

Assessing Polling Place Accessibility

A Reference Guide for Election Observers and Challengers



This guide explains what to look for when assessing accessibility at a polling place. It is made available to partner organizations to enhance the ability of their election observers and challengers to evaluate accessibility features as part of their existing program.

General requests for more information, guidance or training should be directed to elections@DetroitDisabilityPower.org.

Accessibility concerns observed at Election Day polling locations or early voting sites should be reported to the Election Protection Hotline (866-OUR-VOTE).

This guide is for reference purposes only and the content should not be considered legal advice.

PARKING & ARRIVAL

An accessible parking spot includes:

- A marked parking space with blue lines
- Signage designating the space as accessible: An accessibility symbol (wheelchair icon) on a sign at the end of the space, and/or painted at the foot of the space
- An access aisle next to the space (required in parking lots; not applicable for street parking)
- The access aisle must be clear of obstructions — no cones, vehicles, or equipment
- Street parking must have curb cuts or ramps within a reasonable distance of the spaces.

Curbside voting signage includes:

- Signage is not required, but is recommended.
- A sign that is visible before you enter the building
- The sign explains that curbside voting is available and how to request it
- A sign that has fallen over or is blocked by another object does not count

An accessible path from the accessible parking to the building entrance includes:

- The parking lot and sidewalks being paved and free of obstacles
- Curb cuts where the sidewalk meets the road or parking lot
- Ramps for any stairs. The ramp should not be excessively steep or in disrepair.
- Pathways free of protruding objects like wall-mounted signs or low-hanging branches
 - Objects with their bottom edge more than 27 inches off the ground are a hazard.
- A smooth and stable surface (No gravel, grass, or broken pavement on the accessible route)

ENTRANCE

An accessible entrance includes:

- The accessible entrance may be the main entrance used by all voters, or a separate entrance
- **The main entrance is accessible:** it should be clearly marked as the polling place entrance, but it does not need to specifically say “accessible.” The accessible door should be unlocked
- **The accessible entrance is a separate entrance:** it must have “accessible” signage. There should be wayfinding signage directing voters from the main entrance to the accessible entrance. The entrance should be unlocked.
- Doors that are operated via a working push-button, open automatically (motion sensor or pressure pad), are light enough to open with one hand and do not require gripping or twisting of the handle, or are propped open using a method that does not block or impede travel through the door.

INSIDE THE POLLING PLACE

A clear path through the building includes:

- Being free of stairs, narrow doorways, protruding objects above 27 inches from the ground, or other obstacles
- If there are stairs on the interior path, there must be a ramp, elevator, or lift
- Any elevator or lift must actually be in working condition

A properly set up accessible wheelchair-height voting booth includes:

- A booth that is a lower surface that allows a seated voter to mark their paper ballot
- It must be its own distinct voting booth separate from the VAT booth
- The booth must be set up and ready to use as a voting booth, not repurposed as a desk or storage
- The path to the booth should be clear of large objects, narrow passages, or unsecured cords
- There should be enough space for a wheelchair user to pull up and position themselves to utilize the booth
- The booth should include secrecy shields or other features that ensure voter secrecy

A properly set up Voter Assist Terminal (VAT) includes:

- The VAT must be physically set up, at wheelchair height, and powered on
- The accessible controller and headphones should be available and plugged in
- The path to the VAT should be clear of large objects, narrow passages, or unsecured cords
- There should be enough space for a wheelchair user to position themselves in front of the screen
- The VAT should include secrecy shields and be positioned so that others cannot see the screen while a voter is casting their ballot