

The State of Texas



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Secretary of State

Report to the 88th Legislature on the Implementation of Educational Programs to Help Voters with Disabilities Understand How to Use Voting Systems Used in the State of Texas

Background

Pursuant to Senate Bill 1 (87th Leg., 2d C.S., 2021), the Secretary of State's Office (SOS) was directed to conduct a study regarding the implementation of educational programs, including the production and publication on the Secretary of State's Internet website of instructional videos, to help voters with disabilities understand how to use voting systems used in the State of Texas.

Methodology

In conducting this study, the Secretary of State's Office posted updated instructional videos related to the use of electronic voting systems on the Secretary's voter-facing website, "VoteTexas.gov," and monitored the website traffic on the applicable pages. The SOS also obtained certain data and feedback from the 2022 voter identification education campaign relevant to this study. Additionally, the SOS utilized existing resources to produce a series of explainer videos related to voting by mail, voter registration, the use of electronic voting systems, and casting and counting ballots in Texas elections. Lessons learned from the production of these videos can also help inform possible next steps in producing additional videos with a disability focus.

Discussion

Current Resources on "VoteTexas.gov"

The SOS voter-facing website, "VoteTexas.gov," contains resources designed to educate voters about the procedures for voter registration, voting in person, and voting by mail in Texas. On "VoteTexas.gov," there is a page included in the main navigation menu dedicated to voters with disabilities. This page contains information related to voter registration, voting in person, curbside voting, assistance at the polls, and accessibility of electronic voting systems and polling places. Between August and December of 2022, the page received 8,491 page views.

Additionally, under the "Voting in Person" tab on "VoteTexas.gov," there is a specific page related to the use of electronic voting systems. This page contains details on the different types of voting systems certified for use in Texas elections, as well as instructional videos on the use of each of the certified systems in Texas. The page also contains written instructions for each system that voters can review for assistance. These videos were

provided by each of the voting system vendors. While the videos are not specific to voters with disabilities, many of the videos address some of the specific accessibility features that are available for voters on the different devices. Between August and December of 2022, the voting systems page received 11,724 views.

In total, "VoteTexas.gov" had a total of 3,237,540 views between August and December of 2022.

Previous versions of VoteTexas.gov included instructional graphics that were created by a third-party vendor describing the use of the electronic voting systems and their accessibility components. However, due to reduced resources, the SOS now relies on information provided by the individual voting system vendors.

Voter ID Educational Campaign

For the 2022 election cycle, the Texas Legislature appropriated \$3.5 million for voter education efforts. The SOS published a request for proposal in December 2021, and awarded the contract to San Antonio-based GDC Ideation & Marketing to undertake the voter education campaign in January 2022 after a competitive bidding process and evaluation of campaign proposals submitted.

The messaging of the campaign focused on educating eligible Texas voters on Voter ID requirements in Texas, including highlighting the seven approved forms of photo ID that can be used to vote in person and what to do if the voter does not possess and cannot reasonably obtain one of those seven forms. While the campaign targeted Texans 18 and older generally, it also focused on senior citizens, younger voters, voters with disabilities and Texans whose primary language is Spanish.

The media purchases throughout the campaign totaled \$2,448,216 across the March Primary Election and November General Election, including:

- 30- and 15-second television ads in English and Spanish;
- 30- and 15-second radio ads in English and Spanish;
- 2 ½ - 3 minute morning television segments featuring the Secretary aired on local TV stations in every market across Texas;
- Digital ad banners in English and Spanish;
- Print advertisements in English, Spanish and – where applicable – Mandarin and Vietnamese;
- Out-of-home advertisements such as vinyl and digital billboards, gas pump toppers, and window clings, all in English and Spanish; and
- Paid social media advertisements

Approximately \$930,000 of the 2022 voter education campaign was allocated for paid media purchases for the Primary Election phase of the campaign, while approximately \$1,519,000 was allocated for the General Election phase of the campaign. The campaign achieved an added value of \$2,800,000 worth of media exposure through earned media opportunities such as press conferences, interviews with Secretary Scott, and other public engagements.

Additionally, the campaign included an interactive grassroots tour, which visited community events across the state to distribute educational materials in English and Spanish highlighting Voter ID requirements for voting in person and for voting by mail. The tour covered more than 8,200 miles and visited more than 64 cities across the State of Texas in 2022.

Focus Groups – Coalition of Texans with Disabilities

In order to solicit feedback on the effectiveness of the campaign’s message among Texas voters with disabilities, the SOS enlisted Coalition of Texans with Disabilities (CTD) to participate in focus group discussions and evaluations of the creative assets for the General Election phase of the voter education campaign in July 2022. Focus group participants included Texas voters with visual, hearing, cognitive and mobility impairments.

The post-focus group research found that voters with disabilities felt included, that the sponsor of the advertisements (SOS) wanted them to be successful in voting, and that the language of the campaign materials was “disability appropriate.” The SOS received specific qualitative feedback from voters with disabilities regarding the voter education campaign’s creative elements and messaging through radio, television and digital advertisements, including:

“Very encouraging. Sounded like the people who wrote the ad really wanted us to be successful in voting because the inflection of the person that was speaking sounded like they were trying to be very encouraging.”

- Texas voter with cognitive impairments

“I liked that they showed a very wide range of people that vote and the kinds of ways you can both vote and identify yourself. It’s that not everybody has to be the same or the way that they vote has to be the same.”

- Texas voter with cognitive impairments

“Texas wants us to be ready to vote. They’re not trying to leave anybody out. They’re trying to get us ready for that, so that we will actually be counted.”

- Texas voter with cognitive impairments

“I wanted it to be a song or like an anthem, because it was almost like a chant. It felt very good and I was ready for it to sing or to be like a fight song to encourage people to go vote.”

- Texas voter with vision impairments

“It means that you have the ability to do something and it’s not only the ability, but it’s enabled to you and it’s entitled to you by the government. The government says you are permitted to do this thing. You’re given access to do this thing. You and only you are allowed to do this thing. It means freedom to me, you’re independent to do this thing. And this thing that we’re talking about is voting. You are free to exercise that right. To access your body in the way you see fit to go vote and to say yes or no to the laws or bills or rights you see that are acceptable. It’s super important.”

- Texas voter with visual impairments

“I like that very much. I had 20/20 vision until I was around 17. And when I turned 18, I didn’t know if I could vote or not. I was talking with my parents and they weren’t sure about that either. It was an area of mystery to us. Of course, I knew I’m 18, I should be able to vote, but I didn’t know how I could do this. So I like hearing the message, ‘Your Right.’ I like the encouragement of people to go out and vote.”

- Texas voter with visual impairments

While the SOS did not receive a specific allocation to educate voters with disabilities on the use of electronic voting systems, should an appropriation occur, the campaign could be modeled after the current Voter ID campaign in its scope, research, activities, and outreach efforts to Texas voters with disabilities.

SOS Production of “SOS 101” Videos

Between September 8, 2022 and October 24, 2022, the SOS released a series of videos entitled “SOS 101” designed to educate voters about election administration and the voting process in Texas. These videos were designed to provide information to voters, enhance transparency of how election systems and procedures work in Texas and, ultimately, build greater confidence in the processes and safeguards in Texas elections. The videos were produced in-house with limited resources under the direction of the Assistant Secretary of State for Communications. The videos each began with the Secretary providing a high-level overview of the topic, followed by the Secretary speaking with local election officials to answer common questions related to the election process in Texas. Below is a listing of the individual videos produced and their individual view counts on YouTube:

- [SOS 101: Voter Registration in Texas](#) (2.6K views)
- [SOS 101: Voting Systems in Texas](#) (3.9K views)
- [SOS 101: Voting by Mail in Texas](#) (2.4K views)
- [SOS 101: Casting and Counting Your Ballot](#) (4.1K views)

While these videos were not targeted to the disability community specifically, they did provide the SOS with a better understanding of the production requirements related to these types of educational videos, as well as the resources needed to ensure these videos are accessible for Texas voters with certain disabilities. Additionally, the two most popular videos were specific to electronic voting systems, which indicates that voters are interested in content in this area. In the future, the SOS may be able to expand our SOS 101 series to include videos that address topics specific to voters with disabilities. The SOS would likely continue to consult with organizations that serve the disability community to ensure that the proper topics are being addressed in a manner that is appropriate for the target audience.

Conclusions

Currently, the SOS maintains resources on “VoteTexas.gov” that provide information to voters with disabilities on the voting process in Texas. These resources include videos about the overall use of the certified electronic voting systems in Texas. If legislative funding was available, an educational program targeted to voters with disabilities on the use of electronic voting systems could be modeled after the Voter ID campaign and could provide

more specific information to Texas voters with disabilities that may be helpful in enhancing understanding of the voting process and dispelling misconceptions about voting procedures in Texas.

If resources are available, the SOS may be able to expand the SOS 101 videos to provide content that is specific to the use of electronic voting systems for voters with disabilities. Additional videos addressing key topics would be developed in consultation with groups that serve the Texas disability community to ensure proper content.