of those are local offices. You can always consider running for federal office, but a lot of people who run for office at that level often start at the local or state level.” - Sarah Blahovec Disability Civic Engagement Expert

People also run for office in their home state. There are approximately “13 state executive offices in the United States.”⁴⁰

However, not all of these positions are available in every state. “Of the 13 offices, seven appear in all 50 states, including: governor, attorney general, superintendent of schools, insurance commissioner, agriculture commissioner, labor commissioner, and public service commissioner.”⁴¹

State-level representatives have requirements and terms that are set at the state level, so it is important to look up what exists in your state. There are

also many positions people run for at the federal level. It is important to keep in mind that many elected offices have certain requirements that they want candidates to have before running for office. The positions and requirements for federal offices are:

- **President & Vice President:** The President is the head of the United States Government. The president can be elected for a four-year term two times, meaning they can serve eight years in total if the people decide to elect him two times. If someone wants to run for President of the United States they must be at 35 years old or older.

⁴⁰ State Executive Offices. (n.d.). Ballotpedia. https://ballotpedia.org/State_executive_offices

⁴¹ State Executive Offices. (n.d.). Ballotpedia. https://ballotpedia.org/State_executive_offices

They have to have lived in the US for at least 14 years and be a U.S. citizen since birth.⁴² The Vice President is someone who advises the president and serves as the president of the Senate.⁴³ The president and the vice president will run on a ticket together as one campaign. The requirements to be vice president is the same to be president.

- **Senate:** Senators serve for 6 year terms and every two years $\frac{1}{3}$ of the senate seats are open for elections. If someone wants to run for the US Senate they must be at least 30 years of age and a U.S. citizen for nine years. They also must live in the state they wish to represent at the time of the election.⁴⁴
- **House of Representatives:** A Congressman in the House of Representatives serves for 2 years. To run for House of Representatives, a potential candidate must be at least 25 years old, a U.S. citizen, and a resident of the state they wish to represent.⁴⁵

Running for office is not easy, and many people face many barriers. However, do not let this discourage your ambition and motivation to run. Ableism can be one barrier for women with disabilities to run whether it be because of not making spaces accessible or people not believing in their ability to run and/or lead because of your disability.⁴⁶ One barrier for

⁴²USAGov (n.d.). Constitutional requirements for presidential candidates. Retrieved August 8, 2023, from <https://www.usa.gov/requirements-for-presidential-candidates>

⁴³ United States Senate (n.d.). *About the Vice President (President of the Senate)*. Retrieved February 28, 2024, from <https://www.senate.gov/about/officers-staff/vice-president.htm#:~:text=The%20Constitution%20names%20the%20vice>

⁴⁴ United States Senate. (2019, June 6). U.S. Senate: Qualifications & Terms of Service. Senate.gov. https://www.senate.gov/senators/qualifications_termsofservice.htm

⁴⁵ U.S. House of Representatives. (2017). The House Explained | House.gov. House.gov. <https://www.house.gov/the-house-explained>

⁴⁶ 26 Common Barriers to Running for Office. (n.d.). She Should Run. <https://www.sheshouldrun.org/starter-kit/26-common-barriers-to-running-for-office/>

disabled people who want to run for office is the risk of losing benefits that some people with disabilities depend on, like Supplemental Security Income, Social Security Disability Insurance, and Medicaid.⁴⁷ If this is a barrier for you, you may need to hold off on running for office. However, consider using your advocacy skills to ask your Congressional representative to support legislation that would remove this barrier. Another barrier that people with disabilities who want to run for office is not having access to reasonable accommodations for candidates. For example, not having digital platforms accessible to find critical information⁴⁸ or not being able to access debates or candidate forums because the location is not accessible to you or you need an ASL interpreter. In these scenarios, showing voters your willingness to advocate for your own accommodations and fight for your rights may help them to better understand what you would be willing to do for them.

**“Civic engagement and running for office can be very intimidating but the important thing to know is that it’s just a set of skills. It’s a set of skills that anyone can learn.” - Nikki Villavicencio
Maplewood
Minnesota City
Council**

For multiple marginalized disabled women, there are even more barriers. Disabled women of color will likely face racism. Women of color often work

⁴⁷ United States Senate (2022, July 25). Casey Introduces Suite of Legislation to Enable Americans with Disabilities to Run for and Serve in Elected Office. Bob Casey U.S. Senator for Pennsylvania. Retrieved February 28, 2024, from <https://www.casey.senate.gov/news/releases/casey-introduces-suite-of-legislation-to-enable-americans-with-disabilities-to-run-for-and-serve-in-elected-office>

⁴⁸ Pulrang, A. (2022, November 30). 5 Things People With Disabilities Look For In Social Media. Forbes. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/andrewpulrang/2022/11/30/5-things-people-with-disabilities-look-for-in-social-media/?sh=2f7cb40231c6>

in occupations that are necessary to society but vastly underpaid.⁴⁹ Women, and particularly women of color, struggle to break into male-dominated fields, and once there, struggle with sexism, racism, and discrimination.⁵⁰ The same can be true when running for office. However, this is why representation is so important because people who see elected officials who remind them more of themselves might be encouraged to run for office. “Women make up 51% of the population but only makeup 24% of Congress, 28% of state-wide executive seats, 29% of state legislatures, and only 27% of mayors of the 100 largest cities in America. Those numbers go down for Black women and women of color”.⁵¹ Women who identify as LGBTQ+ also face many barriers when running for office. For example, LGBTQ+ women may struggle with fundraising as they may have to worry about finding a community of people to donate financially to a campaign. They may even experience threats and violence from people who are against LGBTQ+ people.⁵² Even though it can be frustrating with so many barriers for people with disabilities to run for office, I still encourage people with disabilities to run if they want to. Seeing the representation of disabled people in elected office is so important, and we deserve to have our voices at the table!

⁴⁹ Mason, J., & Gallagher Robbins, K. (n.d.). *Women's Work Is Undervalued, and It's Costing Us Billions*. National Partnership. Retrieved February 28, 2024, from <https://nationalpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/womens-work-is-undervalued.pdf>

⁵⁰ Mason, J., & Gallagher Robbins, K. (n.d.). *Women's Work Is Undervalued, and It's Costing Us Billions*. National Partnership. Retrieved February 28, 2024, from <https://nationalpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/womens-work-is-undervalued.pdf>

⁵¹ 26 Common Barriers to Running for Office. (n.d.). She Should Run. <https://www.sheshouldrun.org/starter-kit/26-common-barriers-to-running-for-office/>

⁵² Gonzales, R., Imse, E., LeDonne, S., & Pope, S. (2021, March). *The Decision to Run: Uncovering the Barriers and Motivator for LGBTQ Women Running for Office*. Retrieved February 28, 2024, from https://victoryinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Victory-Institute_The-Decision-to-Run-Report.pdf

“For me growing up as a disabled girl, I felt like I was conditioned not to take up space. Both because I was a woman and because I was disabled. And I want young women and girls with disabilities to know that they should take up space. They should actually make our spaces deserve them and that they can do so through civic engagement.” - Maria Town, President and CEO of the American Association of People with Disabilities

Disability Community Political Participation

The Disability Vote is both unique and powerful when it comes to elections. Studies show that “17.7 million people with disabilities reported voting in the November 2020 elections.”⁵³ With these numbers alone, the Disability Community is guaranteed to make a change and have our voices heard!

There really is power in numbers! A big reason the Disability Community is able to pull together that power is online advocacy during election seasons. Twitter now called X was a great platform to start these discussions and conversations with elected officials on their disability platform. They would discuss how they would improve things for Americans with disabilities.

Crip The Vote

The first campaign to highlight the Disability Community as a powerful voting block is called Crip The Vote. Crip The Vote was created by Alice Wong, Andrew Pulrang, and Gregg Beratan to help voters with disabilities

⁵³ Schur, L., & Kruse, D. (n.d.). Fact sheet: Disability and Voter Turnout in the 2020 Elections. https://smlr.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/Documents/Centers/Program_Disability_Research/FactSheet_Disability_Voter_Turnout_2020.pdf

“Crip The Vote is one of the most essential pieces of infrastructure we have in the Disability Community.”

- Rebecca Cokley, the first Disability Rights Program Officer at the Ford Foundation

and politicians engage in issues that are important to the Disability Community. Crip The Vote is nonpartisan which means it is not connected to a political party. Crip The Vote has discussions about a variety of issues at any level, including elections and voting and uses the hashtag #CripTheVote. A hashtag is a symbol with words following it without spaces. All posts that use a hashtag can be found when you click on or search the social media site using that

hashtag. This campaign was active on Twitter and Facebook, with Twitter being its most popular platform. The organizers of Crip The Vote would often hold Twitter Chats which is where the organizers would ask a question related to disability and the election process and include the hashtag #CripTheVote. Participants in the chat would put their responses on that same thread while also using #CripTheVote. Politicians also used this hashtag to help spread the word about their disability platform.

#CripTheVote proved to be a powerful tool leading up to the 2020 election as candidates running in 2020 came on Twitter to discuss their disability platform including Senator Elizabeth Warren and Secretary Pete Buttigieg. The #CripTheVote campaign is historic, because it encourages politicians, the media, and the general public to pay attention to the Disability Community. Crip The Vote shows the Disability Community is a powerful group of voters and that our community has something to say. Also, it gets disabled people excited to go out and vote!

Advising on Campaigns

It is important that people with disabilities advise on campaigns. Their personal lived experience can help to have an impact on policies and practices that will help other people with disabilities throughout their community, state, and all over our country.

Every issue is a disability issue, and it is important for all campaigns to take time to consider how their platforms impact the disabled people they serve. The best way for them to do this is to hear from people with disabilities, which is why they need to hear from you! Advising a campaign can come in many different forms people such as:

- Providing feedback on a particular policy issue or on their platform as a whole,
- Providing insight on how to make their digital content more accessible,
- Giving guidance on how to create accessible events and volunteering opportunities.

All of these and more can help the candidate and campaign reach disabled voters and help the candidate represent the Disability Community when elected. All it takes is an email, call, or handshake to get started.

Political campaigns often have more work than they have time to complete, so connecting with the candidate or campaign manager and offering to advise their campaign on an issue or accessibility can be an easy yes for them. In order to be successful, you want to make sure you communicate

your expertise and shared interests. You may want to say or send something like the following:

Dear **Candidate/Campaign Manager's Name,**

I hope this email finds you well. I am writing to express my interest in contributing to your political campaign by offering my expertise on disability issues.

As a person with a disability, I have lived experience with the issues the Disability Community faces. I am a passionate advocate for the rights and inclusion of individuals with disabilities. I believe that addressing disability issues creates a more inclusive world.

*Following your campaign, I am impressed by your commitment to **add your ideas about a specific policy, initiative, or statement related to inclusivity or social justice.** I am confident that by incorporating a detailed and informed approach to disability issues, your campaign can further connect with disabled voters. I would like to offer my assistance in providing insights, strategies, and recommendations on addressing disability issues within your campaign platform. I am eager to collaborate with you to ensure that the needs and concerns of the Disability Community are addressed.*

I would be happy to meet as soon as possible to discuss how we can work together to enhance your campaign's approach to disability issues. Thank you for considering my offer, and I look forward to the

*possibility of contributing to your campaign's success. Please feel free to contact me via email or phone **Add your email address and phone number here** to schedule a meeting.*

Best regards,

Your Name

Policy issues

As stated earlier, the unique thing about disability is that all policy issues are disability issues. Below are just a few examples of well-known issues and the impact they have on the Disability Community.

- **Housing:** People with disabilities are fighting for homes to be accessible, affordable, and integrated for all people. Integrated housing is when people live in the community instead of being separated into nursing homes or institutions.
- **Transportation:** Many wheelchair users have had damage done to their wheelchairs while traveling on airplanes. Additionally, transportation is a big issue for the Disability Community because for many disabled people driving or owning an accessible vehicle is too expensive or not an option due to their disability. This means many people with disabilities have to use public transportation, and as such, buses and trains need to be accessible as well.
- **Employment:** Currently, employment and specifically subminimum wage is a “hot button” topic. Many people with disabilities struggle to get jobs due to employment discrimination and difficulties finding work that is accessible and inclusive. Beyond that many disabled

people, particularly people with intellectual and developmental disabilities are forced to work for subminimum wages.

- **Subminimum Wage:** Through the 14(c) program, the Department of Labor certifies employers to pay individuals with disabilities wages below the federal minimum—also known as subminimum wage.⁵⁴ This is a discriminatory practice towards people with disabilities that our government is still letting happen today. Many people with disabilities still struggle to find a job and be part of the workforce themselves. “Across all age groups, persons with a disability were much less likely to be employed than those with no disability.”⁵⁵

Policy is so broad, so if you are particularly interested in an issue, there are most likely policy discussions on it. Don't be afraid to do research, ask questions, and connect with people in that policy field and, in turn, push candidates to develop platforms on these issues. Platforms are a candidate's statement about an issue or how they plan to act on an issue.

“We researched what certain people cared about. We knew Senator Elizabeth Warren would care about education because she was a special education teacher.”- Rebecca Cokley, first Disability Rights Program Officer at the Ford Foundation talking about connecting with 2020 presidential candidates on issues they cared about that impact the Disability Community.

⁵⁴ Office, U. S. G. A. (n.d.). Subminimum Wage Program: DOL Could Do More to Ensure Timely Oversight | U.S. GAO. [www.gao.gov](https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-23-105116). <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-23-105116>

⁵⁵ Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2021). Persons with a disability: Labor force characteristics. <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/disabl.pdf>

Accessibility On The Campaign Trail

All eyes are on the campaign trail during the election season. The campaign trail is a word used to describe the travel between different places and events that a political campaign goes to where they make speeches and talk with potential voters. It is a critical way for voters to stay engaged with the election process and learn about candidates. Campaign trails do not often plan for accessibility, so we need to consider how we, as disabled women, can help a campaign with this process.

As a woman with a disability, you can work with the campaign and partner organizations to make events accessible. There are several things to take into consideration when doing this:

- If an organization is hosting a campaign event, make sure that the building is physically accessible and barrier-free, for example utilizing no-step entrances or ensuring that there is not a long way to walk to get to the entrance of the area where the event is held.
- Give participants who register to attend the campaign event a place on the registration form to request reasonable accommodations that they may need because of their disability.
- Sign language interpreters and CART which is short for Communication Access Realtime Translation captioning should be present at all campaign events so the Deaf and hard of hearing community and people with auditory processing disabilities can be informed of what is being said at the event.
- At campaign events, there should be specifically “ADA” seating so people with disabilities can see what is going on and comfortably

participate in all elements of the event. These seats should be as close to the stage as possible for wheelchair users and also for those who need access to chairs.⁵⁶

- If any materials are handed out at the events, they should be written in plain language so that it's easy for people with cognitive disabilities to understand so they can participate.⁵⁷
- At loud campaign events offering ear plugs for people with autism and other sensory-related disabilities who have a sensitivity to noise.⁵⁸
- Lastly, campaign events must have accessible bathrooms that are inclusive of all genders.⁵⁹ Ideally, the bathroom should be on the same level as the campaign event. However, if that is not possible, it is important to ensure that the bathrooms are accessible by

“It was really interesting to see how much the other people on the campaign had to learn about disability and accessibility. For example, it was interesting to see how many folks have never interfaced with any sort of disabled community or accessibility best practices before.” - Jules Good worked on Stacey Abrams for Governor campaign

⁵⁶ National Council on Independent Living (2018, April 13). *Including People with Disabilities in Your Political Campaign: A Guide for Campaign Staff*. Retrieved February 28, 2024, from <https://ncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/4-13-18-Resource-for-Campaign-Staff-on-Disabled-Volunteer-s.pdf>

⁵⁷ National Council on Independent Living (2018, April 13). *Including People with Disabilities in Your Political Campaign: A Guide for Campaign Staff*. Retrieved February 28, 2024, from <https://ncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/4-13-18-Resource-for-Campaign-Staff-on-Disabled-Volunteer-s.pdf>

⁵⁸ Autistic Self Advocacy Network (2011). *Autistic Access Needs: Notes on Accessibility*. Retrieved February 28, 2024, from <https://autisticadvocacy.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Autistic-Access-Needs-Notes-on-Accessibility.pdf>

⁵⁹ National Council on Independent Living (2018, April 13). *Including People with Disabilities in Your Political Campaign: A Guide for Campaign Staff*. Retrieved February 28, 2024, from <https://ncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/4-13-18-Resource-for-Campaign-Staff-on-Disabled-Volunteer-s.pdf>

elevator for wheelchair users or people who have difficulty taking the steps.⁶⁰

Campaign events traditionally are not accessible to the Disability Community and as such we are not considered in the broader get-out-the-vote plan for a campaign, but each of us can do our part to change that. We can all consult with campaigns to ensure they work to make their events, volunteering, and more accessible to our community.

A Call To Action And Thank You

With the resources you have read in this guide, now it is time to take the knowledge you have acquired and let your voices be heard! Whether at the federal, state, or local level you can make a difference! Even if it's as simple as encouraging your friends to vote, you are participating in civic engagement. If there is a cause you are passionate about, go after it, and don't be afraid to speak your mind, even if it's something others may not want to hear. Never be afraid to fight for your human rights.

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⁶⁰ National Council on Independent Living (2018, April 13). *Including People with Disabilities in Your Political Campaign: A Guide for Campaign Staff*. Retrieved February 28, 2024, from <https://ncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/4-13-18-Resource-for-Campaign-Staff-on-Disabled-Volunteers.pdf>

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Thank you!

Kelsi Weaver

