



Accessible Social Media in Elections

Technology platforms and products have transformed political life and continue to have implications for voter education and trust. Social media is a key tool used by civil society organizations and election management bodies (EMBs). Analysis conducted by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) in 2022 found that 73 EMBs currently use social media in their outreach, but in most cases, EMB communication strategies do not include guidance on ensuring social media posts are accessible to people with disabilities. IFES supports partners in civil society and EMBs to craft effective social media strategies to expand voter outreach, enhance transparency, increase trust in the election process, and effectively counter disinformation and hate speech. EMBs around the world use social media for voter education, with many EMBs using multiple platforms to reach voters. Social media allows EMBs to have strong two-way conversations with the public—particularly underrepresented groups that might have a more active presence on social media, such as young people.

Why it Matters

Providing accurate information to all voters is an important part of an EMB’s work. Election officials ensure that everyone who is eligible to vote is registered, has access to information about voting and running for office, and is able to cast their ballot. EMBs and other actors that use social media to connect with the public must ensure that the content they produce is accessible to persons with disabilities. When social media content is not accessible, voters with disabilities may encounter barriers to accessing and understanding information on social media.

Best Practices

This guide provides strategies and resources for ensuring that social media content is accessible for and inclusive of persons with disabilities.

Provide alt text or image descriptions

Alternative, or alt, text, is descriptive text that conveys the meaning of and provides context for visual items that are part of online content. Screen readers need alt text to convey photos to users. When screen readers reach an image or other visual, they read the alt text aloud, helping users to understand what is represented on the screen. Labeling images with alt text (for example, if a photo shows a woman casting a ballot, the alt text should say “woman casting a ballot”) helps website users who are not able to see the image clearly to hear the description.



Alt text: Three women from Guyana smile at the camera. They are holding up a purple photo frame that reads “Disability Awareness” in gold letters.

This is an example of alt-text for an image.

Provide captions or transcripts

Subtitles are used for dialogue, but they don't include sound notes. For this reason, deaf and hard-of-hearing audiences prefer captioning. Captions include both dialogue and sound notes, such as a doorbell chiming, a person speaking with a foreign accent, or wind blowing. Captions on videos enable people who have hearing disabilities or who are unable to watch with sound to access the same information as others. When captions aren't available, provide a transcript.

Review and correct automatic captions

Major social media platforms have upgraded their accessibility features. Many automatically include captioning for video content and built-in features for generating alt-text image descriptions. Those features can be useful, but they are not always fully accurate. Social media managers should not rely solely on the automated content, and they should review and correct all captions and alt text before posting.

Avoid abbreviations and non-standard text

Text on social media is marked by informality and experimentation. Unfortunately, screen readers sometimes interpret this text inaccurately. Therefore, adhering to conventional spelling and punctuation standards is advised. Use emojis or other small images to enhance messages, not to replace text, in ways that don't impact the meaning of the message. When creating hashtags on content, capitalize each word in the phrase to enable access for persons using screen readers or with low vision (e.g., PersonsWithDisabilities, NothingAboutUsWithoutUs).



Time ⌚ is running out to vote 🗳️ by mail. 🗳️
⌚ is running out to 🗳️ by 🗳️.

The first line is a good practice example of using emojis to enhance text.

Accessible social media best practices

- Institutionalize accessible social media practices in organizational communications strategies.
- Be objective when writing alt text. Focus on describing the physical aspects of the image without any commentary or opinions on the image.
- Be accurate. Alt text should convey all the information in the image that would be available to someone viewing it.
- Provide alt text for all images and photographs on social media. Facebook and the X platform, formerly Twitter, have built-in tools for adding alt text to images.
- On platforms without built-in alt text tools, add a detailed image description in the caption.
- Review computer-generated captions for accuracy and revise as needed.
- Avoid abbreviations.
- Use conventional spelling and punctuation.
- Use emojis to enhance your message, not to replace words.
- Capitalize each word in a hashtag, e.g., #NothingAboutUsWithoutUs.

Resources

International Foundation for Electoral Systems, [Social Media Strategies for Election Management Bodies: A Tactical Guide to Expanding Voter Outreach](#)

International Foundation for Electoral Systems, [Social Media Strategies for Election Management Bodies: A Tactical Guide to Expanding Voter Outreach](#)

Accessible Social, [Alt Text Writing Tips](#)

Facebook, [Accessibility Resources](#)

Instagram, [Accessibility Resources](#)

X Platform (formerly Twitter), [Accessibility Resources](#)

Read and download Accessible Social Media in Elections on www.IFES.org.

IFES's *Learning Series on Disability-Inclusive Election Technology* provides EMBs and civil society with guidelines and recommendations to ensure the technology they use, procure and develop is fully accessible for persons with disabilities.

Learn more at [Learning Series on Disability-Inclusive Election Technology](#).

Follow @IFESDisability to stay up to date on IFES's work on inclusion of persons with disabilities.

Contact media@ifes.org for more information.

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