

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Polling Place Accessibility Checklist

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Author: U.S. Department of Justice

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Summary Overview

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a 1990 federal civil rights law that provides protections to people with disabilities to ensure that they are treated equally in all aspects of life. Title II of the ADA requires state and local governments to ensure that people with disabilities have a full and equal opportunity to vote. The ADA's provisions apply to all aspects of voting, including ballot access and access to polling places (i.e., vote centers). Voting in person at one's designated polling place represents the quintessential American voting experience, although voting by mail has become an increasingly common alternative.

In communities large and small, people cast their ballots in a variety of facilities that temporarily serve as polling places, such as libraries, schools, and fire stations, or churches, stores, and other private buildings. Voters include people with a variety of disabilities, such as those who use wheelchairs, scooters, or other devices, those who have difficulty walking or using stairs, or those who are blind or have vision loss. They are people, young and old, who have come to their polling place to exercise their right to vote. Many localities report that their polling places are accessible. However, a review by the Government Accountability Office estimated in 2008 that only 27 percent of polling places were accessible to people with disabilities. According to the ADA, people with disabilities must have the opportunity to be full participants in a public civic event. The ADA requires that state and local governments ensure that people with disabilities can access and use all of their voting facilities.

Defining Moment

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) regulations set out what makes a facility accessible. Because a mix of public and private facilities are used as polling places, district officials can ensure Election Day accessibility of a polling place by using low-cost temporary measures, such as portable ramps or doorstops, rather than necessarily making permanent modifications to a facility. In cases where temporary measures will not fix a barrier, and permanent modifications are infeasible (because of cost or use of the facility outside of polling), districts must locate an alternative, accessible polling place.

In the years following the institution of the ADA, the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) occasionally issued guidance to state and local governments regarding voting rights under the ADA. The document presented here, a checklist for polling officials to

ensure compliance with the law, was released in 2016. The checklist is based on a fuller explanation of ADA regulations called the Standards for Accessible Design.

Author Biography

The ADA was put in place by a broad bipartisan coalition of legislators based on the recommendations of the National Council on Disabilities. It was signed into law in 1990 by President George H. W. Bush. Generally supported by the American public, it was initially opposed by business interests because of concerns over the cost of modifications. Since then, it has become an ingrained part of business, education, and public life in communities throughout the United States.

The DOJ, an independent part of the executive branch of the U.S. government, is charged, among

other things, with informing public entities about their rights and responsibilities concerning federal laws and regulations. In this instance, the DOJ issued (in 2016) specific guidance regarding the layout and use of polling places under the ADA. The guidance is based on the more comprehensive and

authoritative ADA Standards for Accessibility Design. As noted in the document, those standards were established in 1991 and revised in 2010. The 2016 checklist reproduced here came out of DOJ's Civil Rights Division—specifically, its Disability Rights Section.



Historical Document

Part 3 : Polling Place Accessibility Checklist

Ward:_____ Precinct:_____ Staff:_____ Date:_____ Time:_____

Address:_____ Location name:_____

This checklist is designed to provide guidance for determining whether a polling place has basic accessibility features needed by voters with disabilities.

For each question below there are citations to the 2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design (2010 Standards). Please review the 2010 Standards for all requirements.

There are some differences between the 1991 ADA Standards for Accessible Design (1991 Standards) and the 2010 Standards. Elements and spaces in a building constructed or altered before March 15, 2012, that complied with the 1991 Standards may remain in compliance with the 2010 Standards. See 28 C.F.R. §35.150(b)(2) for more information.

In completing the checklist, provide a measurement for every question with a “no” answer. Where a question asks about more than one element, provide a note in the comments explaining any noncompliant elements.

Status of Polling Place

___ All Elements Compliant

___ Non-Compliant Elements Remediable with Temporary Measures

___ Non-Compliant Elements Not Remediable with Temporary Measures
(Relocate Polling Place)

Ward:_____ Precinct:_____ Staff:_____ Date:_____ Time:_____

Address:_____ Location name:_____

A	Parking	Yes	No	N/A	Comments/ Remedies
	Only complete this section if off-street parking is provided to voters. If off-street parking is not provided to voters, go to Section B. If more than 25 parking spaces are provided to voters, see the 2010 Standards for the number of accessible parking spaces required. (§208.2)				
A1	Is there at least one designated van accessible space with signage with the International Symbol of Accessibility and designated "van accessible"? (§§208.2, 208.2.4, 502.6)				
A2	Are the designated van accessible spaces at least 96" wide with a 96" wide access aisle, or 132" wide with a 60" wide access aisle? (§§502.2, 502.3) Width of space _____ Width of access aisle _____				
A3	For van accessible spaces (particularly in a garage or parking structure), is there vertical clearance of at least 98" for the vehicular route to the parking space, in the parking space and access aisle, and along the vehicular route to the exit? (§502.5)				
A4	Are designated accessible parking spaces and the access aisles serving them on a level surface, with slopes not exceeding 1:48 in all directions? (Note: Curb ramps may not be part of an access aisle since they include slopes greater than 1:48.) (§502.4)				
A5	Are the surfaces of the designated accessible parking spaces and access aisles stable, firm, and slip resistant? (§§502.4, 302.1)				
A6	Are the designated accessible parking spaces located on the shortest accessible route to the accessible entrance? (§208.3.1)				

Ward:_____ Precinct:_____ Staff:_____ Date:_____ Time:_____

Address:_____ Location name:_____

B	Passenger Drop-Off Area Only complete this section if a passenger drop-off area is provided for voters. If a drop-off area is not provided to voters, go to Section C.	Yes	No	N/A	Comments/ Remedies
B1	Is the vehicle pull-up space on a level surface, with slopes not exceeding 1:48 in all directions? (§503.4)				
B2	Is the access aisle next to the vehicle pull-up space on a level surface, with a slope not exceeding 1:48 in all directions? (§503.4)				
B3	Is there vertical clearance of at least 114" (9 feet 6 inches) from the site entrance to the vehicle pull-up area, in the access aisle, and along the vehicular route to the exit? (§503.5)				
B4	Is a curb ramp provided if a curb separates the access aisle from the accessible route to the accessible entrance? (§§206.2.1, 503.3)				
B5	Is the width of the curb ramp surface at least 36" (not counting the side flares)? (§405.5)				
B6	Does an accessible route connect the access aisle and curb ramp to the accessible entrance of the polling place? (§206.2)				

Ward:_____ Precinct:_____ Staff:_____ Date:_____ Time:_____

Address:_____ Location name:_____

C	Exterior Route to Accessible Entrance	Yes	No	N/A	Comments/ Remedies
	Complete a separate Exterior Route form, when applicable, for the routes from 1) parking, 2) passenger drop-off areas, 3) public sidewalks and 4) public transportation stops. Exterior route location: _____				
C1	Is the route at least 36" wide? (§403.5.1)				
C2	Is the route free of abrupt changes in level greater than ½", including stairs? (§303)				
C3	Is the route free of surface openings greater than ½", such as grates or holes in the pavement? (§302.3)				
C4	Are walking surfaces stable, firm, and slip resistant? (§302.1)				
C5	Is the route free of wall mounted objects that protrude more than 4" into the path of travel and are between 27" and 80" high? (§307.2)				
C6	Is the route free of post mounted objects that protrude more than 12" into the path of travel and are between 27" and 80" high? (§307.3)				
C7	Are objects that hang over the pedestrian route 80" or higher, including the underside of exterior stairs? (§307.4)				
C8	If the route crosses a curb, is there a curb ramp that is at least 36" wide with a slope no more than 1:12? (§§303.4, 405.2, 405.5, 406.1)				
C9	Is the running slope of part of the route greater than 1:20? If yes, go to Section G. (§402.2)				
C10	Is the cross slope of the accessible route no greater than 1:48? (§§403.3, 405.3)				

Ward:_____ Precinct:_____ Staff:_____ Date:_____ Time:_____

Address:_____ Location name:_____

D	Polling Place Entrances	Yes	No	N/A	Comments/ Remedies
D1	Is the clear width of the door opening (one door or one active leaf of a double door) at least 32"? (§404.2.3)				
D2	Is each door hardware useable with one hand without tight grasping, pinching, or twisting of the wrist? (§§309.4, 404.2.7)				
D3	On the pull side of the door, is there at least 18" of clearance provided to the side of the latch? (§404.2.4)				
D4	Is the area in front of the door level, with slopes no greater than 1:48 in all directions? (§§404.2.4.4, 405.7.1)				
D5	If there are doors in a series, is the distance between the two hinged doors at least 48" plus the width of the door swinging into the space? (§404.2.6)				
D6	Can the second door (interior door) in the series be opened with no more than 5 pounds of force? (§309.4)				
D7	Does the second door (interior door) in the series comply with D2, D3, and D4, above?				
D8	Are door thresholds no higher than ½"? (Note: If the threshold is between ¼" and ½" it must be beveled.) (§404.2.5)				
D9	Do inaccessible entrances have signage directing voters to the accessible entrance? (§216.6)				
D10	If voters are directed to an alternative accessible entrance, is this entrance kept unlocked during voting hours? (28 C.F.R. §§35.130, 35.133)				

Ward:_____ Precinct:_____ Staff:_____ Date:_____ Time:_____

Address:_____ Location name:_____

E	Route from Entrance Into Voting Area	Yes	No	N/A	Comments/ Remedies
E1	Is the route at least 36" wide? (§403.5.1)				
E2	Is the route free of wall mounted objects that protrude more than 4" into the path of travel and are between 27" and 80" high? (§307.2)				
E3	Is the route free of post mounted objects that protrude more than 12" into the path of travel and are between 27" and 80" high? (§307.3)				
E4	Are objects that hang over the route 80" or higher, including the underside of stairs? (§307.4)				
E5	Is the route free of abrupt changes in level greater than ½", including stairs? (§303)				
E6	Is the running slope of part of the route greater than 1:20? If yes, go to Section G. (§303.4)				
E7	If the route to the voting area has stairs, is a platform lift or elevator provided? If yes, go to Section H (lifts) or Section I (elevators). (§402.2)				
E8	If doors are provided along the route to the voting area, is the clear width of each door opening (one door or one active leaf of a double door) at least 32"? (§404.2.3)				
E9	Is each door hardware useable with one hand without tight grasping, pinching, or twisting of the wrist? (§§309.4, 404.2.7)				
E10	Can each door be opened with no more than 5 pounds of force? (§309.4)				
E11	Is the threshold at each door no higher than ½"? (Note: If the threshold is between ¼" and ½" it must be beveled.) (§404.2.5)				
E12	On the pull side of each door, is there at least 18" of clearance provided to the side of the latch? (§404.2.4)				
E13	Is the area in front of each door level, with slopes no greater than 1:48 in all directions? (§§404.2.4.4, 405.7.1)				

Ward:_____ Precinct:_____ Staff:_____ Date:_____ Time:_____

Address:_____ Location name:_____

F	Within the Voting Area	Yes	No	N/A	Comments/ Remedies
F1	Are floor surfaces stable, firm, and slip resistant? (§302.1)				
F2	Is the route free of wall mounted objects that protrude more than 4" into the path of travel and are between 27" and 80" high? (§307.2)				
F3	Is the route free of post mounted objects that protrude more than 12" into the path of travel and are between 27" and 80" high? (§307.3)				
F4	Are objects that hang over the route 80" or higher, including the underside of stairs? (§307.4)				
F5	Is there enough room to provide a route at least 36" wide to the registration table and voting stations? (§403.5.1)				
F6	Is there enough room to provide a turning space in front of at least one voting station, such as a circle that is at least 60" in diameter? (§304.3)				
F7	Is there enough room to provide a turning space in front of at least one accessible voting machine, such as a circle that is at least 60" in diameter? (§304.3)				

Ward:_____ Precinct:_____ Staff:_____ Date:_____ Time:_____

Address:_____ Location name:_____

G	Ramps Complete a separate ramp form for each ramp, whether exterior or interior. Ramp location: _____	Yes	No	N/A	Comments/ Remedies
G1	Is the running slope of the ramp no greater than 1:12? (§405.2)				
G2	Is the cross slope of the ramp 1:48 or less? (§405.3)				
G3	Is the rise (height) for any ramp run 30" or less? (§405.6)				
G4	Is the ramp, measured between handrails, at least 36" wide? (§405.5)				
G5	Does the ramp have a level landing that is at least 60" long, at the top and bottom of each ramp section? (§405.7)				
G6	For every 30" of rise, is a level landing at least 60" long provided? (§§405.6, 405.7)				
G7	Is a level landing, at least 60" by 60" provided where the ramp changes direction? (§405.7.4)				
G8	If the rise of the ramp is greater than 6", are handrails provided that are between 34" and 38" above the ramp surface? (§§405.8, 505.4)				
G9	If the rise of the ramp is greater than 6" and the ramp or landing has a vertical drop-off on either side of the ramp, is edge protection provided? (§405.9)				

Ward:_____ Precinct:_____ Staff:_____ Date:_____ Time:_____

Address:_____ Location name:_____

H	Lifts	Yes	No	N/A	Comments/ Remedies
H1	Is the lift operational at the time of the survey? (28 C.F.R. §§35.130, 35.133)				
H2	Is the lift independently operable, or can it be made so during Election Day? (§410.1)				
H3	Is there 30" by 48" of clear floor space within the lift? (§§410.3, 305.3)				
H4	Are the controls for the lift no higher than 48"? (§§410.5, 309.3, 308)				
H5	Are the controls useable with one hand without tight grasping, pinching or twisting? (§§410.5, 309.4)				
H6	Is the clear width of the door opening/gate opening at the end of the lift at least 32"? If a side door/gate is provided, is the clear opening width at least 42"? (§410.6)				

Ward:_____ Precinct:_____ Staff:_____ Date:_____ Time:_____

Address:_____ Location name:_____

I	Elevators	Yes	No	N/A	Comments/ Remedies
I1	Is the elevator car door opening at least 36" wide? (§407.3.6, Table 407.4.1)				
I2	Is there space to maneuver within the elevator car, e.g., 51" deep and 68" wide; OR 80" deep and 54" wide; OR 60" deep and 60" wide? (§407.4.1)				
I3	Are hallway elevator call buttons 48" high or lower? (§§407.2.1.1, 308.2, 308.3)				
I4	Are elevator car controls 48" high or lower? (§§407.4.6.1, 308.2, 308.3)				
I5	Does the elevator have visible and audible signals in the hallway to indicate the arrival and direction of the elevator car? (§407.2.2.1)				
I6	Does the elevator have visible and audible signals within the elevator car to indicate the position of the car? (§407.4.8)				



Document Analysis

The checklist is broken down into nine sections: Parking, Passenger Drop-Off Areas, Exterior Route to Accessible Entrance, Polling Place Entrances, Route from Entrance into Voting Area, Within the Voting Area, Ramps, Lifts, and Elevators. Each section has a set of Yes or No questions to address in order to determine whether a space or facility is compliant. The user can also add comments or notes/measurements at the end of each question.

The checklist is designed to assist officials in determining whether a facility being considered for use as a polling place is accessible to people with mobility or vision disabilities, and, if not, whether modifications can be made to ensure accessibility or relocation to another accessible facility will be necessary. The checklist can be used to evaluate both new and existing polling places. Completing the checklist is a way to learn whether a facility is accessible for voters with disabilities, and to identify and help remedy any barriers that exist.

The evaluation of a polling place's accessibility is meant to bring to focus those areas of the facility that will be used by voters—specifically, voters with disabilities—on Election Day. The checklist leads one to examine parking area and passenger drop-off sites routes (both exterior and interior) the entrance to the polling place, and the voting area itself.

Each disability parking space must have an access aisle adjacent to it that is wide enough to allow voters with a mobility disability to get out of their car or van, and signage identifying it as an accessible parking space. After exiting the vehicle, the voter with a disability must have an accessible route from the parking lot or passenger drop-off site (including from public transportation stops) to get to the entrance of the voting center. Inside the polling place, there must be an accessible route from the entrance through hallways, corridors, and interior rooms leading to the voting area. All such routes, exterior or interior, must be free of abrupt changes in level, steps, high thresholds, or steeply sloped walkways. Gradually sloping ramps can be added as necessary. Each polling place must have at least one accessible entrance with a minimum clearance width to allow wheelchairs through. If the

voting area is not on the same level as the entrance, there must be a user-operable elevator or lift to provide an accessible route to individuals with disabilities. The voting area must have an accessible entrance and adequate circulation and maneuvering space for voters who use wheelchairs or scooters, or who walk with mobility devices, to get in to the voting area, sign in at the check-in table, and go to the voting stations or machines.

Although one person can complete a survey of a polling place, it is recommended elsewhere in the document (narrative portion; not shown) that two people work together to make the process go more quickly and easily. One can be responsible for taking the measurements and the other for recording the information and taking any photographs.

Some accessibility barriers at polling places can be addressed with temporary remedies. By visiting local hardware or home improvement stores, or shopping online, one may find such items as traffic cones, accessible parking signs, directional signs, portable ramps, doorstops, threshold wedges, and more. When temporary measures are insufficient, district officials will likely need to budget for building contractors to make the necessary changes to the facility. Many contractors specialize in accessible design and construction and can serve as a resource for local officials.

—Salem Press

Bibliography and Additional Reading

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