



JETT GIVING FUND Accessible Vehicle Fund

TIPS FOR FINDING YOUR PERFECT ACCESSIBLE VEHICLE

This document includes resources to help you choose what accessible vehicle is right for your family and what information you will need when applying to the Accessible Vehicle Fund. Even if you are not applying to the Accessible Vehicle Fund, we hope you find this information helpful.

WHEN IS THE RIGHT TIME TO GET AN ACCESSIBLE VAN?

This is going to be slightly different for everyone, but generally speaking you will need some sort of accessible transportation before you actually realize that you need it. You will need to have an idea of what kind of vehicle you want to get and where you will be able to get it. The planning is best started in advance of the day that it becomes a necessity. A good time to think about purchasing an accessible van is when you look at buying a vehicle after an individual receives their first wheelchair, whether manual or electric.

WHAT SHOULD I TAKE INTO CONSIDERATION FOR THE FUTURE?

Growth of a child

- As a child gets older, it will be more difficult to place a child in a booster seat on your own. This will start to become a safety risk. As the wheelchair size begins to grow, putting it in the trunk of a car might also become difficult. This is where an accessible vehicle will be necessary.

Growth of your equipment

- When shopping for an accessible vehicle, consider future and current needs. You'll want a vehicle that can safely accommodate each individual's needs today, but will have enough interior space to accommodate a larger wheelchair and the larger person (height, weight, etc.) he/she may be in just a few years.
- Flexible seating configurations allow a child to use a child seat or booster seat. It also allows the wheelchair to be used as seating during transit when an individual outgrows the ability to be transferred, which can be important.

Permit/License Ready

- Drivability and modification are possibilities.
- The ability to drive a mobility vehicle can foster independence and confidence for teenagers who use wheelchairs. This is a goal to keep in mind no matter the child's age. Read about our first Accessible Vehicle Fund participant to drive their own vehicle here.
- Even if a child is young now, you should ask if the vehicle can be modified later to allow driving from a wheelchair.
- Many different mobility devices are available to make driving possible. Speaking to a driver rehabilitation specialist can help you determine which modifications will be necessary to allow an individual the opportunity to drive in the future. Even though driving may seem way in the future, it is important to consider when choosing a mobility vehicle.
- Adaptive driving equipment (examples)
 - Hand controls - provides assistance to users with limited foot control
 - Allows driver to steer, accelerate, and brake with the use of specific controls installed on the steering wheel
 - Some systems are even portable, allowing the owner to carry them and operate any automatic-transmission vehicle with just a few minutes of installation
 - Swivel seating - allows for a driver's seat to lower to outside of the vehicle, giving a driver accessibility to the front seat

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT WHEN CONSIDERING A VEHICLE

How many passengers will you be transporting?

Account for how many are in your family, along with unlikely scenarios as well. Remember to account for the time the wheelchair is loaded.

- Ex. An eight passenger minivan might only fit five if the middle seat is removed to store the wheelchair.

How will you be entering the vehicle?

- If driving the vehicle, a side swivel/transfer seat may be the best option.
- If using as a passenger only, a rear or side entry vehicle may be the best option.

Will you be driving? What adaptive aids will you require?

Driving the vehicle requires you to make many more decisions about how you enter the vehicle. Advances in technology have opened new worlds of possibilities, so make sure you research the most current options.

Understand what will and won't work for you and your family

Make sure to consider your unique space accommodation requirements. Even if you have the budget for the biggest and the best, the biggest might be too big for you, and the best might introduce unforeseen complications into your transportation routine. Ask yourself the questions below to narrow down what will work for your specific situation:

- **What are the dimensions of your wheelchair?**
 - When determining the dimensions, make sure to put yourself in the wheelchair to help get accurate numbers. If you're going to be sitting in the wheelchair while you enter the vehicle, you'll need to be able to get through the door.
- **Where will you be parking this vehicle?**
 - Will you be pulling the car into the garage, leaving it in the driveway, or parking it on the street?
 - Will the van's dimensions fit into the garage? If parking in the driveway, will you have room to deploy the ramp or lift to get into the vehicle? If you're on the street, which side will the ramp or lift need to be installed on for you to safely enter your vehicle without putting yourself out into traffic?
 - Also consider whether you live out in the country or city. If you live in the city or travel there often for appointments, a rear-entry might not be a good fit due to parallel parking spaces.
 - Minivans and SUVs are easier to park than full-sized vans. Full-sized vans might also give you the room you need for a larger family.
- **Will the necessary equipment require a full passenger van, or can you make use of a different type of passenger vehicle?**
 - On one hand, smaller vehicles are less expensive to purchase, so you might save money on the total package by passing up the full-size van. However, your adaptive equipment might be more expensive to install in a smaller vehicle because of labor involved to make it fit. If you think you might be able to get away with a smaller vehicle, consult a sales professional to get a sense of what the differences in cost might be. Be sure to consider the growth of a child if choosing a smaller vehicle.

WHAT TO LOOK AT WHEN CONSIDERING A VEHICLE

Can the dealer install necessary equipment if their current inventory is not properly equipped?

Because of the nature of physical disabilities, no two individuals' needs will be exactly the same. Even the most well-stocked dealer might not have a vehicle with the exact combination of technology and equipment that you require. Accessible vans are rarely a one-size fits-all scenario, so finding a dealer that can make the customization process as painless as possible is very valuable.

OTHER QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT:

It is important that you speak to your mobility dealer about both entry styles to make sure you get which one is right for you. Important questions to ask are:

- Will there be someone to assist the individual who uses a wheelchair when the vehicle is in use?
- What are the most important things for me in my accessible vehicle?
- If you have more than one individual using a wheelchair, will this van fit more than one wheelchair?

TAKING IT STEP BY STEP

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STEP ONE: Decide what vehicle and setup is best for your family.

What are my options when looking for an accessible vehicle?

- Wheelchair Vehicle options: Mini-vans, Trucks, Full-Sized vans, and SUVs
- You have four options that you will need to consider in terms of what kind of conversion your family will need: Side Entry Ramp, Rear Entry Ramp, Full-Size Van with Hydraulic Lift, and various other nontraditional setups.
- If you're buying a van and need to have it converted, make sure you take accurate measurements to make sure the lift will fit. ***See above on how to take accurate dimensions and measurements for your wheelchair.

What should I consider when thinking about what type of vehicle I want?

Consider parking, cost, maintenance, and seating. There is no such thing as the perfect solution when it comes to accessible vehicles. Each vehicle will have pros and cons. The decision comes down to what works best for your family.

SIDE-ENTRY VS. REAR-ENTRY



SIDE ENTRY VAN

(popular models: Dodge Caravan, Chrysler Town & Country, Toyota Sienna)

Pros

- Has the broadest range of seating options.
- Has the option of front removable seats. This allows the individual who uses a wheelchair to ride in the front passenger spot, or actually drive the van.
- This is the only conversion that allows an individual who uses a wheelchair to drive the car.
- Has remote power on your key fob that operates the van's side door.
- One "up" or "down" button that retracts or deploys the wheelchair ramp.
- Tend to be easier for curbside access for picking up/dropping off passengers.

Cons

- Requires the most extensive vehicle modifications.
- The floor is lowered across the entire vehicle. Adjustments are typically made to both sliding doors and front seats.
- Costs more than a rear conversion.
- Most well-known, but parking is one of the most significant drawbacks to this conversion style.
 - Only around 10-20% of parking lots have the crosshash area next to the handicap spot in order to accommodate the side ramp when it is open.
- This is the most expensive of the options - it will run about \$20,000-\$30,000 just for the conversion, in addition to the vehicle price.
- Additional room is needed to deploy the ramp.
- Can be expensive with maintenance. While it has a nice automatic ramp that deploys at a touch of a button, it can be difficult and can be prone to maintenance issues.
- The middle or second row of the van will need to be removed to account for the conversion.
 - This can be problematic if the vehicle is used to transport additional passengers who do not use a wheelchair.



REAR-ENTRY VANS

Pros

- Has more interior space, allowing for bigger wheelchairs to fit.
- Usually less expensive than other conversions.
- Requires fewer changes to the van itself.
- The ramp is welded into the frame of the rear-entry.
- Provides multiple seating and position options for individuals who use a wheelchair. There is an option of stationary bucket seats, flip-and-fold seats, as well as wheelchair positions in both the middle and back of the van.
- Side/middle seats can remain intact for additional passengers.
- Additionally, a third-row, flip-and-fold seat is available to increase the seating capacity in the rear-entry wheelchair van.
- The ramp doesn't interfere with entering and exiting the side of the vehicle. Drivers are not limited to accessible parking spots and have more room to maneuver.
- Side doors do not have to be blocked if a folding style ramp is utilized.

Cons

- Does not allow the individual who uses a wheelchair to access the driver's seat or front passenger seat because of the lowered floor behind the middle seat.
- Parallel parking can be challenging due to access needed behind the vehicle.

WHEELCHAIR RAMPS VS. WHEELCHAIR LIFT



RAMPS

- 3 main options: portable, motorized, or manual.
- Can be in-floor or fold-out.
- If you're purchasing a lowered-floor van with a ramp, they tend to be much less expensive, take up less space, and are more fuel-efficient compared to full-size vans.

In-floor

Pros

- Stowed in the floor of the van, creating more interior room.
- When stowed, they are not seen.
- If there is uneven terrain, in-floor ramps are easy to use.

Cons

- The angle of in-floor ramps is higher than fold-out ramps, making entering/exiting slightly more difficult.
- Because of the location in the floor, it may require more maintenance and cleaning.

Fold-Out

Pros

- Individuals who use a wheelchair can assist the folding out of the ramp if there is a need for it.
- By folding, gravel and dirt are able to fall through, which means less maintenance is required.

Cons

- Because of the fold, rough terrain may hinder how it folds out.
- Resides next to the sliding minivan door, which necessitates removal of the center seats, reducing overall seating capacity.
- The seat in front of the fold-out ramp cannot recline when the ramp is not being used.
- When individuals who do not use a wheelchair need to enter and exit, the ramp still needs to be deployed.

Portable ramps

- Least expensive and easiest to install.
- Has the ability to be used with multiple vehicles.
- Can be removed whenever they are not a necessity.
- Motorized/Automatic ramps

Pros

- Boast added convenience in their motorized movements and higher degree of autonomy.
- With limited mobility, a powered ramp may be the difference between entering and exiting the vehicle on your own.
- The ramp can be stopped mid-cycle if needed.
- Most ramps don't have this potential accident-saving feature.
- Power ramps have manual back-up systems, you'll never be stuck inside or outside your van.

Cons

- More expensive.
- If the vehicle experiences a power or an equipment failure, you have to manually operate the ramp, which can be difficult when in a wheelchair.

Manual ramp

Pros

- Fewer moving parts, which usually means less cost to install and maintain.

Cons

- Less expensive, but requires more effort to extend and retract the ramp.
- Usually used when another person is present in order to assist.
- An individual who uses a wheelchair may not be able to operate the ramp while seated in their wheelchair.

WHEELCHAIR RAMPS VS. WHEELCHAIR LIFT, CONT.

LIFTS

Lifts are usually installed in full-sized vans.



Pros

- They help to effortlessly raise a person in a wheelchair into the vehicle.
- A lift is an ideal choice for an individual who requires a higher weight capacity to accommodate a heavier wheelchair.
- Lifts can also potentially offer independent use for the individual in the wheelchair, greatly enhancing personal freedom.

Cons

- All lifts depend on a battery. If the battery is weak or dead, the lift will not work.
- Larger motor wheelchairs might also require an extended platform for the lift.
- Lifts require lots of hardware, so if you wish to use a lift, you will almost always find them in full-size passenger vans.

There are 7 different types of lifts: hydraulic, electrical mechanical lift, gravity lift, platform lift, fully automatic platform lift, semi-automatic lift, and a swing lift.

Hydraulic Lift

- Uses a pump and cylinder filled with fluid pressure that enables the pump to raise a lower lift.
- Electrical mechanical lift
- Operates either by chain or screw rod, powered solely by the battery.

Gravity Lift

- Has power to lift and fold, while gravity lowers the platform to the ground level.

Platform Lift

- More complicated and requires two doors or a sliding door on the side of the van.

Fully Automatic Platform Lift

- Will fold, unfold, lower and rise by a switch.

Semi-Automatic Platform

- Requires manual folding and unfolding, and assistance may be necessary.

Swing Lift

- It "swings" inside, outside and up-and-down.
- Less room is needed to enter and exit the van, which provides parking convenience.



INTERACTIVE STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE/QUIZ

BraunAbility provides a [step-by-step guide](#) to help you identify what kind of vehicle is right for you and your family based on your lifestyle, budget, and style.

Get started at <https://www.braunability.com/us/en/where-to-start.html>.

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STEP TWO: Find your quotes!

When applying to the Accessible Vehicle Fund, each applicant must submit three quotes from at least two certified dealers. These quotes must be on official dealer letterhead, clearly include the name of the dealer and the name of the applicant, and an itemized breakdown of the vehicle cost. Please see the sample quote for an example.

Some Trusted Accessible Vehicle Companies

- Mobility Works
- Accessible Vans of America
- Adapt Solutions
- BraunAbility
- 101 Mobility
- Purple Ribbon Mobility
- AMS Vans

Jett Foundation staff are not trained as certified vehicle professionals. The following resources were to compile this document:

Accessible Vehicle Checklist:

- Blvd.com

Ramps vs. Lifts:

- EZ Carrier

Side Entry vs. Rear Entry:

- Ability Center

What Vehicle is Right for You and Your Family:

- BraunAbility

Mobility Van Considerations:

- BraunAbility
- Rohrer Bus