DISABILITY RESOURCE GUIDE



Frank LaRose
Ohio Secretary of State

This guide is a resource for election officials and poll workers to better understand how to create an accessible environment on Election Day and how to ensure all voters, including voters with disabilities, have equal access to the voting process.

Dear Poll Worker,

Every Election Day, more than 35,000 Ohioans across the state step up to play a critical role in their communities by serving as poll workers. They help voters check in, navigate the voting booth, answer questions, and hand out the coveted “I Voted” stickers. As a poll worker, you are on the front lines of our democracy. With your help, all registered Ohioans have the opportunity to make their voices heard on important races and issues.

Election officials work hard to make voting convenient for all Ohioans by selecting accessible polling locations and providing accessible voting equipment. This guide is a resource to help poll workers create an inclusive and accessible environment to ensure that voters with disabilities can vote privately, independently, and with dignity. Topics covered include:

- Ensuring your polling location is physically accessible.
- Ensuring accessible voting systems are available, functioning, and ready for voters.
- Providing proper assistance to voters with disabilities.
- Tips for interacting and communicating with voters with disabilities.

Thank you for defending our democracy by volunteering for this important task and for helping ensure Ohio elections are secure, accurate, and accessible.

Yours in service,



Frank LaRose
Ohio Secretary of State

ACCESS TO POLLING LOCATIONS ON ELECTION DAY

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Ohio law, local county boards of elections must select polling locations that are or can be made accessible. This is so voters with disabilities can participate in elections like other voters, independently and privately.

Poll workers must ensure that the polling location provides the most accessible, integrated environment possible. Here are some simple solutions to improve access in four main areas that could affect voters with disabilities visiting your location on Election Day.

AREA ONE: PARKING

Verify that adequate accessible parking (temporary or permanent) is available at the polling location. Evaluate the parking area for the following.

- Accessible parking should be clearly marked with vertical signs.
- Parking spaces and aisles should be relatively level.
- Access aisles should be designated either permanently or temporarily with cones.
- Parking spaces should be close to the accessible voting entrance.

AREA TWO: EXTERIOR AND INTERIOR ROUTES

Travel the route from the accessible parking space(s), through the accessible entrance, and then inside the polling location. Doing this ensures that there are no physical barriers for people with disabilities.

- Routes, pathways, and walkways should be relatively level, stable, firm, and clear of obstructions.
- Ensure adequate directional signs are posted.
- Make objects (tree branches, electrical boxes, coat racks, counters, etc.) that protrude into routes of travel cane detectable for voters who are blind or have low vision by placing a cone or other object underneath them.

AREA THREE: ENTRANCES

Assess the entry door(s) to the polling location and the voting room to ensure they are accessible.

- The main voting entrance and/or alternative accessible entrances should be clearly marked and identified.
- Propping doors open is a great way to ensure easy access for all voters on Election Day.

AREA FOUR: VOTING AREA OR ROOM

Proper layout and setup of the voting area on Election Day is critical to voter access and privacy. Review all the following:

- Ensure aisles and pathways are wide enough to provide adequate maneuvering space around tables, voting machines, and other equipment.
- Make sure voting machines, voting booths, or voting tables are set up to ensure privacy.
- Accessible voting machines should be integrated into the layout and set up with other machines versus being isolated and separated within the voting space.
- Provide chairs for voters to sit as needed, tape cords down to minimize tripping, and ensure tables used for election purposes are accessible.

TIP #1

Poll workers must ensure that the polling location provides the most accessible, integrated environment possible.

These considerations will help ensure all voters, including voters with disabilities, have equal access to the polling location.

If you find that accessibility needs improvement, you should contact the board of elections immediately. Please always be alert that voters with disabilities may need additional assistance in accessing the polling location.



ACCESSIBLE VOTING SYSTEMS

Accessible voting systems are required by law, but more importantly, the accessibility features offered are vital. These systems are often the difference between a person with a disability not voting and voting.

In 2002, the U.S. Congress passed the Help America Vote Act (HAVA). Each polling location is required to have at least one voting machine that is accessible to individuals with disabilities, including people who are blind or visually impaired. The voting system should provide the same opportunity for access and participation (including privacy and independence) as for other voters.



These machines include such features as:

- audio ballots
- braille and tactile lettering
- zoom screen/large print text
- screen/text color contrast
  - screen height or tilt adjustments
  - sip/puff navigation
  - touch screen or push button navigation

KEY STEPS TO ENSURING VOTERS WITH DISABILITIES HAVE ACCESS TO ACCESSIBLE VOTING EQUIPMENT

1. Setup and Readiness

   Privacy and independent voting should be a driving force behind the setup of all voting equipment.

   - Accessible voting machines should be set up in the most integrated environment possible during early voting and on Election Day.
   - All accessibility features, like headphones, tactile keypad/input switches, audio ballots, zoom screen, and braille should be ready for use when a voter arrives.
   - All voting equipment, including machines, scanners, electronic poll books, and tables, should be accessible to everyone.

2. Knowledgeable Poll Workers

   Don't be the barrier that prevents or discourages a voter from exercising their fundamental right to vote.

Poll workers should:

- Know that the accessibility features exist and the options that are offered on the accessible voting machines.
- Know how those accessible features work and be able to explain those features to voters if needed.
- Be able to answer questions and troubleshoot any issues that arise with the accessible voting machines.
- If you don't know the answer, know where and how to promptly find the answers to ensure an uninterrupted voting process.

TIP #2

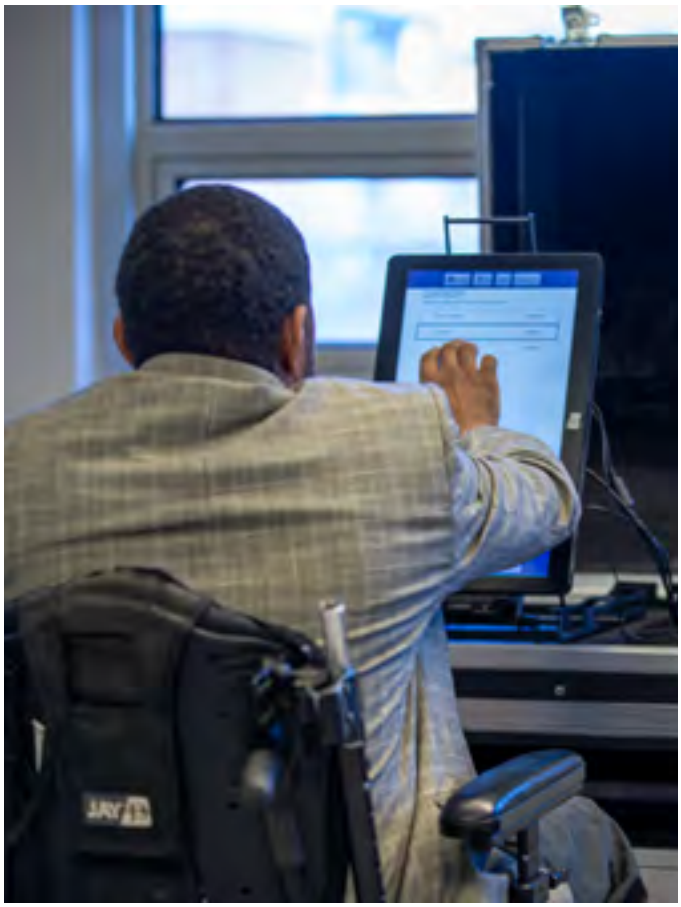
When a voter arrives at the polling location, accessible voting equipment should be set up and ready. This is critical to ensure that voters with disabilities can vote privately, independently, and without any delay.

3. Use of Accessible Voting Machines

Accessible voting machines help all voters cast their ballot privately and independently.

- Poll workers should consider that many voters may not identify as a person with a disability or may have hidden disabilities and may benefit from the accessibility features on the voting machines.
- Poll workers should actively promote the accessible features of their voting machines to all voters.
- Ohio has an aging population, and many voters, both with and without disabilities, can benefit from large print, audio ballots, screen/text contrast, and screen height/tilt adjustments.

As poll workers, it is your duty and responsibility to perform the duties required by law, which include setting up and ensuring accessible voting equipment is ready for voters on Election Day.



PROVIDING ASSISTANCE TO VOTERS WITH DISABILITIES

All voters must have the opportunity to exercise their fundamental right to vote privately, independently, and with dignity and respect. Voters with disabilities want the same opportunity, although they may need some assistance. When providing assistance, the goal should always be to maximize the voter's independence and to ensure that privacy is not compromised during the voting process. Understanding the voter's needs and ensuring clear communication will allow all voters to equally vote.

TIP #3

Clear communication is key, simply asking a voter with a disability, "Would you like some assistance?" wait for acceptance, and allow the voter to indicate how to provide the needed assistance.

A voter with a disability who needs and wants assistance participating in the voting process has two options:

1. The voter may bring a person of their choice to assist in the voting process. They may choose anyone except their employer, or agent of their employer, a union officer or agent (if the voter is a member of one), or any candidate on the ballot.
2. The voter may decide to receive assistance from two poll workers, each from a different political party.

GENERAL TIPS FOR EFFECTIVELY COMMUNICATING WITH ALL VOTERS WITH DISABILITIES

Failure of poll workers to communicate effectively and appropriately with voters with disabilities may be a major barrier to ensuring they can vote privately and independently. Here are some general recommendations for communicating with all voters with disabilities followed by some tips for specific types of disabilities.

The way a poll worker conducts himself or herself at the polling location sets the tone for the voting location and serves as an example for voters. Treating all voters, including voters with disabilities and other election officials, with courtesy and respect is the foundation for a smooth process.

- Don't make assumptions about a person's ability to make an informed vote based on appearance or disability.
- Not all voters with disabilities need assistance. Do not assume that if the voter arrives with someone, the person will be assisting the voter.
- Communicate clearly.
- Simply ask, "Would you like some assistance?" or "Do you need some help?"
- Always wait for the offer to be accepted. Allow the voter to indicate what he or she needs assistance with and how it may be provided.
- If you assist a voter, always maintain their privacy and ensure the secrecy of their ballot.

- Some voters may need more time to process information for a variety of reasons; do not rush them or become impatient.
- Talk to voters with disabilities as adults and talk to them directly, rather than any person accompanying them.
- Don't be self-conscious about your use of wording such as "Do you see what I mean?" when talking with someone with a vision impairment.

There are a variety of Ohioans with disabilities, and sometimes a specific disability will dictate the proper assistance needed to make that voter's experience a positive one.

TIP #4

When guiding a voter who is blind, simply offer your elbow for them to grasp and allow them to follow behind you. Voters who are visually impaired want to vote privately and independently. Provide assistance as requested by the voter.

INTERACTING WITH VOTERS WHO ARE BLIND OR VISUALLY IMPAIRED

People who are blind often know how to orient themselves and get around, but a location new to them, such as a polling location, may create some uncertainty. These voters may travel unassisted, sometimes using a cane or a guide dog. A person may have a visual impairment that is not obvious, such as difficulty adjusting from outside to inside lighting. As with any disability, be prepared to assist the voter.



- As soon as you approach the voter, identify yourself and state that you are a poll worker. Let the voter know when you leave or walk away from them.
- When giving directions to navigate the voting location, be as specific as possible and indicate obstacles in the path of travel or offer your elbow and guide the voter. Don't be uncomfortable using words like "look" or "see."
- If you are asked to guide a voter who is blind or visually impaired, don't just grab the voter; ask which arm he or she prefers and allow the voter to grasp your arm above the elbow. This will allow the voter to walk a half step behind you.
- After asking, it is appropriate to guide a voter's finger to the signature line on the electronic poll book or signature book to show the voter where to sign.
- It is neither helpful nor courteous to raise the volume of your voice when addressing a person who is visually impaired.
- Speak directly to the voter, not to a companion who may be assisting the voter.
- Service animals are not pets. Do not distract or pet them. Don't be afraid to ask how to be most helpful. The voter with a disability will appreciate you asking and will clearly provide the best instructions for the assistance they need.

INTERACTING WITH VOTERS WHO HAVE MOBILITY DISABILITIES

People who use canes, walkers, or wheelchairs have different disabilities and varying abilities. Some can use their arms and hands. Some can get out of their wheelchairs and even walk for short distances. To aid these voters, review all the following.

- Make sure that chairs are available for voters with mobility disabilities and/or voters who are elderly, have a serious illness, are pregnant, or cannot stand for a long period of time.
- Do not lean or hang on a voter's wheelchair. Consider this device an extension of the voter's body.
- Place yourself at eye level when speaking with a voter in a wheelchair. Try to sit or kneel at the same level as the voter in a wheelchair.
- Voters who use canes or crutches need their arms to balance themselves; never grab a voter's arms or his or her devices.
- Always ask the voter if he or she wants assistance, wait for a response, and then provide the needed assistance as directed.

TIP #5

Communicating with a voter who is deaf in writing is acceptable due to the brief interaction during the voting process.

INTERACTING WITH VOTERS WHO ARE DEAF OR HARD OF HEARING

People who are deaf or hard of hearing have a variety of communication preferences and styles; some may use sign language, others may read lips, rely on assistive listening devices or interpreters, and/or use a combination of each. When assisting these voters, review the following.

- To get the attention of a voter who is deaf, tap him or her on the shoulder or wave your hand.
- Identify who you are (i.e., show your name badge).
- Look directly at the voter when communicating.
- Speak calmly, slowly, and directly to the voter rather than through a companion or an interpreter.
- In simple and brief interactions like voting, communicating in writing is acceptable.
- If not understood at first, write or rephrase, rather than repeat sentences.



INTERACTING WITH VOTERS WHO HAVE COGNITIVE OR INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES

Communication can be the biggest barrier to the voting process for people with a cognitive or intellectual disability. In these situations, adjusting one's method of communication is key to ensuring effective communication. Be aware of all the following.

- People with cognitive or intellectual disabilities may have a hard time using what they have learned and applying it from one setting or situation to another.
- Keep communication simple and direct; help voters understand a complex idea by breaking it down into smaller parts if needed, such as giving instructions one-step at a time.
- Supplementary visual forms of communication, such as gestures, diagrams, or demonstrations, may be helpful.
- Voters with cognitive or intellectual disabilities rely on routine in their everyday lives. Changes in environment or routine may induce anxiety or fear—be patient.
- Allow for extra time for a voter with a cognitive or intellectual disability.

TIP #6

Keep communication simple and direct to help the voter understand the process to cast their ballot.

INTERACTING WITH VOTERS WHO HAVE SPEECH IMPAIRMENTS

People who have speech impairments want you to talk to them as you would talk to anyone else. Be patient and understand that it may take more time to communicate with them. When assisting these voters, consider the following.

- A voter who cannot speak may give a name and address simply by providing identification to the assisting poll worker, who then reads the name and address out loud.
- If you do not understand something, do not pretend that you do. Ask the voter to repeat what he or she said and then repeat it back.
- Follow the voter's cues to determine whether speaking, gestures, or writing is the most effective method of communication.
- When speaking, do so calmly, slowly, and directly to the voter. Do not shout.
- Ask short questions that require only short answers or a nod of the head.

TIP #7

If you are having a difficult time understanding a voter, be patient and simply ask the voter to repeat what he or she said.

INTERACTING WITH VOTERS WHO HAVE HIDDEN DISABILITIES

Not all disabilities are apparent. A person may make a request or act in a way that seems strange to you for reasons that relate to a disability. People may also have a respiratory or heart condition that limits their ability to walk long distances or walk quickly. Be aware of the following.

- You may give seemingly simple verbal directions to a voter, but the person asks you to write the information down. They may have a learning disability that makes written communication easier.
- A voter with a hidden disability may request to use an audio ballot. Do not question or ask why. He or she may have dyslexia or other reading disabilities that make written information difficult to comprehend.
- An apparently healthy-looking voter may request to sit, rather than stand in line. This voter could be fatigued from the effects of his or her disability.
- Be respectful of the person's request and accommodate the voter if possible.

TIP #8

Voters with disabilities are people first; they want to be treated no differently than other voters, and they want to vote both privately and independently with equal access to the voting process.

A FINAL WORD

People with disabilities are individuals with families, jobs, hobbies, likes and dislikes, problems, and joys. While the disability is an integral part of who they are, it does not define them. Treat them as individuals. It is your duty as a poll worker to ensure all voters, including voters with disabilities, have the same equal opportunity to participate in the election process in Ohio.



Frank LaRose
Ohio Secretary of State

WE'RE HERE TO HELP!

Contact the Ohio Secretary of State
ADA Coordinator or your county board
of elections for assistance.

ADA@OhioSoS.gov | VoteOhio.gov/Boards

Ohio Secretary of State's office
180 Civic Center Drive | Columbus, Ohio 43215-4138

614-466-2585 | 877-SOS-OHIO (877-767-6446) | TTY 877-889-6446

VoteOhio.gov

Elections@OhioSoS.gov

COUNTY BOARDS OF ELECTIONS

Each of Ohio's 88 counties has a board of elections responsible for administering local elections. For a listing of county boards of elections, visit VoteOhio.gov/Boards.

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