



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?

Where did the idea for a tax credit come from?

Why is access technology so expensive?

Where can I learn more about this Act?

Q: What is access technology?

A: Access technology is a recently developed term that describes hardware and/or software 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 people with disabilities to perform tasks that would otherwise be difficult to perform due to the nature of their disability, with the same level of ease and efficiency as nondisabled individuals. For instance, a blind person might use optical character recognition software to read text from a printed document or access information on a computer through the use of screen access software. Access technology can also reduce expenditures associated with early childhood intervention, education, rehabilitation and training, health care, employment, residential living, independent living, recreation, and other aspects of daily living.

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 that receive federal and state funds to provide services to people with disabilities, such as Vocational Rehabilitation.

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

A: Congress previously recognized that tax credits and deductions create the best 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. Likewise, Congress created an additional personal tax deduction specifically for blind Americans in order to motivate these individuals to transition away from government assistance. Therefore, it seems reasonable to create a similar tax benefit that removes an additional barrier to employment opportunities for blind Americans.

Q: Why is access technology so expensive?

A: Designing and manufacturing 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 and cracks 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 Windows and Mac OSX are commonly found in most homes in the world, unlike screen access software such as JAWS. Finally, the technical support associated with access technology also contributes to the high cost of the products.

Q: Where can I learn more about this Act?

A: To learn more visit www.nfb.org