

Voting Accessibility Advisory Committee (VAAC) Meeting Minutes

September 12, 2017, 2 p.m. – 4 p.m.

City Hall, Room 305

Meeting Attendees:

John Arntz, Director, Department of Elections
Nicole Bohn, Director, Mayor's office on Disability
Andy Pastalaniec, Department of Elections
Jill, Fox, Department of Elections
Jonathan Aaberg, Department of Elections
Kimberly Daniel, Department of Elections
Mayank Patel, Department of Elections
Yelena Cappello, Department of Election
Fred Nisen, Supervising Attorney, Disability Rights California
Bill Hershon, Attorney, Disability Rights California
Bill Grubaugh, SFSU Disability Programs and Resource Center
Ed Evans, former member, Mayor's Disability Council
Eileen Norman, Deputy Director, San Francisco In Home Support Service

Fiona Hinze, Independent Living Resource Center
Francis Lau, State Council of Developmental Disabilities (call in)
Hillary Brown, Polling Place Inspector
Jane Ferguson Flout, Catholic Charities San Francisco
Jeremiah Beasley, Web Accessibility Coordinator, SF State University,
Katherine Powell, Episcopal Community Services of San Francisco
Linda Porelle (call in)
Lou Grosso, previous member, Mayoral Disability Forum
Marti Goddard, SFPL Deaf Services Center
Valerie Coleman, Department of Aging & Adult Services
Walter Guerra-Ostolaza, Pollworker

Meeting Minutes:

1. Introductions of committee members
2. Purpose of the VAAC
 - a. John stated that he believes elections are a direct reflection of the community as a whole
 - b. In furthering the goal of increasing access to voting and elections materials, John envisions the VAAC having the potential to go beyond making recommendations for day-to-day Department procedures, instead providing feedback and guidance on matters that can shape elections and possible influencing policies and procedures beyond San Francisco City and County
3. John introduced the idea that "access for all" should be synonymous with "accessibility for people with disabilities"
 - a. Nicole added that while she agrees with the sentiment, there are different levels of understanding of what accessibility means and more education is necessary to ensure common understanding of accessibility needs
 - i. She cautioned that although access should include "accessible for people with disabilities" it is not always the case, and the flip side of removing the phrase has the risk of losing the buy in from people with disabilities who have worked so hard to raise awareness about accessibility concerns
 - b. Nicole added that the VAAC has a unique opportunity to be leaders in the conversation about what true universal access is and the work taken on by the VAAC has the potential to positively impact the city of San Francisco as a whole
 - c. Fred added that access should always be a consideration but cautioned against complacency, as it is not inherent to everyone that access equals accessibility

4. Remote Accessible Vote-by-Mail System
 - a. The Department of Elections is required by California law to make electronic ballots available to voters with disabilities and military and overseas voters at the next scheduled election, which is June 5, 2018 in San Francisco
 - b. Two systems are currently being reviewed by the California Secretary of State and John will be attending the voting technology hearing held on September 27 to learn more about the vendors seeking approval
 - i. John will report back on his findings during the next VAAC meeting and will share any notes with the committee as they become available
 - ii. John will also ask the vendors to run a pilot program in San Francisco so VAAC members and their associates will have the opportunity to share feedback on the options
 - iii. John indicated that the Department will provide the Secretary of State's staff reports assessing the two remote vote-by-mail systems involved in the September 27 hearing
 - c. Other access issues that will need to be considered when implementing the remote accessible vote-by-mail system should also include issues such as not having access to a printer, and ensuring hardware and software compatibility at locations such as the SF public library – this is the intersection of access and accessibility
5. Potential New Voting System for 2019 (Replacement Voting System)
 - a. San Francisco currently utilizes a Dominion Voting System and the current contract is set to expire in December 2018
 - b. The Department is in the process of leasing a new system beginning in 2019, however this will not be a long-term solution
 - c. John plans to complete the RFP in November and there will need to be a pilot program where people from the public come to test the potential systems and provide feedback, providing VAAC members with the opportunity to test the potential systems and determine what type of system will be most useful for San Francisco voters
6. Possibly Developing an Open Source Voting System
 - a. The Board of Supervisors requested that the City consider the possibility of developing an open source voting system
 - b. The Elections Commission passed a resolution supporting the City developing an open source voting system
 - c. The Mayor's Committee on Information Technology (COIT) allocated \$300,000 to fund an assessment of the City's options to develop an open source voting system
 - i. Of the \$300,000, \$175k was allocated for a contractor to develop the business case assessing the feasibility of the City's options to develop a highly accessible, open source voting system.
 - ii. The remaining \$125k was allocated for a temporary position to assist in work regarding the business case and also in obtaining a system to replace the current voting system
 - d. Nicole underscored the important role that VAAC members can play in advocating for accessibility considerations in the new voting system technology that will be developed
 - i. The end-user accessibility must be the starting point when considering the development of a voting system, and not an add-on after the voting system is developed.
 - ii. If the design does not contemplate accessibility requirements on the front end, the software will not be compatible with hardware that is used by people with disabilities
 - iii. Bill indicated that often when new technology is developed that the developers set the level of accessibility based on their consideration of criteria regarding accessibility rather than planning for the technology to be accessible according to actual experiences of the users

- iv. Lou commented that the hardware and the software must be designed together and with each in mind in order for the accessible features of the software programs to function.
 - v. Jerimiah highlighted that one change to the open source software design is all it takes to “break” accessibility features, and prompt the need for an immediate accessibility assessment (including additional user testing).
7. Nicole opened the floor to VAAC members for additional discussion topics
- a. Jane mentioned that perceptions of voter security and fraud may influence an individual's decision to vote using technology. The intersection of security and accessibility needs to be part of the VAAC discussion.
 - b. Marti shared that the library often serves the community by downloading information and sending it to requestors who might not be tech savvy – this could present challenges for those voters who wish to have remote accessible vote-by-mail ballots sent who may be unable to access them by other means
 - c. Valerie shared that there are technology hubs in roughly 30 locations around San Francisco including senior centers for people who wish to access computer technology
 - d. Valerie inquired as to the existence of data pertaining to voters with disabilities, the rates at which voting occurs and barriers that hinder participation
 - i. Fred and Bill stated that a study conducted by Rutgers University highlights some data and offered to share it with the group
 - ii. Linda indicated that often young students with disabilities are not provided with information about voting which often results in their not becoming familiar with voting processes
 - iii. The Controller's office was also cited as having compiled significant data that could be useful
 - e. Bill stated the best course is to provide people with as many accessible options to vote as possible.
 - f. Nicole stated that due to some people's condition and financial resources they sometimes cannot choose among options associated with voting
 - g. Nicole stated that VAAC might discuss and explore the intersection of accessible transportation to and from polling places
8. The Community Engagement Team will compile an email list so members can share information with all group members between meetings
- a. VAAC members are also encouraged to invite new members to join the committee and spread awareness about the effort to increase access and accessibility of voting and elections materials
 - b. If there are items that the group would like to add to future agendas, please inform a member of the Community Engagement Team