

Access

What is accessibility?

What are the five areas of accessibility?

How can I measure my current environment and progress toward accessibility?

What resources are available to assist me in evaluating my level of accessibility?

Section VI: Access

Key Words and Terms

Access

Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG)

Accommodations

Alternate Formats

Architectural Access

Augmentative Communication Devices

Barrier-Free Design

Communication Access

Disability Business and Technical Assistance Centers (DBTACs)

Inaccessible

Job Accommodation Network (JAN)

Program Access

Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act

Temporary Barriers

What is accessibility?

When most people hear the word “accessibility” they think of ramps, automatic doors, and elevators. While these provide some access, accessibility refers to **all** the features that make an environment accessible. Moreover, in most cases, accessible design is good design. Not only are accessibility standards designed to assist and benefit persons with a wide range of disabilities, including hearing loss, cognition, and visual impairments, but accessible design benefits everyone. Ramps make it easier for senior citizens, persons with children, and delivery persons to enter buildings. Wider doors and levered handles make it easier for everyone to negotiate doorways. Signage requirements make it easier for everyone to see and understand signs.

What are the five areas of accessibility?

The term “access” or “accessibility” encompasses five different areas: architectural, programmatic, technology, communication, and alternate formats. All five areas are discussed in this section. Accessibility in all

five areas is critical to achieving inclusion.

While it may not always be possible to achieve complete accessibility, a truly inclusive environment continuously strives to increase its level of accessibility.

Architectural Access

Architectural accessibility refers to the “built” environment and the means of getting to and from that built environment, whether it is from a parking lot, a bus stop, or the street. The lack of architectural access affects many people with different kinds of disabilities. We can easily imagine how a flight of steps would impact someone with a mobility impairment, but a truly architecturally accessible building considers the needs of persons with a range of disabilities, including visual, mobility, hearing, and cognitive impairments. Sometimes, an architecturally accessible environment is referred to as “barrier-free.”

Over the past 30 years, the level of architectural access in many communities has increased tremendously; virtually all new buildings are required to be accessible to individuals with a range of disabilities. In many cases renovation or alteration of buildings triggers accessibility requirements. In general, the Americans with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG) are the most appropriate standard to use to achieve architectural accessibility. Additional information on the ADAAG and other architectural standards can be found in Appendix D of this Handbook.

Barrier removal need not be expensive, and there are often many ways to remove barriers or increase accessibility creatively and inexpensively. There are, however, times when buildings are old, and retrofitting to remove barriers is an undue financial burden for your organization; in

TIP
Be watchful of naturally occurring barriers. For example, low, overhanging tree limbs can grow across sidewalks, and sidewalks can “buckle,” creating hazards and barriers.

Example:
Access and accommodation
“Access” and “accommodation” are sometimes used interchangeably. Access means that conditions exist so that a wide range of persons with disabilities can access a building, a program, or an activity. Accommodations are a part of access. They are the specific services, equipment, or changes in policy, procedures, or the built environment that allow an individual with a disability to participate in activities.

Example:
Accessible routes are to be stable, firm, slip-resistant, 36-inches wide, with no objects protruding that someone cannot detect with a cane.

Example:
Door handles — outside, indoor, restroom stalls — should be fully operable with a closed fist. The same is true for water faucets.

these cases retrofitting is not required. (See the Legal Requirements (Section XII) of this Handbook for more discussion of this subject.)

An inclusive service program will still provide as meaningful an equivalent access as possible. In many cases, this means changing an activity so that all persons can participate. Service projects are a great way to increase accessibility and to heighten awareness about disability. The resources listed at the end of this chapter can also provide assistance to you in discovering inexpensive ways to remove barriers and increase program access.

Programmatic Access

Separate and apart from architectural access issues, your program's eligibility requirements, policies, or operating procedures may be causing additional programmatic barriers to full and meaningful access.

For example, do you require your participants to have a driver's license so they can drive from school to school because the service position requires tutoring students in different locations? Is driving the essential function or is it the ability to get from location to location? Do you require your participants who do computerized research as an essential function to serve from 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM? This requirement could be a barrier to a person whose medication makes it difficult to get up in the morning or to someone whose accessible transportation is unpredictable or only available at specific hours.

Flexibility, wherever possible, is the key. Think creatively.

Travel and Participants with Disabilities

Travel for people with disabilities can sometimes be challenging for both you and the individual with a disability. Careful planning and good questions will contribute to a successful experience. Be certain that airlines are notified in advance about special needs, and that hotel

Resource:

The most up-to-date version of ADAAG can be found at www.access-board.gov

Example:

Be watchful of creating transient or temporary barriers. These are barriers you create with furniture, boxes, or plants placed in the path of travel and preventing access.

Example:

Programmatic Access
George, an applicant who uses a wheelchair, cannot get into the Foster Grandparents' office because it is in an older building that has three steps at the entrance. The program manager relocates the interview to a meeting room at a local school site that is accessible and ensures George's subsequent service site is fully accessible to him.

and meeting spaces are accessible. Also, know that some participants with disabilities are not experienced travelers and may not be aware of barriers that they may encounter while traveling. Advise participants to call a DBTAC or Independent Living Center for suggestions for a good travel experience.

Technology Access

Technology has become an extremely valuable way to increase inclusion for people with a range of disabilities. In some cases technology is specifically designed for use by people with disabilities.

Augmentative communication devices, wheelchairs, and screen readers which “speak” what is on the computer screen are all examples of personal technology used by individuals with disabilities to increase accessibility and inclusion. Remember that technology access is not always complex electronic devices, it can be as simple as a rubber pen grip.

In other cases, accessibility is built into the technology that everyone uses. Computers, websites, telephone systems, and televisions all are increasingly accessible to and useable by people with a range of disabilities, including visual, hearing, mobility, and cognitive disabilities. Such technology is often referred to as “universal design” because it can be used by everyone regardless of their ability or disability. Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act is a recently strengthened federal requirement to ensure technology access in federal agencies. For more information on Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act go to www.section508.gov.

Examples of Universal Technology Access

- Adjustable Work Stations
- Hearing Aid Compatible Telephones
- Caller ID
- Captioned Videos, Television Shows, and Televised Public Service Announcements
- Capacity to Use Larger Fonts
- Tape Recorder

Example:
Programmatic Access
 A weekly meeting for a Learn and Serve program is held in a classroom next to a gym. When volleyball season starts, it is very noisy. The program relocates the meeting so that Marcia, a participant with a hearing loss, can fully take part.

Website Accessibility

It is important to consider accessibility in your website. Remember, any audio information should also be written. "Alt tabs" which describe graphics make websites accessible to persons using screen readers. Good information on how to incorporate accessibility features on your website can be found at www.cast.org.

Communication Access

For persons with hearing, speech, cognitive, or learning disabilities, you may also have to provide communication access. Communication access means providing the technology or services necessary to facilitate equivalent communication. In these cases, the focus is on providing an equivalent experience and on ensuring that information is provided effectively. This sometimes requires some thought and discussion about the situation.

Examples of Communication Access

- Writing Notes
- Assistive Listening Devices
- Interpreters
- Real-time Captioning
- Taped Information

Alternate Formats

For people with visual impairments, written material needs to be provided in alternate formats. There is a wide range of alternate formats, including Braille, text file, large print, and audiotape. You should provide the format requested in a timely manner. An inclusive program will provide information in alternate formats at the same time that it provides any written information.

Don't assume that everyone with hearing loss uses American Sign Language (ASL).

For persons who do use sign language, you may need to provide interpreter services.

TIP

For persons with cognitive or learning disabilities, you may need to provide information in a different form, or to provide assistance in understanding that material.

TIP

When preparing video materials, captioning provides access to persons with hearing loss. In the same way, using voice-overs when there are images or music allows persons who are visually impaired to experience the video.

Examples of Alternate Formats

- To make large print documents, ask what point font is preferred and reprint using larger font.
- To make a document accessible to a computer screen reader, save it as a text file, then attach as e-mail or copy to a disk.

How can I measure my current environment and progress toward accessibility?

It is important for programs to continually evaluate the level of accessibility in their program offices, sites, and activities. There are several good checklists that can help you determine your current level of accessibility in all five areas and will provide you guidance in planning strategies to increase your level of accessibility.

What resources are available to assist me in evaluating my level of accessibility?

There are several resources that you can tap to help you evaluate the level of accessibility in your program, as well as to provide communication access and alternate formats. All programs can use the Disability Business and Technical Assistance Centers (DBTACs). Many independent living centers can help you do an evaluation of your sites and the level of accessibility. The Job Accommodation Network (JAN) can help you determine sources for accommodations. An example of a short self-evaluation checklist is available in Appendix B of this Handbook. This abbreviated checklist is intended as a method to evaluate some of the most basic elements of accessibility without actually measuring distances, slopes, or forces.

All programs that receive federal financial assistance are held to the standards found in Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. When you call for technical assistance, be sure to let the provider know that you are a "504 entity." Please see the Legal Requirements section (Section XII) of this Handbook for more information.

TIP

Be sure not to put heavy boxes on top of Brailled documents. The raised dots will be crushed and rendered unusable.

TIP

Your Disability and Business Technical Assistance Center (DBTAC) or Independent Living Center can refer you to a local supplier of Brailled documents (see Appendix D of this Handbook for contact information).

TIP

Many independent living centers can conduct an accessibility evaluation for you. Make sure they know you are a "504 entity."

Contact information for all of these resources can be found in Appendix D of this Handbook.