



Frequently Asked Questions on the Access Technology Affordability Act

What is access technology?

How does access technology help blind Americans?

How do blind Americans currently acquire access technology?

What barriers currently prevent blind Americans from acquiring access technology for themselves?

What is the labor force participation rate of blind people in the United States?

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Q: What is access technology?

A: Access technology describes hardware, software, or information technology whose primary function is intended to convert information normally accessed through visual means into nonvisual media primarily used by blind individuals which may include Braille, synthesized speech, optical character recognition, and magnification.

Q: How does access technology help blind Americans?

A: Access technology enables blind people to perform tasks that would otherwise be difficult to perform, with the same level of ease and efficiency as sighted individuals. For instance, a blind person might use optical character recognition software to read text on a printed document, or use screen access software to read information on a computer. Access technology can also facilitate full participation in such areas as education, rehabilitation and training, health care, employment, residential living, independent living, recreation, and other aspects of daily life.

Q: How do blind Americans currently acquire access technology?

A: There are several routes blind Americans can take in order to acquire access technology. The most common route for those seeking employment is through state agencies, like vocational rehabilitation, which receive federal and state funds to provide services to people with disabilities.

Next, they can seek assistance from state loan programs. Finally, there are other private and non-profit organizations that may help acquire access technology but do not offer financial assistance. Although these options exist, many blind Americans still find themselves without critically needed access technologies to be successful employees, students, business owners, etc.

Q: What current barriers prevent blind Americans from acquiring access technology?

A: The financial barrier associated with the high cost of access technology poses the biggest obstacle preventing blind Americans from acquiring these tools for themselves. Consequently, blind consumers turn to government, private, and non-profit agencies for assistance. Unfortunately, these agencies struggle to meet the demand of their consumers.

Q: What is the unemployment rate of blind people in the United States?

A: According to the United States Census Bureau, 72 percent of blind Americans are either unemployed or underemployed.¹

Q: Where did the idea for a tax credit come from?

A: Congress previously recognized that tax credits and deductions create incentives to transition people with disabilities, including blind Americans, into the workforce. Historically, Congress enacted tax credits for employers in order to incentivize them to hire people with disabilities. Therefore, it seems reasonable to create a similar tax benefit which promotes individual ownership of critically needed access technology. This, in turn, will remove an additional barrier to employment opportunities for blind Americans.

Q: Why is access technology so expensive?

A: To design and manufacture access technology requires a dedicated group of specially trained programmers whose purpose is to ensure that their access technology software is compatible with ever-changing mainstream platforms, in addition to fixing bugs in the program. Additionally, in comparison with mainstream technology used by the general public, these products are not in such high demand. For example, Microsoft Word and Apple iTunes are commonly found in most homes in the world, unlike screen access software such as JAWS.

Q: Where can I learn more about this Act?

A: To learn more visit www.nfb.org.

¹ United States Census Bureau. 2016. *2015 American Community Survey*. www.disabilitystatistics.org (maintained by Cornell University).