



Washington State Democrats Guidelines for Accessibility

How to evaluate location accessibility for a political party activity

We strive to include all Democrats in our activities. Almost one in five people in the United States live with a disability. We need to be clear that with all our activities, we have done our best to create equitable spaces that are accessible, comfortable, and empowering for everyone. To that end, events, meetings, and other Party activities should be held in accessible locations whenever possible. To determine the accessibility of a potential site before the decision is made, you should visit the site and walk through it with an eye to potential barriers to access. The best way to do this is with help from someone with experience in evaluating site accessibility.

Most of us are unfamiliar with the requirements of the ADA for accessible venues, which means we have a lot to learn. The Americans with Disabilities Act was passed in 1990. This means that buildings and spaces constructed since then should be fully accessible. Even with renovations, older buildings may still be partly inaccessible or only partially accessible if they have been renovated since then. It also means that finding fully accessible locations can be challenging. We ask that you do your absolute best to meet the guidelines; our shared goal is to make every Party activity fully accessible. And we want to provide the support to do so. The guidelines below provide a checklist for providing a fully accessible location.

Be Proactive. A very simple first step is to start including a sentence about how to request accommodations on your emails, invitations, and publicity for events. It can be as simple as, "For disability accommodations please call ____ or email ____ by (date). "Pick a date far enough in advance that allows you enough time to satisfy accommodation requests. This simple statement already starts to create a level of inclusion and may encourage people with disabilities to come to the event. It also will provide a gentle reminder to everyone reading the announcement that the Democratic Party is the Party of inclusion.

Identify Common Barriers to Access:

1. Are there physical barriers to access for people who use wheelchairs, walkers, or have other mobility impairments? In the past, many meetings were held in the homes of party members. Unfortunately, private homes usually present barriers to access for party members with mobility impairments, such as narrow doorways, stairs, and bathrooms without adequate space or handlebars. Public buildings, such as schools and libraries, are typically more accessible than private residences. *However public buildings can also have access limitations, so it should not be taken for granted that they are barrier-free, especially if they were built before 1990.*

2. Is there an accessible route? Is there a well-marked, relatively flat, smooth route from parking, the sidewalk, and bus stops to the caucus site? Steep inclines, curbs, gravel or broken concrete can pose hazards and make access difficult for people with mobility impairments. Handrails at the site of ramps and other inclined locations can prevent accidents.

Often, the only accessible route requires entry through a back or side door rather than the main entrance. These sometimes require passage through maintenance, loading, or kitchen areas, and can be considered demeaning. Most people prefer to use the main entrance, so consider this factor in making site selection. Also, check to see if the accessible route is clearly signed or intuitively recognizable. If there is not proper signage, you can create your own, and have a greeter who can help people find the most accessible routes.

3. Do the doorways permit easy access? (at least 32" wide, preferably 36") This includes entry door, and entry to the room where the event takes place, and the restrooms. Are the doors heavy and difficult to open? If so, will you be able to prop them open or otherwise make it possible for people with limited mobility to enter?

4. Are the restrooms accessible? Restrooms vary widely in accessibility. In addition to the width of the doorways, the height of the sink, size of the stalls, grab bars, and other factors should be considered. The resources below can provide help in evaluating restroom accessibility. Often, some but not all of the restrooms in a facility are accessible – if such a site is chosen, be sure to provide signage directing party members to the accessible restrooms. Remember, if you are holding an event outside and are renting portable toilets make sure you rent at least one accessible unit. If you only rent one, make it an accessible one.

5. Is there room to move and sit? Is there adequate space for walker and wheelchair users to move throughout the site and sit at meeting tables? This can be difficult to evaluate unless you use a wheelchair, so consider doing your site evaluation accompanied by a wheelchair user. Venues with stadium style seating are often especially inaccessible, so make sure there are cut-outs and locations for wheelchair users to sit.

6. Is there adequate lighting? Along the access route, in corridors, and in the room where the caucus will be held there should be adequate lighting to assure safe passage for people with limited vision.

7. Is there flexibility in the room arrangements that will accommodate individuals with hearing impairments? Sometimes many precincts will meet at the same location and time, in a large room, cafeteria, or gymnasium. The result can be a din which makes it impossible for individuals with hearing impairments to participate. This difficulty can be managed by providing "break out" rooms for precincts that have a member or members with a hearing impairment. This requires planning ahead – when selecting the site, arrangements will need to be made to ensure

that a break-out room can be available. However, this creates a separation that is far from ideal. Communicate clearly what the options are so you can come to an understanding beforehand.

8. Do you need a sign language interpreter or CART (real-time captioning)? We want to include people who are deaf or hard of hearing. Many deaf people use American Sign Language (ASL) but many do not sign. The alternative to ASL is CART which is real time captioning provided by a court reporter. Frequently those requesting the services will have a trusted vendor to hire.

9. Are all parts of the room area accessible? While the main floor of a large room or gymnasium may be accessible, often the stage is not. If this is the case, and the stage area will be used by speakers, consider whether or not it will be feasible to put in a temporary ramp or otherwise modify the stage so that individuals with limited mobility will be able to use this area when speaking. Be sure to also consider the height of the podium.

10. Is there access by bus or other transportation? Many people with disabilities rely on public transportation to access community events. For areas that are served by public transportation, it is important to locate the event on a bus line. Check to see if the route serves the location at the time the event is planned to take place. (If there is no public transit available, consider offering assistance with rides in the notice of the event)

11. Who can assist you in evaluating the accessibility of the site? There are probably people in your community who can assist you with your site accessibility evaluation. If you would like assistance in finding someone to help you, or would like to find out more about improving accessibility of events, please contact the following:

Northwest ADA Center (contact: Michael Richardson)

Website: <http://www.dbtacnorthwest.org/>

Email: mike67@uw.edu

Phone: (800) 949-4232

Disability Rights Washington

Website: www.disabilityrightswa.org

Email: info@dr-wa.org

Phone: (800) 562-2702

Washington State Democrats Disabilities Issues Caucus

Email: WSDDIC@gmail.com

The U.S. Department of Justice planning guide for accessible meetings that includes suggestions for temporary barrier removal, checklist of what to look for, and highlights the needs across the

general spectrum of disability needs. <http://www.ada.gov/business/accessiblemtg.htm>

Rooted in Rights also has a guide to making social justice events accessible which can be found here:

<http://www.rootedinrights.org/how-to-make-your-social-justice-events-accessible-to-the-disability-community-a-checklist/>

If you are having trouble finding an accessible site: ask for help!

1. **We cannot hold public events in inaccessible locations, but sometimes every available location will have some access problems. An accessible route to the main activities and an accessible restroom are the bare minimum, but you may be able to work with other sites. Be clear.** Until more buildings, curbs, paths, bathrooms, etc. are updated, we have an accessibility problem in this country. Be clear that we are striving to find accessible locations, but that we are having problems. Outline clearly *how* your location is and is not accessible and ask potential participants to contact you with their accessibility concerns. If your location is not accessible, be clear about it, front and center of your event invitation or announcement.
2. **Go to the lengths you can go.** Have volunteers greeting people to lead them to accessible bathrooms, ramps, or the most accessible routes available. Rent ramps, if possible.

Some notes on etiquette

1. **You cannot see all disabilities.** Do not make assumptions about limitations based on appearance or the use of assistive devices. For example, individuals who use mobility aids such as canes, walkers, or wheelchairs have different limitations and may use a mobility aid regularly or only as required by their limitations daily. Also, people who appear to be mobile may require accommodations such as accessible parking because they are unable to walk long distances due to a medical impairment (e.g., a person with asthma or a heart condition).

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2. **When in doubt, ask.** After events, ask people how their experience was. We want people to leave our events feeling like they were accessible, inclusive, and welcoming. Before events, ask what they need. During the event, ask if they need assistance, but don't assume they do.

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3. **For more on etiquette:** <http://unitedspinal.org/pdf/DisabilityEtiquette.pdf>

A final note: beyond complying with the basic legal requirements of the ADA, we strongly encourage you to go beyond the minimum, ask tough questions, and be willing to admit mistakes. Thank you.