

Management

Overview

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), enacted by the U.S. Congress in 1990 (amended in 2009), is a major piece of civil rights legislation that prohibits discrimination toward persons with disabilities in regard to access to housing, employment, public entities, and education. Additionally, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 eliminates discrimination towards individuals with disabilities by entities receiving any Federal financial assistance and mandates equal education for all students. The legislation was reauthorized as the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, and strengthened with the addition of Section 508, which has defined standards in regard to electronic access. Section 508 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 and agencies receiving federal money. It requires that any information or communication technology they develop, procure, maintain, or use is accessible to people with disabilities. The [Section 508 website](#) is an excellent resource to learn about the standards as well as to connect with tools, resources, and accessibility vendors. The website also includes a link to policy guides used by governmental agencies in regard to access as well as offering a training workshop on Section 508.

People with disabilities should have unimpeded access to both the physical and virtual library. It is estimated that up to 25 percent of 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 staff members stand ready to provide service to this group of people. Although some resources will cost the library additional funds, it is important to ensure that the entire community's needs are being met to ensure sufficient and ongoing financial support. Library management professionals should lead the way by ensuring that no member of the library community gets left behind.

Tips

- Have staff do a walk-through to be sure that all facilities meet the ADA accessibility requirements. A walk-through was most certainly done at the time of the passage of the ADA but may not have been done often enough in the years since. Many times well-meaning architects will tell planners that furnishings, aisles, and so forth meet ADA requirements when they do not. An aisle that is only one inch too narrow can mean the difference between a person using a wheelchair getting through it or not getting through it. Also, it is human nature for new staff to want to change the look and feel of their environment, and they may not realize, for example, that by moving a few tables and chairs, they may have created a barrier.
- Ensure that staff members keep all public and staff areas uncluttered and accessible.

- Create policies detailing what is required and not required by the library staff when providing services to patrons with disabilities. Ensure that staff members understand these requirements, and always provide adequate training. Staff should feel comfortable when working with persons with disabilities.
- Allow staff the time needed to work patiently with patrons with disabilities. Never expect them to rush through a transaction when patience is needed.
- Allow staff some latitude in regard to enforcing the library's rules and regulations, as some patrons will need such latitude.
- Encourage staff to focus outreach on local groups to promote your library's services for people with disabilities.
- Ensure that the library's collections are accessible, especially the library's electronic resources. Designate a Section 504/508 coordinator, and give this person the authority to ensure acquisition staff are aware of the need for compliance when purchasing all electronic resources and when maintaining and updating the library's website.
- Staff should maintain a collection development policy that includes titles in multiple formats. Although the Libraries for the Blind & Physically Handicapped have the largest collections, all libraries should have some material for everyone.
- Encourage staff to form partnerships with individuals and agencies in the disability community, inviting them to come to the library as patrons and, in return, asking to have staff attend their events.
- Form an advisory group of patrons with various disabilities to work with the Human Services Department staff (or appropriate staff) to develop programs and chart progress.
- Organize regularly scheduled training sessions with simulation exercises, presentations, or programs by members of the community who have a disability as a refresher on services to persons with disabilities. A quick review of the ASCLA Toolkit could also be incorporated in these sessions. Libraries can be busy environments with staff facing new challenges on a daily basis. With the overload of new information, sometimes the old is forgotten.
- Make sure that library staff members are aware of what equipment and software the library owns, how the equipment can be used, and where it is located. All public service staff responsible for computer literacy should know how to use the adaptive technology so that they are able to teach the basics to the patrons. At minimum, all staff should be empowered with the knowledge needed to activate the programs patrons need to use and use the programs Help features.
- Develop and publicize an accessible online 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.
- Orientation for new staff members should include instruction in regard to providing services to people with disabilities.
- Locate and submit applications for funding for assistive technologies on an annual basis to ensure continuity of services.

Resources

Funding Resources

- The Library's Office of Disability Affairs. Locate the office through the [Office of Disability Employment Policy](#)—Directory of State Liaisons
- [United States Access Board](#) Independent federal agency devoted to accessibility for people with disabilities. The United States Access Board website includes information on federal guidelines and standards; technical assistance, training, and research; and enforcement.

General Resources

- [ADA Technical Assistance Program](#). This website contains information regarding training and technical assistance to businesses and agencies with responsibilities under the ADA.
- [Library of Congress: The National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped](#) NLS administers a free library program of Braille and recorded materials circulated to eligible borrowers through a network of cooperating libraries.
- [World Wide Web Consortium's Website Accessibility Initiative](#) International group of professionals who work to establish guidelines, standards and educational programs to ensure web accessibility for all persons.