



The eSlate is the Most Accessible Voting System on the Market Today

Accessible Features of the eSlate

One of the hallmarks of the eSlate electronic voting system is accessibility. The eSlate offers accessibility to people with a wider variety of disabilities than does any other voting system on the market today. Developers at Hart InterCivic are committed to the rights of every individual to cast a private vote. This commitment has been in place from the beginning, years before the new federal Help America Vote Act mandated accessibility.

With the eSlate voting system access is not “separate but equal.” It is equal, period. Voters who are sighted or blind vote in the same manner. The eSlate is not a touch screen system that can be adapted to provide accessibility. With the eSlate, all voters use a rotary precision navigation system to turn to their choice and then press a large ENTER button next to the wheel to mark that choice. Both the wheel and the buttons require very little strength or dexterity. Voters who have suffered a stroke that permanently reduced strength and mobility have used the interface without difficulty.

Specifically, the eSlate offers accessibility in six ways.

First: An audio component is available to voters who are blind or have a severe visual impairment. Technologists and consumers of various ages who are blind tested the eSlate along with other electronic voting systems on the market today. Working through the American Foundation of the Blind’s Technology and Employment Center in Huntington, these testers ranked the eSlate number one because of its ease of use and fully accessible features.

The voter hears the entire ballot using headphones with volume control. The voter may take as long as he or she wants to complete the voting process. And having information repeated is as simple as turning the wheel counter-clockwise. Turning the wheel clockwise moves the voter through the ballot and each “notch” forward triggers the audio. Every choice marked by the voter is verified by the audio. If a voter changes his or her mind, simply turning the wheel until the correct choice is heard and pressing the ENTER button will remove the earlier choice and mark the new selection.

The audio uses a human voice that is usually specific to the locale. A male voice is used in most instances to provide a frequency level most easily heard by those who experience hearing impairments in addition to visual ones.

Although the speed cannot be varied, the voter can turn past any instructions, contests, or candidates as quickly as desired. Listening to every word is not necessary.

Likewise, color contrasts used to display voting instructions and the ballot are not voter options. The colors used were selected, however, to make viewing the easiest for the widest range of visual impairments causing color distinction problems.

If an individual needs large print in order to read the ballot independently, he or she may, at the beginning of the voting process, select the large print option.

Second: Two large tactile switches are available for any voter who has limited upper body mobility or dexterity imposed by, for example, Parkinson's disease, cerebral palsy, stroke, amputation or other causes. The switches are light touch and can be placed anywhere the voter chooses. The switches can be activated using an adaptive device or just about any part of the body, including the feet.

Third: Voters who are quadriplegic may also vote privately using a sip 'n puff device to move through the ballot and mark choices. Poll workers are trained to help disconnect the device from the wheelchair and connect it to the eSlate so voting using one's breath can begin.

Fourth: Over 70% of polling sites in the United States are inaccessible to wheelchairs. For those voters who cannot get into the polling site, irrespective of the reason, poll workers can disconnect the eSlate and bring it to a car so that voting can be accomplished without coming inside. The battery-powered eSlate weighs just 7.7 pounds making it easy for any poll worker to carry curbside.

Fifth: At least one booth at each polling site is ADA compliant. The eSlate booth is the perfect height for a chair or wheelchair and tilts forward for easy viewing of the ballot. The eSlate booths are included as part of the purchase by any jurisdiction.

And finally, if a voter uses a neck loop to increase his or her ability to hear audio emitted from an electronic device (as may be the case with a person who is both blind and has a severe hearing impairment) that voter can use the neck loop to enhance his or her hearing of the eSlate audio system. The voter's hearing aid must be fitted with a telecoil, and the RCA connector must be compatible with the eSlate audio output jack (3.5mm). If it is not, adaptors may be provided by the voter or by the jurisdiction if they are notified of the need to do so.

Literacy and Languages

Although not specifically considered accessibility issues as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act, those who cannot read and those who do not read English are also accommodated. Any voter can choose to listen to rather than read the ballot. The ballot is presented in print and auditory form in all languages required by the jurisdiction in charge of elections, whether that is one or eight.

Training

Even with all these accessible features, people with disabilities may still encounter difficulties voting in private at the polling site if poll workers are not properly trained. Working with experts in the field of disabilities, Hart InterCivic has developed and incorporated a disability etiquette section into the training of all poll workers responsible for operating the eSlate system.

Additionally, a two-hour optional training session for poll workers is available that focuses specifically on the accessible features of the system, etiquette, how to provide meaningful verbal instructions, and inspecting the polling site for and removal of physical barriers to accessibility.



Voter Education and Outreach

Taking a “test drive” or receiving information about “How to Vote Using the eSlate” prior to first using the eSlate in a live election increases voters’ comfort and confidence. Knowing this, Hart InterCivic developed the first voter education and outreach program in the industry. This program has received national recognition and was awarded first place nationally by PR Week for outstanding marketing.

Hart’s Voter Education specialists work with local jurisdictions to evaluate their communities and develop a tailored plan to provide voters with information about the new system. Hart makes sure all plans use a wide variety of communication channels and include a specific emphasis on reaching older voters and voters with disabilities to provide information and an opportunity to use the system.

Hart InterCivic has worked closely with groups such as the American Council of the Blind, the American Foundation of the Blind, and the National Federation of the Blind to provide information about the eSlate system and to acquire input from consumers that will improve the system. As a result of these relationships, the most current version includes several improvements to accessibility.

Conclusion

All of this demonstrates Hart InterCivic’s commitment to excellence. After you try it, we’re sure you will agree, the eSlate is the most accessible, fully integrated electronic voting system on the market today.

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