



*California's protection & advocacy system*

# VAAC's: How Voters with Disabilities Can Make Elections More Accessible

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## **1. What is a VAAC?**

VAAC stands for Voting Accessibility Advisory Committee (VAAC). A VAAC is a community based committee that works with local elections officials. The committee meets regularly to help develop strategies to improve access to voting.

A VAAC can benefit your county in many ways. A VAAC provides a forum for the disability and senior communities in your county to voice their concerns and provide advice to election officials. The VAAC creates opportunities for collaboration and outreach within your community.

## **2. What is a VAAC's Role?**

The VAAC plays an essential role in helping the County comply with laws requiring equal voting access for all. The Secretary of State recommends that each county elections official establish a local VAAC to help address voting accessibility needs. (Please see: CCROV #10234, <http://elections.cdn.sos.ca.gov/ccrov/pdf/2014/august/14223ab.pdf>.)

Issues such as accessible voting systems, accessibility of polling places, and ways to improve the voting experience are typical areas of discussion. VAAC's can play a critical role in improving voting conditions for people with disabilities. For VAACs to be successful, it is crucial to have community participation.

### **3. How Do I Become Involved in a VAAC?**

If you wish to participate in your local VAAC, you should contact your county clerk or registrar of voters and ask to be on the VAAC. VAAC membership is open to all voters. Your participation is important because community members can best anticipate and provide input on needs of voters with disabilities.

### **4. My County Does Not Have a VAAC. What Can I Do to Help Establish One?**

Begin by contacting your county elections official and ask them to form a VAAC. You can give a copy of the Secretary of State's Letter of Guidance: <http://elections.cdn.sos.ca.gov/pdfs/guide-create-local-vaac.pdf>

Use any of the following talking points.

- A) Provide examples of barriers in voting you know about such as:
  - 1) Locked accessible entrances
  - 2) Locked elevators
  - 3) No accessible parking
  - 4) Blocked paths of travel
  - 5) No signs to accessible parking and entrances
- B) Share examples of successful outcomes from other county VAAC meetings such as:
  - 1) Helped develop educational voting videos
  - 2) Advised on the accessibility of polling places
  - 3) Participated in training poll-workers
  - 4) Suggested ways to spend HAVA funds, such as, the purchase of cones for parking and bells for curbside voting

If the election official is unaware of other potential members for the VAAC you can help identify them. You can offer to help develop the VAAC's membership by contacting organizations such as: California Council of the Blind, local Independent Living Centers, organizations serving people with specific disabilities or the local regional center for people with developmental disabilities.

Once a VAAC is formed, you can volunteer to serve on it.

If you need help setting up a VAAC or if you have any questions, contact Disability Rights California's Voting Line: 1-888-569-7955.

## **5. Is There a Statewide VAAC?**

Yes, the Secretary of State established a VAAC in 2005 to advise and provide recommendations on how best to make the voting process accessible to people with disabilities. In 2015, Governor Jerry Brown signed AB 683, which required the Secretary of State to have a VAAC. The Statewide VAAC is composed of nine members: five of whom represent disability advocacy groups and four county election officials.

Throughout the years, the statewide 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 online voter registration.

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For legal assistance call 800-776-5746 or complete a [request for assistance form](#). For all other purposes call 916-504-5800 (Northern CA); 213-213-8000 (Southern CA).

*Disability Rights California is funded by a variety of sources, for a complete list of funders, go to <http://www.disabilityrightscalifornia.org/Documents/ListofGrantsAndContracts.html>.*