



## Voting and YOUth!

If you are 18 years old and a citizen of the United States, you have a right to vote! Voting is an easy and important way to affect your local community, state, and country. It is a basic building block of democracy. Going to your local polling place [place where you vote] or filling out a ballot at home can have a big impact on you and your future. This guide will give you information on how to vote. It will also give you resources to help you find more information.

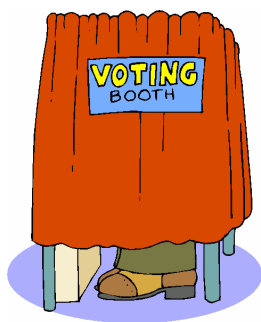
### Laws That Make Voting Accessible

#### Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990

The U.S. Congress passed the Americans with Disability Act (ADA) in 1990. This law says that buildings must allow everyone to enter and get around inside. Building policies must take into account people with disabilities. Public sites and programs have to be available to all people. People with many different disabilities are covered by this law. Title II of this law is about the government.



*IMAGE: A woman wheelchair user is voting at a voting booth.*



*IMAGE: An animated image of a voting booth.*

#### Help America Vote Act (HAVA) of 2002

The Help America Vote Act (HAVA) was passed by Congress in 2002. This law focuses on voting and accessibility. This law says that people with disabilities have the right to vote in their own, private booth and should have accommodations so they can vote independently. It gives them the same right as other voters. Every state must have a way for people with disabilities to get information about which polling places are accessible as well as to report violations (times when the law is not followed).

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## Activities

- Contact the office of your state's Secretary of State. This can be about accessibility, reporting problems, or volunteering.

## Resources

- Federal Election Commission: [www.fec.gov/](http://www.fec.gov/)
- US Department of Justice: [www.usdoj.gov/crt/voting/hava/hava.html](http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/voting/hava/hava.html)
- ADA Technical Assistance: [www.ada.gov/taprogram.htm](http://www.ada.gov/taprogram.htm)
- American Association of People with Disabilities: [www.aapd-dc.org/dvppmain/elreform/havadispro.html](http://www.aapd-dc.org/dvppmain/elreform/havadispro.html)

## Registering to Vote



*IMAGE: A person registering to vote with another person seated at the table.*

You have to register to vote before you can actually vote. You need to be at least 18 years old on the day of the election. So even if you are 17 right now, you can still register if you will be 18 on Election Day. You can register with your County Clerk. The deadline to register is different for every state. Before the deadline, you have to fill out a voter registration form. Then you have to mail it to your County Clerk. That mailing address is usually listed on the back of the registration form.

## Activities

- Find your state's deadline to register.
- Get a voter registration form.
- Fill it out. It's OK to ask for help to fill it out.
- Mail it to your County Clerk. (Contact information for your County Clerk can be found at the front of your local phone book.)

## Resources

- State deadlines: [www.rockthevote.com/voting-is-easy/important-dates/](http://www.rockthevote.com/voting-is-easy/important-dates/)
- Secretary of State Offices: [www.rockthevote.com/voting-is-easy/the-voting-process/contact-sos/](http://www.rockthevote.com/voting-is-easy/the-voting-process/contact-sos/)
- Voter Registration Information by State: [www.votesmart.org/voter\\_registration\\_resources.php](http://www.votesmart.org/voter_registration_resources.php)

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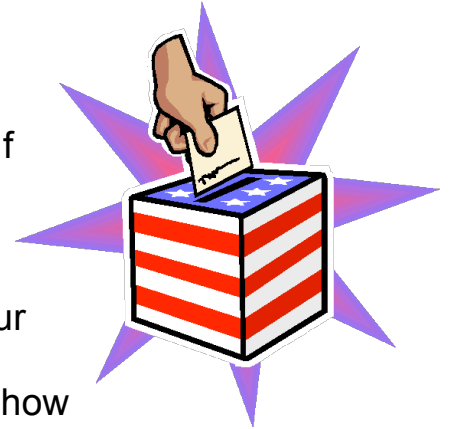


## Methods of Voting

You can vote many different ways. The options you have for voting are different in every state.

### Voting at the Polls

If you vote at the polls (the place in your local community where people go to vote), you will be voting on Election Day. If you choose this option, you will physically go to your assigned polling place on Election Day. Once you register to vote, your County Clerk will send you a voter registration card that tells you where your polling place is. It is usually somewhere in your neighborhood, but if you live in an area with fewer people, you may have to travel a longer distance. It is important that you show up at the polling place that is assigned to you. You will not be allowed to vote at any other spot.



*IMAGE: A red, white, and blue ballot box.*

Once you get to the polling place, you may have to show some identification. This way the people at the polling place know that you are the person you say you are. Rules about what kind of identification you need are different from state to state. You can find the identification requirements for your state by asking your County Clerk or your state's Secretary of State's office.



*IMAGE: A man is putting his ballot in a box.*

Once you show your identification, you may be handed a ballot or shown to a voting booth. Some ballots (the actual form on which you mark your vote) will have you punch out a hole next to the candidates and issues you want to vote for. Other ballots will ask you to fill in a box or a circle. If you are confused by the ballot, just ask someone at the registration desk for help.

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Some states may not have paper ballots at all. These states may have electronic voting systems. If this is the voting system in your state, you will be asked to go to a machine. Electronic voting systems are not all the same.

Usually they will ask you to push a button or pull some kind of lever after looking at each candidate or issue on a computer screen. Election volunteers are at each voting site to help you. They are careful to be impartial (to keep their own ideas to themselves) so that your vote represents only you.

If you need a ballot in alternative format, you need to ask your County Clerk. Some voting districts may have the ballots in Braille or large print. Others may allow you/ask you to take someone into the voting booth with you. This sort of question would be important to ask ahead of time because it may influence if you want to vote at the polls or ask for an absentee ballot to fill out at home.

## Other Ways of Voting



*IMAGE: A paper ballot like the kind you would be sent in the mail if you vote absentee.*

You can also vote by mail-in or absentee ballot. Some areas of the country are starting to run all of their local elections by mail-in ballot only. Even if you are not in one of these areas, you can still ask for an absentee or mail-in ballot. Usually you have to ask for an absentee ballot in writing many weeks before the Election Day, so plan ahead. If you get an absentee or mail-in ballot, you will fill it out at home and send it or hand deliver it to your County Clerk before Election Day. An absentee or mail-in ballot is always on paper and will ask you to fill in a box, fill in a circle, or complete an arrow next to the candidate or issue you want to vote for.

You can have someone help you fill out the absentee or mail-in ballot. Many states ask the person that helped you fill out the ballot to also sign or print his/her name somewhere on the ballot. Many states will not let you vote at the polls on Election Day if you ask for an absentee or mail-in ballot and change your mind at the last minute. Be sure you know the rules and deadlines for your state. If you go to school away from where you permanently live, it's a good idea to get an absentee ballot so you can still vote.

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## Activities

- Decide whether you want to vote at the polls or at home.
- If you want to vote at the polls, make sure that you have the right form of identification for your state.
- If you are going to a polling place, make sure you know where your assigned polling place is.
- If you are voting at a polling place, make sure you know when your polling place opens and closes.
- If you want to vote at home, make sure you ask for an absentee or mail-in ballot ahead of time.
- If you want to vote at home, make sure that once you get your ballot, you fill it out and mail it in by the deadline.



*IMAGE: A group of people putting their ballots in a box at the polling place.*

## Resources

- List of ID Requirements by State: [www.pewcenteronthestates.org/uploadedFiles/voterID.laws.6.08.pdf](http://www.pewcenteronthestates.org/uploadedFiles/voterID.laws.6.08.pdf)
- List of ID Requirements by State Using a Map: [www.pewcenteronthestates.org/uploadedFiles/HAVA\\_Map2.pdf](http://www.pewcenteronthestates.org/uploadedFiles/HAVA_Map2.pdf)
- Rock the Vote Information: [www.rockthevote.com/voting-is-easy/the-voting-process/contact-sos/](http://www.rockthevote.com/voting-is-easy/the-voting-process/contact-sos/)

## Inaccessible Polling Places



*IMAGE: A woman puts her ballot in the box.*

Polling places have to be accessible because of the laws, but some may not be. If your polling place is inaccessible, you will need to advocate for yourself. Do not leave without figuring some way to vote. You have a right to vote and you should exercise that right!

The Help America Vote Act (HAVA) has a system for complaints that most states follow. Most states will make you file a written complaint with the Secretary of State's office. This complaint should include the location of the polling place and the areas

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If you are having trouble filing a complaint, you can also contact your state's Protection and Advocacy Agency. There is one in every state, and they have lawyers who help people with disabilities with accessibility problems.

## Finding Information: Candidates and Issues

It is important to be an informed voter. You can find out about candidates (people running for office) and issues in many different ways. Most states produce a non-partisan (not in favor of either side) voter's guide before each election. This voter's guide will talk about each issue on the ballot. It may also have a list of arguments for and against each issue.



*IMAGE: A candidate stands in front of people with his hands open.*

In most states, these guides are sent to every household in the state. You may have to contact with your state's Secretary of State if you need one in an accessible format. Many private organizations also provide local and national information. Local newspapers may also print information about candidates and issues in your area right before the election. These places can be good sources of information, but know that they may not be completely neutral.

You can also attend a town hall meeting, public event, or fundraiser for a candidate. These kinds of events are held leading up to the election. Candidate websites and state political party websites should have a list of events in your area. Town hall meetings and socials are usually free. Fundraisers may cost money to attend.

### Activities

- Find out what issues are going to be on the ballot.
- Find out who is running for office.
- Get a state voter guide.
- Visit candidates' websites.
- Attend town hall meetings and candidate events, if possible.

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## Resources

- State political party (Democrat, Republican, etc.) websites.
- Candidates' websites.
- State voter guide (from your state's Secretary of State).
- Local newspapers

## General Election Resources

Here is a list of resources that might be helpful to meet your general election and voting needs:

- American Association of People with Disabilities Voting Page:  
[www.aapd.com/dvpmain/dvpindex.php](http://www.aapd.com/dvpmain/dvpindex.php)
- National Disability Rights Network (general voting information for people with disabilities): [www.ndrn.org/issues/voting/day/](http://www.ndrn.org/issues/voting/day/) and also at [www.ndrn.org/issues/voting/resources/](http://www.ndrn.org/issues/voting/resources/)
- The Pew Research Center has a list of general voting resources:  
[www.pewcenteronthestates.org/electionline\\_Info.aspx?category=admin](http://www.pewcenteronthestates.org/electionline_Info.aspx?category=admin)

Feel the power of the disability vote! See you at the polls.

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**This document was written by the  
National Youth Leadership Network.**

This information was created for youth, by youth. The information is based primarily on first-hand life experiences. We value direct youth-to-youth communications. We wrote this document to be as inclusive as possible. However, we also know that there may be additional information or different perspectives to what is shared here. Let us know what you think.

The National Youth Leadership Network (NYLN) works to build power among young leaders with disabilities. We are a national non-profit organization led by and for youth with disabilities ages 16-28 years old. We live across the United States and its territories.

We believe that youth with disabilities can be great leaders. We work to promote youth leadership and education. Our goal is to make sure youth with disabilities have the chance to set and reach their own goals. Anyone can become a member of our organization for free. Please visit our website and register today!

**For more information:  
National Youth Leadership Network  
[www.nyln.org](http://www.nyln.org)  
1-866-480-6565**