

Free Assistive Technology Programs for Low Vision

If you have ever priced a video magnifier or a screen-reading laptop, you already know the sticker can be brutal. A single device can run anywhere from \$800 to well over \$4,000, and most people walk away feeling like real help is just out of reach. That is a frustrating place to be, especially when you are also trying to keep up with appointments, work, or family life.

Here is the part most people never hear: a lot of the most useful low vision tools are available for free or close to it. You just have to know where to look. National nonprofits, state lending libraries, the VA, and the device already in your pocket can cover more ground than you might expect. This directory walks you through the free assistive technology programs low vision users and their families can actually use, plus the free assistive technology for blind and visually impaired adults available right now and how to apply.

This guide is part of our [complete assistive technology funding guide](#), which covers paid options, insurance, and tax breaks if free programs do not fully cover what you need.

National Free AT Programs

A handful of national organizations make free or low-cost assistive technology a core part of what they do. These are usually the first places to check, because their programs are open across all 50 states, and most do not require you to be legally blind.

Lions Clubs International is the biggest name in this space. Sight-related service is the largest category Lions clubs work in worldwide, and many local clubs fund free or subsidized eyeglasses, magnifiers, and electronic vision aids for community members. The trick is that funding is decided club by club, so you apply through your nearest local Lions club rather than a national portal.

The National Federation of the Blind runs several technology programs, including a free Independence Market that ships low-cost and donated aids, plus scholarships and training events that include device access. Their free NFB-NEWSLINE service reads more than 500 newspapers and magazines aloud over the phone or app at no cost. The American Foundation for the Blind hosts CareerConnect and a directory of AT and employment resources. They do not hand out devices directly, but they connect you to vetted programs that do, including state vocational rehabilitation services.

Lighthouse for the Blind organizations operate regionally. Many have device closets, low-cost stores, or free demonstration programs. Search for the Lighthouse serving your state, since each one runs differently.

Prevent Blindness focuses on screening and referral. They will not give you a device, but they can connect you with local programs, free screenings, and patient advocates if you are not sure where your vision falls or what to ask for.

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State AT Lending and Reuse Programs

Every state has an Assistive Technology Act program. This is one of the best-kept secrets in low vision support, because most people have never heard of it.

Your state AT program offers three things, and all three are free or close to it:

Device loans, usually for 30 to 60 days. You can borrow a video magnifier, screen reader software, a smart speaker, or even a CCTV to test it before committing. This is huge if you are not sure which device fits your daily life.

Reutilization programs, where refurbished devices are passed along at no cost or a small handling fee. Inventory changes constantly, but it is worth checking back regularly.

Demonstration programs, where you can come in person, try multiple devices side by side, and get help comparing options without a sales pitch.

To find your state program, visit AT3Center.net and use their state-by-state directory. Each program has its own application, but most only ask for basic contact information and a short description of the task you are trying to solve.

A deeper guide to navigating your state Assistive Technology Act program is coming soon as part of this series.

Veterans AT Programs

If you are a veteran with vision loss, the VA has one of the strongest [assistive technology benefits](#) in the country, and most veterans do not realize how much is available.

[VA Blind Rehabilitation Services](#), often called BRS, provides free evaluation, training, and devices to eligible veterans. This includes electronic magnifiers, screen readers, talking watches, GPS tools, and more. BRS also runs inpatient rehabilitation programs at Blind Rehabilitation Centers across the country, where you can spend several weeks learning to use new tools with one-on-one instruction at no cost.

Each VA medical center has a VIST coordinator, short for Visual Impairment Services Team. Your VIST coordinator is your main contact for everything related to vision loss. They schedule evaluations, order devices, and connect you to training. If you only do one thing as a veteran with vision loss, ask your VA primary care provider for a referral to your VIST coordinator.

Eligibility is broader than most people assume. Any veteran with vision loss can request an evaluation, regardless of when their service occurred or whether the vision loss is service-connected. You do not have to be legally blind, and you do not need a recent disability rating. You just need to be enrolled in VA health care.

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To start, call your local VA medical center and ask to be connected to the VIST coordinator, or visit VA Blind Rehab for the program overview.

Free Technology Already on Your Phone or Computer

This is the section most people skip, and it is the one that can make the biggest immediate difference. The phone or computer you already own probably has powerful, free accessibility tools built right in. No application, no waiting list, no income check. On iPhone and Mac, Apple includes VoiceOver (a full screen reader), Magnifier (turns the camera into a digital magnifier with contrast filters), Zoom (full-screen magnification up to 15x), and Dictation (speak instead of type). All of these are free, already installed, and work without an internet connection.

On Android, Google offers TalkBack (the Android screen reader), Lookout (uses the camera to read text, identify currency, and describe scenes), and system-wide magnification gestures. Pixel phones add Live Caption and Guided Frame for low vision photography.

On Windows, Microsoft includes Narrator (screen reader), Magnifier (full-screen zoom with multiple modes), and Eye Control. Office apps have built-in read-aloud and dictation. None of this costs extra.

Amazon Alexa devices, including the basic Echo Dot, give you a voice-first way to set timers, read news, control lights, hear medication reminders, and check the weather without ever looking at a screen.

How to Apply for Free AT

Free assistive technology is not always easy to access, but the application process is usually simpler than people fear. Here is what most programs ask for.

Documentation typically includes a vision diagnosis from your eye doctor (a recent letter or chart note works), basic identifying info, and sometimes proof of residency. Many programs do not have any income requirement at all. Veterans programs only require VA health enrollment. State AT lending programs usually require nothing beyond contact info.

A few application tips that consistently improve approval odds:

Be specific about the task. "I need help reading prescription bottles and the mail" is far more likely to get approved than "I need a magnifier." Programs are matching you to a tool, so describe the job.

Include a doctor's letter when possible. A short note from your eye doctor confirming low vision dramatically speeds up approvals, even when not strictly required.

Follow up after a week or two. Most of these programs run on small staffs, and a polite follow-up email often moves your application forward.

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If you are denied, do not stop there. Many free programs are funded annually and run out mid-year, so reapplying in the next funding cycle often works. You can also check eligibility for state vocational rehabilitation services or the funding paths covered in our [complete assistive technology funding guide](#).

Be patient on timelines. Free programs can take 30 to 90 days. State AT loans are usually faster, often within a week or two.

Frequently Asked Questions

Where can I get free magnifiers?

Start with your local Lions Club, your state AT lending program through AT3Center, and your nearest Lighthouse for the Blind. Free handheld magnifiers are common; free electronic video magnifiers are rarer but available through state reutilization programs and the VA for veterans.

Does the VA pay for low vision aids?

Yes. VA Blind Rehabilitation Services covers evaluation, devices, and training at no cost for eligible veterans enrolled in VA health care. You do not need to be legally blind, and you do not need a service-connected disability rating.

Are there free apps for people with low vision?

Yes. Be My Eyes, Seeing AI, and Voice Dream Reader Lite are all free. Built-in tools like VoiceOver, TalkBack, and Narrator are also free and already installed on most phones and computers.

Do I have to be legally blind to qualify for free AT?

Usually no. Most state AT lending programs, Lions Club programs, and Hadley have no legal blindness requirement. Some specific grants do require legal blindness, but those are the exception, not the rule.

How long does it take to get free assistive technology?

State AT loans usually arrive within one to two weeks. Lions Club and nonprofit grants often take 30 to 90 days. VA evaluations can usually be scheduled within a few weeks once your VIST coordinator opens a referral.

Take the Next Step

You do not have to navigate this directory alone. NELVB helps people with low vision figure out which free programs they actually qualify for, how to stack them with insurance and assistive technology benefits, and which devices will solve the specific tasks getting in the way of daily life.

[Schedule your no-obligation consultation](#), and we will help you build a plan that combines free programs, training, and the right tools for the way you live.

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About This Document

This white paper was created by New England Low Vision and Blindness. Portions of the content were generated using AI technology and reviewed for accuracy. However, the information is provided “as is” and is not intended as a substitute for professional advice or a comprehensive assessment.

About New England Low Vision and Blindness

New England Low Vision and Blindness is a leading provider of assistive technology, training, and support for people who are blind or visually impaired. We serve individuals, schools, and organizations across the Northeast with personalized solutions that empower independence and improve quality of life. To learn more or schedule a no-obligation consultation, visit [NELowVision.com](https://www.NELowVision.com) or call 888-211-6933. You can also email us at info@NELowVision.com.