

Curtis Chong

Curtis Chong was born in Hawaii and lived there for twenty years. Because he was born prematurely (weighing in at only two-and-a-half pounds), he was placed in an incubator. Unfortunately, at that time, the incubator delivered too much oxygen, causing his retinas to be irreparably damaged.

For more than four decades, he has worked to improve the ability of blind people to use computers and other technologies. Since 1969, he has been active in the National Federation of the Blind, promoting civil rights and improved services for blind people nationally and in the states of Hawaii, California, Minnesota, Maryland, Iowa, New Mexico, and now in Colorado.

Before entering the field of work with the blind, Curtis spent more than 20 years working in information technology. He programmed his first mainframe computer in 1972, at a time when computers did not talk to the blind. As a designer/consultant at American Express Financial Services (now Ameriprise), he provided technical support for mainframe database and communications software, maintaining systems for sighted coworkers within the company. From 1997-2002, Curtis worked as the Director of Technology for the National Federation of the Blind, supporting internal information technology for the Federation and its external programs to improve nonvisual access technology and accessibility for the blind in several different areas. He then spent ten years in Iowa as Director of Field Operations for the Iowa Department for the Blind and five years as an assistive technology expert with the New Mexico Commission for the Blind.

From October 1998 through April 1999, Curtis served as a member of the Electronic Information and Technology Access Advisory Committee of the U.S. Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board (the Access Board); which prepared the preliminary standards which were later used to implement Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act. Curtis also served on a second Access Board committee, appointed ten years later, which developed updated technical standards for Section 508; these standards have been incorporated into published federal rules.

Today, Curtis Chong has retired from paid employment. Nevertheless, he continues his work to help blind people to live the lives they want regardless of their blindness. He continues to volunteer as a nonvisual access consultant for the National Federation of the Blind. In this capacity, in 2019, he and his colleagues in the National Federation of the Blind of Colorado worked to pass a law which enables people with disabilities in Colorado who cannot fill out the printed mail ballot without help to mark their ballots online using the assistive technology with which they are most familiar. In 2021, Curtis and his colleagues in the blind community worked to pass a second voting bill which makes it possible for registered Colorado voters with print disabilities to return their ballots electronically.

Curtis serves as a member of the Colorado Governor's Office of Information Technology's Technology Access Advisory Board, which works to improve access to the technologies used by state governmental agencies in Colorado.