

Need Addressed

People with disabilities have traditionally lower voter turnout rates. Schur and Kruse used the 2016 Current Population Survey Voting and Registration Supplemental data to estimate that 55.9% of people with disabilities voted in the 2016 election compared to 62.2% of people without disabilities, and only 43.5% of individuals who responded that they had a mental or cognitive impairment had voted. In Arizona, the same survey results estimate 66.2% of people with disabilities voted in the 2016 election, compared to 59.6% of people without disabilities. However due to small sample sizes by state, this number likely overestimates the voting rate of people with disabilities and does not further address voting rates across or within disability types, such as intellectual disability.

Among this group, low voter turnout rate may be a result of individuals with intellectual disabilities being more likely to encounter barriers when trying to vote than those without disabilities. Research on barriers for individuals with disabilities and voting point to some traditional barriers to voting including issues with accessibility and accommodations. Accessing the polling place can prove problematic, as one study estimates that 30% of people with disabilities are unable to drive, resulting in a much lower voter turnout for that group (Schur, Shields, Kruse, & Schriener, 2002). Accessibility issues are not limited to getting to the polling place, or even the physical accessibility but also result from the lack of plain, easily understandable language on ballots. In addition, accommodations can be problematic since not all individuals are comfortable having their support providers help them with their ballots, nor are all poll workers trained in helping provide different types of accommodations. In addition to barriers encountered when they reach the polling place, individuals with intellectual disabilities are also more likely to have difficulty accessing easily understandable information on elections.

As state laws around voting change, individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities are more likely to encounter new barriers to voting, as well. In some states, Voter ID laws can bring new challenges for those without photo identification, or whose names are not on utility bills. Also, while absentee ballots offer an opportunity for people to vote from home, there are also some anecdotal stories of potential voter fraud (Belt, 2016). In these stories, people have taken advantage of those with intellectual and developmental disabilities by having them sign absentee ballots that were filled out on their behalf, but without their input.

Despite all of these barriers that individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities likely encounter around voting and voter education, very little research has been taken from the perspective of how these barriers are experienced by individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Much of the research in this area has focused on legal researchers perspectives of whether or not individuals with intellectual disabilities should vote and also barriers they might encounter, and very little information is available from the perspective of individuals with disabilities.

To address this dearth of research, Agran conducted three sequential studies looking at perspectives from providers and individuals with disabilities. In the first study, they surveyed 100 support personnel to ask about client interest in voting and to describe their role in supporting people in voting (Agran & Hughes, 2013). The second study extended the first survey by asking the providers new open-ended questions around barriers to voting and beliefs about providing voter education for individuals with disabilities (Agran, MacLean, & Hughes, 2015). The third study included interviews with individuals with intellectual disabilities (Agran, MacLean, & Andren, 2016). During these interviews, the researchers found that most individuals with disabilities wanted to vote. Barriers identified in the interviews

included a lack of voter education around how to choose a candidate when voting, as most voter education focused on the mechanics of voting rather than how to choose a candidate. One main facilitator identified during the interviews was support and assistance from family members, friends, and service providers. Most people interviewed identified how important it was to have family members and friends that encouraged them to vote, and helped walk them through the process of voting (e.g. registering to vote, going to the polling place, etc.).

With the upcoming elections, this project is particularly timely and will be completed in time for changes in support provision to occur before the next state and national election in 2020, bringing more people with intellectual disabilities into the public political process.

Proposed Research Project

This proposal builds on the limited previous research in this area, by exploring and comparing the perspectives of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, their families, and service providers on areas related to voting, factors influencing voting and voting registration, within the context of barriers to their engagement in the larger political process. For the purpose of this proposal, the federal definition of developmental disability will be used.

Data will be gathered primarily through interviews and focus groups with stakeholder groups (e.g. families, individuals, providers, etc.) across the state of Arizona. Research questions guiding this study are:

- What barriers do voters with intellectual and developmental disabilities experience with voter registration, voter education, and the voting process (e.g. going to the polls, completing the ballot, mail-in and absentee ballots, etc.)?
- What influences individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities to register and vote?
- What is the extent to which current education, accommodations, and support match the needs as expressed by persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities?

This proposal addresses these research questions through a series of activities, organized into the following 4 components: Planning (Months 1-3), Provider Interviews (Months 3-6), Focus Groups with Individuals with Disabilities and their Families (Months 4-9), and Reporting (Months 9-12).

Planning (Month 1-3): Three major activities comprise the planning of the research project. First, a more comprehensive literature review will be completed, examining the barriers and influencers identified in previous research and building a more complete picture of the history and current extent of voting for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. This literature review will also potentially identify any barriers that might be unique to Arizona, through identification of any legislation that might present barriers to voting, such as Voter Identification Laws and rules around absentee ballots.

Second, a planning team will be created to provide guidance on interview questions, advise on and support participant recruitment, and provide state and local contextual information within which to understand the ultimate results of the study. The Planning Team will include no more than 8 participants, drawn from organizational partners such as:

- Arizona Department of Education Exceptional Student Services (ADE-ESS),
- Arizona Secretary of State's Office,
- Arizona Association of Providers Professional for Disabilities (AAPD),
- Arizona Center for Disability Law (ACDL),
- Arizona Chapter of SABLE,
- Raising Special Kids,
- Arizona Development Disabilities Planning Council, and
- Division of Developmental Disabilities.

Third, approval for the study will be sought and obtained, during the planning time, from the Northern Arizona University Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB is designed to protect the rights and welfare of participants in research projects, and is a necessary prerequisite before conducting the project and/or developing any manuscripts for peer-reviewed journals.

Interviews and Focus Groups with Providers (Month 3-6): Semi-structured interviews and focus groups will be conducted with providers that who are in a position to give support to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities around voting and voter education. Semi-structured interviews and focus groups are beneficial for this setting to provide the interviewer a set of guiding questions but still allow flexibility to ask follow-up questions around new or unexpected topics. Interviewers will probe provider perspectives around: (1) their understanding of their role in providing access to vote and voter education; (2) their understanding of their clients' interest in voting; and (3) their beliefs around the rights of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities to vote. Participants will be drawn from provider groups such as:

- Arizona Centers for Independent Living (e.g. Ability 360, DIRECT Center for Independence)
- Group home and day program providers
- DDD Support Coordinators
- County Recorder's Offices
- SPED teachers and directors
- Southwest Institute for Families and Children
- Raising Special Kids
- The ARC of Arizona

Focus Groups with Individuals and Families (Month 4-9): Focus groups will be used because they provide opportunities for peer support, and allow participants to validate and expand on common experiences (Abbott, & McConkey, 2006), and can also be used to explore ideas around which there is little data.

Focus groups with individuals will be conducted separately from their families.

Focus Groups with Individuals. Semi-structured focus groups with individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities will be conducted and individuals will be compensated for their time. Like the interviews, semi-structured focus groups also start with a set of questions but allow flexibility to ask follow-up and probing questions around new or unexpected areas of conversation. The questions will be focus on individuals' knowledge of and experience with voting and voter education, as well as what makes voting challenging or hard for them.

Demographics will also be collected at the time of the focus groups, to include age, disability, and location, as these factors might impact voting behavior.

Focus Groups with Families of Individuals. Semi-structured focus groups with families of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities will also be conducted to offer a complete understanding of the experience of voting for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Among other topics, focus groups with families will concentrate on: (1) their voting behaviors; (2) beliefs around voting rights for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities; (3) knowledge of the voting system and barriers their child might or did encounter voting or registering; and (4) their understanding of their child’s interest in voting.

Reporting (Month 9-12): After data from the interviews is transcribed, coded, analyzed, and major themes have been identified, the planning team will reconvene to review the results. The planning team will provide context, and fill in missing elements of state and local factors that influence voting and public participation. Activities related to reporting include developing the draft research report, drawing together the Planning Team, and other key participants to review and comment on the results. In this way, a group of experts and participants are invited to confirm conclusions and interpretations of the research project, in addition to making recommendations for change based upon the conclusions of the research reports.

Timeline and Responsible Persons

	Responsible ¹	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Literature Review	PD, GA	x	x	x									
Planning Team provides guidance	PT	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
IRB approval	PI, PD	x	x										
Recruit participants	PT, PD		x	x	x	x	x	x					
Interviews with Providers	PD, GA			x	x	x	x	x					
Focus Groups with Providers	PD, GA			x	x	x	x	x					
Pilot focus group questions with persons with IDD	PD, GA		x	x									
Focus Groups with Individuals with ID	PD, GA				x	x	x	x	x	x			
Focus Groups with Families	PD, GA				x	x	x	x	x	x			
Transcribe recordings	Contractor (TBH)				x	x	x	x	x	x			
Analysis	PD, GA								x	x	x	x	
Reporting and Dissemination (e.g. manuscript, infographic, fact sheet)	PD												x
													x

¹ Principal Investigator (PI), Project Director (PD), Graduate Assistants (GA), Planning Team (PT), To Be Hired (TBH)

A process evaluation will be conducted to determine if program activities have been implemented as planned. Information will be collected periodically to ensure that the research is remaining on track to

complete all goals within the identified timelines. Barriers and influencing factors will be identified and addressed to maintain the program timelines.

Methodology

Provider Interviews/Focus Groups.

Providers, who are eligible to participate, will: (1) work for one of the aforementioned agency groups; (2) support a person who is eligible to vote; and (3) be in a position to know something about voting and voting requirements. One method of recruitment will be to include providers who are suggested by the planning team to be interviewed, and also request suggestions from the interviewees to find others who the interviewer should talk to about these issues.

A mix of virtual focus groups and virtual and in-person interviews will be used to help reach providers in rural areas, and expand the reach of the project.

Three to five virtual focus groups with six to eight participants will be conducted, and will be constrained to one provider type per focus group. For example, this might include focus groups with: (1) SPED educators, directors, and transition specialists; (2) DDD support coordinators; and (3) group home and day program providers. Virtual focus groups provide the format needed to.

Around 15-20 semi-structured interviews will be conducted with providers across the state of Arizona, virtually, by phone, or in-person. A recent study by Hennink, Kaiser, and Marconi suggests that 16 to 24 interviews are needed to reach both meaning and code saturation (2017). A maximum of 20 interviews should meet those requirements for meaning saturation, or having the depth of meaning needed to fully understand the themes found in the interviews.

Focus groups.

Focus Groups with Individuals. Individuals eligible to participate in these focus groups will: (1) have an intellectual or developmental disability, (2) be eligible to vote and have voted in the 2018 General Election, and (3) be able to communicate their thoughts to the researcher. Other considerations, that will be noted as potential factors in voting behavior but not required as an eligibility requirement to participate in the focus groups, include: access to transportation, living situation (e.g. with family, in a group home, etc.), and demographic characteristics.

Six focus groups will be conducted with individuals, regionally, across the state of Arizona, with six to eight people each. Traditionally focus groups are conducted until data saturation has been reached, or the point at which new information no longer addresses new themes or topics. One study suggests that data saturation can be reached in as few as three to six focus groups, with 90% of themes being discovered (Guest, Namey, & McKenna, 2017). A maximum of six focus groups should meet the saturation requirements, and identify if location (e.g. rurality) effects voting barriers experienced. The state-based regions will be based on the DD regions (i.e. south, central, and north), with more focus groups being conducted based upon the success of recruitment efforts, percent of voter turnout in the given area, and population density. For example, focus group efforts will be concentrated in the counties with higher percentages of voter turnout in the 2018 midterm elections: Yavapai (77.9%), Pima (70.6%), Gila (70.0%), and Maricopa (64.5%).

The focus group questions will first be piloted through one-on-one interviews to test for clarity of initial questions, as well as identify and address any barriers that individuals might experience with the interview or focus group process. One potential set of questions, that were identified by Agran, Maclean, and Adren (2016), and will be considered for this study include: (1) What do you know about voting? (2) What experiences have you had with voting? (3) Tell me about any preparation or education you have received about voting? (4) Has anything ever stopped you from voting or made it hard for you to vote? (5) What do you think would help you to vote?

Additional questions around barriers and accessibility of the voting process and ballot will be included.

Focus Groups with Families. Six focus groups, of family members, will be conducted in the same way, and around the same time, as the individual focus groups. Participants will meet similar eligibility requirements: (1) be the family member of an individual with an intellectual or developmental disability who is eligible to vote, (2) be eligible to vote, and (3) be able to communicate their thoughts to the researcher.

One potential set of questions around voting behaviors and beliefs includes: (1) Are you registered to vote? (2) Do you talk about political issues at home? (3) Have you looked at voter informational materials? (4) Is it important in your family to vote? (5) Why do you think it is/isn't important for your child to vote?

Confidentiality.

All participants will be notified that his/her responses will not be completely anonymous. While their verbatim interview/focus group will not be shared, responses specific to a type of agency may be inferred. This notification will occur at the beginning of the conversation prior to the interview. If the interviewee verbally agrees to continue, the interview will proceed. The participant will also be told that he/she may stop the interview at any time or choose to retract their participation at any time.

All interview and quantitative data will be stored on a password protected computer. All written notes will be kept in a locked file. Only the staff at the NAU Institute for Human Development have access to the computer files and locked cabinet.

No names are tied to the data. No name is explicitly tied to the interview; however, through a logical process of deduction, the name of the individual can be deduced. No names of individuals or agencies will be published. Only summary data will be published. There are no anticipated circumstances that may lead to breaking confidentiality.

Plan for Analysis

All provider interviews and individual and family focus groups will be recorded and transcribed.

After interviews and focus groups are transcribed, they will first be grouped into categories by respondents (i.e. provider, individual with intellectual or developmental disability, and family member). Information will then be coded or analyzed (1) by question, (2) across questions, and (3) across respondent type to identify themes and patterns, through common stories, interactions, and barriers encountered. Relationships between themes will be identified, explained, and reported. Explanation of the data will be aided by the planning group to fully examine the results in the context of the larger

state context and initiatives and partnerships that may exist. These analyses will be guided by the research questions identified for this proposal and additional information the planning team might identify.

Qualitative analysis will be conducted using NVivo, which offers a platform for saving identified themes, as well as enhancing mixed methods analysis by allowing themes to be analyzed by participant attributes. It will be used in conjunction with SPSS for any quantitative analysis.

Reporting

All results will be included in a final report and executive summary to be completed 30 days after the final planning meeting. In addition to a final report, multiple methods of information dissemination will be explored to provide results of the study to families and individuals, as well as researchers. Formats for dissemination materials include the following:

- fact sheet for families,
- infographic designed for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, and
- academic journal publication geared toward researchers.

References

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Budget Request Form

Contractor Name: Northern Arizona University/Office of Sponsored Projects

Contractor Address: 1395 S. Knoles Drive, Ste 252 (ARD, bldg. 56) Flagstaff AZ 86011
Street Address City State Zip

Project Name: ADDPC-Voting Project

Budget Category	Requested ADDPC Funds	Non-Federal Cash Match	Non-Federal In-Kind Match	Total Program Cost
Personnel/Salaries	39,200		5,850	45,050
Fringe Benefits	19,899		1,508	21,407
Supplies / Operating Expenses	3,000			3,000
Travel	3,048			3,048
Rent or Cost of Space				-
Contracted Services / Professional Services	6,690			6,690
Administrative / Indirect Costs	7,184		19,171	26,355
Total Costs	79,021	-	26,529	105,550

It is understood that Non-Federal Funds identified in this budget will be used to match only ADDPC Federal Funds, and will not be used to match any other Federal Funds during the period of the ADDPC funded Project.

Additional description and background information shall be included as a budget narrative, including for match. The contractor agrees to submit additional background information to the ADDPC upon request.

Name of Certifying Official

Title of Certifying Official

Phone Email