

From: Inclusion Solutions (Hollister Bundy) [hbundy@inclusionsolutions.com]
To: brett.fraser@invest.gov.au
Subject: Polling Place Access (June-July 2009 International)

May 2009

Vol. VII No. 2

HAVAccess

The election reform resource to help you address polling place access



**Inclusion Solutions
 2009 Final Catalog:
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HAVAccess is [Inclusion Solutions'](#) free newsletter to help election officials ensure access for voters with disabilities under the Help America Vote Act and/or other laws.

We are based in Chicago, Illinois USA and have helped officials worldwide with these accessibility issues. This is an international version of our latest newsletter designed to introduce the issue of disability access to elections to officials worldwide.

Please call us in the United States at 1-866-232-5487 or email elections@inclusionsolutions.com to discuss accessibility in your jurisdiction.

Be sure to whitelist this email address or add it to your contact list.

Disability Access Grants Open to U.S. Election Officials

In the last two months, the United States 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 have been critical to the United States' improvement of polling place accessibility as they have allowed local officials to fund accessibility improvements -- hopefully other nations will create similar funding programs for this critical issue.

State Grant Programs

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

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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

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](#)

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](#)

Resurveying Polling Sites for Accessibility

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

The majority of election jurisdictions in the United States have already surveyed their polling places for accessibility for voters with disabilities. But a common question is whether or not your office needs to do it again. Circumstances vary, but normally the answer is yes.

There are many reasons that a jurisdiction should consider resurveying its polling places to ensure that they are accessible. These include:

- Locations change – on average 5% or more of the sites in any given county/city vary each election cycle – new polling locations have not been surveyed before. At minimum every county should do a "supplemental accessibility survey" of new locations.
- Officials out in the field resurveying locations often are able to identify nearby newly-constructed facilities which may be more accessible than current locations.
- Specifics at polling locations may change over the years. Depending on the rooms or areas used at a given site, the level of accessibility may change over the years. For example, a school that may have been historically accessible when voting was in a front foyer may not be so if voting has been moved to a gymnasium or side entrance.
- Election officials and advocates have learned a great deal about surveying polling locations for accessibility in recent years and second-generation surveys are improved. New survey tools such as digital levels, door pressure gauges, tape measures with accessibility codes on them also make surveying easier than ever before.
- Training on surveying polling places has improved significantly. Officials in Hawaii, New York and other states have custom-produced videos on evaluating polling locations and other states (e.g. Nebraska) are considering video projects in 2009. And there are other commercially-available packages of survey tools that combine national-standard videos with survey tool packages. [See page 2, 39.](#)
- There have also been significant improvements in available accessibility solutions in recent years such as [level landing ramps](#), [new doorway solutions](#), [alert systems](#), [and/or new signage](#). Resurveying sites with new solutions in mind may allow jurisdictions to implement these temporary access improvements to make sites more accessible than before.

And other factors have created a new wave of accessibility surveys or resurveys in 2009. Litigation has been one such driving force. For example in Philadelphia, a: [recent settlement involving the City Board of Elections, the U.S. Department of Justice, local advocates, and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Division of Elections mandated accessibility surveys during a recent May 18 election and again throughout upcoming months.](#)

Legal actions have likewise been the impetus for consistently strong efforts to survey locations and address issues in Kern County, California and other jurisdictions.

Accessibility funding has also led to resurvey projects. Many California counties have requested and received funds under a recent: [Vote Grant Program RFA](#) (e.g. San Mateo and Los Angeles Counties). New Jersey has similarly funded increase survey efforts including a recent purchase of additional accessibility survey kits for local officials, and the release of [an updated 2009 New Jersey polling place accessibility report form.](#)

Wisconsin gets high marks for having one of the top resurvey programs in the country. The state initially required officials to surveys locations in earlier years. However, state officials and advocates learned many things over the course of these surveys and came up with many ways to improve the survey and further increase access for voters with disabilities.

Wisconsin's [2009 Materials](#) include several fantastic resources including the actual survey, instructions on how to survey sites, a "Quick Fixes" document outlining simple ways to make sites accessible and more. Wisconsin: [Click Here to Download Detailed State Accessibility Materials Including 2009 Access Survey, Information, Appendix and More \(links have been up and down -- if it doesn't work please check again later\).](#)

Wisconsin's FAQ asks the question: "I completed an accessibility survey for my polling place before. Why am I required to complete a new one in 2009?" The state responds that "Many polling locations have changed since 2004. Some are no longer used, some have been added, and others have been modified or improved. The 2009 survey is completely redesigned to help you.... better determine whether a polling place is accessible."

But the best indicia of the increasing national trend towards resurveying polling places

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](#)

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for accessibility comes from the national level. Perhaps the most famous accessibility survey was the 2002 U.S. General Accounting Office report "[VOTERS WITH DISABILITIES: Access to Polling Places and Alternative Voting Methods](#)" which outlined significant national accessibility problems. However, the GAO decided it was time to resurvey sites nationally and conducted a follow-up survey of polling places for accessibility during the 2008 presidential election. The GAO survey is national in breadth and addresses a small cross-section of locations. The release of the new report later in 2009 may be the impetus for a national trend to resurvey locations in advance of 2009 and 2010 elections.

Path of Travel Issues and Solutions

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.

Over 100 Path of Travel Solutions

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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