Disability Awareness

Working with people with disabilities requires the same manners and courtesies extended to any potential or current national service participant. However, without personal experience working alongside people with disabilities, some people can be unsure of what to say or do in order to create an environment where people with disabilities feel welcome. There are also issues of access, such as maintaining an accessible web site or connecting with people who don't use standard voice telephones. The information in this chapter will help educate you and your service providers on disability-related issues and assist with making your program and activities more accessible.

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The Definition of Disability

Deborah Kaplan

The questions of the definition of "person with a disability" and how persons with disabilities perceive themselves are knotty and complex. It is no accident that these questions are emerging at the same time that the status of persons with disabilities in society is changing dramatically. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is the cause of some of these changes, as well as the result of the corresponding shift in public policy. Questions of status and identity are at the heart of disability policy. One of the central goals of the disability rights movement, which can claim primary political responsibility for the ADA, is to move American society to a new and more positive understanding of what it means to have a disability

** Deborah Kaplan is Director of the World Institute on Disability. The complete article: The Definition of Disability by Deborah Kaplan can be found at the following link: http://www.accessiblesociety.org/topics/demographics-identity/dkaplanpaper.htm*

General Considerations for Interacting with People with Disabilities

The biggest barriers that people with disabilities face, and the hardest barriers to remove, are other people's negative attitudes and erroneous images of them. **Some common pitfall reactions to people with disabilities are:**

- **All that matters is your label.** Individuals adopt a label, usually based upon a person's disability. There is little regard for the individuality of the person, i.e., the blind have all the same needs; all quadriplegics have the same interests and abilities; or people with any kind of physical impairment are "the handicapped," "the crippled" and all become "cases."
- **I feel sorry for you.** In this syndrome of pity, focus is inordinately on the negative aspects of the person's life: a life filled with pain, suffering, difficulty, frustration, fear, and rejection. Although you may be aware of these negative feelings and try not to show them, they often emerge through the tone of voice or the expression on your face.
- **Don't worry, I'll save you.** Characteristics of this pitfall are expressions such as the following: "I'll do it for you," "Give the person a break," Don't worry about it, I'll take care of it," and "It's too difficult for you."
- **I know what's best for you.** This syndrome is characterized by such expressions as: "You shouldn't…" "You'll never…" or "You can't…."
- **Who's more anxious, you or me?** Characteristic comments about the person are typically communicated to colleagues, family members, and friends. These include "Makes me feel uncomfortable," It's so frustrating," or I can't deal with…."

People with disabilities are just people who may happen to have more difficulty than others walking, moving, talking, learning, breathing, seeing, hearing, etc. They are remarkably like everybody else. They pass, they fail, they succeed, they go bankrupt, they take trips, they stay at home, they are bright people, they are good people, they are pains in the neck, they

are trying to get by. To free yourself from the limitations of the reactions above, keep in mind these general suggestions:

Be generous with yourself. Admit that the uneasiness you feel is your problem, not the person's, and realize that it will pass with time and exposure.

Do not be afraid of saying or doing the wrong thing. By avoiding communication or contact with a person with a disability, fears and misconceptions cannot be curbed. Discomfort can and will be eased if people with disabilities and people without disabilities see and interact with each other more often at work and social settings.

Talk directly to the person with a disability. Comments such as "does he want to…" to an attendant or friend accompanying a person with a disability should be avoided. When a person who is deaf is using a sign language interpreter, look at them and direct all questions and comments to them, not to the interpreter.

Do not apply blanket accommodations. Needs vary among individuals, even those with the same type of disability. Therefore, all accommodations are not automatically applicable to all persons with a particular disability. A disability can vary in terms of the degree of limitation, the length of time the person has been disabled (adjustment to the disability), and the stability of the condition.

Do not discuss a person's disability or related needs with anyone who does not have a legitimate need to know. A person's disability and any functional limitations caused by that disability should be held in the strictest confidence.

Do not feel that people with disabilities are getting unfair advantages. Accommodations help to "even the field" so that a person may be effective in their work. People with disabilities do not get by with less work.

Pretending to understand someone's speech when you do not will hinder communication. Some people with disabilities may have difficulty in expressing ideas orally. Wait for the person to finish their thought rather than interrupting or finishing it for them. If you do not understand what is being said, repeat back what you do not understand and the other person will fill in or correct your understanding where needed. It is appropriate to ask the person if it may be easier for them to write down the information, however, you must be prepared to accept the answer "no."

Recognize that a person with a disability may afford you a unique opportunity. What is not always readily appreciated is the unique input of a person whose life experience may be different from our own. If we view this situation as a learning experience rather than a problem we can all be enriched by it.

**This material was adapted from: Succeeding Together: People With Disabilities in the Workplace: A Curriculum for Interaction, By Terri Goldstein, M.S., CRC, Michael Winkler, M.S., and Margaret Chun, M.S.*

People-First Language

People with disabilities are just that – people. Everyone has multiple facets to their personalities and different aspects to their lives. Using language that puts the person first is not a matter of political correctness; it acknowledges that people with disabilities are people and should not be defined or limited by others' perceptions of their bodies and minds.

Instead of…	Say…
The disabled, the handicapped	People with disabilities
Special-needs population	The disability community
Disabled or handicapped child	Child with a disability
Is afflicted with…, suffers from…, is a victim of…	Has…
Palsied or spastic	Person with cerebral palsy
Mute or dumb	Without speech, nonverbal
Is slow	Has a developmental delay
Is crazy, nuts, insane, postal	Has emotional disorder or mental illness
Deaf and dumb	Can't hear and has no speech
Is confined to a wheelchair; is wheelchair-bound	Uses a wheelchair
Retarded	Person with mental retardation
Epileptic	Person with epilepsy
Mongoloid	Person with Down Syndrome
Is learning disabled	Has a learning disability
Normal, healthy, able-bodied	Not disabled
Is crippled, lame	Has a physical disability or mobility impairment
Birth defect	Congenital disability
Is sickly	Has a chronic illness
Is quadriplegic	Has quadriplegia (paralysis of both arms and legs)
Is paraplegic	Has paraplegia (loss of function in lower body only)

Myths, Misconceptions, & Realities of Disability

1. Wheelchair users are paralyzed and, therefore, are confined to their chairs.

False: Some people can walk, but their strength may be limited so they use a wheelchair to enable them to travel longer distances. Also, some people who use wheelchairs prefer to transfer to more comfortable chairs such as at their desk or in a restaurant.

2. Deaf people cannot speak.

False: Deafness does not affect the vocal cords, although it can affect a person's ability to hear and monitor the sounds they make. Some people who are deaf make a conscious choice not to use their voice while others choose to speak. The type and degree of hearing loss as well as the age of the person when they became deaf (i.e., before or after learning to speak English) also influences their speech.

3. People with disabilities live very different lives than people without disabilities.

False: Overall, people with disabilities live the same as individuals without disabilities. Although some ways of doing things may be a little bit different depending on the type and severity of the disability. For example, someone with limited use of their arms and legs can drive, but their car will be fitted with hand controls for gas and brakes, and possibly a special handle to grip on the steering wheel.

4. Employees with disabilities have a higher absentee rate than employees without disabilities.

False: Studies by firms such as DuPont show that employees with disabilities are not absent any more than employees without disabilities. In fact, these studies show that, on average, people with disabilities have better attendance rates than their non-disabled counterparts.

5. It is important to place persons with disabilities in jobs where they will not fail.

False: Everyone has the right to fail, as well as to succeed. Be careful not to hold someone back from a position or a promotion because you think there is a possibility that he/she might fail in the position. If this person is the best-qualified candidate, give him/her the same opportunity to try that you would anyone else.

6. People with disabilities are less likely to have accidents than other employees.

True: Two studies, one conducted by the Bureau of Labor Statistics during the 1940's and a current study recently complete by the DuPont Company, support the findings that workers with disabilities performed significantly higher than their counterparts without disabilities in the area of safety. These studies included people in professional, technical, managerial, operational, labor, clerical, and service areas. It evaluated individuals with orthopedic, vision, heart, health, and hearing disabilities. Conclusion: Workers with disabilities are often more aware, not less, of safety issues in the workplace.

7. Persons who are deaf make ideal employees for noisy work environments.

False: Loud noises of a certain vibratory nature can cause further harm to the auditory system. Persons who are deaf should be hired for all jobs they have the skills and talents to perform. No person with a disability should be prejudged regarding employment opportunities.

8. Considerable expense is necessary to accommodate workers with disabilities.

False: Most workers with disabilities require no special accommodations, and the cost for those who do is minimal or much lower than many employers believe. Studies by the President's Committee's Job Accommodation Network have shown that 15% of accommodations cost nothing, 51% cost between $1 and $500, 12% cost between $501 and $1,000, and 22% cost more than $1,000.

9. People with disabilities need special legal procedures.

False: While there are laws in place, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act, that serve to protect the rights of individuals with disabilities by providing equal access in the areas of employment, transportation, public accommodations, public services, and telecommunications, there are no special legal procedures for people with disabilities.

10. Deaf persons do not appreciate music, theater, movies, etc. because they cannot hear.

False: Today many movies and television shows are captioned (conversations appear as words on the screen). If a program is open captioned, no special decoder is needed. If a show is closed captioned, a TV with a decoder is needed. The Americans with Disabilities Act mandates that all new televisions 13 inches and larger MUST include a built-in caption decoder.

Many theaters offer special performances that are interpreted into sign language. Again, the type and degree of hearing loss, as well as the age of the person when they became deaf, also influences their appreciation of music.

11. Certain jobs are more suited to persons with disabilities.

False: As with all people, certain jobs may be better suited to some than to others. While there are obvious bad job matches, such as someone who is blind and wants to be a bus driver or someone who is quadriplegic and wants to be a loader for a shipping company, be careful not to pigeon hole people in or out of certain occupations based on their disability. Just because you can only think of one way to do something does not mean that other ways do not exist that are equally effective.

12. Most people with cerebral palsy (CP) are less intelligent than the general population.

False: CP does not itself affect a person's intelligence; however, at times a person may have CP and another disability, such as a Developmental Disability that affects intellectual functioning.

13. Blind people have exceptional hearing.

False: A person's vision, or lack of vision, does not affect their hearing. However, someone who is blind may depend more on their hearing and be more attuned to sounds than a sighted counterpart.

14. An employer's worker's compensation rates rise when they hire workers with disabilities.

False: Insurance rates are based solely on the relative hazards of the operation and the organization's accident experience, not on whether workers have disabilities. A study conducted by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the National Association of Manufacturers showed that 90% of the 279 companies surveyed reported no effect on insurance costs as a result of hiring workers with disabilities.

15. Persons with disabilities are unable to meet performance standards, thus making them a bad employment risk.

False: In 1990, DuPont conducted a survey of 811 employees with disabilities and found 90% rated average or better in job performance compared to 95% for employees without disabilities.

A similar 1981 DuPont study which involved 2,745 employees with disabilities found that 92% of employees with disabilities rated average or better in job performance compared to 90% of employees without disabilities. The 1981 study results were comparable to DuPont's 1973 job performance study.

16. People with learning disabilities who can't use proper grammar are not very bright.

False: The nature of a learning disability is such that the person performs at an average to above average level in all levels of functioning except for one or two specific areas. Therefore, a person's ability to write a grammatically correct sentence is independent of their ability to create and organize thoughts.

17. People who use wheelchairs cannot work in a fast-paced, high-pressure job.

False: Ability to use a wheelchair is separate from ability to work quickly and to work under stress. Give the person ample room to maneuver their chair and let them go!

18. If a person is having an epileptic seizure, you should NOT place something in their mouth to prevent them from "swallowing their tongue."

True: It is physically impossible to "swallow" one's tongue and placing something in the mouth of a person who is having a seizure can cause choking. Don't try to restrain the person; this might cause injury. Instead, move anything hard or sharp out of the way and place something soft and flat under the person's head.

19. Persons with disabilities have problems with transportation.

False: Persons with disabilities are capable of arranging their own transportation: walking, biking, driving, taking public transportation, hiring a driver, or taking a cab. Just because a person has a disability doesn't mean they can't get around. People who are deaf drive and bike, some people who use wheelchairs drive, blind individuals can use public transportation, etc.

20. Hearing aids correct hearing impairments.

False: Only certain types of hearing losses, those due to lack of amplification, can be effectively aided. If a person's hearing loss is due to nerve damage, a hearing aid will only serve to amplify noise. In this case, a hearing aid may only help someone to hear environmental sounds such as sirens or alarms.

21. Employees with disabilities tend to do work of a higher quality than employees without disabilities.

True: In several studies, including those previously mentioned, it was found that 91% of the workers with disabilities scored average or better when compared with the general workforce. Their attendance is also better.

22. All hearing impaired people can read lips.

False: Only about 15–25% of what we say is actually visible on the lips. Therefore, someone with a hearing impairment relies on other cues such as facial expressions, body language, and residual hearing (usable hearing), in addition to reading someone's lips – all of these cues combined are more accurately known as "speech-reading." Amount of usable hearing and knowledge of the English language are important variables in the process. Ability to speech-read is a skill not everyone can master and is not related to a person's intelligence.

23. Workers with a disability are a good influence on other workers.

True: More often than not, the worker with a disability brings additional diversity into the workplace. For example, someone who uses a wheelchair may point out ways to make physical access better for all by not cluttering walkways and offices. Someone who has a learning disability may develop a filing system based on colors in addition to words that increases efficiency and ease of use.

Disability Etiquette:
General Rules for Communicating with Persons with Disabilities

1. When talking with a person with a disability, speak directly to that person rather than through a companion or sign language interpreter.
2. When introduced to a person with a disability, it is appropriate to offer to shake hands. People with limited hand-use or who wear an artificial limb can usually shake hands (shaking hands with the left hand is an acceptable greeting).
3. When meeting a person with a visual impairment, always identify yourself and others who may be with you. When conversing in a group, remember to identify the person to whom you are speaking.
4. If you offer assistance, wait until the offer is accepted. Then listen to – or ask for – instructions.
5. Treat adults as adults. Address them by their first names only when extending the same familiarity to all others. Never patronize people who use wheelchairs by patting them on the head or shoulder.
6. Leaning or hanging on a person's wheelchair is similar to leaning or hanging on a person, and is generally considered annoying. The chair is part of the personal body space of the person who uses it.
7. Listen attentively when you're talking with a person who has difficulty speaking. Be patient and wait for the person to finish rather than correcting or speaking for the person. If necessary, ask short questions that require short answers, a nod, or a shake of the head. Never pretend to understand if you are having difficulty doing so. Instead, repeat what you have understood and allow the person to respond.
8. When speaking with a person in a wheelchair, place yourself at eye level by pulling up a chair or kneeling down to facilitate the conversation.
9. To get the attention of a person who is hearing impaired, tap the person on the shoulder or wave your hand. Look directly at the person and speak clearly, slowly, and expressively to determine if the person can read your lips. Not all people with a hearing impairment can lip read. For those who do not read lips, be sensitive to their needs by placing yourself so that you face the light source and keep hands, cigarettes, and food away from your mouth when speaking.
10. Relax. Don't be embarrassed if you happen to use accepted, common expressions such as "See you later," or "Did you hear about this?" that seem to relate to a person's disability.

Disability Etiquette: Questions and Answers

1. You're being introduced to a person with an artificial limb. Should you reach out to shake his hand?

Many people with artificial limbs or motor-skills disabilities of the shoulder, arm, or hand prefer to offer a greeting other than a handshake. Let him set the agenda. If he does extend his hand, shake it! Never pat a person with a disability on the shoulder, face or head, which is a gesture more appropriate to greeting a child.

2. You just said, "See you later!" to a girl with a visual impairment. Should you apologize?

"I've got to be running along…" "I'll be seeing you…" "You won't believe what I just heard…" – these are all natural figures of speech. Listen closely and you'll often hear people with disabilities relying on them too. Use them without embarrassment.

3. What do you do if you're especially curious about a disability assistance device like a power wheelchair? Do you ask?

Some disability assistance devices like modern electronically controlled power wheelchairs are intriguingly sophisticated, but you should remember most people who use such devices consider them no more unique than a pair of prescription sunglasses. If you feel you must ask – if you have a valid reason for asking – you should be direct, but casual and prepared for the fact you may be crossing the boundaries of good manners.

4. A person with Down Syndrome asks you about your program. What should you do?

Respond to questions asked by a person with a disability with the same information you'd provide a person without a disability. Avoid making assumptions about what a person needs to know based on what you think they might or might not be able to do. When speaking with someone with a developmental disability, use simple but not childish language.

5. A woman who is deaf comes into your office with a sign language interpreter. Who should you look at when you're talking?

When talking with a person who has a disability, speak directly to that person rather than a companion or interpreter.

6. You see a man with no obvious disability using a handicap parking space. Should you leave a note on his car?

Handicap parking spaces are reasonable accommodations for people with disabilities, but not all disabilities are visible. Consider severe heart or lung function problems as an example. Both limit a person's mobility. Assume anyone driving a properly tagged car has the right to use an accessible parking space.

7. You meet someone with an obvious disability who is a person of some accomplishment. How do you express your admiration?

Many people with disabilities cringe at the words "overcome" and "hero." To credit accomplishment to those values in some measure denigrates the hard work and talent that made possible the achievement. Ignore the disability—praise the accomplishment.

8. A man comes into the office with a dog wearing a service animal tag but the man does not appear to have a sight impairment. Should you tell him pets aren't allowed in the building?

While guide dogs are the traditional service animal, you may meet someone being assisted by a dog – or another animal – for other reasons. If the animal is wearing a service animal tag, you should assume it has the right to proceed unhindered in any social or professional setting. Remember the animal is not a pet. Allow it to do its work.

9. You observe a man using a wheelchair at the curb, in obvious need of assistance. How do you help?

Ask politely before doing anything to help anyone. If you offer to help, wait until the offer is accepted, then listen or ask for instructions. Never grab hold of a wheelchair without permission. While wheelchairs are generally sturdy, many need to be handled in a specific fashion to avoid damage.

10. You offer to help a woman with a disability and she responds by yelling a rude remark at you. What do you do?

Disability does not confer sainthood. People with disabilities are people, subject to all the human idiosyncrasies and faux pas you see around you every day. If you're met with rudeness, blame it on the person rather than the disability.

**Specific material for this chapter was adapted from the Participants Manual, Module I: Learning about Disabilities from* Succeeding Together: People with Disabilities in the Workplace – A Curriculum for Interaction*. The entire handbook can be found online at:*
www.csun.edu/~sp20558/dis/emcur.html
Click on the image of the cover to continue onto the Table of Contents.

Etiquette for Specific Disabilities

Hearing Impairments:

- Face the person when you are speaking.
- Don't chew gum, smoke, bite a pencil, or cover your mouth while talking – it makes speech difficult to understand!
- Rephrase sentences or substitute words rather than repeat yourself again and again.
- Speak clearly and at a normal voice level. Communicate in writing, if necessary.
- Move away from noisy areas or the source of noise – loud air conditioning, loud music, TV, and radio.
- Don't stand with bright light (window, sun) behind you – glare makes it difficult to see your face.
- Get the hearing-impaired person's attention and face in full view *before* talking.

Visual Impairments:

- Be descriptive. You may have to help orient people with visual impairments and let them know what's coming up. If they are walking, tell them if they have to step up or step down, let them know if the door is to their right or left, and warn them of possible hazards.
- You don't have to speak loudly to people with visual impairments; most of them can hear just fine.
- Offer to read written information for a person with a visual impairment, when appropriate.
- If you are asked to guide a person with a visual impairment, offer your arm instead of grabbing theirs.

Speech Impairments:

- Listen patiently. Don't complete sentences for the person unless he/she looks to you for help.
- Don't pretend you understand what a person with a speech disability says just to be polite.
- Ask the person to write down a word if you're not sure what he/she is saying.

Mobility Impairments:

- Try sitting or crouching down to the approximate height of people in wheelchairs or scooters when you talk to them.
- Don't lean on a person's wheelchair—it's their personal space.
- Be aware of what is accessible and not accessible to people in wheelchairs.
- Give a push only when asked.

Learning Disabilities:

- Don't assume the person is not listening just because you are getting no verbal or visual feedback. Ask the person if they understand or agree.
- Don't assume you have to explain everything to people with learning disabilities. They do not necessarily have a problem with general comprehension.
- Offer to read written material aloud or have it recorded, when necessary.

Planning Accessible Conferences and Meetings

Accessible conferences and meetings allow people with disabilities to move about the site freely and independently and participate in and benefit from the program.

Choosing an Accessible Site

A site visit to the hotel or conference center should be conducted to determine whether barriers to accessibility exist. The site visit should include checking:

- Entrance and interior doorways
- Parking lots
- Corridors and aisles
- Stairways
- Elevators
- Sleeping rooms (if needed)
- Meeting rooms
- Restrooms
- Dining facilities
- Telephones
- Water fountains
- Temperature controls
- Light and emergency controls
- Fitness center or health club

Site Accessibility Considerations for Individuals with Mobility Impairments

The following accommodations should be provided for individuals with mobility impairments, including those using wheelchairs, crutches, canes, or walkers:

- Accessibility of main entrances to the site.
- Doorways wide enough to accommodate wheelchairs and scooters of varying sizes.
- Capability of the site to provide appropriately graded ramping in inaccessible areas (including meeting rooms, dining, and lounge areas).
- Wide spaces, corridors, and aisles.
- Accessible restrooms.
- Public telephones at accessible height.
- Adequate space for wheelchairs in meeting rooms, at conference/meeting and banquet tables with all the participants, not on the outskirts.
- Wheelchair-accessible registration table.
- Allow for the time necessary to move from one session to another in the agenda.
- Accessible electrical outlets and closet rods of appropriate height in guest rooms.

Site Accessibility Considerations for Individuals with Visual Impairments

The following accommodations should be provided for individuals who are partially sighted or blind:

- Well-lit areas, adjustable lighting.
- Obstacle-free environment (i.e., free of protruding objects that cannot be detected easily).
- Large, tactile directions for equipment, elevators, and restrooms; elevator numbers written in Braille or raised print.
- Dog runs in the hotel or convention center (or an area near the outside entrance) for guide dogs.
- Appropriate accommodations in guest rooms.

Site Accessibility Considerations for Individuals with Hearing Impairments
The following accommodations should be provided for individuals who are hard of hearing or who are deaf:

- Guest rooms equipped with alternative emergency devices such as visual alarms and indicators (e.g., flashing lights on doors, telephones, and fire alarms), vibrating beds, volume-controlled phone lines, and close-captioned television.
- An available TTY.
- Dog runs in the hotel or convention center (or an area near the outside entrance) for hearing-dog users.

Promotion and Registration

- Use the appropriate standardized symbols on all conference/meeting promotion, registration forms, information materials, and facility signage.

- The MCSC Equal Access/Reasonable Accommodation statement should be used on all conference/meeting materials.
- Include photographs of individuals with disabilities in promotional material; this illustrates a commitment to assuring participants an accessible conference/meeting.
- Planners should arrange for all promotional material to be available in alternative formats, such as Braille, large print, or computer disk.
- In all conference/meeting materials, make participants aware that accommodations can be made for a variety of needs. The registration form must ask whether any special assistance is needed. Examples include statements such as the following:
  1. If you have a disability and require special assistance, please inform (planner) by attaching your requirements to this form or call (planner.)
  2. If you have a disability and may require accommodation in order to fully participate in this activity, please check here. You will be contacted by someone from our staff to discuss your specific needs.

A more detailed registration form requesting information on specific disabilities and needs can also be used. If a more general statement such as the one above is included, staff responding to special assistance requests should be prepared to ask detailed questions regarding necessary accommodations.

Sample Registration Questions
I will need the following accommodations in order to participate:

- Interpreter
- Note taker
- Assistive listening device
- Open captioning
- Large print
- Braille
- Audio cassette
- Disk (List format: _____)
- Wheelchair access
- Orientation to facility
- Special diet (List:_____)
- An assistant will be accompanying me ☐ Yes ☐ No

Social Functions and Meals:
When planning social functions and meals, planners should:

- Include personal assistants/interpreters in the estimated number of participants.
- Make adequate provisions for seating, allowing all participants to sit in the same area. Do not place persons in wheelchairs or those who use walkers or dog guides on the fringes of the dining area.
- Avoid buffet lines; they can be particularly difficult for persons with mobility or visual impairments.
- Determine the accessibility of any outside entertainment and transportation services offered to participants.

Presentations:
The conference/meeting planner should work with invited speakers and presenters to ensure presentations are accessible to persons with disabilities.

Accessible Presentations for all Participants with Disabilities

- Choose well-lit and easily accessible meeting rooms.
- Control background noise to the greatest extent possible.
- Choose a meeting room with good acoustics and an auxiliary sound system, if possible.
- Provide written materials (handouts, slides, etc.) disseminated at the meeting in a variety of formats, such as raised print, large print, Braille, CD, or flash drive.
- Discuss with each presenter, prior to the meeting, the importance of developing a presentation that will be accessible to all participants.
- Instruct the presenter(s) to include the key points of the presentation on overheads or slides. Be sure they are completely legible, with large print and sharp, contrasting colors. In addition, ask the presenter(s) to limit the number of overheads or other visual aids used in the presentation and to allow adequate time for the audience to read the visual aids.
- Ask the speaker(s) to accompany materials, including presentations and handouts, with a complete verbal description. If slides, videos, or other visual aids are used, the speaker must describe them orally. Ask presenter(s) to provide a copy of presentation materials well in advance to allow for large print or Braille transcription.
- Instruct the presenter(s) to speak in well-paced and well-modulated tones. It is particularly important for presenters to monitor their rate of speech and not speak too rapidly.
- Check for the special needs of presenters with disabilities. Special needs may include ramping or podium requests, a reverse interpreter, an orientation and mobility specialist, or guide for a person with limited vision.

Accessible Presentations for Individuals with Visual Impairments and Reading/ Learning Disabilities

- Meet with participants who have visual impairments and show them the site by explaining the layout, identifying the location of amenities and exits, and walking through the meeting area with them. Help them to find seating in the meeting room.

- Provide oral descriptions of meeting room layouts, emergency exit locations, and amenities prior to the beginning of the presentation.
- Allow access to front row seats during meeting sessions.
- Offer papers, agendas, or other materials in alternative formats. Options include large print, Braille, tape recordings, and computer disks in ASCII format. Print materials can be transcribed in Braille through contracting with outside agencies or by purchasing the necessary computer hardware and software programs. If the session is to be recorded, the master recording must be good quality. A verbal listing of contents should be included at the front of each recording. One other option is to have reader(s) available for participant(s) with visual disabilities.
- Have photocopies of slides available at the registration area for close examination; some audiovisual materials may not be amenable to verbal description.
- Design exhibits so they may be touched and/or heard. Always provide an alternative to solely visual exhibits.
- Check for adjustable lighting in the meeting room; this is particularly important for the individual with low vision. Lowering the ceiling lights can increase the contrast—and thus the visibility—of audiovisual materials. However, moving from a brightly lit vestibule to a darkened room can cause temporary disorientation. Ask the participant whether a sighted guide would be helpful.
- Use sharply contrasting colors and large print for materials, signs, menus, forms, and displays. All materials should be available in large or raised print or in Braille.
- Caution presenter(s) against relying solely on oral presentations and gestures to illustrate a point, or using visual points of reference (i.e., "here" or "there").

Accessible Presentations for Individuals who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

- Allow for preferred seating, usually in front of the speaker and interpreter (preferred seating should also be away from heating and air conditioning units, hallways, and other "noisy" areas).
- Keep lights bright in the area where the presenter and interpreter stand.
- Check that window coverings are adjustable to reduce or remove glare.
- Arrange seats in a circle for smaller discussion groups.
- Provide copies of material presented orally in written form or on diskette. Work with the presenter(s) prior to the meeting to allow for these accommodations.
- Have notes on the presentation available beforehand, if possible. Alternatively, have a staff member or volunteer available to take notes during the presentation, allowing the participant to focus on the speaker and interpreter.
- Arrange for qualified, professional interpreters, trained in the preferred communication style, for example, American Sign Language, Signed English, or Cued-Speech. Use a local or national agency or organization to obtain interpreters.
- Investigate the possibility of real-time captioning for large group meetings.
- Arrange for an adequate number of interpreters for meetings and events. At least two interpreters must be available for any meeting longer than two hours.

Accommodating Participants with Differing Disabilities

In the event that there are participants with both visual and hearing impairments, accommodations necessary for one person may conflict with the needs of another. For

example, presenters using overheads usually request that the lights be dimmed in the room, making it difficult for a person who is hard of hearing to see the interpreter in the dim light. However, if the lights are raised, individuals with visual impairments may have difficulty seeing the overheads because the bright lighting decreases the contrast. Therefore, it is particularly important to consult with persons with visual impairments and those who are deaf or hard of hearing before visual aids are used or the lighting level in the room is brightened or dimmed.

The meeting planner is responsible for accommodating each individual to the maximum extent possible. Jane E. Jarrow, Executive Director of the Association on Higher Education and Disability, suggests dimming the overhead lights and putting a spotlight on the interpreter, thereby maintaining enough contrast for the person with limited vision while still providing light on the interpreter. Before the meeting, the planner should confirm with the hotel that spotlights are available.

Resources:
Rehabilitation Engineering and Assistive Technology Society of North America, Technical Assistance Project, *Arranging Accessible Meetings* – also available at the following link: http://www.resna.org/tap/tapbull/tapaug.htm

Resources for Specific Conditions Associated With Disabilities

The Job Accommodation Network (JAN)
(http://askjan.org/index.html)

The Job Accommodation Network provides A to Z accommodation information, a general overview of numerous disabilities, as well as accommodation ideas and organizations you can contact for additional information.

The Job Accommodation Network (JAN) is the leading source of free, expert, and confidential guidance on workplace accommodations and disability employment issues. Working toward practical solutions that benefit both employer and employee, JAN helps people with disabilities enhance their employability, and shows employers how to capitalize on the value and talent that people with disabilities add to the workplace.

JAN's trusted consultants offer one-on-one guidance on workplace accommodations, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and related legislation, and self-employment and entrepreneurship options for people with disabilities. Assistance is available both over the phone and online. Those who can benefit from JAN's services include private employers of all sizes, government agencies, employee representatives, and service providers, as well as people with disabilities and their families.

A to Z Disability Accommodation information: http://askjan.org/links/atoz.htm

**It is important to remember that this is general information and will not apply to every person who has a particular condition. The person with the disability knows best how their situation or condition affects them.*

Services Available to Hard of Hearing Individuals

Department of Energy, Labor and Economic Growth (DELEG)
Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DODHH)

This state office concentrates on helping improve the lives of Michigan's 1 million Deaf and Hard of Hearing citizens. Their mission is to affirm the indisputable right of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Persons to secure effective communication.

Website: http://www.mi.gov/dleg/0,1607,7-154-28077_28545_28559---,00.html

E-Michigan Deaf and Hard of Hearing People

Get answers to many questions related to Deaf and Hard of Hearing issues such as; Communication Accommodations, Health Care, Education and much more.

Website: http://www.michdhh.org/

Michigan Relay Service

The Michigan Relay Center (MRC) is operated by AT&T on behalf of Michigan's Local Telephone Companies. For more information about all relay services, visit the Michigan Relay Service web site at: www.michiganrelay.com.

Additional accommodation information and ideas related to hearing loss are available through the Job Accommodation Network at: http://askjan.org/media/deaf.htm

- Accessing information from videotape, television broadcasts, or webcasts
- Communicating in groups, meetings, or training
- Communicating using a telephone
- Communicating using a TTY
- Communicating using voice mail
- Communicating using a two-way radio
- Individual communication
- Responding to emergency signals
- Responding to the presence of vehicles
- Responding to a pager
- Transcribing dictation
- Taking vital signs
- Using a telephone headset

Web Accessibility Guidelines

Provided by the Institute for Community Inclusion at UMass Boston

If you want to reach your total potential audience, your organization's website must be accessible to users with disabilities. More and more, organizations and companies recognize that good web design is accessible design. Just as curb cuts help people with strollers as well as wheelchairs, an accessible website works better for everyone. The following document offers standards to build accessibility into your websites. As these are technical instructions, managers may prefer to share and review the guidelines with their web team.

ICI Philosophy

The Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI) strives to make all of its web products accessible and usable to all people, regardless of ability or disability. The overall goal is for our web products to be accessible and usable to anyone connecting in any way. This means that they work for people using screen readers, text-only browsers, keyboards only (no mouse), wireless (phone, PDA), slow connections (dial-up), etc.

The following are the suggested guidelines to follow when building a web product. ICI web developers are available for consultation on accessibility issues:

Guidelines

- **Section 508**
  - These are the guidelines the U.S. government has created to evaluate accessibility in both real and virtual places (i.e., the internet): www.section508.gov/index.cfm?FuseAction=Content&ID=12#Web
- **Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 1.0**
  - These are the guidelines the World Wide Web Consortium has created in an effort to have standards for developers of online content.
  - Follow Level 2 at the minimum: www.w3.org/TR/WAI-WEBCONTENT

Standards

- **xHTML (high priority)**
  - All templates/modules will pass validation before content is added. Strive to make content valid, although the realities of multiple coders and old pages at times make this impossible.
  - www.w3.org/TR/xhtml11
- **CSS 2.0 (low priority)**
  - CSS strives to achieve both validation (compliant to CSS standards) and browser support, which unfortunately are two different things.
  - www.w3.org/TR/CSS21
- **Mark-Up Guidelines**
  - Use xHTML and CSS to separate content from style.
  - Use proper mark-up.
  - Organize pages in a logical manner, meaning they will read correctly, top to bottom, without CSS styling.
  - Use headings (<h1>, <h2>, etc.) to organize content.

- Use a logical tabbing order.
- Use list tags (<ul>, <ol>, <dl>) for lists and menus (note: definition lists work very well for CSS layouts).
- Do not use deprecated tags like <font>, <b>, <i>.
- Use tables only for displaying tabular data (with rare exceptions). General page layouts will be done with CSS.
- All pages will have unique and meaningful titles. Standard format is “page name [or article title], name of site.”
- Site navigation and menus come after the content on pages other than the homepage. This prevents users of assistive technologies from having to tab through menus on every new page to get to the content. Alternatively, a “skip to content” link can be used as a secondary option.
    - > Navigation and menus should be coded with xHTML markup, not rendered on the fly with a scripting language like JavaScript/ECMAscript.
- Use text in place of images when possible. No graphical menus will be used.
- Use <abbr> and <acronym> elements when appropriate. Use the title attribute to define the abbreviations and acronyms.
- Use <label> and <fieldset> elements for forms.
- Use rel attributes for <link> and <a> elements:
    - www.w3.org/TR/2002/WD-xhtml2-20020805/abstraction.html-dt_LinkTypes

CSS Guidelines

- Try to not rely on “classes”. Rather, write your stylesheet to format tags within a specified .
- Avoid using tags.
- Avoid “div soup,” which is when you overuse divs or have many nested divs.
- Name ids and classes with semantics in mind. Good: “content”, “primary-navigation”, “search-input”, “search-results”.
    - Bad: “bluelinediv” or “255pixelbox”.
- Do not rely on browser-specific hacks. A few might be necessary, such as the @import hack to prevent NS4 from using CSS, but don’t write separate styles for separate browsers.
- The majority of measurements within pages will be done with “em” or “%”. Control fonts with CSS keywords (small, xsmall, etc.). Use pixels only with images and related items.

Design Guidelines

- Design pages to use a “liquid design” technique. This means a technique that does not rely on fixed sizes. Users can resize windows, view the site on small screens, and increase or decrease fonts without breaking the design.
- A design doesn’t need to look perfect in an unsupported browser, but it does have to degrade gracefully and still look logical and usable.
- Use contrast between foreground and background colors.
- Use client-side scripting (JavaScript, ECMAscript) sparingly. No page should require client-side scripting to be usable.

Content Guidelines

- Avoid contextually meaningless link text, like “click here”, “learn more”, or “go.”
- Links should describe the destination page/resource.
- Use title attributes to provide additional contextual meaning for links.
- For the sake of screen readers, avoid combining two words into one, such as “homepage.” Use “home page” instead.

Supported Browsers

Support anything newer than Netscape 4.x and early versions of Internet Explorer. You may also wish to support Lynx.

Usability Tests

The best option is to do usability tests with a group of people who have varied disabilities. If that is not possible, make sure the site works under these conditions:

- With style sheets disabled
- With images disabled
- With javascript
- Without mouse (keyboard only)
- With text very large
- With screen size very small or very large (within reason)
- With an alternative stylesheet (high contrast, large text)
- With JAWS (demo versions are available)

*Note: ICI recommends using the Mozilla (or Firefox) browser with the Web Developer extension by Chris Pederick. Mozilla is a standards-based browser, and the Web Developer plug-in allows the designer to replicate the above conditions. The browser is available at www.mozilla.org and the Web Developer extension at: www.chrispederick.com/work/firefox/webdeveloper.

**The information above was written by Jeff Coburn, Web Specialist, ICI/UMass Boston*

For more information on accessibility consultation, contact:

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