



## Accessible Polling Facilities and the ADA

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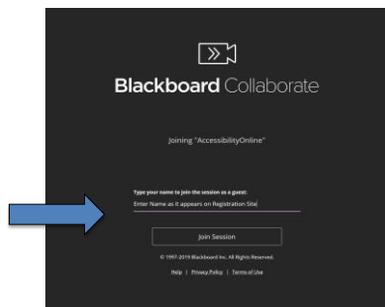
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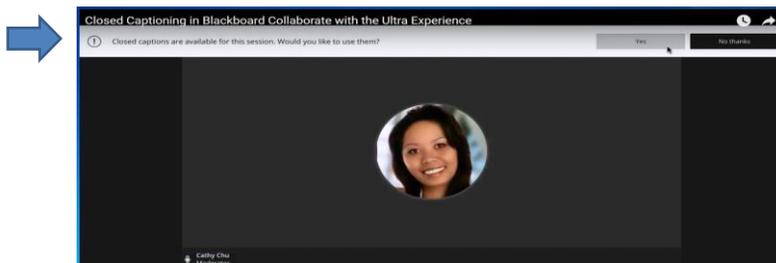
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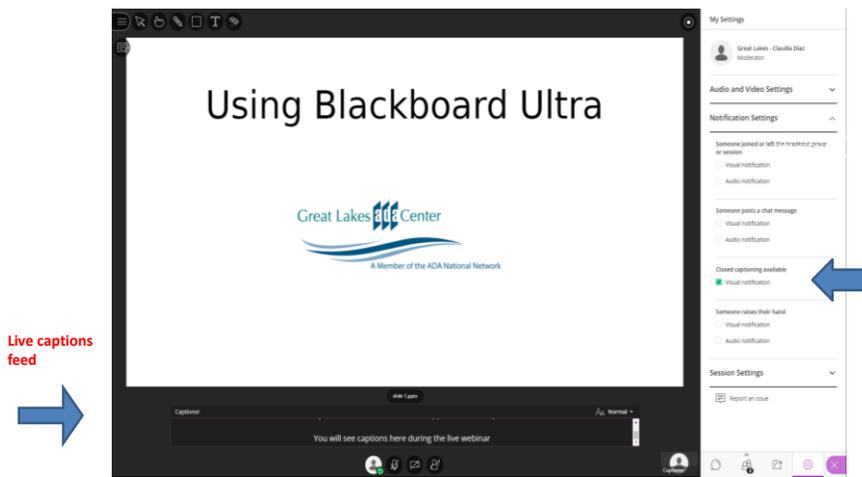


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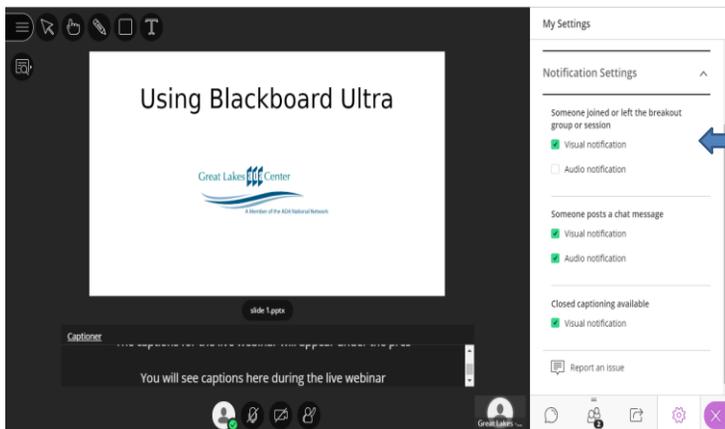


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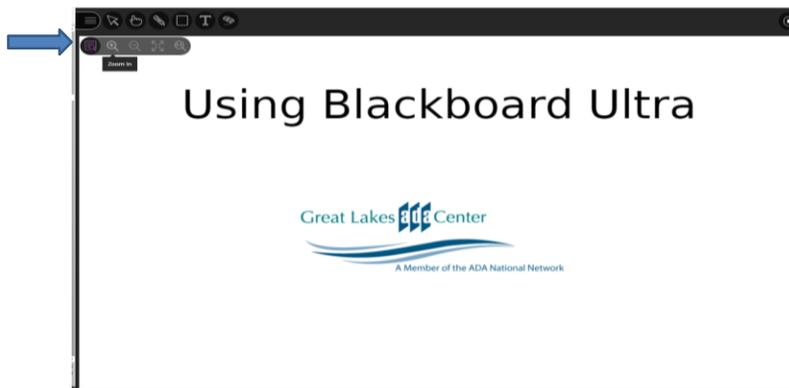
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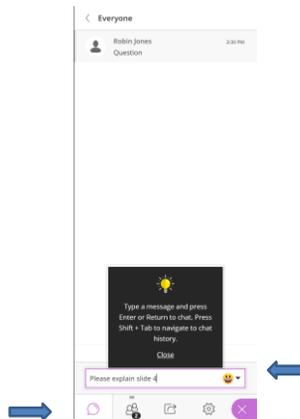


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## Americans with Disabilities Act Requirements for Accessible Polling Places and Accessible Voting



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## Requirements for Accessible Polling Places

- These requirements are identified by the U.S. Department of Justice in the guidance *ADA Checklist for Polling Places* (2016)
- Not all features of an accessible facility are required for polling places. The primary features that are covered include:
  - Parking
  - Accessible Route
  - Ramps and Curb Ramps
  - Doors and Interior Access
  - Signage

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When you are evaluating a facility as a polling place, think of the facility in terms of a temporary event.

You will be using the building for another purpose than its intended use.

This will effect how you determine if parking is appropriate or needs to be changed, signage, and other temporary features that may be needed—even if the facility is accessible!

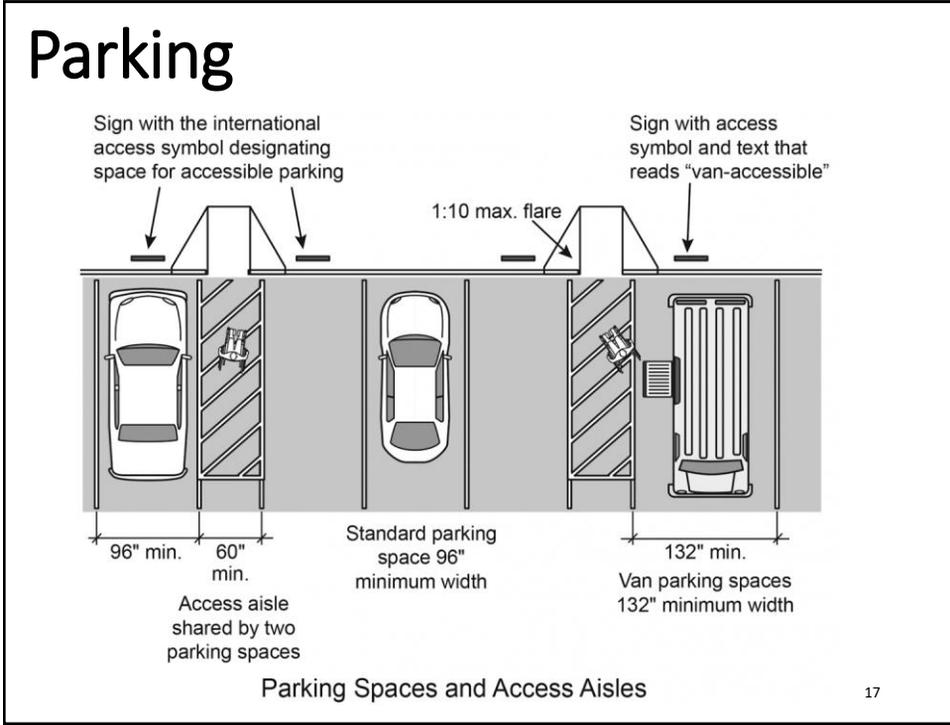
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## Parking

**If parking is provided for voters, accessible parking must also be provided for people with disabilities.**

- An accessible space is composed of three elements:  
the parking space,
- an access aisle adjacent to the space that is wide enough to allow voters with a mobility disability to get out of their car or van,
- signage designating it as an accessible space.

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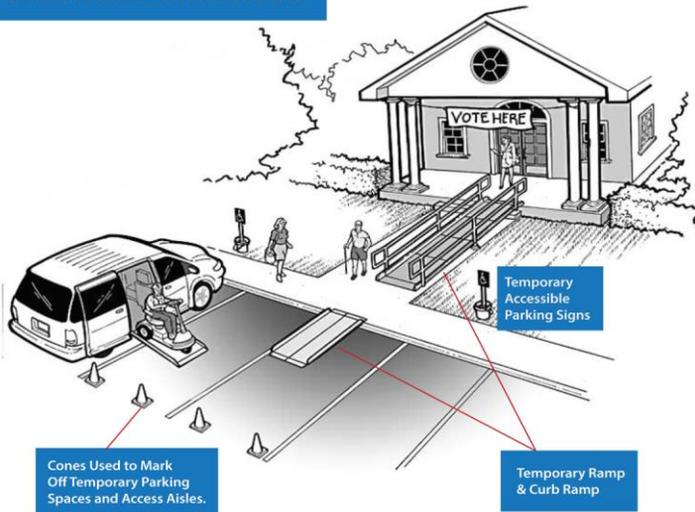
# Parking

- **Note:** Because other entrances – not the main entrance to the building – are commonly used as entry points to the polling place, especially at large facilities such as schools, permanent accessible parking may not be close to the entrance to the voting area. In this case, temporary accessible parking in a different location may be needed.

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# Accessible Route

Temporary Elements Used to Remove Accessibility Barriers and Create an Accessible Route



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## Accessible Route

- Continuous, unobstructed path connecting all accessible elements and spaces in a building, facility, or site.
- Whenever possible, the accessible route should be the same route used by the general public. When this is not feasible, the accessible route should be as close to the general route as possible.

### **To be considered accessible, the route must be:**

- free of abrupt changes in level, steps, high thresholds, or steeply sloped walkways.
- at least 36 inches wide. It may narrow briefly to 32 inches wide, but only for a distance of up to 24 inches.

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## Accessible Route

Must have an accessible route from each way that may be used to arrive at the polling place.

- accessible parking spaces
- accessible passenger drop-off sites
- sidewalks and walkways for pedestrians
- public transportation stops

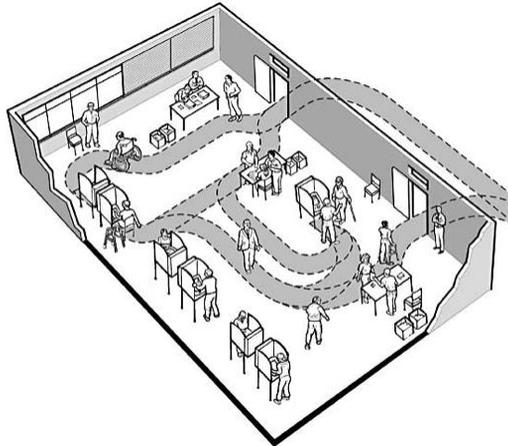
**Note!** When an accessible route is different from the general path, signs will be needed to direct voters with disabilities to both the accessible route and the voting area.

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## Accessible Route

- Accessible route extends into the polling place, and then from the entrance through hallways, corridors, and interior rooms leading to the voting area.

Graphic showing path of travel in the interior room to voting area



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## Passenger Drop Off Locations

Polling places with passenger drop-off areas must have at least one drop-off area that is accessible.

An accessible drop-off area (also known as an accessible passenger loading zone) must have:

- a level access aisle next to the vehicle space.
- If a curb separates the access aisle from an accessible route, a curb ramp must be provided.

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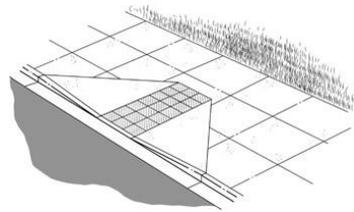
# Curb Ramps

Curb ramps, or “cuts,” are required when level changes along streets and parking lots make the route difficult, if not impossible, for people with mobility disorders to use.

A curb ramp slopes no steeper than 1 in 12 (1 inch of rise for every 12 inches of run).

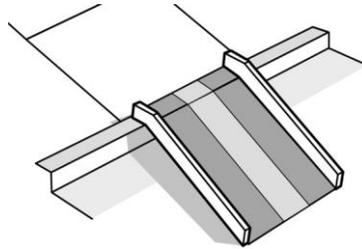
They may have flared sides that slope as steeply as 1 in 10 if the flare is not directly in the pedestrian path of travel.

Curb ramps are commonly used to create an accessible route from the street curb to the sidewalk.



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# Portable Curb Ramps



Portable curb ramps or sometimes thick mats can be used in places where sidewalks are cracked and uneven.

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# Ramps

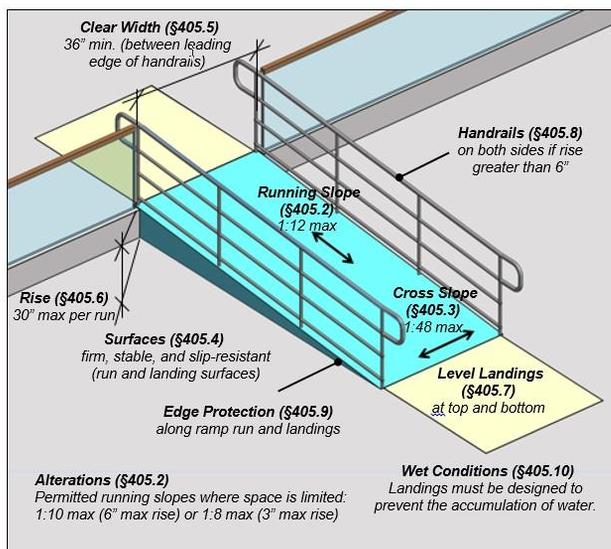


If any part of the accessible route - exterior or interior - has a slope greater than 1:20, it is considered a ramp and must meet the requirements for ramps.

If any part of the accessible route contains steps, it must be ramped. Even one short step.

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# Ramps



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## Ramp Specifications

Ramps may have a maximum slope of 1:12.

Ramps must be a minimum of 36 inches wide. Some areas require wider ramps.

All edges must be protected to keep anyone from slipping off.

All ramps shall have top and bottom landings as wide as the ramp itself and at least 60 inches long.

Landing size must be at least 5 feet square.

Ramps must have handrails on both sides if their rise is greater than 6 inches

Cross slopes (areas where a ramp slopes sideways, perpendicular to the ramp's length) must be less than 1:48, and surfaces must be slip-resistant and stable.

A level landing is required at the bottom and top of the ramp.

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## Building Entrance

**A polling place must have at least one accessible entrance into the facility. There must also be an accessible route and entrance into the voting area.**

- Doors and doorways along the accessible route must have a **minimum clear width of 32 inches.**
- Doors must **not** have high thresholds that make it difficult or impossible for voters who use wheelchairs or other mobility devices to cross the threshold.
- Entrances that are not accessible **must** have signs directing voters to the accessible entrance.

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# Building Entrance



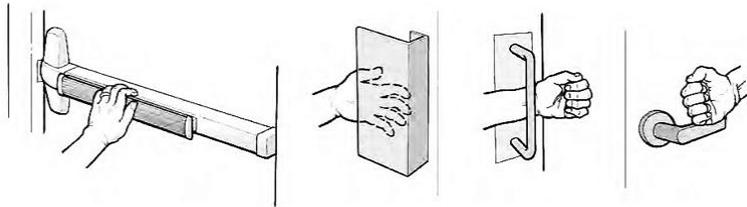
## Door Opening Force

**Interior doors** should never require more than five pounds of force to open. Doors requiring excessive force can be propped open. Removing a closer or lessening its force is also an option for some doors.

**Best practice:** No more than eight pounds of force, if possible, should be required to open **exterior doors**.

If exterior doors require more than 8 pounds of force to open, consider propping the doors open.

# Building Entrance



Door hardware must be useable with one hand without tight grasping, pinching, or twisting of the wrist.

# Protruding Objects

Objects like signs or branches that are **over 80 inches** from the floor or ground that overhang a pedestrian route do not pose a hazard.



Objects that protrude **more than 4 inches** from the wall and are located **between the 27 and 80 inch range** pose a hazard for people who are blind, because these objects cannot be detected by the cane sweep.

Objects that are **less than 27 inches** from the floor or ground can be detected by the cane sweep, and do not pose a hazard.

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# Protruding Objects



This fire extinguisher protrudes more than four inches from the wall in the area above 27 inches from the floor.

Simply placing an object like a planter on the floor underneath the protruding object provides a detectable warning for the cane sweep.

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## Protruding Objects



The undersides of stairs in any route must be enclosed or protected with a cane-detectable barrier, so that people who are blind or have vision loss will not hit their heads on the underside.



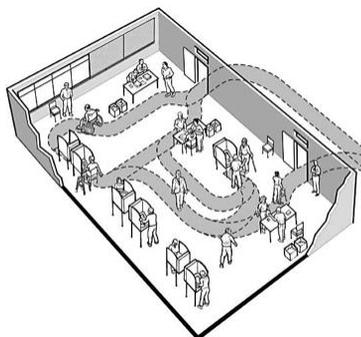
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## Voting and Voting Area

**There must be an accessible entrance to the voting area.** There must also be adequate circulation and maneuvering space allowing voters who use wheelchairs or scooters, or who walk with mobility devices to:

- get to the voting area
- sign in at the check-in table
- go to the voting stations or machines

**Note:** Items that may be usually left out such as trash cans or small, slippery rugs in front of the door should be moved in order not to block the path of travel or cause a tripping/falling hazard.



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## Voting and Voting Area

If voters are expected to complete paper ballots at counters or tables, there should be a writing surface that provides knee and toe clearance so that a voter who uses a wheelchair may use the counter or table.

If voting machines are used, they should be positioned so that the highest operable part (the part that the voter must use with her hands) is no higher than 48 inches.



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## Temporary Signage

Necessary because facility is used for a different activity than usual.

Although temporary signs do not have to meet the ADA Standards, they should follow specifications for “directional” signs, if possible.

Simple design—no extended or condensed type  
High contrast and non-glare finish

Characters should be sized according to viewing distance (characters should be larger on overhead signs or signs that people can’t approach closely).



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## Temporary Signage

If existing room signs are difficult to read or are too small, temporary signs should be added if possible.

Make hand lettered signs in printed rather than cursive lettering.

People with low vision will not be able to read signs that are highly decorative, printed on glossy surfaces, or poorly lit.

When only some routes are accessible, include the international symbol of accessibility on signs for accessible routes, parking spaces, passenger loading zones, and entrances.



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On election day, a sign would be needed to indicate the voting entrance. If more accessible parking spaces are needed, cones and temporary accessible parking signs could be used to create temporary accessible parking.

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Critical to indicate which entrance leads directly to the voting area.

**Street level entry:** no need for anyone to use the ramp.

**Front entrance with stairs** leads to the voting area: a sign for that entrance and a sign showing which of the two accessible entrances should be used.

If both accessible entrances are about the same distance to the voting area, then both entrances should have accessible entrance signs.

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The temporary arrow sign helps navigate people toward the accessible entrance from the accessible parking spot-a good idea!

The only recommendation is to move the sign to the right of the accessible parking sign.

This step will ensure the directional sign doesn't interfere with the correct parking sign placement and visibility.

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## Tips for Conducting an Accessibility Survey

### Tools

- Metal tape measure at least 20 feet long.
- Soft tape measure to measure grab bar/handrail dimensions accurately.
- Digital level or a bubble level that is at least 24 inches long.
- Door pressure gauge.
- Digital camera with a flash and spare batteries. Camera phone may also be used.
- Clipboard and pens or pencils.
- Door stops for keeping doors open during measurements.



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## Tips for Conducting an Accessibility Survey

### Measuring and Recording

One person can complete a survey of a polling place but it is often quicker and easier for two people to work together.

One person can be responsible for taking the measurements and the other for recording the information and taking any photographs.



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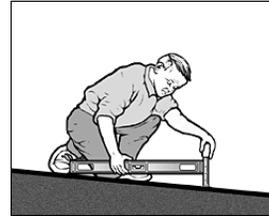
## Tips for Conducting an Accessibility Survey

### Sloped Surfaces

- When measuring the slope of a ramp, parking space, pedestrian route, or other ground or floor surface it is important to identify whether the surface is accessible.
- Two slope measurements perpendicular to one another should be taken at each location. One is the **running slope** that runs parallel to the direction of travel and the other is the **cross slope**, which runs perpendicular to the running slope.
- The amount of slope or grade is described as the proportion of a vertical rise to a horizontal length. It is usually described as:

ratio (e.g., 1:20, means one inch of vertical rise for each 20 inches of horizontal length); or

percentage (e.g., 8.33% which equates to a ratio of 1:12 or 4.76 degrees).



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## Tips for Conducting an Accessibility Survey

### Sloped Surfaces

- **The easiest way to measure slope is to use a digital level.**
- The digital display gives a reading that may be shown as a ratio, percent, or degree. Be sure to calibrate the digital level before each use.

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## Tips for Conducting an Accessibility Survey

**Another way to measure slope is to use a 24 inch level with leveling bubbles and a tape measure.**

Place the level on the sloped surface in the direction you wish to measure. Rest one end of the level at the highest point of the sloped surface and lift the other end (see image) until the bubble is in the middle of the tube.

This is the "level" position. While the level is in this position, measure the distance between the bottom end of the level and the sloped surface below.

If the distance is two inches or less, then the slope is 1:12 or less.

When the distance is more than two inches, record the distance on the checklist so the exact slope can be calculated later.

For measuring cross slope, if the distance measured from the level position is 1/2 inch or less then the slope is 1:48 or less.

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## Tips for Conducting an Accessibility Survey

### Measuring Door Openings

Special care is needed when measuring the clear opening of a doorway.

To measure the clear opening of a standard hinged door:  
Open the door to 90 degrees.



Measure the clear door opening from the edge of the doorstop to the edge of the door (not to the door jamb).

This measures the clear width of the door opening through which people pass, which is less than the width of the door itself.

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# Additional Requirements and Voting Assistance

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## Curbside Voting



Curbside voting is a modification allowing people to vote from their vehicles. It is also a form of "program access" another means of providing access to a program when facilities are not accessible.

**Signage** informing voters of the option to vote curbside, the curbside voting location, and how a voter is supposed to notify the official that they are waiting at the curbside voting location.

A location that allows the curbside voter to obtain information from candidates and others campaigning outside the polling place.

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## Effective Communication



The ADA requires state and local governments to provide communication that is as understandable to citizens with disabilities as it is for all other citizens.

- Website information on voting and registration.
- Face to face communication.
- Printed information.
- Auditory information including videos and presentations at meetings.
- Ballot. The information on the ballot itself is a form of communication.

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## Effective Communication

### Auxiliary Aids

- Constituents should know that auxiliary aids are available and also know how to request them.
- Elections officials may require reasonable advance notice from citizens based on the length of time needed to acquire the aid or service.
- Voters' requests should be given primary consideration. However, local governments do have the option of using a different type of auxiliary aid if it is just as effective in providing understandable communication.
- No fees may be charged for expenses, labor, or time involved in providing effective communication.

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## Effective Communication

### Exceptions

- Election officials are not required to provide auxiliary aids that would cause an undue financial or administrative burden. Financial burden must be based on the overall operating budget, not just the budget allocated for elections.
- Whenever an auxiliary aid request is found to be “not reasonable”, the local government should try to find another way to provide effective communication, if possible.
- Election officials are also not required to take actions that would affect the “fundamental nature of the program” such as election security or confidentiality.

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## Effective Communication: Best Practice

The National Association of the Deaf recommends printing common statements and questions in advance and having them ready at each polling place.

### Sample statements and questions include:

- Please show your driver’s license or other photo identification.
- Is your address correct?
- Sign the registration list/card(s).
- Take the voting card to the person standing near the voting machines.
- Directions for how to use the voting machine or the voting booth.
- Do you have any questions?

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## Temporary Signage

**Signage is critical for voters that need accessible routes, especially when parking, routes, and entrances differ from what other voters are using.**

- Although temporary signs do not have to meet the ADA Standards, they should follow specifications for “directional” signs, to the fullest extent possible.
- Simple design—no extended or condensed type.
- High contrast between the text (or icon) and background. The finish should be non-glare.
- Characters should be sized according to viewing distance



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## Temporary Signage

- If existing room signs are difficult to read or are too small, temporary signs should be added if possible.
- Make hand lettered signs in printed rather than cursive lettering.
- People with low vision will not be able to read signs that are highly decorative, printed on glossy surfaces, or poorly lit.
- **Note:** When only some routes are accessible, you must include the international symbol of accessibility on signs for accessible routes, parking spaces, passenger loading zones, and entrances.



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## Service Animals



- The ADA gives people with disabilities the right to bring their service animals to public places, which includes polling places.
- The ADA defines a service animal as a **dog** that is individually trained to perform a task or work related to the person's disability.

The dog can be any breed or size, even if community has breed restrictions.

### Note:

Staff should not distract service dogs by trying to get their attention, petting them, or offering treats. The dog is working and needs to keep its focus on performing its job.

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## Service Animals-Identification

- Polling staff should **not** ask for identification that a dog is a service animal.
- Service dogs are not **required** to wear a vest or any other type of identification. Their handlers are not required to have documentation of training, certification or licenses.

If it is **not** obvious that a dog is a service dog, staff may ask two questions.

- Is your dog a service dog?
- What task or work does your dog perform?

**Note:** Staff may not ask the dog to perform its task.

(Reason: Performing a task when it isn't needed can interfere with the dogs training.)

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## Service Animals-Removal

- The ADA clearly states that a service dog handler can be asked to bring the dog under control if it is wandering around, bothering other voters, barking, etc.
- If the dog cannot be brought under control quickly then polling place staff can ask that dog is removed from the area.
- If a dog is aggressive: snapping, snarling, lunging, or biting; the handler may be asked to remove the dog immediately.
- **Note:** The voter has the right to return without the dog.

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## Modification of Policy

- Modifications are a change in the environment or the way things are usually done (policy and practice) that help people with disabilities participate in services and programs.
- Modifications should be provided as long as they are "reasonable".
  - Don't pose an undue financial or administrative burden
  - Don't change the fundamental nature of the program.

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## Modification of Policy

Staff and volunteers should be prepared to make “on the spot” modifications to assist people with disabilities.

### Example:

- A woman with cerebral palsy asks for assistance in putting her ballot in the ballot box.
- A man uses an approved form of identification that is not a driver’s license.
- A person asks to have one of the ballot questions read to them.
- A person waiting in line in the voting area nibbles on a small snack due to low blood sugar (even though there is a sign that reads “ No Food or Drink Allowed”).

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## Voting Assistance



Staff and volunteers are responsible for ensuring voting policies and practices are followed.

But they should be careful **not** to make decisions based upon appearances or biases about an individual’s abilities.

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- Voters with disabilities may have a friend, relative, or poll workers representing both political parties assist them in casting their vote.
- Staff may provide other types of assistance, such as helping a voter with limited hand dexterity to place their ballot in the ballot box or providing a chair to a person with severe fatigue who is waiting to vote. **Note:** Staff is not required to let someone go to the “front of the line” due to disability.
- Staff and volunteers should be sure not to judge a person’s ability to vote based upon appearance, physical abilities, or the need for reading and writing assistance.
- **People with disabilities may have voting issues that are not related to disability.** These situations should be treated in the same manner as they would for any other citizen. For instance, if a citizen who is blind did not register before the election, the issue at hand is voter registration--not disability.

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## **Accessibility Complaints** (not requests)

- Don’t take complaints as a personal criticism of yourself or the polling place.
- Remain courteous and friendly and follow-through on the request. Generally, these types of issues are handled by the polling staff notifying local election officials of the complaint.
- A voter with a disability may inform you that they plan to file a complaint based on issues such as inaccessible facilities or ballot marking devices. Remember, it is their right to do so and not a personal reflection on polling staff. Filing a complaint is one way to improve future voting accessibility.

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## Some Quick Customer Service Tips for Polling Staff

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### Universal Customer Service Tips



### **Introduce Yourself!**

Who you are and your role in the company.

Especially important for people who are blind or low vision!

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Universal Customer Service Tips

Speak directly to the person who is voting.

**Not the:**

- Interpreter
- Family member
- Care assistant

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Universal Customer Service Tips



**It's not just what you say**

-it's how you say it.

Eye Contact with the Voter.

Body Language-Avoid:

- Foot tapping
- Arms crossed
- Pointing at people



**Note:** If a voter has difficulty maintaining eye contact—then take your cue from the voter and don't force eye contact. Focus on the activity, instead.

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## Universal Customer Service Tips

### Speaking Loudly Doesn't Always Help!

**Avoid the tendency to "turn up the volume" if a person:**

- Asks a question twice.
- Has difficulty speaking themselves.
- Has hearing aides or cochlear implants.
- Needs any other kind of assistance.



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## Universal Customer Service Tips

**Avoid approaching people from behind—out of eyesight.**

Especially avoid touching people from the back.

Can be startling for people who are blind or deaf or have other disabilities.

Natural human response is to **not** like being approached or touched from behind.

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## Universal Customer Service Tips

**Communication is critical to excellent customer service and part of the ADA's requirement to provide effective communication.**

Make sure both you and customer are clear on what is being said/agreed to:

When unsure of communication:

**Use "Play it Back" Technique.**

Repeat back or summarize what you understood the customer to be saying. Then let the customer confirm if this is correct.



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## Offering and Providing Assistance

If you notice a person having difficulty opening a door, getting a wheelchair over a threshold, etc., don't hesitate to offer assistance.

But always ask how to help. NEVER just push a wheelchair without permission.



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### Tips for Specific Disabilities

## Voters Who Use Wheelchairs

- A wheelchair is part of a person's body space. (Don't lean on it)
- Sit at eye level for longer or important conversations.
- Keep paths clear in buildings and outside. Notice if someone is having difficulty getting to a space or location.
- If you are driving for a wheelchair user, go easy on the brake.

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### Tips for Specific Disabilities

## Blindness or Low Vision: Guiding

- Offer your arm, elbow, or shoulder if assistance is needed. Give the person information- "I'm offering you my arm."
- When moving, describe what is on the path ahead.
- Make sure to alert to steps, curbs, narrow doorways.
- Great resource for guiding:  
<https://www.visionaustralia.org/information/family-friends-carers/guiding>



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## Tips for Specific Disabilities

### Speech Impairments

- Allow the voter time to speak—don't show impatience—pay attention to what your body language/facial expressions are conveying.
- Remember, the person has difficulty speaking—not understanding. Don't change your vocabulary or manner of speaking.
- Don't complete the person's sentences.
- Make eye contact.
- Use the "Play it Back" technique.

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## Tips for Specific Disabilities

### Hearing Loss/Deaf



- Speak normally— hearing aids are tuned for it.
- Keep your face and mouth visible for lip reading. Don't over enunciate or talk too slowly—that actually makes lip-reading more difficult.
- When a interpreter is present, address the voter, not the interpreter.
- If you turn your back or move away in order to get something, don't speak until you are facing the voter again.

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## QUESTIONS?

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## Resources

**ADA National Network**  
<http://www.adata.org>

**Regional ADA Center**  
<http://www.adata.org> 800-949-4232

**U.S. Election Commission**  
<https://www.eac.gov/voters/voting-accessibility>

**U.S. Access-Board**  
<http://www.access-board.gov>

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