

# What Trustees Need to Know

## Overview

The number of Americans living with a disability is growing. Some of this increase is due to the aging population (of persons over the age of sixty-five, at least 50 percent have a disability); some growth is due to more thorough evaluation methods regarding some disabilities; while other growth is due to more persons being willing to self-identify with having a disability. Preliminary reports from the 2010 U.S. Census find that 21 percent of the workforce has some type of disability.

The need to serve people with disabilities is justified by the growing numbers within the general population, as well as the need to maintain a library that responds to the needs of the entire community. There are few families that do not have a member with a disability.

People with disabilities have the same rights and needs to access a library, as do members of the community without disabilities. 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 while ensuring that there is no case for litigation for noncompliance.

## Tips

Trustees may not be empowered to dictate procedures, but trustee suggestions are valued and often acted upon by library administrators. Trustees help ensure that the library meets the needs of all users. Meeting the needs of patrons with disabilities is a great way to build a relationship with the entire 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, using [this checklist](#). Even a one-inch deficit can impede access for people who use wheelchairs.
- Suggest that all public and staff areas, including break rooms, remain uncluttered and accessible.
- Work with the library staff 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. There is a tendency for snowplows to push snow toward the edges of parking lots leading to sidewalks, creating obstacles for those people using canes, walkers, or wheelchairs.
- Check to be sure that your library provides a well-lit area for library users to read and study in quiet. This will enable patrons with low vision to see text with greater ease. Additionally, minimizing visual distractions aids persons with attention deficit disorders.

- Encourage the library to provide tables and computer workstations that can be accessed by people using wheelchairs. Emphasize the library's obligation to the community and to the law.
- Ensure that the library has a discretionary budget for the purchase of special equipment that a particular patron might need, such as magnifying glasses or flashlights if the lighting in the stacks is insufficient. Other inexpensive items might include a bookstand, 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 ensure 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 ensure that staff is adhering to the policies.
- Review the library's policies for needed flexibility. Staff should be empowered, for example, to extend loan periods for patrons with disabilities if needed or allow patrons who need to have a small snack or sip a beverage because of a medical need to do so while in the library.
- Promote library services by working with library staff to provide outreach to local groups supporting disabled persons.
- Ensure that library programs are accessible and that this accessibility is 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.
- If appropriate, confer with the collection development staff to ensure that collections and electronic resources are accessible for all patrons. The library's collection should include titles in multiple formats.
- Recommend that the library have a Section 504/508 coordinator invested with the authority to ensure compliance when purchasing or maintaining electronic resources (such as the library website).
- Form an advisory group of patrons with disabilities to meet with trustees and library staff to provide input regarding service enhancements.
- Require that board members and employees with disabilities be offered the opportunity to voice their accommodation needs without retribution or adverse reactions to the request.

## Resources

- [Americans with Disabilities Act Home Page](#) supported by the Department of Justice, visitors can locate general information about the Americans with Disabilities Act as it relates to the physical library and virtual library, technology and job accommodation needs.
- [Disability Law Center has created an "ADA Checklist" for libraries](#) which is easy to understand and use. Most libraries will find this checklist appropriate and useful.
- [U.S. Department of Labor Office of Disability Employment Policy](#) website provides resources about legislation and statistics concerning persons with disabilities. Also offers access to database for employers seeking to recruit persons with disabilities.