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HAVAccess

The election reform resource to help you address polling place access



**Inclusion Solutions
2009 Final Catalog:
Finished and All New
With Over 300 Products**

HAVAccess is [Inclusion Solutions'](#) free newsletter to help election officials in the United States ensure access for voters with disabilities under the Help America Vote Act and/or other laws. Please call 1-866-232-5487 to discuss accessibility in your jurisdiction.

Be sure to whitelist this email address or add it to your contact list -- some officials have mentioned that email filters have blocked their receipt of HAVAccess. Don't miss an issue.

Health and Human Services Grants Now Open!

In the last two weeks, the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services Administration for Children and Families announced the availability of three separate HAVA accessibility grants. These include:

[\\$12,154,000 available to States and Territories to make elections accessible to voters with disabilities. \(Click here for details\).](#) These are the grants that have been the basis of most accessibility improvements nationwide in the last several years and are usually administered by states to local election authorities.

[\\$5,256,000 available to Protection and Advocacy \(P&A\) Agencies to promote accessible voting efforts. \(Click here\)](#)

[\\$367,920 available to public universities and not-for-profits to assist P&As with accessible voting work. \(Click here\)](#)

These grants are only open through June so make sure your state or P&A is aware of their availability.

State Grant Programs and How to Access Them:

Accessibility funds administered by HHS (such as those mentioned above) are distributed by states to local officials to improve accessibility in many states. Active and closed state grant programs include:

- [Washington \(Closes May 29\)](#)
- [Missouri \(Closes December 31\)](#)
- South Carolina (Open Indefinitely): [Reprint of State HAVA Grant Letter \(unofficial\)](#); [Customizable Access Proposal for Submission to State \(IS document\)](#)
- [Vermont \(Closed May 15 but applications may be allowed at discretion of Secretary of State\)](#)
- Colorado: [HAVA and Voters With Disabilities FAQ](#)
- Texas: [HAVA Memo \(unofficial\)](#)
- Florida: [Grant Proposal Form \(IS document\)](#)

State Grant Programs that are closed (but which may reopen later) include: Michigan: [State Accessibility Grant Materials](#); Alabama: [2008 Grant Materials](#); California: [Vote Grant Program RFA](#).

Other states with active grant programs where election administrators may have access to funding to make polling places accessible include Ohio, Illinois, New Jersey, Nebraska, and Pennsylvania and many more. Be sure to check with your own state for official information.

Other Articles on Access:

Hawaii: [Online Voting in Hawaii \(in an actual, binding neighborhood board election\)](#)

Georgia: [New Georgia Web site aids disabled voters](#)

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Kern's Corner (From My Perspective...)

by Kern Walden



Kern Walden wrote last issue's From My Perspective. We were so impressed with Kern and his commitment to election accessibility that we brought him on as a member of our team. Thus this is an unprecedented sequel article as Kern is now Inclusion Solutions' National Director of Accessibility. Future "From My Perspective" articles will vary between those by guest authors, as before, and some will be by Kern, talking about his experiences as a voter with a disability and working with election officials on the issues. Kern focuses on election sales to Michigan and Wisconsin and working election conferences. Please email Kern at kwalden@inclusionsolutions.com

My name is Kern Walden -- you might remember from last issue that I'm an incomplete quadriplegic, which means that my spinal cord injury has left me paralyzed with some form of mobility loss to all four of my limbs. But just as you may have learned something about me in the last few months, I've learned so much about elections and working with all of you. And I'm excited to work together with all of you to make elections more accessible for people like myself who may have some form of mobility limitation.

Before the last few months, I confess that I was one of those people that thought that elections "just happened" -- and that all of you worked just a few days a year. And before my accident, I had no idea of what it meant to be a person with a disabilities. But wow have I learned a lot about both of these areas!

Between my accident and working with clerks in the last few months, I have been given the opportunity to learn a tremendous amount of information as to what the world has as far as, "accessibility options", or "readily achievable" solutions, to allow myself and others like me to be able to access society. Specifically, I have been working with City Clerks, Treasurers, Deputy Clerks and/or Town Supervisors throughout the state of Michigan and learning what their needs are in particular and individually, in order to make any and all of their Polling Places more accessible and accommodating to people who may have, "special needs". I have also been privileged to learn about the different needs, questions, problems, or concerns that arise with every new Polling Place, and what all of you go through to make them as accessible as possible. And I've learned a lot about the grant process under the Help America Vote Act that funds many of these changes throughout the United States.

Furthermore, I have learned that there is a strong interest on behalf of mostly everyone I've spoken with in making your elections as completely inclusive and welcoming/accommodating to your constituents as possible.

But there are challenges. I've realized that some of you public servants are overworked. And many of you simply don't have the

Pennsylvania: [Candidate pushes for polls to be handicapped-accessible](#); [Polling stations will be assessed](#); U.S., Philadelphia OK plan for disabled access to polls.

Lebanon: [Improving access to polling stations for the disabled](#)

India: [Disabled get to vote with dignity in elections](#)

Also see the [Inclusion Solutions all new 2009 Catalog](#)

Universal Design in Elections

Do I really need to resurvey my sites for accessibility? – I already did it in (insert year).

HAVA Access Universal Design in Elections

The last 10 years have seen tremendous improvements in every aspect of the electoral process for voters with disabilities from accessible voting machines to polling places to even voting booths. But taking accessibility to the "next level" in upcoming years will require the adoption of the principle of "universal design."

Universal design is a concept that encompasses the creation of solutions and environments that are "universal" – or equally accessible to all. A good example of universal design would be where the main entrance to a facility is a built with an integrated gently sloping ramp that all individuals use. At such a building, it doesn't matter if someone does or doesn't have a disability, is a parent with a stroller or has other issues. With universal design, no one is singled out – rather the environment is usable by all individuals no matter who they are -- accessibility features are built right in.

Despite the incredible improvements to accessibility of elections in recent years, universal design has often been missing in these improvements. Accessible voting machines or ballot marking devices such as the AutoMARK are the "disability" or "accessible" machine and are often used only by voters with disabilities. Polling places may have the "normal" entrance and the so-called "handicapped" entrance. And voting booths – even for voters using paper ballots may also be divided into the "standard" and the "accessible" booths with lower shelves.

This is not to diminish the importance of these improvements – they have made voting much easier for all voters. But for many voters with disabilities they are still presented a very different experience upon arriving at the polling place. They may have to use a different entrance, a different, lowered voting booth, or a completely different voting system.

In some cases, the differences may be subtle, but in others it can be extreme. Clyde Terry, director of the Granite State Independent Living Center spoke of New Hampshire's accessible voting system – which requires him to be accompanied by multiple officials, go over to a side of the room and vote using headphones and a dedicated phone line. Terry says that while he appreciates the accessibility, "it's a spectacle when I come in to vote, and it isn't for other voters."

Likewise Greg Jones, with the New York Commission on Quality Care who has worked on multiple voting issues admits that it "gets to me when we arrive at polling places and voters without disabilities are pointed one way and those with a different way."

Some even have likened the situation to a more benign version of the "black fountain/white fountain" segregation that characterized some of the darker moments in U.S. history. There is a difference – the segregation of elections today is not a result of malfeasance or deliberate discrimination. Rather it is the result of the reactionary manner in which accessible voting systems were first created. When HAVA's mandate demanded accessible voting machines, vendors worked to quickly create saleable solutions rather than redesign integrated systems from the ground up. Likewise "accessible" voting booths have historically been "standard" voting booths retrofitted with lowered shelves or wider legs.

In some cases, these differences are inevitable. For example, sometimes the main entrance of polling place simply cannot be made fully accessible. But in other areas, the future holds promise of seamless accessibility integrated right into voting systems or other election accessories.

The Future – Accessible Design

As elections moves to the "next generation" it is clear that universal design and integrated accessibility for all voters is becoming increasingly prevalent.

Polling Places: As new facilities are being built nationwide, they are all required to be built under ADA accessibility standards. Increasingly, newer buildings are constructed with the accessibility features naturally part of the design – so that all voters using these facilities will enter in the same manner.

Voting Booths: Similarly, the newest styles of voting booths integrate accessibility into the features. For example, the PakFlat Franklin voting booth is a four-station unit that has three "higher" shelves and one "lower" shelf. All four shelves are accessible under ADA standards for width, knee clearance, and wheelchair approach and one is at a lowered height for those voters who must be seated or who use standard wheelchairs when voting. When a voter arrives at a polling station using one of these booths they are not directed to the "accessible" or the "regular" voting booth – they are merely directed to the "voting booth" and can decide for themselves how they will be voting at which of the stations on the universal voting booth.

Voting Systems: The promise of universal design might be most exciting with respect to voting systems. Election officials are often frustrated that they may have different voting systems for voters without disabilities, voters with disabilities, absentee voters, UOCAVA voters and possibly others. The optimal solution would be a means to allow all of these voters to vote on the same system. Inclusion Solutions and Everyone Counts have partnered to bring such universally designed systems to the market. These systems provide accessibility to all voters with capabilities for audio-only interface (similar to DRE/AutoMARK), compatibility with screen readers and assistive technology (such as Oregon's innovative Alternative Format Ballot), and new features such as

staffing or the time to understand all of the nuances of election accessibility. Some don't realize what proper accessibility is or understand how it can positively affect your communities. And many others aren't aware of all of the great resources out there to assist you with improving your polling place accessibility from grants available from your states to resources such as your Protection and Advocacy agencies to companies like ours with hundreds of innovative products to solve access/inaccessibility issues in an affordable and dignified manner.

Thankfully even in working with Michigan clerks in the last few months, I've seen amazing progress. The election officials I've talked to have been excited to become more educated and informed about readily achievable solutions for accessibility. This is phenomenal because as long as others are willing to put forth the effort I, Kern Walden, want to be your partner on this. It's a "win-win" for everyone. I promise to offer complete dedication and as much time as necessary to work with you to make your sites accessible in a way that is reasonable and cost effective for your office but that is dignified for voters with disabilities such as myself.

I'm going to continue to work on election accessibility throughout the United States. I'll be focusing on the states of Michigan and Wisconsin in the next few months, but will be at other trade shows (such as in Florida in June) and look forward to meeting or talking with many of you in the upcoming months and years. Yes, I'm a person with a disability -- but first and foremost I want to be your ally and resource in addressing these issues and making the election process fair and open to everyone, of any age, color, creed, religious background, and also level of physical ability.

I hope you have enjoyed taking a view from my seat because I have learned a great deal about the view from yours! It is and has been an honor and privilege to be allowed to help progressively make changes with wonderful people over the past two months -- I look forward to being your partner on this journey in the years to come.

Inclusion Solutions: New 2009 Catalog!

Inclusion Solutions [Final 2009 Catalog](#). We now carry over 300 products to make elections accessible to voters with disabilities including many new products -- even if you have a past version of our materials, be sure to [download the new catalog today](#).

No matter where your office is in the process of election accessibility -- Inclusion Solutions can help make your job easier and solve your access issues -- often at no cost to your jurisdiction.

Product Focus: BallotMagnifier



The BallotMagnifier is the first magnifier custom-built for elections. Designed by a leading election accessibility expert, this magnifier allows a voter to use it hands free. It also allows voters to line up candidate names on optical scan ballots and allows voter to mark the ballot while looking through the magnifier! At only \$7.95 each, it's a -- *must have for every polling station!* Please email us or call us at 1-866-232-5487 for a no-obligation proposal on these booths.

Other new products (all available in [2009 Catalog](#)):

- **Safepath Paint:** Makes any ramp or path of travel non-slip.
- **Stand-alone Tabletop Voting Screens.** These stand-alone screens come with a durable base for maximum stability and are available in packs of three screens.
- **BallotCall Max:** Our accessible alert system allows voters to request assistance with heavy, locked, or inaccessible doors or to request curbside voting assistance -- we now have a new version with a flashing strobe, recordable alert, and much improved operating range.
- **Franklin 4-Station Voting Booth:** This incredible booth is truly universally designed -- voters with and without disabilities vote at the same booth -- check out our new Patriotic Color Scheme and our [expanded Franklin Booth Flyer](#).

These and more are listed in our [2009 Catalog](#)

hands-free, voice operation (unprecedented). Best of all, all voters use the same interface and same system. Indeed even one of the key product lines acknowledges this critical feature and is named eLect Universal.

The concept of universal design is one that is particularly appropriate to elections as the objective is to provide true equality for all voters. While the first set of HAVA improvements addressed accessibility generally, the next generation of solutions will hopefully encompass these critical components of universal design such that someday all voters in your jurisdiction will go to polling places, use voting booths, or ultimately vote on a single system that seamlessly integrates accessibility.

Training on Accessibility

Advocates and state officials often point out the important of an "accessible path of travel" when evaluating polling locations for accessibility. But its important that local officials understand what this concept means and how to address this critical barrier.

The concept of an accessible path of travel can be confusing when applied to a polling place. And different states have all identified important concepts – all of which require consideration. For example:

- [South Carolina's accessibility survey](#) asks two simple questions: "Is the path of travel from the parking area to the door clear for a person who uses a wheelchair [and asks about barriers such as gravel or dirt]?" and "Is the path of travel clear for a voter who is blind or has low vision?"
- [Michigan's polling place improvement grant form](#) states that " Exterior Path of Travel/Sidewalks refers to the route an individual must travel from the exterior of the building up to the building entrance. The path of travel could begin at any parking space (including the accessible parking space), a passenger drop-off area located close to the building or a drop-off location where a person can exit public transportation."
- [Wisconsin](#) asks officials to check if the route is clearly marked with signs, free of breaks, edges, snow, ice and debris, has compliant curb cuts and ramps and is well lit.

With these differing focuses on the same requirements, officials are seeking uniformity – but even national standards on the width of the path of travel can be inconsistent.

The [Arkansas accessibility survey](#) follows the majority rule that "At least one path of travel to the entrance of the facility should be accessible.... This path should be free of obstacles that cannot be detected by someone using a cane.... The path of travel should be a minimum of 36" wide to accommodate wheelchair users."

In most states, the rule is that there should be a 36" wide route from parking to the entrance to the building – this is consistent with the Americans With Disabilities Act. But standards sometimes allow or require different widths. [The DOJ ADA checklist for Polling Places states that:](#) "An accessible route is at least 36 inches wide and may narrow briefly to 32 inches wide where utility poles, post-mounted signs, furniture, and doorways are located along an accessible route."

California modifies the standards to require a wider path of travel. [The state's polling place access survey](#) asks "Is the path of travel to the building at least 48 inches wide?" Thus compliant sites or temporary solutions in other states may still not pass muster in California (and in fact solutions such as ramps and matting for unpaved areas must sometimes be custom-designed for use in California).

Consistent Standards and Solutions

With the varying standards, it can be frustrating for officials to try to determine what are the appropriate considerations and solutions for their locations. However, there are several principles of universal design that all officials can use as guidelines:

1. Be sure to consider both an accessible exterior and interior path of travel. Trace the route that a voter must take from when he or she arrives – whether at the accessible parking space, the drop off area, or the pedestrian entrance.
2. Think about possible barriers for voters who use wheelchairs or other assistive mobility devices. These include narrow areas in the path, steps or changes in pavement, unpaved routes, unramped or improperly ramped areas, steep sidewalks, debris in the path, and more.
3. Also consider the different barriers that may affect voters who are blind or who have limited vision. Make sure that the path of travel from arrival outside and into the voting area is free of objects such as wall mounted boxes, fire extinguishers, signs, tree branches, etc. with bottom edges that are higher than 27 inches but less than 80 inches above the walkway and that extend more than 4 inches into the path of travel. And make sure that there is sufficient lighting on the path both inside and outside of the polling place.

Path of travel barriers can be solved permanently or temporarily. Michigan suggests permanent changes such as constructing curb cuts, widening or repairing sidewalks, and repairing loose gravel or concrete. Protruding objects can be removed or branches cut back. [Temporary changes](#) can improve the path of travel as well. Hard mats can cover unpaved areas and cones can be placed underneath objects to make them cane-detectable. Access route tape and markings can ensure that voters follow a safe, accessible route from their arrival into the voting room. The U.S. Department of Justice also suggests temporary upgrades such as portable curb ramps, and points out that "Sometimes there is a less direct route that can serve as the accessible route."

Probably nothing is more important to creating accessible paths of travel than signage. Temporary signs should identify the accessible route and alternative routes and/or accessible alternative entrances must be clearly marked.

Armed with this information, understanding of the differing standards but consistent principles, and with ideas about solutions to address accessibility permanently and temporarily, you can ensure that the path of travel at your polling places is accessible to all voters.

Accessible Online Voting For Voters With Disabilities

We continue to work with [Everyone Counts](#) to bring officials cutting-edge accessibility solutions through secure online voting systems. The [eLect Universal](#) and [eLect Today](#) systems makes voting accessible inside and outside of the polling place, at voters' homes and even overseas. Check out our [information sheet with more details on accessible e-voting](#).

Free Help Analyzing Surveys and Completing Grants Inclusion Solutions has analyzed survey results and come up with non-binding proposals for hundreds of jurisdictions nationwide -- even for states such as Michigan, Wisconsin, and in New England if you only operate a single polling location. [See our Sample Survey Analysis](#) We can also [merge information onto State HAVA Grant Forms no matter what state](#).

Products address accessibility issues in your polling places from parking lots, to steps, to door hardware, to restrooms to inside of the polling place. Our [products](#) are primarily portable and owned by you, the election official, and are consistent with Section 261 of HAVA.

Other Materials and Free Resources

- [Free door hardware evaluation form](#)
- [Power Point Training on Accessibility](#)
- [Past Issues: 28 Past HAVAccess issues available online](#)

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New GAO Report and the Status of Polling Place Accessibility in the U.S.A

Access in Vote by Mail States -- Oregon and Washington

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