



Library Staff with Disabilities:
What You Need to Know
Library Accessibility
Tip Sheet 13

Overview

People who have disabilities are part of our community, so it follows that people with disabilities are part of the library staff. The disabilities can be congenital, acquired through an accident, or developed as part of the aging process. In today's technologically advanced world, there is no reason why accommodations cannot be made to enable people with disabilities to work within the library community. Furthermore, the Americans with Disabilities Act requires that "reasonable accommodation" be provided for most disabilities.

Screen readers and text-enlargement software programs enable persons with visual disabilities to access online information; ergonomically designed furniture enables persons with lumbar disabilities to work in relative comfort; ergonomically designed keyboards and large-grip pens enable persons with physical disabilities such as arthritis and carpal tunnel syndrome to work with greater ease; good lighting, correctly adjusted monitor displays, and the elimination of glare enable staff experiencing vision loss to continue to work efficiently throughout the workday; and people who are deaf benefit from good lighting and software programs that give the user a visual cue instead of auditory alerts when programs change.

Job sharing, flexible assignments, and good resource management can help people with disabilities get through the workweek, contribute to the community, and earn a living. For example, a person may have a disability that prevents him or her from lifting heavy loads; pairing this person with another staff member who can do the lifting when needed is a solution and a reasonable accommodation.

Administrators must ensure that the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) mandates and rules set forward by the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, including Sections 504 and 508 regarding electronic information, are adhered to for staff in the same manner as they are for the general public. Staff should be aware of their rights as well as those of their coworkers and assist whenever possible to allow the library staff to be a reflection of the community while rendering the best service possible. Be aware that larger institutions are required to have a Section 504/508 or ADA coordinator.

Do not hesitate to hire persons with disabilities for fear they will need expensive equipment to perform their duties. Often the accommodations are low cost, and in some cases the accommodations may be underwritten by state rehabilitation agencies.

This tip sheet is meant to begin the discussion only. Please check with your organization's human resources or personnel department, ADA or 504 coordinator, or general counsel for specific workplace-accommodation requirements.

Tips

The tips listed below are meant for managers, staff with disabilities, and staff who are currently not experiencing a disability but work with staff who are. For tips relating to specific disabilities, see the tip sheets on those topics.

- Respect staff privacy and the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA) privacy and security rules.
- Ensure that your library meets ADA standards for access.
- Ensure that good lighting is installed in all work and break areas, including the stacks and storage areas. Glare should be eliminated.
- Know what types of ergonomic equipment and devices could help staff to perform daily tasks, and ensure they are available. Staff with disabilities should not hesitate to ask for equipment that will help them continue to work.
- Contact the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (see "Resources," below) for current information on federal law and referrals to employer assistance centers.
- Remember that nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in your community may have experience assisting with ADA workplace compliance.
- Contact local disability employment agencies.
- Acquire electronic media that staff needing assistive technology can access.
- As library staff ages and vision declines, the need to enlarge text will increase; adherence to Section 508 guidelines is essential.
- Conduct and attend workshops where disabilities can be explained, allowing time for staff discussions.
- Allow staff to job share. All staff should understand the importance of job sharing and be willing to participate in job sharing, each contributing his or her strengths to the task at hand.
- Allow staff members (if comfortable in this role) to explain their special needs.
- Allow staff to ask coworkers "How can I help?" without invading a coworker's privacy. If told, "I do not need any help," staff should respect the decision.

Resources

Job Accommodations Network (JAN)

www.askjan.org

JAN provides employers and employees with reasonable solutions to accommodations for persons with disabilities. The website provides information on a wide range of disabilities and the ADA.

Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA)

www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/rsa/index.html

Assists both persons with disabilities and the employer to find workplace solutions which will be acceptable for both the employee and employer.

U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy

www.dol.gov/odep

Rules, obligations and regulations concerning the legal mandates of U.S. legislation may be located on this website

Working with a Disability

http://careerplanning.about.com/cs/personalissues/a/disability_act.htm

and <http://careerplanning.about.com/b/2007/08/24/working-with-a-disability.htm>

Practical information for both the person with a disability and the employer can be found at this website.

This tip sheet, revised in 2010, is one in a series developed by the Association of Specialized and Cooperative Library Agencies, a division of the American Library Association. See www.ala.org/ascla.