

An Election Worker's Guide to Serving Voters with Disabilities

General tips

- Assume competence and treat every voter with respect.
- Be patient to those who need extra time to communicate or cast their ballot.
- Offer assistance, but don't begin to assist someone before asking if they want help.
- If you don't know what type of assistance someone needs, just ask.
- Inform people of right to use an accessible machine.
- Allow voters with disabilities to receive assistance from any person of their choice (besides their employer or union representative).
- Remember that some disabilities are invisible.
- Don't question a person about their disability.
- Offer curbside voting to someone having trouble getting into polling place.

Serving voters who use wheelchairs or have mobility limitations

- Don't start pushing a wheelchair without first asking if assistance is needed.
- Sit while talking to someone in a wheelchair, so they don't have to look up.
- Don't lean or hang on someone's wheelchair.
- Don't offer to carry someone up stairs or into an inaccessible space.
- Provide a place to sit or line preference for individuals who cannot stand for a long time.

Serving voters who are blind or have low vision

- Don't touch, pet or distract an assistive animal.
- Greet the person by telling them who and where you are.
- Provide a guiding device such as a ruler or card for signing forms.
- Offer to explain how the accessible machines work.
- If the voter needs assistance getting to the voting booth, guide them by voice or by offering your arm. Do not touch the individual without asking.
- Offer assistance, but allow individuals to cast votes independently if they prefer.

Serving voters who are deaf or have hearing impairments

- Don't shout at a person who is deaf.
- Some voters read lips. Keep good eye contact and don't chew gum.
- Keep pen and paper for voters who may be able to communicate by passing notes.
- Understand that some voters will require a sign language interpreter.
- If voter is using a sign language interpreter, maintain eye contact with the voter directly, not their interpreter.

Serving voters with speech impairments

- Ask someone you don't understand to repeat what they said.
- Don't pretend to understand what someone says or complete someone's sentences.

For help, call Disability Rights Texas' Voting Hotline at 1-888-796-VOTE (8683)

A Basic Guide to Polling Place Accessibility



This is a basic guide to accessibility to assist in identifying barriers and potential solutions to ensure access to voters with disabilities. Election officials should try to select fully accessible polling places and conduct the full Department of Justice accessibility survey available at www.ada.gov/votingck.htm.

Parking and Drop-Off Areas

- If parking is provided, at least one accessible parking spot that is nearest to the accessible entrance must be provided for every 25 regular parking spaces.
- The first accessible spot should be van accessible with an access aisle at least 8ft wide.
- Accessible parking spots should be relatively level and not have loose gravel or dirt.
- If drop-off area is provided, it should be level and have an access aisle that is at least 5ft deep and 20ft long where people can access entrance (near ramp if necessary).
- *Solutions:* Traffic cones can be used to mark accessible parking spaces and access aisles. Heavy duty mats can be used to level out uneven surfaces.

Paths of Travel

- There must be an accessible path from parking spot to entrance and voting area.
- Path must be at least 36 inches wide and free of steps or level changes more than ½ inch.
- If accessible path crosses traffic, a marked crosswalk should be used.
- Where path crosses curb, a curb cut or temporary ramp should be used.
- Ramps can't be steep. For every 1 inch high, a ramp must be at least 12 inches long.

Preventing Obstructions for Voters Who are Blind or Have Low Vision

- People who are blind can easily run into objects that hang from above (like tree limbs), are open beneath (like staircases), or protrude from the side (like trophy cases).
- *Solution:* Place a barrier within 27 inches of the floor so cane can detect the obstruction.

Entrance to Polling Place and Voting Area

- Doorways must be at least 32 inches wide.
- Threshold must not be more than ¾ inches high at door and must be beveled on each side.
- No heavy doors.
- No slick, round door handles.
- *Solutions:* If door is too heavy to open easily, adjust door closer, disconnect operating arm, or prop door open on Election Day. If smooth round handles are on door, use temporary hardware or prop door open. If threshold is too high, use temporary threshold ramp on each side that is too high.

Voting Area

- An accessible voting machine on wheelchair accessible booth should be located along an accessible path in a location that ensures privacy.

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Polling Place Accessibility — Ensuring Effective Interaction

- Doors, entrances and exits used to enter or to leave the polling place must have a minimum width of 32 inches.
- Any curb next to the main entrance to the polling place must have curb-cuts.
- The polling place may not have any barriers, such as gravel, automatically closing gates, closed doors without lever-type handles, or any other barrier that impedes the path of persons with physical disabilities as they travel to the voting station.
- Accessible parking spaces must have room for the vehicle and an additional space that serves as an access aisle — at least 8 feet for an accessible van.

Accessibility Solutions

- Keep poll entrance doors unlocked and/or open during voting hours.
- Keep a few chairs handy for those needing a place to sit.
- Make sure there is adequate space for those in wheelchairs to maneuver in/out and while voting.
- Let all poll workers and voters know the proper procedure for handling curbside voting in advance of Election Day.
- Mark accessible passages and entrances with easy to read, large print signs.

Effective Interaction with Voters with Disabilities

- Voters with mental disabilities should be assumed to be competent to vote. Individuals accompanying these voters should be permitted to assist them.
- Voters who are visually impaired should be given the opportunity to vote independently. Ask if they need assistance. If they need assistance getting to the voting machine, gently guide them by the elbow to the voting station.
- It is okay to offer assistance, but be respectful if the offer is declined. If the offer is accepted, listen and/or ask for instructions on how best to assist the individual.

Disability Etiquette — Questions Answered

- If you cannot understand a person with a speech disability, don't be afraid to ask them to repeat — even three or four times.
- When meeting someone who cannot shake your hand, touch the person on the shoulder or arm to acknowledge their presence.
- If an interpreter is present, speak to the person, not the interpreter.
- Avoid euphemisms (e.g., physically challenged, differently abled).
- Do not hang or lean on someone's wheelchair.
- To facilitate conversation, utilize a chair when speaking to someone in a wheelchair for more than a few minutes.
- When communication with someone who has a hearing impairment, do not exaggerate lip movement.
- Never pretend to understand someone if you have difficulty in doing so. Ask questions that require short answers.
- Do not distract a person's guide dog or work animal from its job without the owner's permission.

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