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Poster Session Abstract:
Accessible Voting Technology Research Workshop

Research Alliance for Accessible Voting
Center for Accessible Information
Cognitive Access

What is cognitive access?

From our point of view, cognitive access refers to removal of barriers that arise when an individual has information processing difficulties of any kind. These can arise from intellectual disability, learning disability, dementia, traumatic brain injury, low literacy, lack of English language proficiency (when the situation requires English proficiency), attentional difficulties, and so forth.

Within the American voting context, cognitive access is of primary concern with respect to voters and poll workers. The immediate ballot completion process places significant demands on language and information processing skills. Beyond that, access to information that allows voters to make informed decisions is also a significant concern. Thus we argue that cognitive access should be a concern of candidates, election information disseminators (including public service groups like the League of Women Voters and also private marketers and pollsters), and election officials at all levels.

How does the Center for Accessible Information approach cognitive access in the voting context?

Within the Research Alliance, the primary focus of the CAI has been creation of a comprehensive resource library composed as much as possible of accessible documents. All materials created by CAI and other RAAV partners are presented in Clear and Simple language, and in accessible digital formats. The RAAV website, AccessibleVoting.org, allows users to listen to all content via "Listen" buttons. It also provides extensive information about using other, non-site-specific, listening tools and tools intended for people with low vision.

The Resource Library also contains materials intended for web designers, content authors, poll workers, election officials, candidates, people with disabilities, advocates, election officials, and researchers. Our goal is a very comprehensive library in which all items have an accessible description. The items themselves are made maximally accessible (given our limited resources), but without making any changes in the language of the content. At this time, uncaptioned video remains uncaptioned. In its first iteration, the library search system is based on topic categories represented by both words and icons. We are in the process of adding author and keyword search capabilities.

In addition, during the lead-up to federal elections (including primaries), the website includes a state-by-state calendar for key dates such as registration deadlines, poll openings, poll closings, early voting windows, and absentee ballot or mail-in windows. It also includes a news section for current information

about accessible voting, and information and links for all partners within the RAAV, as well as for NIST, the EAC, and ITIF.

Beyond the website, our primary focus is on providing accessible information for voters and poll workers at the polling place. We created accessible instruction cards for the Automark accessible machine, which is used throughout our home state of Michigan. Unfortunately, a planned pilot test of these cards failed when they were not properly introduced to poll workers and not made salient to voters. This in itself, was an important finding, however. Beyond that, we also concluded that the large instruction card is hard to use and a revision using a flip book is under construction and will be made available on the website.

Another small study will be carried out this coming year. In this study, we will examine the feasibility of translating materials written in Clear and Simple Language into languages other than English using automated translation applications. To be honest, our fear is that the generality of much of the vocabulary used in the clear and simple English versions of voter information will lead to confusing and even incomprehensible translations into Spanish, Japanese, and Korean. We hope, of course, to be proved wrong.

What is the purpose of our poster session?

We have two main reasons for presenting a poster session at the NIST/EAC workshop.

Raising Awareness of AccessibleVoting.org:

Our intention is that the website will be a major resource for everyone concerned with accessibility of American elections for all eligible voters. On one hand, therefore, we simply want to make sure that everyone attending the AVT Workshop is made aware of the site and encouraged to link to it. On the other hand, we also want to invite all attendees to submit or recommend materials for the website, both in the resource library and other sections of the site.

Raising Awareness of Cognitive Access and Information Processing Difficulties

Equally importantly, we know that cognitive access receives far less attention than physical access and sensory access (hearing and vision issues), despite the fact that growing numbers of American have cognitive access difficulties. Therefore, we plan to use the poster session to raise awareness of cognitive accessibility issues and solutions.