

HAVAcess

The election reform resource to help you address polling place access



BRAND NEW 2007 CATALOG

2007: More Funding and More Improvements

HAVAcess is Inclusion Solutions' free newsletter to help election officials implement the disability access provisions of the Help America Vote Act. Please call 1-866-232-5487 to discuss accessibility in your jurisdiction.

In 2007, election accessibility for voters with disabilities is at a crossroads. Many states have made extraordinary efforts in this area, others are moving along with partial plans, and others are just now starting to address these issues. And still other states are looking at options like vote by mail and vote centers -- decisions that impact accessibility.

But 2007 is also an exciting time. Just recently, President Bush's budget included additional funding for over \$16 million for Section 261 of the Help America Vote Act. Better news still is that funding levels are also tentatively proposed at the same levels for 2008. See [HR 5647, the Departments of Labor, Health, Human Services and Education and Related Agencies Appropriations Act](#) provides that "\$15,720,000 shall be for activities authorized by the Help America Vote Act of 2002, of which \$10,890,000 shall be for payments to States to promote access for voters with disabilities, and of which \$4,830,000 shall be for payments to States for protection and advocacy systems for voters with disabilities..." (In order to locate the actual legislation -- click on the text of the legislation and look under "children and families services programs").

It is promising to see that both parties have jointly acknowledged the importance of these issues as well as the necessity of maintaining funding. But it also remains incumbent upon election officials and advocates alike that this budget item is approved by Congress and that accessibility funds remain available for state and local election officials in 2007 and beyond.

HAVAcess is also at a crossroads. Our first issue was in February 2003 and many things have changed since that time with respect to accessibility in terms of standards, federal funding, and available solutions. We've also expanded from 1,500 to over 7,500 subscribers.

Thus while previous issues have talked through particular accessibility barriers and solutions, much has changed in four years. In 2007 we will be revisiting and updating discussions of several important areas to check for accessibility at your polling places given what the nation has learned in the past few years.

And we've learned, too. Your suggestions and ideas and "best practices" from advocates and election offices have led to the creation of many new products in our [2007 Catalog](#). Even if you've seen past versions, check out these updates.

Other Developments on Access:

New York: [Westchester seeks home for voting machines in Ardsley](#)

Indiana: [State Promises Money for Paving Expenses](#)

Demos Report (Unaffiliated Blog for Reference Purposes Only) [Improving Access to Voting: A Report on the Technology for Accessible Voting Systems](#)

Surveying Sites Revisited

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From My Perspective...

by Jodi Park

The Coalition of Texans with Disabilities (CTD) is a cross disability social and economic impact organization serving people with disabilities of all ages. Founded in 1979 by consumer advocates, CTD is controlled by people with disabilities and houses offices in Austin, TX a block away from the State Capitol.

My name is Jodi Park. I have been CTD's Director of Projects & Communications since 2000. I have spoken too over 1,000 Texas election officials about polling place accessibility. Important components to ensure maximum accessibility of polling locations and equipment include accessible voting machines and a number of accessibility accommodations legislated by the national Help America Vote Act. I have served on the Secretary of States' HAVA Advisory Committee, which developed the Texas State Plan for HAVA compliance.

As a disability advocate, I was thrilled to see that all four million Texans with disabilities could, for the first time, vote at polling places just like their non-disabled counterparts. This federal legislation mandates accessibility of all federal elections.

Unfortunately, some Texas counties and municipalities are afraid that complying with the same accessibility standards for

Surveying polling locations is the first step in ensuring accessibility to polling places. Election jurisdictions are "all over the map" with respect to surveying. Some have done exemplary jobs evaluating their locations; others have completed surveys but possibly missed either new locations or certain barriers; and some states and counties are still in the process of reviewing their locations. And for all officials, the constant changing and expanding of voting locations ensures that continued surveying of locations will remain important.

Who Should Complete Surveys?

Different groups have completed surveys throughout the United States. Some counties have used local disability advocates or independent living centers. This is an excellent alternative as advocates understand accessibility issues. The only danger is that advocates are adept at pointing out barriers but they may not be as experienced in determining solutions that work for voting. Architects, ADA consultants and experts also bring a wealth of knowledge but may be costly or may be more prone to suggest expensive permanent improvements rather than temporary solutions customized for election use. But the majority of U.S. election offices have completed surveys in-house. With the proper surveys, training, and tools, this has been successful for many jurisdictions.

What Survey to Use?

No matter who is completing surveys, a crucial issue is what survey form should be used. The most well-known one is [the U.S. Department of Justice ADA Guide for Polling Places](#). Illustrations and a step by step process make it easy to work with. However, some officials have found it a bit long and cumbersome with unnecessary focus on elevators and other features not commonly found at polling locations.

Other states have created their own accessibility surveys. Examples include: [Wisconsin](#), [California](#), and [Michigan](#). Some officials in other jurisdictions such as Illinois, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Pennsylvania, and Ohio, have used a survey developed in conjunction with disability advocates. This two-page survey has been popular for it's conciseness and completeness. [Click here to download a copy.](#)

Survey Tools

Next, surveyors must have the proper tools to evaluate sites. A tape measure is crucial as is a door pressure gauge or other means of measuring the weight of doors. Other items that may be helpful include slope measuring tools, distance measuring wheels or door hardware evaluation sheets. [Click here for a free door hardware evaluation form.](#)

But a camera might be the most overlooked tool of them all. Ideally you should snap photographs of the entrances of

local and statewide elections is too expensive. Knee jerk legislation has been filed this legislative session, some of which is likely to run afoul of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Here's info on some voting legislation CTD is actively following:

HB 690, Author: Rep. Brown of Kaufman, TX: If an election subdivision has a population of less than 7,500 and there is no federal election on the ballot, that political subdivision would not be required to make the voting stations accessible. Texas is home to hundreds, if not thousands of small towns. Over 20% of Texans have disabilities. This legislation disenfranchises Texas voters with disabilities in most elections.

HB 600, Author: Rep. Smith, Wayne: Polling places where less than 100 voters have voted and there is not a federal election on the ballot will be exempt from meeting accessibility requirements currently required by Texas Election Code. This is a backwards step that involves changing current code to DECREASE polling place accessibility for voters with disabilities.

HB 1031, Author: Rep Chisum, Warren: For an election of a city with a population of less than 25,000, in which a federal office appears on the ballot, it would no longer be required to use a voting station that meets the requirements for accessibility under 42 U.S.C. Section 15481(a)(3). This bill would take away accessibility for tens of thousands of Texas voters with disabilities by adding yet another barrier to voting on Election Day.

There are other bills proposed that would make it more difficult for people with disabilities to vote, including various legislation requiring additional state issued photo IDs that are not expired (many people with disabilities don't drive and have a hard time getting to the Dept. of Public Safety to renew their state ID cards) or a birth certificate. The Help America Vote Act has legislated what forms of ID are acceptable by polling place officials. It would be extremely confusing to have one set of requirements for elections involving federal races and another set of requirements for non-federal races. Most folks will not be made aware of these proposed changes and will come to the polls with the

each of your locations. This allows simple review of the surveys and is a crucial complement to a written form for each location. North Carolina -- long a leader in this area -- used HAVA funding to purchase digital cameras for each elections office and required digital photos of each polling location in conjunction with surveys.

Tips While Surveying

When evaluating sites, it is important that the surveyor trace the path of travel that a voter with a disability will take when arriving on election day. Be sure to evaluate access from the parking lot and from the perspective of a voter arriving as a pedestrian.

It is also crucial to evaluate the precise dimensions of the barrier. For example the DOJ checklist includes the question "If there is a raised threshold, is it no higher than 3/4 inch at the door and beveled on both sides?" Unfortunately, many surveyors will answer questions such as this or regarding steps and only indicate that there is a step or threshold. It is important to measure the exact height of the step to be able to determine the needed ramp or threshold solution. Likewise with respect to door hardware, be sure to indicate the type of inaccessible handle so that you can determine an appropriate solution.

Similarly, it makes sense for surveyors to be thinking about solutions while doing surveys and visiting sites. While visiting locations with inaccessible parking, think about places that parking could be set up or how to address the unpaved area. When there are steps, think about possible temporary ramps. For alternative entrances, think about the signage or other accessories needed to make that entryway usable.

Evaluating Survey Results

Finally, it's crucial to appropriately evaluate survey results. Ideally surveyors will have made preliminary thoughts on possible accessibility improvements. Survey results should be reviewed with an idea of creating an "Access Plan" for each location along with needed accessibility improvements. Alternatively, Inclusion Solutions will review accessibility surveys free of charge as we have for hundreds of jurisdictions nationwide. We will also create a no cost an access analysis and plan to improve your locations. [Click here for sample analysis.](#)

Surveying polling places -- and resurveying them every few years or when new sites are used -- is a crucial first step towards guaranteeing accessibility for all voters.

New Trends in Voting and Implications on accessibility

NEW WAYS OF VOTING AND ACCESS

Many changes have come to voting and elections since the implementation of HAVA. Some states and counties have implemented more radical changes to how

same ID they had in the last election and will be turned away.

Texas currently has fairly progressive accessibility requirements under Texas Election Code and via HAVA requirements. It would be a shame to rescind the basic civil right to vote from voters with disabilities. Rest assured that CTD will be opposing any legislation which has the potential to disenfranchise Texas voters with disabilities and will spark lawsuits against the State for not meeting the requirements of the ADA.

[Coalition of Texans With Disabilities Home Page](#)

Inclusion Solutions: Now Almost 200 Solutions

Inclusion Solutions is excited to launch our all-new [2007 Catalog](#) with more products than ever to solve polling place access.

Inclusion Solutions is the nation's leader on election access. We have now worked with officials in 51 states and territories and we continue to come up with even more solutions. We are *the only vendor in this area with attorneys, ADA experts, and people with disabilities on staff to ensure dignified solutions.*

New Products in the [2007 Catalog](#) include:

- **AutoMARK VoterAssist Terminal Accessories**
We are excited to offer accessories for the AutoMARK VAT including accessible tables, storage and transport solutions, privacy screens and more
- **Cone Top Signs** Signs stick right into existing cones. Parking, directional, poll distance, and even general election day signs available.
- **Paint Strippers to Paint Parking lots** Temporary

elections are done -- mail voting and vote centers.

While there are positives and negatives with respect to both of these trends in voting and elections, this article will focus on the implications with respect to accessibility.

Mail Voting

Mail voting is an idea that has both benefits and drawbacks and significant implications on accessibility.

Oregon has led the trend towards all mail-in voting. Local communities in Oregon started mail-only elections in 1981. Following a 1998 referendum, the state has now switched so that statewide elections are on an all-mail basis. Starting in 2005, the State of Washington allowed local counties the option of mail only voting. At least 33 of the state's 39 counties have done so since that time. Other states are considering the option while some have already rejected it.

Mail only voting impacts accessibility. Sending ballots to the homes of voters has the obvious benefit of eliminating the need for accessible polling places. But the implications go beyond that. Voters who cannot complete the vote by mail application may be unfairly discriminated against. Oregon has one accessible voting machine in each county election office and offers voters the option of in-person voting at that location. Voters with disabilities requiring this option must travel to these offices to vote -- an additional burden not placed on other voters. Some have even challenged this as an "poll tax" that unfairly targets voters with disabilities.

Vote Centers

Another popular trend is towards vote centers -- or limited centralized accessible facilities where multiple precincts vote. Thus a county may significantly limit the number of voting locations and ensure the accessibility of those sites that remain.

Larimer County, Colorado is a national leader on this issue and has piloted vote centers and promoted the idea nationally. The State of Indiana is among other jurisdictions looking at the issue. Indiana also commissioned a [a report analyzing vote centers in detail](#).

With respect to accessibility, Vote Centers are a mixed blessing. Vote centers can be sited at only the very most accessible locations, so that the challenge of making sites accessible is diminished. Likewise, officials can be certain to have adequate accessible voting machines and technicians on staff to ensure that they are functioning properly at a limited number of "super polling sites." And officials can outfit these limited number of voting sites with the highest quality assistive technology and items that might not otherwise be affordable for a greater number of locations.

But vote centers also can pose an accessibility challenge. Because there are so few polling places, the distance voters must travel is increased. Remember that many voters with disabilities cannot independently drive. Thus they may be able to easily get to local polling sites but may face transportation barriers to vote centers.

Counties implementing Vote Centers should be sure that Vote Centers have the very best assistive technology for disabled voters and should also make arrangements to ensure that transportation will not be a barrier.

Each of these new trends in elections show potential promise. But if considered, they must also be implemented in a way so as not to infringe upon the rights of voters with disabilities.

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We carry solutions for all 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

- [Sample Polling Place Survey](#)
- [Free door hardware evaluation form](#)
- No Cost Help Going Through Survey Results. Call us toll free -- we have analyzed survey results and come up with non-binding proposals for hundreds of jurisdictions nationwide. [Sample Survey Analysis](#)
- **Free CD Rom with Power Point Training**

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