



Office of the Dubuque County Auditor

The Dubuque County Elections office partnered with the Dubuque County Disabilities Council to visit polling locations on election day to see if any improvements could be done to make polling places more accessible.

Dubuque County utilized 32 polling locations for the 2022 elections. While all our polling locations have been reviewed for ADA compliance using the ADA Checklist for polling places, there is still a lot of unintentional human error that our election staff could be creating without even knowing. While staff are trained before each election and given disability checklists, with all the other responsibilities on election day, some tasks may be unintentionally neglected.

We started our collaboration in May of 2022, meeting with the Dubuque County Disabilities Council to form a strategic partnership to review the Iowa Primary Election polling places on June 7, 2022. Auditor's staff accompanied members of the disability council to two polling locations. It was determined at the first location that a clearer sign for the elevator would be helpful to voters. The election staff took this knowledge and created a large sign on laminated paper to put in the elevator to help assist voters. At the second location, it was suggested to change the wording on a sign to say "Facilities for Voting for People with Disabilities" and to enlarge the sign so voters would be better able to read it. Election staff contacted our vendor and changed the wording on the advice of the disabilities council, enlarged the sign and laminated to distribute to all of our polling locations. This was able to be used for the November 8, 2022, general election.

Another recommended correction pertained to the location of curbside voting signs. Staff were able to look at the parking lots and work with the head election officials of those precincts for better placement for the election. While we train our election staff on accessibility issues, it is difficult to ascertain necessary changes without having direct disability experience. This leads to unintentionally hindering how voters with disabilities might interact with our polling locations.

These small changes may seem insignificant to some, but our office was able to improve our polling locations to increase accessibility to all voters. Given the Primary Election success of this partnership, we planned to partner with the council again in November for the General election. The council was very happy to be a part of this process.

After the June Primary in Iowa, the Iowa Secretary of State's office offered a HAVA accessibility grant for \$1,000.00 for Iowa Counties to spend on improvements to voter access. The Dubuque County Auditor's

Office not only pioneered this type of partnership prior to the Secretary of State's offering but was also one of the only counties in Iowa who applied for these grant funds when they were available.

For the November 8, 2022, general election we again partnered with the Dubuque County Disabilities Council to visit four polling locations. The council was excited to continue this partnership, and we were thrilled that a grant was available for them to be able to receive some compensation for their critical assistance.

At our first stop on election day, while everything was ADA compliant, it was determined that the lighting was inadequate for all voters in the voting privacy booths. For those voters with visual impairments, this presents as a massive barrier to voting. A corrective measure that went into the budget was clip-on lights for our voting booths. Something that probably seems inconsequential to most voters will make a large impact on those disabled, elderly, or low-vision voters. Upgrades were made at this location, and we look forward to documenting feedback from voters at this location in future elections.

The second location the team visited, presented with issues regarding the space between tables and chairs. This location was very large; however, elections staff had not adequately allowed for practical space to move through the area with assistive devices. While the aisles were 36 inches wide, there was not enough room to provide a turning space that was at least 60 inches in diameter. For the size of the room the set up could have been done a bit differently as the council felt that all the aspects of the voting check-in and ballot station felt cramped. Auditor's staff also explained that there was a new precinct election chairperson for that location that may have contributed to a less than optimal setup. The suggestions made by the team lead to the creation of a plan of action to take pictures for the election workers as a guide to go off for the next election on how to better set up polling areas. These guides will include layouts, floor plans and will help to address voter flow.

The Dubuque County Auditor's Office looks forward to continuing our partnership with the Dubuque County Disabilities Council. We plan to keep reviewing a handful of polling locations each election. While the HAVA grant was nice for one election, the Council is more than willing to do this free of charge and will accompany us in 2023 for our elections. These small yet meaningful changes help to make Dubuque County polling locations more accessible for ALL voters.



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MAY 20, 2024



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Polling Place
MAY 20, 2024



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