

Topics to be Addressed in Agency Equity Action Plans

Due Date: Thursday, January 20th, 2022 (Upload by 5:00 PM)

Method of Submission: MAX: <https://collect.max.gov/x/Ms6gnO>

Maximum Length of Report: See guidance below.

Format: Microsoft Word Document, 12 pt. font, normal margins

Release: Per Executive Order (EO) 13985, the final submission due on January 20, 2022 will contain an Equity Action Plan (“Plan”) to meaningfully address the barriers and opportunities identified through the agency’s equity assessment. The Plan will be used to help set public expectations and promote accountability, and inform the agency’s longer-term equity planning and implementation strategy. The Plan should be reviewed by the agency’s Office of General Counsel (OGC) prior to submission, and may be used to inform public documents released by the Domestic Policy Council (DPC).

1. Executive summary (Max length: One page)

Agency name and mission- U.S. Election Assistance Commission

The U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC) helps election officials improve the administration of elections and helps Americans participate in the voting process. The EAC is an independent, bipartisan commission charged with developing guidance to meet HAVA requirements, adopting voluntary voting system guidelines, and serving as a national clearinghouse of information on election administration.

Summary of Action Plan

The EAC serves many stakeholders including election officials at the state, county, and local level in addition to the American public. As the only federal agency focused exclusively on election administration, the EAC is uniquely positioned to provide resources to these stakeholders that work to increase equity in service of Executive Order 13985. In furtherance of this EO, the EAC has evaluated existing agency materials and opportunities for expansion:

- Materials for election officials to improve election administration
- Resources available on EAC.gov for direct use by voters looking to participate in elections.

This evaluation included ensuring materials posted online include captions and all written materials are 508 compliant to ensure accessibility. Additionally, materials like our Glossary of

Election Terminology, the National Mail Voter Registration Form, and the executive summary of the Election Administration Voting Survey (EAVS) are translated into various languages. We are currently evaluating expanding translations to include additional materials and languages to broaden accessibility and use of the EAC's work products serving both election officials and the public.

The EAC intends to discuss expanding the equity of our produced materials with our Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) boards in their upcoming meetings and on an ongoing basis in furtherance of the Executive Order. The EAC has also formed a new FACA Board, the Local Leadership Council, consisting of local election officials from all 50 states. Input from these boards will help the EAC to improve current resources and produce new materials for use by election officials for their direct outreach to underserved communities.

2. Summary of early accomplishments *(Max length: One page)*

The EAC translated the National Mail Voter Registration Form into six new languages in 2021, bringing the total languages offered to 21. The new languages include Amharic, Polish, and Somali. For the first time, the form has been translated into three Native American languages: Apache, Navajo, and Yup'ik.

The EAC translated the updated Glossary of Election Terminology, which includes almost 1,300 terms and phrases, into 20 languages in addition to English. The EAC also translated the Executive Summary of the Election Administration Voting Survey (EAVS) into the same 20 languages. More information on these translations is included in the Action summaries below. The EAC also published the Language Access Program Checklist with practical information for election officials to look ahead and plan to effectively serve their language communities.

In July the EAC, in partnership with Rutgers University, released the factsheet: “Disability and Voter Turnout in the 2020 Election.” This report used 2020 Census data and results from the EAC report released in February 2021, “Disability and Voting Accessibility in the 2020 Elections.” This factsheet provided valuable insights on the issues faced by voters with disabilities including identifying a digital divide disproportionately impacting these voters. This work will inform future EAC work products to ensure election officials can meaningfully expand outreach to voters with disabilities.

The EAC hired two Senior Subject Matter Experts (SME) focused solely on accessibility and language access. The agency also established an internal accessibility working group. The SME and working group collaborated with the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) on their response related to the Executive Order 14019 on Promoting Access to Voting. NIST addressed members of two of the EAC’s advisory boards, the Board of Advisors and the Standards Board, during their annual meetings in June to request responses to their request for information. The EAC has also released three work products for election officials on these topics: Best Practices: Accessible Voter Registration, Voting Access for Native Americans: Case Studies and Best Practices, and Native American Voters and Disability Access.

Since the issuance of EO 13985 on January 20, 2021, the EAC has held the following public roundtable discussions to focus on the experiences, challenges, and needs of voters with disabilities as well as EAC funded data collection and analysis of the experience of voters with disabilities during the 2020 election cycle: Accessibility Lessons Learned During the 2020 Elections (February 17, 2021); Voter Turnout and Trends for People with Disabilities During the 2020 General Election (July 7, 2021); and Serving Voters with Disabilities (August 11, 2021). The EAC also recorded video series for African American Heritage Month; AAPI Heritage Month; Hispanic Heritage Month; and Native American Heritage Month.

On July 26, the EAC Commissioners issued a joint statement for the 31st anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) to raise awareness and recognize the importance of this landmark legislation.

3. Equity action plan (*Max length PER ACTION: Two pages*)

Please clearly identify **three to five** actions that your agency plans to undertake and list them **in order of priority**; provide evidence-based reasoning for selection; and outline high-level elements of implementation. (Actions should address the institutional resources available to offices responsible for advancing **civil rights** pursuant to Section 5(d) and **procurement and contracting** pursuant to Section 7(a) of EO 13985, but may also focus on other significant priorities identified by the agency regardless of whether they were included in the agency's equity assessment.)

For **each action**, please include:

A. Barrier to Equitable Outcome(s)

- o *Describe the barrier you are trying to address.*
- o *Specify the program, policy, or regulation that contributes to this barrier.*
- o *Indicate which populations are most impacted by this barrier.*
- o *List the evidence indicating that this barrier meaningfully impacts full and equal participation.*

B. Action and Intended Impact on Barrier

- o *Describe the actions the agency will take to eliminate/reduce the barrier.*
- o *Why did you prioritize these actions?*
- o *Indicate how the actions are expected to result in reducing or eliminating the barrier to equitable outcomes. If not identified above, please indicate what evidence supports this connection.*

C. Tracking Progress

- o *Describe what factors you will use to determine whether the agency action(s) has eliminated or substantially reduced the barrier to equitable access identified above in the near- to mid-term (2-4 years out).*
- o *Indicate what success might ultimately look like in the long-term (5-8 years out).*

D. Accountability

- o *Describe how the agency will hold itself accountable to implementing this action. Consider potential internal and external mechanisms (e.g., aligning with the Agency Strategic Plan and/or other public-facing documents, embedding equity-related goals in performance plans, holding virtual town halls, etc.) and how and when the agency will communicate progress to stakeholders.*

Action 1: Expanding and Improving Materials and Resources for Election Officials

Barrier to Equitable Outcome

Elections are administered by thousands of local election officials. Each of these officials serves a unique community with varying needs and resources available for participation. Often, election administration is only one of numerous areas of focus for these officials. Despite this, administering elections is a full-time job that requires extensive resources to best engage the public about changing requirements, deadlines, and procedures. The EAC is working to provide critical resources to election officials to help them serve voters in their communities.

The entire voting population is impacted but voters with disabilities, voters for whom English is a learned language, and other minority voters are particularly impacted by the lack of resources for election officials. State and local election officials are the main trusted sources of information on voter registration, voting, election results, and post-election activity. Every jurisdiction in the country has members of these impacted communities, further emphasizing the need for all election officials to be provided with resources to improve election administration to reach these communities.

Action and Intended Impact on Barrier

The EAC is charged by the Help America Vote Act of 2002 to be a clearinghouse of election administration best practices. That, paired with being the only federal agency whose sole focus is election administration, gives the EAC an important role in providing materials and resources to state and local election officials so they can better serve their communities.

The EAC will expand and update its range of materials and resources for election officials as part of its role as a national clearinghouse for election administration. This includes formal reports like the Election Administration and Voting Survey (EAVS) and the Disability and Voting Accessibility in the 2020 Elections report. The EAC will also continue to publish materials highlighting elections best practices such as our video series, the Government Coordinating Council COVID working group documents on absentee/mail voting and in-person voting during the pandemic, Best Practices: Accessible Voter Registration, Voting Access for Native Americans: Case Studies and Best Practices documents, and Native American Voters and Disability Access. There is an opportunity to involve representatives from more communities in the development of these materials, and participation in efforts like our roundtable discussions and video series.

The EAC has existing and expanding relationships with election officials and election official organizations to directly distribute these materials for use in the field. These officials can then utilize these materials to implement best practices without having to conduct research or develop best practices when budgetary or time constraints make independent development unfeasible.

Tracking Progress

The EAC is subject to the Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA), limiting the agency's ability to quickly field surveys to collect information from election officials on what resources or language

options would be most helpful for their communities. As a result, we rely upon information we receive from our FACA boards and/or internal knowledge of the landscape. An exemption from the PRA would allow us to more quickly and broadly collect information to track progress. The EAC will continue to rely on informal feedback from election officials, and input from our board members to indicate the usefulness of resources and their effectiveness to reducing or eliminating barriers to equitable access.

Success would include election officials reporting widespread use of our resources to engage voters in their communities. Long-term success will be measured through the ongoing use of EAC materials and consistent feedback from election officials utilizing these resources in their communities.

Accountability

The EAC's mission includes serving as a clearinghouse of information on election administration. As a result, the work to further this action is a key component of our strategic plan and yearly goals as an agency. The EAC reports annually to Congress on our actions and programming in furtherance of our mission. These reports will continue to highlight all actions that are taken to implement this action.

Action 2: Addressing and Expanding Resources for Underserved Voters

Barrier to Equitable Outcome

Voters with disabilities and those for whom English is a learned language face additional barriers to casting a vote. These barriers have been recognized as the EAC's HAVA mandated mission includes ensuring equity for voters with disabilities in the voting process. Additionally, Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act requires jurisdictions across the country to provide voting information in languages other than English to serve their populations.

According to recent Census data, 17.7 million people with disabilities voted in the 2020 general election. The disability population will continue to grow and, therefore, so will the number of voters with disabilities election officials must serve. Data from the 2021 EAC study, "Disability and Voting Accessibility in the 2020 Elections" showed voting difficulties among people with disabilities has declined markedly from 2012 to 2020, but about one in nine voters with disabilities encountered difficulties voting in 2020. This is double the rate of people without disabilities, but a sizeable drop from 2012. While election officials have made significant progress, there are still improvements that can be made. This shows there is a need for additional resources to help further close this gap and improve accessibility for voter registration and casting a private, independent ballot.

Action and Intended Impact on Barrier

The EAC has committed to expanding our focus on accessibility and resources to better serve voters with disabilities. A full-time staff member, focused on accessibility issues, joined the EAC in 2021. The EAC has been able to produce more information focused specifically on expanding access for voters with disabilities and planning future programming to collect the data necessary to make best practices recommendations for jurisdictions to expand equity for these voters. Resources developed in 2021 include best practices for serving voters with disabilities in voter registration, and a study and fact sheet regarding disability and voting accessibility in the 2020 election. The EAC has also commissioned a study into the digital divide among those with disabilities. This study, expected to be released in 2022, will allow the EAC to provide critical information to enable election officials to reach voters with disabilities who do not have access to the internet at home. The EAC will continue to expand the resources available on these topics.

The EAC also added a subject matter expert focused on language accessibility in 2021. This staff member has helped to produce resources for serving language minority voters. The agency has also worked to expand the translation of materials available on the EAC website into 21 languages. These resources include the National Mail Voter Registration Form, the Glossary of Election Terminology, and the Executive Summary of the Election Administration and Voting Survey (EAVS). These documents allow language minority voters to access voter registration, understand common terminology used in elections or on their ballots, and learn about election administration across the country. The translations completed in 2021 include six new languages: Amharic, Polish, Somali, Apache, Navajo, and Yup'ik.

The translated materials provide direct and tangible opportunities for the EAC to serve language minority voters in the voting process. By providing basic information on terminology, the glossary of election terminology translations allows language minority voters to navigate the sometimes scientific or precise language barriers that can exist in elections. The EAC is charged with maintaining the National Mail Voter Registration form. Previously translated into 15 languages, the form provides an opportunity for voters to register in their native language in the absence of a translated form in their local jurisdiction. The expansion to 21 languages in 2021 allows the EAC to serve even more voters. The Election Administration and Voting Survey (EAVS) is the most comprehensive report of election administration information and is released biennially. This report has previously only been provided in English, limiting the audience that could learn from the extensive data collection of EAVS. By translating the executive summary, the EAC has provided an opportunity for more Americans to read and understand critical election information in their jurisdiction and across the country. The EAC will continue to consider additional translations of these materials or additional materials as appropriate to serve America's diverse population.

Tracking Progress

The EAC is subject to the Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA), limiting the agency's ability to quickly field surveys to collect information from election officials on what resources or language options would be most helpful for their communities. As a result, we rely upon information we receive from our FACA boards and/or internal knowledge of the landscape. An exemption from the PRA would allow us to more quickly and broadly collect information to track progress. The EAC will continue to rely on informal feedback from election officials, and input from our board members to indicate the usefulness of resources and their effectiveness to reducing or eliminating barriers to equitable access.

Success would include widespread use of our resources by voters with disabilities and language minorities. Long-term success will be measured through the ongoing EAC commissioned research, with difficulties for voters with disabilities decreasing.

Accountability

The EAC's mission includes serving voters with disabilities. As a result, the work to further this action is a key component of our strategic plan and yearly goals as an agency. The EAC reports annually to Congress on our actions and programming in furtherance of our mission. These reports will continue to highlight all actions that are taken to implement this action.

Action 3: Conducting Original Research Examining Elections to Identify Areas for Development

Barrier to Equitable Outcome

As noted in Action 1, election officials are routinely underfunded and overworked. As a result, election offices must sometimes rely upon outside organizations or agencies to conduct original research into the pressing issues of election administration. Third party organizations conducting such research may face hurdles in presenting research transparently or could have a partisan leaning which may create issues with acceptance of results by election officials looking for nonpartisan information.

Action and Intended Impact on Barrier

The EAC will conduct original research into issues of election administration including serving those with disabilities in order to identify areas of expanded programming and resource development. The agency will consider what topics will best serve to produce findings applicable to all election officials to allow these findings to be utilized broadly. The first study will examine the digital divide among voters with disabilities to help inform election officials on how to reach this population and ensure equal access to voting information. Following the studies, the EAC will hold a public briefing on the findings and present materials and best practices for election officials to use. Additionally, the EAC will continue to evolve the EAVS to best collect critical information on election administration including information on voter registration at agencies which provide services to those with disabilities.

Original research allows the EAC to use its national scope to study issues that may cross jurisdictional boundaries and identify unique and efficient solutions for election officials to address them. In line with serving as the nation's clearinghouse of information on election administration, original research allows the EAC to have a direct impact and answer the questions that election officials cannot answer individually.

Tracking Progress

The EAC is subject to the Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA), limiting the agency's ability to quickly field surveys to collect information from election officials on what resources would be most helpful for their communities. As a result, we rely upon information we receive from our FACA boards and/or internal knowledge of the landscape. An exemption from the PRA would allow us to more quickly and broadly collect information to track progress. The EAC will continue to rely on informal feedback from election officials, and input from our board members to indicate the usefulness of resources and their effectiveness to reducing or eliminating barriers to equitable access.

Success would include election officials reporting widespread use of our resources developed following our original research. Long-term success will be measured through improvements to election administration as measured by ongoing EAC commissioned research measuring difficulties for voters with disabilities decreasing.

Accountability

The EAC's mission includes serving voters with disabilities. As a result, the work to further this action is a key component of our strategic plan and yearly goals as an agency. The EAC reports annually to Congress on our actions and programming in furtherance of our mission. These reports will continue to highlight all actions that are taken to implement this action.