Dear EAC Awards Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit the Voting Accessibility Quick Check program for the 2020 Clearinghouse Award in the category of Improving Accessibility for Voters with Disabilities. Two years ago, you rewarded my office’s work with an EAC Clearie Award for our Helping Veterans and Iowans with Disabilities Vote initiative. The Quick Check booklet is a continuation of our work to make all of Iowa’s elections easy and accessible.

The key to ensuring polling places are accessible is providing poll workers with the necessary tools in a format that is easy to follow. We accomplished that objective with the Voting Accessibility Quick Check guide. Partnering with Disability Rights Iowa my office produced booklets and distributed them to every polling place in the state. The booklet includes information about accessible voting equipment and signage. It can also be used as a measuring tool to ensure polling spaces are accessible for wheelchairs and other mobility devices.

Voter participation is one of my top goals as Iowa’s Commissioner of Elections. All Iowa polling places are inspected for general ADA compliance. The Voter Accessibility Quick Check booklet is an additional resource for precinct election officials to have on hand to ensure the polling place stays accessible throughout Election Day.

I am certain you will agree that helping citizens with disabilities vote is vital for our representative form of government. Their voices are often not heard in the legislative process. I want to change that by helping all of them #BeAVoter.

This useful tool can be replicated in every state at minimal cost. I hope all who administer elections will find this information beneficial.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Paul D. Pate
Iowa Secretary of State
U.S. Election Assistance Commission Award Application
2020

Iowa Secretary of State’s Office

Accessibility Competition

State Office: Iowa Secretary of State Paul D. Pate

Contact: Kevin Hall, Communications Director (515) 725-2942, Kevin.Hall@sos.iowa.gov

Title of Program: The Voting Accessibility Quick Check Guide

Project lead: Heidi Burhans, State Elections Director; Heather Livingood, Elections & Voter Registration Specialist

Subject area of nomination: Improving Accessibility for Voters with Disabilities
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The key to ensuring polling places are accessible is providing poll workers with the necessary tools in a format that is easy to follow. We accomplished that objective with the Voting Accessibility Quick Check guide. The Iowa Secretary of State’s Office partnered with Disability Rights Iowa to produce booklets and distribute them to every polling place in the state. The booklet includes information about accessible voting equipment, spacing and signage. It can also be used as a measuring tool.

BACKGROUND

When Iowa Secretary of State Paul Pate returned to office in 2015, one of his top priorities was helping veterans and Iowans with disabilities vote. That initiative turned into a multi-pronged effort at voter and poll worker education, community outreach and providing the necessary resources at every polling place. The initiative was recognized with an EAC Clearie Award in 2018.

The program continued in 2020, with a new tool to ensure polling place accessibility.

ACTION STEPS

Iowa Secretary of State Paul Pate and Disability Rights Iowa partnered to produce a Voting Accessibility Quick Check booklet and provide one for every polling place in the state. The booklet is a tool for precinct election officials to ensure polling places meet American Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements and to quickly recognize and fix any accessibility issues that may arise on Election Day.

Taking extra time and care to make sure the polling place is accessible will allow Iowans with disabilities to have a positive voting experience when they show up to cast their vote. We wanted to provide the counties with as many resources as possible to help them provide the best experience to all voters at the polls on Election Day.

The booklet includes information about accessible voting equipment, spacing, signage, and can be used as measuring tool.

The panels in the easy-fold booklet provide the necessary measurements and accessibility requirements for outside the polling place, entrances to the polling place, and inside the building.
The first page provides valuable information about overall polling place accessibility, voting machines, and the contact number for the county auditor’s office.
The second page provides information about how to ensure the area outside the polling place is accessible. It includes a graphic on the required number of accessible parking spaces, measures for ramps, and information about the path from accessible parking to the building.
Page three provides details about entrances to polling places. This includes information about signature, necessary entryway width, door handles and wall space.

**ENTRANCES**

If there are stairs at the main entrance, there must be an **ALTERNATE, ACCESSIBLE entrance available**

There **MUST BE SIGNS** from the main entrance to the accessible entrance

Entrances should have **18” OF CLEAR WALL SPACE** on the pull side of the door next to the handle

Handles must be **48” FROM THE GROUND** and operable with a single, closed fist from a sitting and standing position

Entryways must be at least **36” WIDE**

No doorknobs! They are too difficult to operate.

Doors should open **WITHOUT TOO MUCH FORCE**

If a door is too heavy, consider propping it open or posting a Greater to open the door for all visitors.

The amount of clear space next to a door handle

18
The fourth page covers the area inside the polling place. It includes necessary measurements for paths, signage, objecting hanging from the ceiling and useful tips about carpets and furniture.

Unfolded, the entire booklet spans 36 inches and includes a ruler at the bottom that can be utilized to quickly check measurements.
One Last Check

Use this list to keep track of what is accessible and what isn’t — and then what you’re going to do about it!

1. **Outside**
   - Appropriate number of accessible spaces
   - Minimum of 1 van space
   - Pathway to the entrance is relatively level
   - Accessible spaces are clearly marked

2. **Entrances**
   - Clearly marked accessible entrance
   - Entryways are at least 36” wide
   - Handles meet all listed accessibility requirements
   - Doors are easy to open

3. **Inside**
   - Adequate space to navigate and turn around
   - Thresholds, rugs, and carpets are short and flat
   - Signs are an appropriate height
   - Hanging or protruding objects are marked with a cone

On the back side is the ‘One Last Check’ page. This simple checklist offers an easy review of the major steps that election officials need to take to ensure full accessibility at the polling place. Completing the checklist means you’ve ensured all voters can navigate the polling place, outside and inside, and are easily able to cast their ballot.

There is also a ‘Notes’ page in case poll workers want to write important information onto the booklet.

Altogether, the Voting Accessibility Quick Check Guide is a very useful tool that helps election officials ensure polling places are accessible at the beginning of Election Day, and is a great asset for poll workers to ensure it remains accessible throughout Iowa’s 14-hour Election Day timeframes.
RESULTS

“The Quick Check booklet helps poll workers make the voting experience more welcoming and accessible to people with disabilities,” said Jane Hudson, executive director Disability Rights Iowa. “Increased attention to accessibility will encourage more people with disabilities to participate, making our democratic process more obtainable for all.”

All Iowa polling places are inspected for general ADA compliance. The Voter Accessibility Quick Check booklet is an additional resource for precinct election officials to have on hand to ensure the polling place stays accessible throughout Election Day. Having one at every polling place on Election Day on November 3, 2020 helped ensure accessibility for all Iowa voters and was a tremendous tool for poll workers.

This project can be replicated in every state at minimal cost. It is a simple addition to the election toolkit, but an extremely valuable one.