

Tip Sheet 3

Library Accessibility: What You Need to Know

What Management Needs To Know

Overview

It is important to remember that the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a major piece of civil rights legislation similar to the Voting Rights Act. Additionally it is important to be aware of the piece of the U.S. legislation known as Section 508 which was enacted to eliminate barriers in information technology, to make available new opportunities for people with disabilities, and to encourage development of technologies that will help achieve these goals. The law applies to all Federal agencies when they develop, procure, maintain, or use electronic and information technology. People with disabilities have the same right to use our libraries as women, minorities, seniors and others. Up to 25% of library staff and the people we serve has or will develop a disability. It is important for the library to take the lead to assure that all of its facilities, electronic resources, and its staff stand ready to provide service to this group of people, which anyone may join in the blink of an eye. While some resources will cost the library additional funds, bad publicity will cost the library more. A society is often judged on how it treats its most vulnerable members, lead the way by assuring that no member of the library's community gets left behind.

Tips to Assure the Facility is Accessible for All Patrons

- Have staff do a walk through to be sure the all facilities meet the ADA accessibility requirements. Many times well-meaning architects will tell planners that furnishings, aisles, etc. meet ADA requirements when they do not. An aisle which is only one inch too narrow can mean the difference of a wheelchair getting through it or not getting through.
- Ensure that all public and staff areas, including break rooms, are kept uncluttered and accessible.
- Create policies on how the library staff should provide services to patrons with disabilities and provide training.
- Allow staff the time needed to work patiently with patrons with disabilities
- Offer flexible policies such as extended loan periods or the ability to drink non-alcoholic beverages, if necessary, while in the library.

- Focus outreach with local groups to promote your library's services for people with disabilities.
- Include the needs and wants of people with disabilities at all levels of planning: strategic, budget, monthly, as you would any other patron group.
- Ensure that your collections are accessible, especially the library's electronic resources. Designate a Section 504 coordinator and invest them with the authority ensure compliance when purchasing all electronic resources, including the library's web site.
- Collection development should include titles in multiple formats. While the Regional Library for the Blind & Physically Handicapped Libraries have the largest collect, all libraries should have some material for everyone.
- Have partnerships with individuals and agencies in the disability community.
- Form an advisory group of patrons with various disabilities to provide input for training the staff on ways that the library can improve services.
- Organize twice annual trainings with simulation exercises and a review of the ASCLA Toolkit.
- Make sure that the library staff learn how to use the adaptive technology so that they are able to teach the basics to the patrons.
- Develop and publicize a virtual reference service. Ensure that staff members who will be involved in providing this service are adequately trained.
- Make certain that the person who is responsible for the library's website knows how to determine and maintain the website's accessibility.
- Encourage/require staff to regularly attend meetings or communicate with local organizations that provide services to the disabled.
- Arrange for short (30-minute) presentations on a fairly regular basis by resource people from local hospitals, rehabilitation centers, and mental health agencies for staff training purposes.

- When hiring a new employee with a disability, prepare the staff in advance by holding a meeting to discuss the new staff member's skills and any accommodations that will be needed.
- Set up orientation for new staff members with instruction about providing services to people with disabilities
- Locate and submit applications for funding of assistive technologies on an annual basis to assure continuity of services.

For Further Information:

Funding:

- Your state's Office of Disability Affairs. Locate through Office of Disability Employment Policy - Directory of State Liaisons:
<http://www.dol.gov/odep/state/state.htm>
- Your State Library: http://www.publiclibraries.com/state_library.htm
- The Access Board:
<http://www.access-board.gov/>
Independent federal agency devoted to accessibility for people with disabilities. The Access Board website includes information on federal guidelines and standards; technical assistance, training and research; and enforcement.

General Resources:

- ADA Technical Assistance Programs:
<http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/taprog.htm>
This website contains links and information to National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research funded grantees who provide information, training, and technical assistance to businesses and agencies with duties and responsibilities under the ADA
- Assistive Technology Showcase
<http://www.gsa.gov/Portal/gsa/ep/contentView.do?noc=T&contentType=GSA_OVERVIEW&contentId=9815>
Displays state-of-the-art assistive technologies and ergonomic solutions. The Showcase supports government managers, supervisors, employees, and the public with a wide range of assistive technology equipment

- DisabilityInfo.gov Home Page <<http://www.disabilityinfo.gov/>>
This web portal is a gateway to the federal government's disability-related information and resources relevant to people with disabilities, their families, employers, service providers and other community members.
- Library of Congress: The National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS): <http://www.loc.gov/nls/>
NLS administers a free library program of Braille and recorded materials list circulated to eligible borrowers through a network of cooperating libraries.
- Section 508 <[http.www. 508.gov](http://www.508.gov)>
- Watchfire Bobby 5.0
< <http://www.watchfire.com/products/webxm/bobby.aspx>>
Watchfire Bobby 5.0 is a web accessibility desktop testing tool designed to help expose barriers to accessibility and encourage compliance with existing accessibility guidelines, including Section 508 of the US Rehabilitation Act and the W3C's Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG).
- WebXACT < <http://webxact.watchfire.com/>>
WebXACT is a free online service that lets you test single pages of web content for quality, accessibility, and privacy issues.
- World Wide Web Consortium's Website Accessibility Initiative (W3C):
<<http://www.w3.org/WAI>>

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.