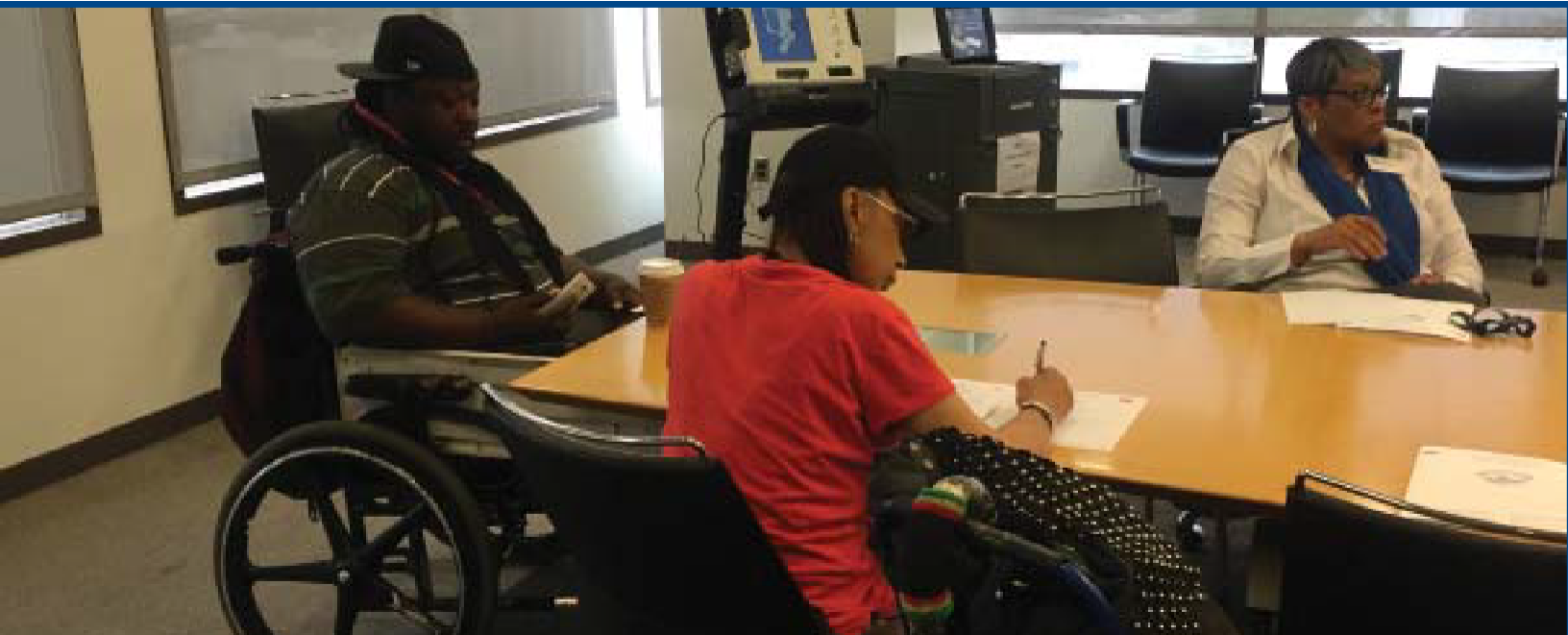


VOTER & LANGUAGE ACCESS PROGRAM

Annual Report & Look Forward 2016-2017



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ADA Coordinator

Program Mission

VOTER AND LANGUAGE ACCESS PROGRAM

The purpose of this report is to provide comprehensive feedback on the accessibility services implemented by the DC Board of Elections (BOE). This report draws data from the 2016 elections, Election Day surveys and thoroughly documents this agency's compliance with the federal and local mandates for accessible voting and minority language assistance.

PROGRAM MISSION

The right to vote is an American principle and a basic democratic right that should be protected, promoted, and practiced by everyone. The BOE is committed to ensuring that all District residents have equal access to the voting process.

PROGRAM GOALS

Our goal is to ensure that we comply with all federal and local laws that promote accessible voting and language access for limited English proficient and non-English proficient voters. This includes full compliance with the regulations under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the federal civil rights law that provides protections to people with disabilities, and ensures access and use of their voting facilities. It also includes compliance with the DC Language Access Act of 2004 and federal regulations that promote minority language assistance.

To further our initiatives we train election workers to approach each task with a positive customer service attitude, and to make each voter's experience as positive as possible. Additionally, we teach election workers about applicable laws and regulations, the rights of voters, disability etiquette, along with the responsibilities and the limits to their authority during election season.



District of Columbia Mayor Muriel Bowser visits BOE polling sites on Election Day.



Training election workers on how to create an accessible environment at District polling places.

Voter & Language Access

VOTER AND LANGUAGE ACCESS: PROGRAM SUMMARY

During the 2016 election season, all 143 polling sites were surveyed to evaluate whether they met the federal and local accessibility standards. After the assessment 10 polling sites were relocated because they were not physically accessible for voters with disabilities.

Other polling sites were structurally enhanced through our collaboration with agencies such as the Department of General Services (DGS), District Department of Transportation (DDOT) and Office of Disability Rights (ODR). For example, several precincts received permanently installed automatic door openers. Precincts that could not be structurally modified received temporary fixes, such as the installation of mobile ramps and removal of muntin bars to widen narrow doorways.

“...10 polling sites were re-located because they were not physically accessible for voters with disabilities.”

We also revamped the voter and language access portion of the election worker training class. The disability etiquette segment was expanded to include more simulations and practical training. Election workers were able to sharpen their skills by practicing on the new voting machines, while utilizing the accessibility features. They were also taught how to use the language kits, create accessible routes, post signs appropriately and procedures for curbside voting.

The ADA compliance team was expanded for the 2016 General Election. The ADA Compliance team grew from thirty (30) volunteers, to fifty (50) volunteers. The team assisted the ADA Coordinator in maintaining operationally accessible precincts across the city.

Additionally, the program created new minority language assistance initiatives, redesigned the language access kit, recruited more interpreters and expanded the number of language services we offered to limited English proficient and non-English proficient District residents. We also continued to take a proactive approach in recruiting more bilingual poll workers for Election Day.

Lastly, the voter and language access team collaborated with the voter education and outreach team to increase voter participation in the disability community and amongst senior citizens. The team presented at several events, including the National Federation of the Blind Possibilities and Health Fair, National Disability Voter Registration Week: “The REV UP Campaign” and the Annual Mayor’s Disability Awareness Expo at the Department of Employment Services.

ACCESSIBILITY HIGHLIGHTS, 2016

10

Polling sites were relocated to more accessible facilities.



5

Supported languages for non-English speakers including Spanish, Mandarin, American Sign Language, Vietnamese, and Amharic

50

ADA Compliance volunteers in the field to assist with operational accessibility.



2016 Election Year in Review

FAQ GUIDE

A new Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document was created to address voter and language access concerns for senior citizens, people with disabilities and limited English proficient voters. The document was created for our election workers and staff members to equip them with the knowledge required to effectively answer questions from the public. It was also created to be distributed during outreach events.

MEDIA

The ADA Coordinator participated in an on-air nationally broadcast radio interview with Pam Fessler of National Public Radio (NPR) to discuss voter access issues including accessible voter registration, accessible voting and accessible technology. She was also interviewed by local media concerning the accessibility of polling sites, election preparedness and other voter access topics.

DISABILITY RIGHTS ADVOCACY GROUPS

The Board of Elections worked with organizations such as University Legal Services (ULS) and The Equal Rights Center (ERC) to achieve a consensus with respect to identifying and correcting accessibility issues during the election season.

VOTER ACCESS FORUMS

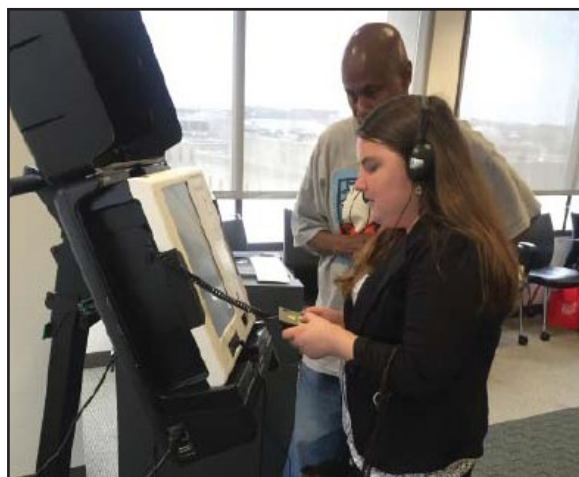
The DC Board of Elections (BOE) hosted two (2) voter access forums in 2016. Advocates from the disability rights community, senior citizens, voters with disabilities, disability rights lawyers, other affiliated groups and supporters were invited to the BOE office to meet with the Executive Board and the ADA Coordinator. The voter access forum allowed us to interact and exchange thoughts and ideas with members of the disability rights community. It also allowed the Board to disseminate information concerning the availability of accessible voting equipment, the availability of trained election workers to assist voters and the relocation of inaccessible polling sites.



Members and advocates from the disability community attend the annual Voter Access Forum at the Board of Elections.



The General Council, Kenneth McGhie greets the attendees at the annual Voter Access Forum.



An attendee with a visual disability tests out the accessibility features on the new Expressvote voting machine.

Voter Access Outreach Events

VOTER REGISTRATION DRIVES

During the 2016 election season, the Board participated in numerous voter registration drives hosted by various community-based organizations, nursing homes, assisted living facilities and disability rights groups. Our Ward Coordinators and/or ADA Coordinator visited numerous groups, including the local chapter of the National Federation of the Blind, The Bridges Center and schools such as Gallaudet University. The coordinators completed voter registration forms for individuals requesting help, and answered voter access questions concerning issues such as accessible voting technology and polling sites. The ward coordinators were successful in registering applicants, and 1,487 residents at nursing homes/senior living facilities voted absentee at their respective facilities.

“...1,487 residents at nursing homes/senior living facilities voted absentee at their respective facilities.”

ANNUAL MAYOR’S DISABILITY AWARENESS EXPO

In October 2016 the Board participated in the Annual Mayor’s Disability Awareness Expo at the Department of Employment Services. The event was created to advance the conversation on equal opportunities and inclusive environments for people with disabilities. BOE staff members registered several applicants with disabilities and educated other attendees about the accessible forums through which they could register to vote at accessible voting technology and polling sites.

NATIONAL FEDERATION OF THE BLIND POSSIBILITIES AND HEALTH FAIR

In October 2016, the Board participated in the National Federation of the Blind’s Possibilities and Health Fair. Our coordinators provided voter education information, answered questions and exhibited the new voting machines, especially the features most important for voters with visual disabilities

“THE REV UP CAMPAIGN” - NATIONAL DISABILITY VOTER REGISTRATION WEEK

In June 2016, the Board partnered with the Office of Disability Rights (ODR) and the American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD) to launch the Washington, DC installment of the “Register! Educate! Vote! Use Your Power! (“REV UP”) Campaign”. REV UP stands for Register! Educate! Vote! Use your Power! The Board and ODR brought the standard maple proclamation to Mayor Muriel Bowser to have the week of July 11-15, 2016 declared National Disability Voter Registration Week. In July 2016, the proclamation was signed by the mayor, followed by a week of voter registration outreach events for people with disabilities.

Opposite Page: An attendee at the National Federation of the Blind Conference testing out the new, accessible ExpressVote voting machine.



Interagency Collaborations

INTERAGENCY COLLABORATIONS

To ensure that polling places were both structurally and operationally accessible for the General Election, DGS provided a team of facility managers, building managers, and engineers to correct structural issues at government buildings that serve as polling places. Modifications included installing automatic door openers, temporarily removing narrow doors and removing center poles. DDOT made permanent fixes to streets and sidewalks at government buildings that serve as polling places. DGS fulfilled over 90% of the service requests the Board made in connection with the General Election.



DEPARTMENT OF GENERAL SERVICES (DGS)

The Board made over two-hundred and forty (240) requests for structural changes to be made to existing DC governmental facilities used as polling sites. Over 90% of the service requests were fulfilled by DGS.

DGS provided a team made up of approximately 7 facility managers, building managers and engineers to correct structural issues to DC government buildings on Election Day. This included removing center poles, propping heavy doors open, relocating inaccessible entrances and installing temporary ramps.



OFFICE OF DISABILITY RIGHTS (ODR)

While the ADA Coordinator provided in-person assistance at our polling sites on Election Day, ODR staff members worked in the BOE call center to answer voter access questions and concerns from voters and advocates.

ODR staff reviewed our voter access training material and allowed us to use their disability etiquette training video during each class. The Board of Elections is currently working on creating an election-specific disability etiquette training video.



DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION (DDOT)

The Board made several service requests to the DC Department of Transportation (DDOT) to correct issues such as cracked sidewalks, potholes, etc., at dozens of government facilities used as polling sites. While not all requests were fulfilled, permanent fixes were made at several polling sites.

Disability Awareness Training

ELECTION WORKER TRAINING

Over 2100 election workers received disability awareness training during the 2016 General election cycle. The ADA Coordinator focused the training on Title II of the ADA, ADA compliance and disability etiquette. While all election workers receive basic introductory training regarding how they should treat senior citizens and people with disabilities, only early voting staff, Voter Assistant Clerks (VAC) and ADA Compliance volunteers receive extensive voter access and disability etiquette training.

During the 2016 election cycle, the voter access and disability rights etiquette portion of the election worker training class was revamped to include more practical applications and simulated training exercises. We also incorporated games that allowed trainees to learn the material without depending on the written material. This was ideal for workers with literacy concerns and certain disabilities.

Topics covered: Disability etiquette, operational accessibility, polling place set up and curbside voting.

The election worker training manual's ADA section was also

updated with information concerning appropriate set up of the voting technology and placement of ADA compliance accessible route signs and directions. Additionally, all voter access signs were redesigned to make them multi-lingual to comply with local and federal language access regulations. Finally, several new signs were created to make it easier for seniors, people with disabilities and voters with limited English-proficiency to navigate at polling places.

“Over 2100 election workers received training... regarding Title II of the ADA, compliance, awareness, and disability etiquette.”



Election workers receive training on voter accessibility and disability etiquette.



Election workers in a Voter Assistant Clerk training class completing a practical training exercise.

ADA Compliance

ADA COMPLIANCE

On Election Day, all polling locations are equipped with accessible voting machines, auxiliary aids, temporary ramps (where necessary) and election workers trained to meet the needs of voters with disabilities and senior citizens. However, voters with physical disabilities or other disabilities who opted not to come inside the polling site had the option to vote using an absentee ballot or via curbside voting. Regardless of the option chosen, each person had the opportunity to vote independently and privately. During the past election and during future elections our agency will continue to prioritize accessibility and create initiatives to improve upon the services we currently provide to members of the disability community.

ACCESSIBILITY HIGHLIGHTS, 2016

Surveyed 143 polling sites, relocated 10 facilities, combined and structurally modified others to ensure physical accessibility on Election Day

Hosted 2 Voter Access Forums for voters, advocates and members of over 20 local disability rights organizations

Increased our ADA Compliance Team from 30 volunteers in the Primary Election to 50 volunteers in the General Election

Partnered with the Department of General Services to make almost 240 structural accessibility changes to government facilities

Increased the number of Spanish, mandarin, Vietnamese and American Sign Language interpreters available on Election Day

Redesigned the language access kit and all access signs to comply with federal and District language access regulations

ADA COMPLIANCE VOLUNTEERS

The Board deployed 50 ADA Compliance volunteers throughout the city on Election Day. Each was assigned four to five polling places to monitor and address any correctable issues that presented barriers to voting for senior citizens and people with disabilities. The volunteers were responsible for completing a precinct operational accessibility checklist, make operational accessibility changes where necessary and assist the election workers at each site.

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY STUDENT VOLUNTEERS

American University Disability Rights Clinic law students also volunteered in shifts on Election Day to assist voters with disabilities.

Accessibility Services

SERVICES AVAILABLE FOR SENIORS, LIMIT ENGLISH PROFICIENT VOTERS AND VOTERS WITH DISABILITIES

During the last election, it was estimated that one in six eligible voters had a disability. In fact the disability community encompasses this country's largest minority group; it includes all races, ages, gender identities, sexual orientations and religions. As a result, this agency is committed to ensuring that all voters receive equal access at the voting process. In order to facilitate this, the following services and resources are offered to voters:

- Expressvote accessible voting machines;
- Accessible passenger drop-off areas;
- Curbside voting available for people ages 65 or older, or any person with a disability;
- Permanent or temporary ramps;
- Operable elevators (where necessary);
- Doors with levers or push bar handles (or that are propped open);
- Pathways free of debris and obstructions;
- Walkways wide enough for wheelchairs/ walkers;
- Walkways and pathways free of debris;
- Directional signs along the accessible route;
- Service animal friendly environment;
- Seating for voters who need it while waiting;
- Magnifying glasses, headphones and other auxiliary aids;
- TDD services for voters with auditory disabilities;
- Sign language interpreters are assigned to designated polling sites;
- Language Access assistance/ interpreters are assigned to designated polling sites;
- Language Access kits at all polling sites/ translated ballots and forms;
- Bilingual poll workers;
- Translated ballots;
- Absentee voting; and
- Election Day hotline dedicated to ADA Compliance and accessible voting.

EXPRESSVOTE SYSTEM

This system was designed to accommodate voters in the general voting population, including voters with cognitive, dexterity, auditory and visual impairments. Accessible features include:

- Voters may touch the screen or use the moveable keypad provided.
- The voter may adjust the display contrast and text size in order to read the screen.
- Each key on the pad has both Braille and printed text labels designed to indicate function and a related shape to help the voter determine its use.
- Alternatively, voters may also use headphones to hear a recorded list of the instructions and candidates for each contest and then make selections by touching the screen, touching the keypad, touching a two-position switch, or through a sip/puff device.
- The voter may adjust the volume and tempo of the audio.



The picture above depicts the ExpressVote voting machine, ballot and tactile pad (with Braille).

2016 Election

2016 EARLY VOTING

During the general election the Board operated nine Early Voting Centers— one in each ward, with the exception of Ward 6, which had two. All nine early voting centers were accessible for the general election early voting period. This was achieved after modifications were made to some sites, as detailed below.

MODIFICATIONS MADE TO EARLY VOTING CENTER

Chevy Chase Community Center

New automatic door opening system installed in October 2016

Columbia Heights Community Center

New automatic door opening system installed in October 2016

King Greenleaf Recreation Center

Improvements made to the automatic door opening system in October 2016

Malcolm X Elementary School

Temporary ramp installed at the backentrance of this center in October 2016 to create a shorter route to the voting area

Sherwood Recreation Center

Improvements made to the automatic door opening system in October 2016

Takoma Community Center

Improvements made to the automatic door opening system in October 2016

Turkey Thicket Recreation Center

Improvements made to the automatic door opening system in October 2016



Temporary ramps were installed at various polling sties on Election Day.



BOE, DGS and ODR staff members work to remove the astragal (center pole) from the polling place doorway to meet accessibility standards.

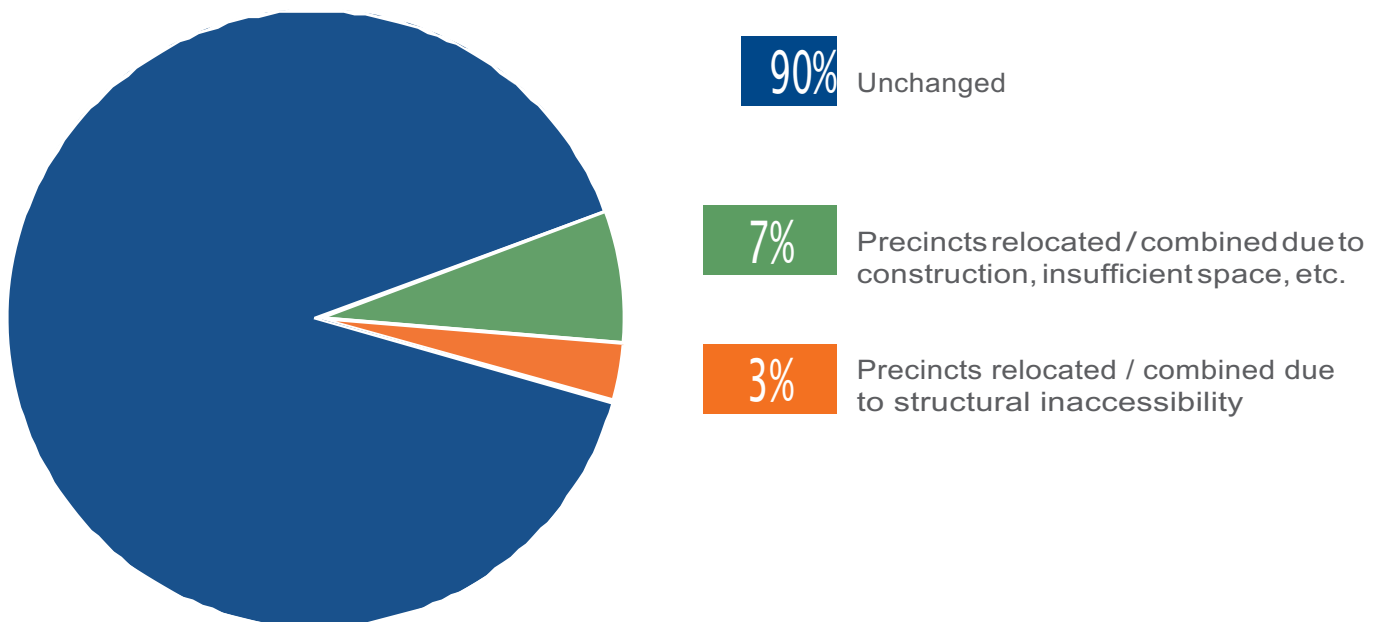
POLLING PLACE RELOCATIONS AND COMBINATIONS

During the 2016 election season, the Board operated 143 precincts at 140 polling places on Election Day. While some polling sites were relocated, others were combined. More specifically, three polling places housed two precincts each. BOE relocated a total of ten precincts during the 2016 election year. During the last election (2016 general election) four precincts were relocated.

Four polling sites were relocated due to structural inaccessibility issues:

1. Precinct #42: Raymond Recreation Center
2. Precinct #85: Northeast Branch Library
3. Precinct #88: Eastern Market
4. Precinct #106: Ridge Road Community Center

RELOCATED AND/OR COMBINED PRECINCTS, 2016



The above chart depicts the percentage of precincts that were relocated, combined and unchanged during the 2016 General Election. Seven percent of the precincts were relocated or combined due to construction or insufficient space. Three percent of the precincts were relocated / combined due to structural inaccessibility. Ninety percent of the precincts remained unchanged.

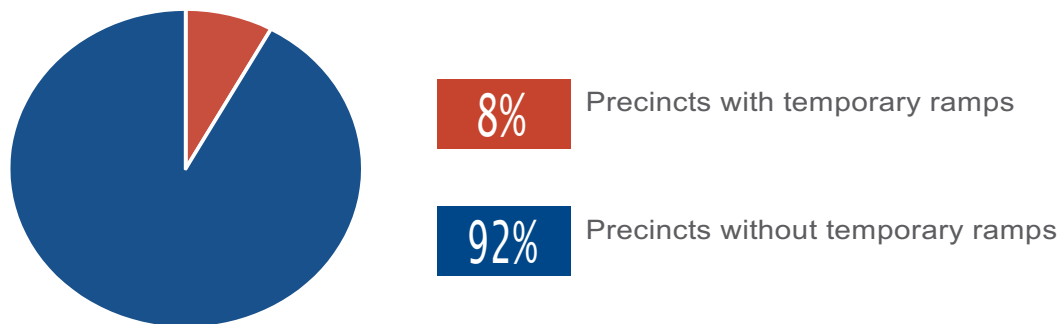
TEMPORARY MODIFICATIONS

The Board makes every effort to identify facilities that are accessible to all voters. In some cases, we have facilities that have structural accessibility issues (as noted on the previous page) and, where possible, we fix them or provide temporary modifications such as propped doors, ramps, signage and accessible parking set-ups to make the polling place accessible on Election Day. Most structural and operational accessibility modifications are accomplished through interagency collaboration.

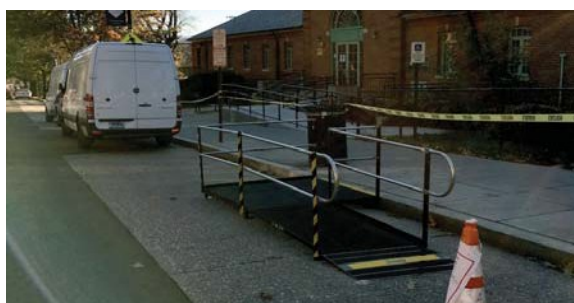
12 temporary ramps were installed on Election Day:

1. Precinct #4: School Without Walls (Francis Stevens High School)
2. Precinct #23: Rita Bright Community Center
3. Precinct #37: Banneker Community Recreation Center
4. Precinct #45: Metropolitan Police Department - Regional Operation Command (North)
5. Precinct #60: Nativity Youth Center
6. Precinct #67: Bunker Hill Elementary School
7. Precinct #81: Miner Elementary School
8. Precinct #83: J.O. Wilson Elementary School
9. Precinct #92: Zion Baptist Church - Eastland
10. Precinct #106: Ridge Road Recreation Center
11. Precinct #120: Malcolm X Elementary School
12. Precinct #133: Orr Elementary School

INSTALLATION OF TEMPORARY RAMPS, 2016



This pie chart depicts the precincts that received temporary ramps during the 2016 General Elections. Based on the chart, eight percent (8%) of our precincts received temporary ramps during the Election, to remedy either an inaccessible or missing ramp. This chart does not include the precincts that received new thresholds.



Pictured left are temporary ramps used on Election Day.

Language Access Program

PROGRAM SUMMARY

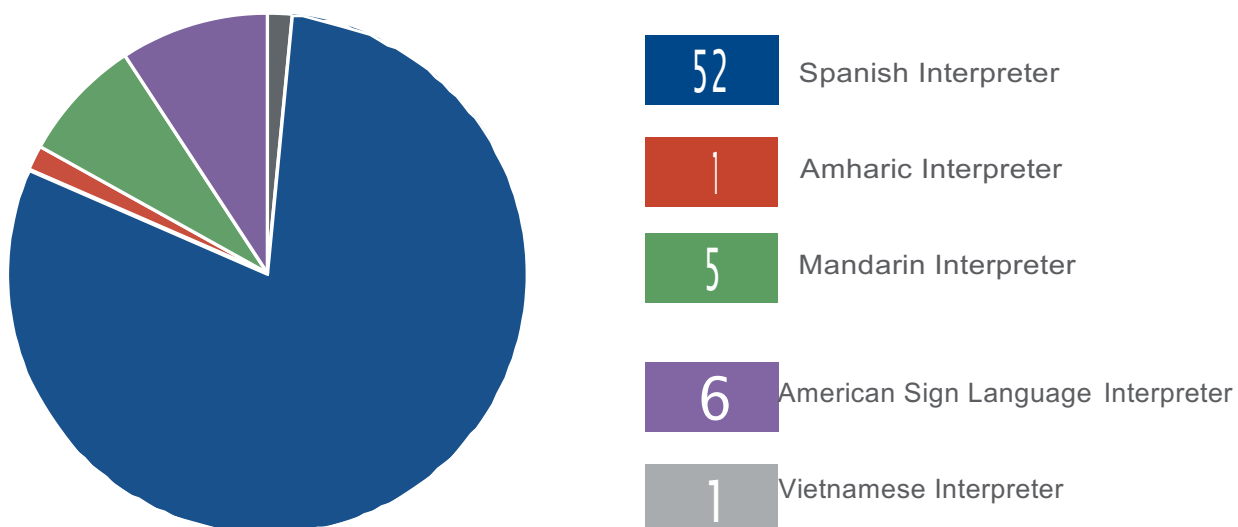
The Board works diligently to comply with all aspects of the Voting Rights Act and DC Language Access Act of 2004 pertaining to language access assistance. District residents with limited or no-English proficiency are able to access or participate in the election process through the availability of translated election materials, bilingual staff members, bilingual poll workers and paid interpreters.

PROGRAM GOALS AND METHODS

During the 2016 General Election the Board deployed forty-two (42) Spanish interpreters, five (5) Mandarin interpreters, one (1) Vietnamese interpreter and one (1) Amharic interpreter to sixty-five (65) designated bilingual precincts. Furthermore, to ensure there was no language access discrimination experienced by people with disabilities, we also deployed six (6) American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters at designated precincts on Election Day.

- All elections-related documents/ forms were translated for limited English-proficient voters. This included our voter registration forms, ballots (special and regular), What Every Voter Needs to Know, screen shots from ballot marking devices etc.
- All elections related signs and posters were revamped and translated (Spanish, Mandarin, Vietnamese and ASL) to comply with language access regulations and simplify the voting process.
- To accommodate all voters we also provided auxiliary aids such as hearing aids and other accessible voting technology.
- Over 250 Language Access Kits (binders) were created for our polling sites. The language access kits (ballots, forms, screenshots etc.) were translated into Spanish and Mandarin for limited English-proficient voters. Voters had the opportunity to speak to an in person interpreter, call the language line or use the translated documents/forms at each polling site.

ONSITE INTERPRETERS BY LANGUAGE, 2016 GENERAL ELECTION



2018 Election and Beyond

PROBLEM/CHALLENGE	PROPOSED PROGRAM SOLUTION(S)
CLOSED DOORS Closed doors- Heavy closed doors remain an issue on Election Day. Most schools still request that all doors remain closed due to student safety concerns. BOE currently designates an election worker to stand at each entrance, as well as hires private security guards for the most high risk school sites on Election Day.	CLOSED DOORS BOE should continue to lobby to have schools closed on Election Day. Most of the surrounding jurisdictions currently implement this practice, rendering student safety concerns a nonfactor. When polling sites are exclusively used for voting, we can leave the doors open/ unlocked. Furthermore election workers can be more focused on the voters, create more accessible routes and decrease operational accessibility issues. Voters with disabilities are also better able to access the facility if the doors are kept open, especially voters with visual and mobility related disabilities.
UNEVELED SIDEWALKS Uneveled sidewalks- BOE continues to receive complaints about uneveled sidewalks (and potholes). This is especially problematic for voters who use mobility devices such as canes, walkers and wheelchairs.	UNEVELED SIDEWALKS All issues concerning potholes and/ or sidewalk repairs are resolved through DDOT. The agency should continue to work with DDOT to ensure that there are no uneveled sidewalks, potholes or other obstructions that impede voters with disabilities from accessing the accessible path and subsequently the voting area.
QUALITY CONTROL Malfunctioning doorbells on Election Day remain an issue for BOE.	QUALITY CONTROL All auxiliary aids and Election Day supplies such as headphones, signs and doorbells should undergo a quality control check before they are sent to the polling sites. We should consider having a quality control form/ sticker attached to each piece of supply that shows the person who last checked it, as well as the date/time. Additionally we should consider using a database to track all supplies (signs, doorbells, temporary ramps, headphone etc.). This will allow all relevant parties to assess when new items need to be ordered etc. All relevant parties should have access to the database to increase accuracy and efficiency. For items that continuously malfunction like doorbells, we should consider exploring new vendors.

PROBLEM/CHALLENGE

DISABILITY ETIQUETTE TRAINING

All election workers do not receive the same standard disability etiquette training. For example, several VAC election workers did not show up for work on Election Day. This subsequently affected the number of staff members we had at some polling sites to assist voters with disabilities.

PROPOSED PROGRAM SOLUTION(S)

DISABILITY ETIQUETTE TRAINING

All poll workers should receive standard disability etiquette training. This does not have to replicate the extensive voter and language access training that VAC election workers and ADA Compliance volunteers receive.

However, all election workers should know how to interact with senior citizens, people with disabilities, use people first language and direct voters to available resources for accessible voting and minority language assistance.

Prior to Election Day or the beginning of early voting, election workers and volunteers should receive training that prepares them to appropriately interact with people with disabilities.

Basic Disability Etiquette training should include the following information for staff and volunteers

- People first language training.
- Voters should not be asked about their disability. Voters do not have to provide proof about their disability.
- Service animals must be allowed to accompany voters inside the polling place.
- Accessibility features at the polling place need to be operational.
- People with disabilities are allowed assistance from a person of their choice; other modifications may be needed to accommodate voters with disabilities.

ACCESSIBLE WEBSITE

The www.dcboee.org website does not currently meet required accessibility standards. The ADA requires election officials conducting any elections at the federal, state, or local level to provide communication with voters with disabilities that is as effective as that provided to others. This remains an issue.

ACCESSIBLE WEBSITE

I recommend that we immediately redesign our website using acceptable accessibility standards. As a Title II entity that uses the internet to disseminate information and offer services, programs and activities to the public. It is critical that we maintain a website that is accessible. In order to prevent a digital divide between the ability of citizens with disabilities and those without disabilities. It is proposed that we revamp our current website to make civic participation and access easier for the public, especially people with disabilities.

It is critical that we remedy this issue soon. Public entities, such as BOE must ensure that they do not have policies, procedures, or practices in place that interfere with or prohibit persons with certain disabilities from accessing our programs and services.

PROBLEM/CHALLENGE

DISABILITY ETIQUETTE TRAINING VIDEO

BOE does not currently create or use its own elections training videos. We currently use the disability etiquette video produced by the Office of Disability Rights (ODR) as a part of our election worker training program.

PROPOSED PROGRAM SOLUTION(S)

DISABILITY ETIQUETTE TRAINING VIDEO

The agency is currently exploring the option of creating its own election training and outreach videos. We also proposed the creation of a disability etiquette training video for election workers.

The disability etiquette video outline, objectives and content is currently in the draft phase. We have also met with a media and videography company to provide us with some guidance regarding this project. It is recommended that we have the videos available for the 2018 election.

POLLING PLACE SET UP

Our poll workers (specifically Precinct Captains) are currently responsible for Election Day set up. We have had several issues in the past with our machines and equipment not being set up in the most accessible way. Voters, specifically those with physical disabilities, have a hard time navigating the voting area and, eventually become quite frustrated with the process.

POLLING PLACE SET UP

We should consider revamping our pre-Election Day set up procedure(s) and perhaps consider employing a team that is solely responsible for setting up polling sites. This is particularly important in regards to our voting machines as there are federal laws that provide technical requirements regarding how they should be set up.

I recommend that we use our ADA Compliance team for pre-Election Day set up. The volunteers are currently being assigned to remedy accessibility issues on Election Day. Many of those issues could potentially be eliminated if we had a team in place with standard procedures to follow BEFORE Election Day.

We should also try to standardize the time pre-Election Day set up starts and ends at each precinct.

2017-2018 Program Initiatives

PROBLEM/CHALLENGE

VOTING ACCESSIBILITY ADVISORY COMM.(VAAC)
The Board is committed to ensuring that everyone has access to the voting process. However, we will not have accurate information concerning the needs of seniors and people with disabilities if we do not keep a close connection with the community. Biannual voter access forums are not enough.

PROPOSED PROGRAM SOLUTION(S)

VOTING ACCESSIBILITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE (VAAC)¹

A local VAAC provides a forum for those who represent the disability and senior communities to discuss issues they encounter in the voting process. VAAC members can recommend accessibility improvements to polling place websites, voter materials, and county election procedures. Local VAAC members can also provide feedback on polling locations, voting systems, and other accessible matters like voter outreach and Americans with Disabilities Act compliance.

A local VAAC opens lines of communication and fosters cooperation with community groups, ensuring elections officials can address issues directly and minimize misunderstandings. A local VAAC is also a great resource for recruiting poll workers.

A local VAAC provides outreach to individuals and organizations that promote awareness of individuals with disabilities and seniors. Reaching out to these people and organizations can provide opportunities for the county to work with the community as a whole to understand the diverse array of challenges these communities face, as well as recruiting potential poll workers or VAAC members.

¹ Several elections offices around the country have established their own Voting Accessibility Advisory Committee (VAAC), comprised of advocates from the disability and senior citizen communities. The California Secretary of State provides a comprehensive guide on how to create a local VAAC https://www.shapethefuture.org/VAAC/documents/SOS_VAAC_guide.pdf (2014).

PROBLEM/CHALLENGE

REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS FOR ELECTION WORKERS AND VOLUNTEERS

BOE does not currently have a standard Reasonable Accommodation policy or request form in place specifically for election workers/ volunteers.

It is challenging to accommodate an accommodation request on the day of election worker training, especially when it involves a request for an American Sign Language Interpreter or training material printed in Braille.

STRUCTURAL ACCESSIBILITY

While it is sometimes challenging to locate accessible polling sites, it's completely necessary. The ADA requires that our agency ensure that people with disabilities can access and use their voting facilities.

PROPOSED PROGRAM SOLUTION(S)

REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS FOR ELECTION WORKERS AND VOLUNTEERS

The agency should create a formal reasonable accommodation request policy and procedure for potential election workers to use BEFORE they arrive at training. That would allow our trainers to have enough time and information to properly accommodate the request. Perhaps we can include a section concerning whether an accommodation is required on the Election Worker Application.

Pursuant to ADA laws, public entities like BOE must provide "program accessibility," meaning that all services, programs, and activities (for example poll worker training) promulgated by this agency must be "readily accessible to and usable by" people with disabilities. Program accessibility can be accomplished in a variety of ways, including:

- modifying policies, practices or procedures;
- acquiring adaptive equipment or a communication device; or
- through the provision of services at alternate accessible sites

It is recommended that the ADA Coordinator collaborate with the poll worker training division to complete this initiative before the next election season starts.

STRUCTURAL ACCESSIBILITY

The ADA's regulations and the ADA Standards for Accessible Design set out what makes a facility accessible and should be used to determine the level of accessibility at any facility being considered for use as a polling place.

The ADA Coordinator and Facilities Manager should propose the relocation of additional inaccessible precincts and encourage capital improvements by the relevant local government agencies

BOE should continue to collaborate with DGS, DDOT, ODR and all other relevant government agencies to ensure that all polling sites are accessible by 2018.

