

State of Wisconsin \ Government Accountability Board

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MEMORANDUM

DATE: June 5, 2014
TO: Michael Haas, Elections Division Administrator
FROM: Richard Rydecki, Elections Specialist – Accessibility Coordinator
SUBJECT: Protocol for Photos during Polling Place Accessibility Audits

Program Summary

The G.A.B. conducts on-site audits during each election to assess the physical accessibility of polling places in Wisconsin. During 2011 - 2014, over 1,800 polling place audits have been conducted over the course of 19 elections. The audit program has visited 1135 municipalities located in 69 Wisconsin counties during this time. All auditors are required to participate in extensive training before they are sent into the field on Election Day. The training protocol includes a review of the polling place accessibility survey, an explanation of Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards and training on the tablet computers which auditors use to collect data.

Training Protocol and Photo Policy

Since 2012, due to increased workload concerns and staffing shortages, Election Day audits have been conducted entirely by temporary employees recruited through state-approved employment agencies. Each potential employee is interviewed and attends a 2.5-day training program before being sent out in the field. A significant portion of the training is focused on review and discussion of the Polling Place Accessibility Survey (Rev. 2009) and the ADA standards that form the foundation of the survey. A mock polling place exercise has been added that allows auditors to gain hands-on experience using the necessary survey tools and familiarize auditors with conducting on-site reviews.

Photos are an essential part of the polling place audit process. Auditors are instructed to take photos of accessibility problems that they encounter at each polling place. G.A.B. staff use these photos to verify problems before a report is issued to the responsible local election official. The photos are also used to answer questions from local election officials and provide specific guidance on how an accessibility problem can be remedied in the most efficient and cost-effective manner. Auditors are also encouraged to collect evidence of “best practices” while out in the field and this information is used to bolster poll worker and local election official training materials. These “real world” examples have been cited by local election officials as more effective training tools than generic diagrams or stock images.

At each portion of the training when taking photos is addressed, auditors are instructed that they should not include voters in any polling place photos. If an auditor would like to take a photo to document a problem or best practice but cannot do so without including a voter in the image, they are trained to refrain from taking that photo. Instead, they are instructed to provide a detailed written explanation of the problem or practice. Any voting area photos that may include voters are taken so that both the voters and their ballot choices are not identifiable.

Conclusion

The polling place audit program has been successful in identifying thousands of polling place accessibility problems across the state. Those problems are then reported to each audited municipality so that a plan can be put in place to address the audit findings. Photos of accessibility problems play an integral role in the administration of this program and in ensuring that local election officials are provided with specific explanations of problems. A proper understanding of the problem allows for the identification of more effective solutions to accessibility problems so that polling places in Wisconsin are accessible to all voters on Election Day.