



How to Plan a Large Reception & Lobby

Space Planning Guide

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A large reception area and lobby — typically 400–800 square feet or more — serves as the face of the organization, a way-finding hub, and a multi-use waiting area that may accommodate 10–30 simultaneous visitors. Planning a large lobby requires zone-based thinking: the reception station, the primary seating lounge, secondary seating or feature areas, and clear circulation paths between all zones. This guide provides the measurements, zone allocations, clearance standards, and furniture specifications for a professional large lobby.

Room Dimensions & Available Floor Space

A large reception area is typically defined as 400–800+ sq ft of dedicated lobby space. Common configurations include dedicated rooms of 20'x25' to 30'x40' or open lobby areas at the building entrance.

Zone allocation for a 600 sq ft (22'x28') lobby:

- Reception station zone: 120–150 sq ft (20–25% of floor)
- Primary lounge zone (6–8 seats): 150–200 sq ft (25–33%)
- Secondary seating/waiting zone (4–6 seats): 80–120 sq ft (13–20%)
- Primary circulation path (5' wide x full length): 100–130 sq ft (17–22%)
- Feature wall / art / signage / plant zone: 40–60 sq ft (7–10%)

Lobby Size	Typical Capacity	Zone Capabilities
400–500 sq ft (20'x22')	8–12 visitors	Reception desk + lounge zone + 1 feature wall
500–700 sq ft (22'x28')	12–20 visitors	Reception desk + two lounge zones + secondary seating
700–1,000 sq ft (28'x32')	20–30 visitors	Reception desk + multiple zones + café or refreshment station

Reception Station

- L-shaped or curved reception desk: main work surface 72"x24", return 48"x18" — total footprint approximately 25 sq ft

- Transaction counter at 42" height on the visitor side, with a 36"-wide, 34"–36" ADA accessible section at one end
- Behind-counter workstation: receptionist task chair (27"×27"), 2-drawer lateral file (30"×18") — positioned with 36"–48" working aisle behind the counter

Primary Lounge Zone (for a 600 sq ft lobby)

- Sofa, 84"×34": 3-seat lounge sofa against the feature or window wall — 23.8 sq ft footprint
- Two 34"×34" lounge chairs: flanking or perpendicular to the sofa — positioned at 36" from sofa arm to chair arm edge, creating a seating cluster around a central table
- 42"×18"×17"H cocktail/coffee table: centered between sofa and chairs, at a height comfortable for a seated visitor placing items (17"–18" height)
- 22"×22"×24"H end tables × 2: at each sofa end for lamps or charging accessories

Secondary Seating Zone

- Four 24"×24" side chairs in a 2-chair × 2-chair arrangement along one wall, flanking a 20"×20" end table — occupies approximately 100"×36" of wall space

Clearance Requirements

- Primary ADA accessible route (44" minimum; 60" preferred for lobbies): The unobstructed path from the building entry door through the lobby to the elevator/stairs/interior doors must be at least 44" wide. In a large lobby serving the public, 60"-wide primary paths are strongly recommended — they accommodate two wheelchairs passing and two people walking side by side. Plan this path as a permanent corridor through the lobby before placing any furniture.
- ADA transaction counter: Required in all commercial lobbies. One section of the reception counter must be 34"–36" height, minimum 36" wide, with 27" knee clearance below and 30"×48" clear floor approach space on the visitor side.
- Lounge seating clearance (18"–24" between each chair/sofa piece): Allow 18"–24" of clear floor between separate lounge pieces (e.g., between the sofa and an adjacent lounge chair) for visitors to navigate without stepping between occupied seats. The 36" clearance between sofa arm and adjacent chair is the recommended minimum for a professional lobby appearance.
- ADA 60" turning radius (multiple positions required in large lobbies): One turning circle at the reception counter approach, one in the lounge zone, and one in the secondary seating zone. In a 600+ sq ft lobby with 60" primary paths, multiple turning circles fit naturally in the open circulation zones between furniture clusters.
- Reception counter working zone (36"–48" behind counter): The receptionist needs to move freely behind the counter. With a 24"-deep counter face and 36"–48" working zone behind it, the total counter depth allocation is 60"–72" from the visitor side counter face to the rear wall of the reception station — plan this dimension when determining where the counter is positioned in the room.
- Lounge zone to reception counter path (48" minimum): The path between the primary lounge seating and the reception counter must be 48" minimum for two people to pass, and the counter must be visible and accessible from the lounge zone without obstruction.

Option A: Island Reception Station

In large lobbies of 700+ sq ft, position a freestanding island reception desk in the center of the lobby floor rather than against a wall. An island desk (typically 72"x36" or 84"x42") with the receptionist inside the island provides 360° visibility and allows visitors to approach from any direction. The island desk requires 48"–60" of clearance on all four sides for visitor and receptionist access. Total floor allocation: 72"x36" desk + 48"x4 sides = 168"x132" = approximately 153 sq ft for the island station zone — practical only in lobbies of 700+ sq ft.

Option B: Zoned Lounge Areas by Visit Type

Divide the large lobby into two functionally distinct seating zones: a "formal" zone with upright lounge chairs and lower-profile end tables near the reception counter (for brief waits and professional first impressions), and a "casual" zone with deeper lounge seating away from the counter (for longer waits or visitor-to-visitor interaction). The formal zone uses 24"–26" seat depth chairs; the casual zone uses 30"–34" seat depth sofas and lounge chairs. Acoustic and visual separation between zones can be achieved with a planter wall, partial-height panel, or art installation at 48"–60" height.

Option C: Reception + Café/Refreshment Station

For lobbies serving 700+ sq ft, incorporate a refreshment station: a 48"x24" counter with bar-height seating (3–4 stools at 42" seat height) against a side wall. A refreshment station adds approximately 80 sq ft of floor allocation (counter + 30" clearance + stool depth). The refreshment station should be positioned away from the primary circulation path to avoid congestion during busy arrival periods. Power and plumbing requirements may affect placement — plan in coordination with building systems.