# Equal Access Through Innovation: Colorado's Partnership with Aira

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| **State:** | **Colorado** |
| **Agency:** | **Governor's Office of Information Technology** |
| **Award Category:** | **Cross-Boundary Collaboration & Partnerships** |
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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Though it is well-established that government is of the people and by the people, government buildings aren't always accessible to all the people. At the State of Colorado, we set out to change that.

Like most state capitol buildings, Colorado's was built more than a century ago when steps were more common than elevators. By its very nature, it was challenging to get into the building, let alone navigate it once inside. Everyone deserves equal access to essential state services.

As part of its drive to create a Colorado for All, the Technology Accessibility Program (TAP) within the Governor's Office of Information Technology (OIT) and the Lt. Governor's Office partnered with Aira to connect those who are blind or have low vision with highly trained visual interpreters to remove barriers when navigating state-operated buildings and digital services for free for up to 30 minutes per session. Through the Aira app, a smartphone camera streams secure, live video to a professionally trained agent who visually interprets what is shared, from describing and reading to explaining and navigating just about anything safely and securely.

Since February 2023, more than 2,000 people who are blind or have low vision have been using the Aira mobile application on their smartphone first to navigate the Colorado State Capitol and other state buildings, university campuses, state parks as well as state websites and applications.
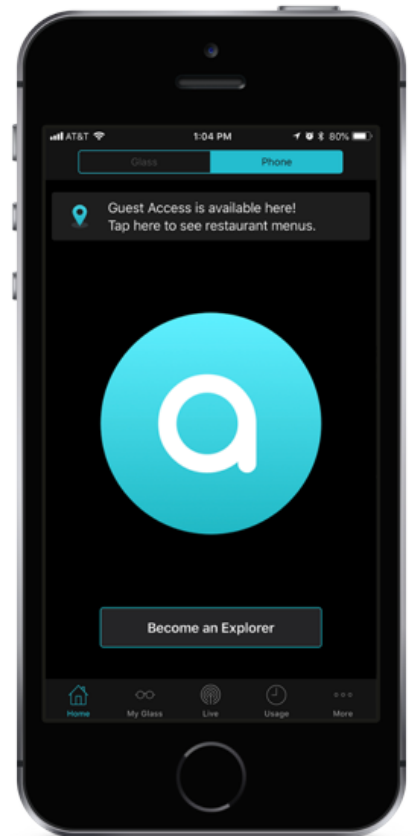
## IDEA

The American Foundation for the Blind reports that more than 150,000 Coloradans are blind or have low vision. Some of Colorado's state-run buildings and spaces might be antiquated, but the technology and accommodations in those places doesn't have to be! Every Coloradan should have equal access to state services.

As part of a broader effort to create a Colorado for All and with Colorado's HB21-1110 Colorado Laws for Persons with Disabilities in mind, in February 2023 the Governor's Office of Information Technology (OIT) embarked on an initiative to partner with Aira, a visual interpreting service that provides live, on-demand access to visual information through human-to-human professional assistance.

Aira enhances independence for individuals who are blind or have low vision by delivering visual accommodation for just about any task. Utilizing free 30-minute sessions, users—whom Aira calls Explorers—are able to get assistance navigating state government buildings, state websites and web applications, and interpreting otherwise inaccessible state documentation. Through the Aira app, a user's smartphone camera streams secure, live video to a professionally trained agent who visually interprets what is shared, from describing and reading to explaining and navigating, just about anything safely and securely. Aira can be used to navigate physical spaces like a state building, campus or state park in addition to navigating state websites (colorado.gov or state.co.us), applications, and online or physical documents.

As the State of Colorado works on making all of its services accessible, Aira is one of the accommodation tools the state provides as a way to ensure better access to services today.

## IMPLEMENTATION

About one in four adults in Colorado have a disability, which accounts for more than one million adults who may have difficulties accessing state services. With the passage of

[HB21-1110 Colorado Laws for Persons with Disabilities](#) and increased funding, the state began taking significant steps to improve not only physical but also digital accessibility to state services.

One of those steps was to implement a longer-term solution for providing access to inaccessible technologies that state employees needed to use in their daily jobs. A few were using Aira to assist them in their work but often relied on office colleagues for help with an application or other digital product they couldn't otherwise access. When most state employees transitioned to remote work at the onset of COVID-19, it suddenly became critical for blind and low-vision employees to have a better way to access those systems on their own. After conferring with the state's Technology Accessibility Advisory Board (TAAB) and state employees, it was decided that any state employee who needs the service should have access to it. In 2022, the TAAB factored Aira funding into the budget which, for the first time, offered the service to all Coloradans engaging with state services and in state-owned or managed locations.

After purchasing the service, a project team composed of team members from OIT's Technology Accessibility Program (TAP) and Communications Office and Aira marketing representatives met weekly to develop an extensive awareness campaign to reach as many potential Aira users as possible. By evaluating what had worked for other government agencies across the country that had launched similar campaigns, the team created materials that could be shared at events attended by those who are blind or have low vision, spread the message to a wide network within that community, and collaborated with Lt. Governor Primavera's office to develop a video that puts you directly into the experience of a user navigating the app.

Concurrently with that effort, extra security precautions had to be taken given the sensitive nature of the app itself and its use within state-owned facilities. A full review by OIT's Information Security Office ensured the State's infrastructure would be protected.

Those efforts culminated in a February 2023 announcement of TAP's partnership with Aira, an accommodation and visual interpretation tool, was announced. Aira offers on-demand visual interpretation services for people who are blind or have low vision – or, as Aira calls them, Explorers. Aira is free to State of Colorado customers and visitors for the first 30 minutes per session, with longer calls charged based on Aira's pricing plans. Aira agents are available 24/7, 365 days a year, and do not require advanced reservations.

With the endorsement and support of Colorado's Lt. Governor Dianne Primavera, OIT and the TAP team launched the awareness campaign with a press release and media toolkit highlighting Aira's benefits as well as a compelling (and short) video that shows how Aira guided a blind state employee to locate Lt. Governor Primavera's office at the State Capitol.

A video filmed at Chatfield State Park highlights the partnership between Aira and Colorado Parks & Wildlife, which launched in June 2023. It shows how the app can be incorporated when visiting Colorado's state parks, demonstrating how blind visitors can navigate trails, experience interpretive signage, and share their visit with friends and family.

**Navigate state buildings and websites more easily with Aira.**
oit.colorado.gov/accessibility/aira

In August 2023, the TAP team launched a Back-to-Campus with Aira mini-campaign aimed at reaching students and visitors to Colorado's state colleges and universities. Not only does Aira offer current and prospective students more independence, but Aira navigators are able to remote into students' computers to help troubleshoot computer issues, assist with coursework, and navigate campus websites and applications.

In early 2024, OIT announced Aira's Colorado Free Access Day on Feb. 12, a day that people with blindness or low vision across the state could access free services from Aira in 30-minute intervals. The free day coincided with the National Federation of the Blind of Colorado's Day at the Capitol, meant to promote advocacy and awareness.

## IMPACT

Aira provides users with instant access to visual information and enhances everyday efficiency, engagement and independence. Since the partnership began, visitors to state-operated spaces have placed more than 2,100 calls to Aira agents and logged nearly 19,000 minutes with them.

The Aira mobile app can be used by anyone navigating state-owned and managed government buildings or state websites and web applications (URLs that include "colorado.gov" or "state.co.us"). Aira Explorers might use the app to help them navigate the ornate halls of the Colorado State Capitol or a tree-lined trail in one of Colorado's 42 state parks. Aira is also free to students and visitors at Colorado's state-owned college and university campuses. With our proven success, we will continue to implement Aira throughout the state as an ongoing accommodation while accessibility continues to improve in technology and physical spaces.

At OIT, our mission is to provide secure digital services that put Coloradans first, and our vision is to make government easy. Our partnership with Aira is just one tool in our journey to meet the needs of every Coloradan through equitable and accessible government services.

# Navigate state buildings and websites more easily with Aira.

## What is Aira?

Aira is a service that provides on-demand, visual interpretation services for people who are blind or have low vision – or as Aira calls them, Explorers. Simply download the app to your smartphone, press a large button on your screen, and your phone's camera streams a live video to a highly trained Aira agent – providing instant access to visual information and enhancing everyday efficiency, engagement and independence.

## How can Coloradans use Aira?

Aira can be used by anyone navigating State of Colorado owned and managed government buildings or visiting state-run websites and web applications (URLs that include "colorado.gov" and "state.co.us"). Aira is free to Coloradans for the first 30 minutes per session. Call time beyond that will be charged based on Aira's pricing plans.

## How do I get started?

• Download the app from your mobile device via the Apple App Store or Google Play Store.
• Open the app and register your phone number.
• Click the link in the text message Aira sends, which will log you into the app.
• Make a free call to learn how it works.
• The next time you're navigating a state-operated building or visiting a state website, make a call of up to 30 minutes through the Aira app!

## What if I need help?

• Aira agents are always available, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year, and do not require advanced reservations.
• The Aira Customer Care team is available at 1-800-835-1934 from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. Mountain Time, 7 days a week.