

Tip Sheet 15

Library Accessibility: What Trustees Need To Know

Background

Among persons over the age of 65, approximately 50% are living with a disability. Disability in the general populace is as high as 14%. Patrons with disabilities have the same right to library as do women, minorities, seniors, and others. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a major piece of *civil rights legislation*, similar to the Voting Rights Act. Trustees must ensure that libraries meet patron needs.

Tips

Trustees are not equally empowered to dictate procedures, but trustee suggestions are valued and often acted upon by library administrators. Trustees help assure that the library meets the needs of users. Meeting the needs of patrons with disabilities is a great way to build a relationship with the community. Providing access often prevents costly litigation.

- Suggest staff do a walk-through of all buildings to determine whether all facilities meet ADA-accessibility requirements. Often, architects will incorrectly advise planners that furnishings and aisles meet ADA requirements. Even one inch can impair wheelchair access!
- Suggest that all public and staff areas, including break rooms, remain uncluttered and accessible.
- Work with the library to develop a policy of enforcement of access-related parking rules, including those involving bicycles. For example, limit bicycle parking to areas away from the ramps.
- Remind those responsible for building maintenance that snow piles must not impede facility access.
- Check to be sure that your library provides a well-lit area for library users to read/study in quiet. Minimizing visual distractions aids persons with attention deficit disorder.
- Ask if the library can provide tables and computer work stations that can be used by people in wheelchairs. The answer is no? Emphasize the library's obligation to the community.

- Assure that the library has a budget for the prompt (ad hoc) purchase of special equipment that a particular patron might need, such as smaller items --- magnifying glasses or flash lights --- if the lighting in the stacks is insufficient. Other extra items might include a book stand, an adapted mouse or track ball, or earphones to use when accessing computers with speech output.
- Assist the library in locating funding for the timely borrowing of adaptive equipment and assistive technology.
- Confer with the Head of Human Services to assure that the library has policies on how the library staff should provide services to patrons with disabilities and that a review process is in place to assure that staff are adhering to the policies.
- Review the library's policies for needed flexibility. Some patrons with disabilities may require an extended loan period, or the ability to drink beverages, while in the library.
- Promote library services by working with library staff to provide outreach to local groups supporting disabled persons.
- Assure that library programs are accessible upon request. Check --- is this advertised on all program and meeting publicity?
- Review the library strategic plan, budget, mission, and vision statements, to confirm that the needs of people with disabilities are included.
- Confer with the collection development staff. Are collections and electronic resources accessible? Your collection should include titles in multiple formats.
- Suggest that the library have a Section 504/508 coordinator invested with the authority to ensure compliance when purchasing electronic resources (such as the library Web site).
- Form an advisory group of disabled patrons to provide input regarding service enhancements.
- Recommend that disabled board members and employees be offered the opportunity to voice their accommodation needs.

Resources

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Access information regarding mandates of the Americans with Disabilities Act.
<http://www.ada.gov/>

Includes an overview of assistive technology and an easily-accessed checklist that was created to assist in electronic purchasing decisions.
<http://www.ala.org/ala/ascla/>

This Tipsheet is one in a series developed by the Association of Specialized and Cooperative Library Agencies, a division of the American Library Association. See: www.ascla.ala.org.