

## INTERACTING WITH PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

1. **Ask how you can assist.** The best way to know how to interact with and accommodate individuals with disabilities is simply to ask them. For example, you could say, “What can we do to make our place more accessible for you?” or “Will you need any accommodations when you come in such as large print?” Don’t refer to accommodations, assistance or people as “special.”
2. **Always ask for permission before “helping.”**  
This is true for:
  - > Pushing a person in a wheelchair.
  - > Assisting a person who uses crutches, a walker or other devices with coats, bags or other items.
  - > Guiding a person who is blind. If he or she wants the assistance, the person may want to hold your arm and control his or her own movements.
3. **Speak directly to the individual,** not to a companion, assistant or interpreter who may be present.
4. **Don’t refer to a person’s disability unless it is relevant to the conversation.**
5. **Always use “person first” language:** “A woman who is blind,” not “a blind woman.” Avoid negative or outdated terms. For example, say, “a person who uses a wheelchair,” not “a wheelchair-bound person” or “a person confined to a wheelchair.”
6. **Let service animals do their work.** A service animal is not a pet. Never touch, pet, distract or feed a service dog without first asking the owner.
7. **When speaking with a person who uses a wheelchair,** try to be at his or her eye level by sitting or otherwise positioning yourself at the other person’s height. Never lean on an individual’s wheelchair or other device.
8. **Gain the attention of a person who is deaf or hard of hearing** before starting a conversation. For example, tap his or her shoulder. Look directly at the person, not an interpreter, and speak clearly and in a normal tone of voice.
9. **If no interpreter is present,** ask if it would be helpful to have an interpreter or to communicate in writing or with a computer. Keep in mind that written communication may not be appropriate or useful for some people and may not be effective for complex situations.
10. **Be prepared to spend a little extra time to understand what a person with a speech disability is saying.** If you don’t understand something, don’t pretend that you do, and don’t complete the person’s thoughts or sentences on your own. Written communication or using a keyboard may be helpful.



## CHOOSING AND USING INTERPRETERS

1. Different people who are deaf or hard of hearing use **different types of sign language**. Some don't use sign language at all. The most common types of sign language are American Sign Language and Signed English.

2. Individuals who use one type of sign language may not communicate effectively through an interpreter who uses another type. **Ask the person how he or she usually communicates.**

3. Some people use **oral interpreters**, who mouth a speaker's words silently to give higher visibility on the lips, and use facial expressions and gestures to enhance comprehension by a person who is deaf or hard of hearing.

4. If you need an interpreter for a visit, meeting or appointment, **seek one as soon as possible.**

Contracting for services with less than 48 hours' notice is much more expensive.

5. An interpreter needs a **break after an hour**. If a meeting or other communication will last longer than that, you will need to give the interpreter a break or have more than one interpreter.

6. An interpreter **must be qualified for a particular situation**. He or she must be able to interpret using the type of language the individual with a disability uses (see 1 and 3). The interpreter must be familiar with any specialized language such as medical or legal terms.

7. Some states like Illinois require that an interpreter be **licensed or certified** by the state.

8. The website of the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, [www.rid.org](http://www.rid.org), offers **searches for certified interpreters or referral services** by location, ZIP code or area code. You can also contact your regional ADA Center (formerly DBTAC, or Disability and Business Technical Assistance Center) at 800.949.4232 or a Center for Independent Living for suggestions. You could also ask the person who is deaf or hard of hearing for a referral. You should seek information about interpreters before you have a request for one, and keep lists of interpreters updated.

9. If a situation is time sensitive and it would be difficult to bring an interpreter to your location quickly, consider **video remote interpreting**, through which an interpreter at a remote location appears on a computer terminal screen, usually via internet. But you need the right equipment and a high-speed connection.

10. **Speak directly to a person who is deaf.** Don't refer to the person as "he" or "she" or tell the interpreter to "ask him" or "ask her" something. Don't speak so fast that the interpreter can't keep up. Avoid having more than one person speak at once.



The most common types of sign language are American Sign Language and Signed English.

11. At a meeting or interview, the interpreter will stand in a **location to be in the line of sight** of the individual who is deaf as he or she is looking at the speaker, so that the individual can see both.
12. **If you don't understand** something that is interpreted, ask. The interpreter may also seek clarification.
13. Expect that **an interpreter will interpret what may seem to be extraneous words** from others such as conversations that are within earshot, announcements, etc. — whatever a hearing person might pick up in the same circumstances.

## SERVICE ANIMALS

1. Some people with disabilities use service animals that can provide various types of assistance. Although service animals are limited to dogs, they aren't limited to guide dogs assisting people who are blind or have low vision.
2. You should allow people with their service animals to go to all areas where people are usually allowed to go.
3. Service animals are individually trained to perform tasks like these:
  - > Pulling a wheelchair.
  - > Retrieving items such as medicine or telephones.
  - > Providing physical stability or balance for people with mobility disabilities.
  - > Alerting individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing to another person's presence or sounds, or people with disorders like epilepsy to an oncoming seizure.
  - > Providing nonviolent protection or rescue work.
  - > Alerting individuals to the presence of allergens.
  - > Helping people with psychiatric or neurological disabilities by preventing or interrupting impulsive or destructive behavior.
4. Service animals do not require certification, identification cards or licenses, vests, or professional training. But they should have a harness, leash or other tether unless the nature of a person's disability prevents that.
5. You may ask if an animal is a service animal, if it is required because of a disability, and what work or tasks the animal is trained to perform. You cannot ask about the person's disability.
6. Service animals are working animals, not pets. Don't pet, feed or play with them.
7. Animals that provide emotional support or companionship are not service animals under the ADA. But other laws such as state or local laws or housing laws may require that you allow people using them to enter your building.
8. Some people use miniature horses as service animals because they live longer than dogs or as an alternative to dogs if the person has allergies to dogs or if his or her religious beliefs preclude the use of a dog. The decision whether or not to admit a miniature horse is made on a case-by-case basis, depending on factors like the horse's type, size and weight, and whether it is housebroken.
9. You may exclude a service animal if the handler is not controlling it, it is not housebroken, it poses a direct threat to health and safety that cannot be eliminated, or its presence fundamentally alters the nature of your program such as barking during a theater performance.
10. Generally you can't exclude a service animal because other people object or are afraid of the animal.



Service animals should be allowed in areas where the public is allowed to go.

## COMMUNICATING WITH TTYS AND TELECOMMUNICATION RELAY SERVICES

**TTY** stands for text telephone. It is also sometimes called a TDD. A TTY is a device that lets people who are deaf, hard of hearing or speech impaired use the telephone to communicate by allowing them to type messages back and forth to one another instead of talking and listening. A TTY is required at both ends of the conversation.

**The ADA doesn't require most nonprofits to have a TTY**, partly because every state has to have a free telecommunications relay service (TRS).<sup>1</sup> **But some people advocate for direct TTY access** when calling crisis lines relating to such matters as rape, domestic violence, child abuse and drugs where confidentiality is a concern. And if you offer telephones for people to use more than just as an incidental convenience, you need to have a TTY. For example, if you have a shelter where clients use the phone to find housing or employment or for other purposes, you need to have a TTY.



A TTY helps people who are deaf, hard of hearing or speech impaired to communicate via phone by typing messages back and forth.

**More and more people with communication disabilities are using the internet and wireless text devices** rather than TTYs as their primary means of telecommunication. But some large and small nonprofits that operate crisis lines, answer emergency incoming calls or serve a large number of people with disabilities use TTYs to receive and place calls.

**If you use a TTY**, it is important to keep it in working order, train staff to answer calls, program them with messages similar to those on voice mail systems and check the answering machines regularly.

**TTYs come with simple instructions. When communicating with a TTY**, keep in mind that:

- > Some messages received via TTY are written in nonstandard English because English is not the first language for many people who are deaf.
- > You will sometimes recognize an incoming TTY call by its beeping sounds. If you receive a silent call or hear beeping sounds, turn on your TTY, type out your greeting and type GA for "go ahead."
- > You have to take turns on a TTY call. If the other person types "GA," that means it is your turn to type a response.
- > Most people type a Q to indicate the end of a question.
- > Usually if a person makes a mistake on a TTY, he or she types XXX rather than backspacing and correcting.
- > When you think the conversation is finished, type "GA to SK," which means "go ahead or stop keying." To end the conversation, type "SKSK."

> *Continued on back page*

<sup>1</sup> The accessibility standards may require that you have a TTY, or a shelf and outlet for one, where you provide public phones. Where entry to a building requires use of a security entrance telephone, a TTY or other effective means of communication must be provided.

A **telecommunications relay service (TRS)** facilitates two-way communication between an individual who uses a TTY and one who doesn't. It is free, except for any long-distance charges that would apply, and available 24 hours a day.

**To contact a relay center, dial 711.**

**Here's how it works:** If you wish to use the phone to contact someone who uses a TTY (or another means of communication, as explained below), an operator (CA, or communications assistant) will actually place the call. The CA types what you say so that the person you are calling can read your words on his or her TTY display. He or she will type back a response, which the TRS operator will read aloud for you to hear over the phone. If you place a call by TTY, the process is reversed.

**If you receive a TRS call,** the CA will tell you that it is a TRS call.

**TRS calls do take longer** than traditional calls, so be prepared to spend the time needed.

Other types of relay services are offered:

- > **Voice Carry Over: VCO** allows a person who is hard of hearing or deaf to use his or her own voice to speak on the phone while reading on the TTY the response of the person they are calling. Many people who are hard of hearing (not deaf) or became deaf later in life prefer to speak in this way rather than typing.
- > **Hearing Carry Over:** People who have a speech disability and who are able to hear on the phone may use a TTY to speak while hearing the voice of the person they are calling.
- > **Speech to Speech: STS** is used by people who have speech disabilities but not hearing disabilities such as people who have cerebral palsy or a laryngectomy. The CA is trained to listen to the caller with a speech disability and repeat the message clearly to the other person.
- > **Spanish Relay Service:** States must provide relay services in Spanish for interstate calls. Some states offer them voluntarily for calls made within states. It is not a translation service; it provides relay services via TTY, voice carry over and hearing carry over from Spanish to Spanish.

## MAKING INFORMATION ACCESSIBLE TO PEOPLE WHO ARE BLIND OR HAVE LOW VISION

1. **There are many ways to provide alternate formats of print documents** for people who are blind or have low vision: large print, Braille, electronic format, audio tape and reading aloud.
2. **Keep on hand alternate formats of documents that people are likely to request or that you require participants or clients to read.** These could include consent forms, class registration forms, applications, shelter rules, information brochures, agendas for large meetings where people don't have to register, guidelines for volunteers, annual reports, postings on bulletin boards, and programs for plays and concerts.
3. **Make others available on request.** These could include materials for a specific class or agendas and materials for meetings that require registration. Or you could keep a Braille, electronic format and large-print version on hand for each. You can require notice for these, but make sure it is reasonable, and make every effort to have the material ready at the time it is needed such as the first day of a craft class.
4. On all materials, **state that they are available in alternate formats**, and give contact information for making requests.
5. It is **sometimes acceptable to read information aloud** to an individual. For example, if you have a coffee house, thrift shop or soup kitchen that posts a menu or prices, you could have staff or a volunteer state that information orally to an individual. A test for a class could also be read aloud in many instances. Reading can also be a stop-gap measure when necessary.
6. **Producing materials in Braille** usually requires preparation time, training and special equipment. You will probably need to have an outside source for this.
7. Look online for guidelines on **accessible electronic-format documents**. Technology is constantly evolving. With some training, you may be able to prepare these in-house.
8. A document that is in simple type **can sometimes be enlarged on a photocopier** at 130 percent. This won't work for materials such as a printed program for a performance because people who have low vision need consistent font, print size and spacing.



Nonprofits should offer their documents in alternate formats such as Braille for people who are blind or have low vision.

> *Continued on back page*

9. You should be able to **create large-print documents** by formatting in Microsoft Word.

- > Use black text on off-white, nonglossy, 8½-inch-by-11-inch paper.
- > Use Arial or another sans serif font such as Helvetica or Verdana in bold 18-point type. Set line spacing to 1½ inches.
- > Generally you should use 1-inch margins (justified to the left), replace tabs with two spaces, and remove italics and underlining.
- > Describe the graphics.
- > It is acceptable to print on both sides of the paper.

## PLANNING FOR ACCESSIBLE MEETINGS

1. **Plan ahead** to provide accessible space and effective communication.
2. **Budget time and money** for possible accessibility and communication needs: interpreters, assistive listening devices and alternate formats of print documents.
3. **Consider the type and size of the meeting, whether it requires registration or a reservation,** and other factors when mapping out your approach:
  - > If the meeting is **open to a limited group of people** such as a support group for women re-entering the workforce or a meeting of your board or an advisory group, and you know who will be there:
    - Ask each person what accommodations they will need, if you don't know already.
    - Arrange for accessible space if needed.
  - > If the meeting **requires pre-registration or a reservation:**
    - Include a place to request accommodations on the registration form. If registration is by phone, ask the same questions when someone calls to register. (See sample language in Template A.)
    - If the meeting space is accessible, say that on the form. If it is not, say that the meeting will be moved to an accessible location on request. BUT be sure you have an accessible location. This approach would work for a small recreation session, classes and other types of events, but probably not for a large group.
  - > If anyone can come to the meeting **without notice or registration:**
    - For a large meeting or event, arrange for sign language interpreters, captioning, assistive listening devices and large-print versions of any handouts.
    - Include an option for an individual to make other requests such as for Braille, readers, oral interpreters or note-takers, with a reasonable deadline stated.
    - Make sure the space is accessible.
    - State the above in all publicity.
4. Provide an **accessible means for people to respond** to invitations, register or make requests by phone, text message and e-mail.
5. When **assessing whether the space is accessible**, consider accessibility of transportation; access from transportation, parking and sidewalks to the entrance; and access to the meeting space, restrooms and drinking fountains.



When planning a meeting, make sure the space is accessible including bathrooms.

> *Continued on back page*

6. **Let presenters know what is expected** as far as accessibility of their materials.
7. Be sure to **maintain accessibility** of the space on the day of the event.
  - > Pay attention to accessible seating, the stage or dais, access through aisles, and registration and refreshment areas. Refer to Tip Sheet 7: The Day of a Meeting: Arranging Accessible Space.
  - > Ensure effective communication. See Tip Sheet 8: Conducting Meetings and Tip Sheet 5: Making Information Accessible to People Who Are Blind or Have Low Vision.
8. If someone comes to the meeting and **needs accommodations that haven't been requested**, attempt to meet the person's request. For example, you may be able to provide a large-print version of the agenda by enlarging it on a copier, or you could read materials aloud. If you cannot, and the request is for an alternate format, meet the request as soon as possible after the meeting.

## THE DAY OF A MEETING: ARRANGING ACCESSIBLE SPACE

*Excerpted from Department of Justice's "Accessible Information Exchange: Meeting on a Level Playing Field"*

### SEATING LOCATIONS

Set up the meeting room to provide access to all participant seating locations, the speakers' area and refreshments. An accessible seating plan requires aisles that are at least 36 inches wide and have sufficient turning space such as a 60-inch diameter in key locations throughout the room.

These dimensions allow people using mobility devices like wheelchairs, scooters, walkers, canes and crutches to independently enter and exit the room and move throughout the space, sit with other participants, participate as speakers, and get refreshments. Remember, when measuring the accessible route through the space, measure the aisle width as if the chairs are pulled out and occupied.

### REGISTRATION TABLE

If a table for registration and handouts is provided, make sure that people with mobility disabilities can approach it and turn around easily to move away again. Place handouts at the front edge of the table to make them easier to reach for participants both seated and standing.

### REFRESHMENT TABLE

If refreshments are served, allow sufficient floor space for people with mobility disabilities to approach the tables. Arrange all food, plates, glasses (supplement stemware with standard drinking glasses for people who have limited hand mobility), straws for people who have difficulty drinking directly from glasses, utensils and napkins within the reach of people who are of short stature or use a wheelchair. Avoid billowing or long tablecloths that pool on the floor – wheelchair wheels and tips of canes, crutches and walkers can easily catch on flowing linens and pull them off surfaces. Provide assistance to people who may need help filling their plates and bringing food and drinks back to their tables.



Long, flowing tablecloths create hazards for wheelchair users.  
*Illustration courtesy of the Department of Justice.*

### PROTRUDING OBJECTS

Some people who are blind or have low vision use canes to detect objects along a route. One element of a barrier-free meeting space for participants who are blind or have low vision requires cane-detectable protruding objects and sufficient head clearance. Wall-mounted objects with bottom edges between 27 inches and 80 inches above the floor cannot protrude into the route more than 4 inches. The route through the meeting space must be free of overhanging objects that are less than 80 inches above the floor.

> *Continued on back page*

## SEATING FOR COMMUNICATION

Arrange the lighting and meeting room furniture to facilitate communication among participants, interpreters and real-time captioners. Try to arrange furniture away from windows or cover the windows so that participants, speakers and interpreters are not silhouetted by the natural backlighting, which makes speech reading difficult.

## PODIUM

If a podium is used, some speakers who use mobility devices may not be able to use one that is standard height. If possible, provide an adjustable-height podium for all presenters at the meeting. If one is not available, either eliminate the use of a podium for everyone (e.g., have everyone sit at a head table with a tabletop microphone) or provide the speaker who has a disability with a hand-held or lavalier microphone to allow him or her to speak from a position next to the podium. Provide the speaker with a disability with a small table on which to put lecture notes and a glass of water.



Accessible meeting space allows everyone to participate. *Illustration courtesy of the Department of Justice.*

## STAGE OR DAIS

If a stage or raised platform is not accessible to all speakers, do not use it. It is insulting to ask a speaker with a mobility-related disability to be the only person to present from below stage level.

## SERVICE ANIMALS

Ensure that all participants and the meeting site staff understand that the ADA requires that service animals are allowed to enter the building and remain with their owners during the meeting.

## CONDUCTING MEETINGS

1. Meeting planners should work with speakers, presenters, attendees and those providing accommodations such as interpreters to ensure that presentations are accessible and everyone can participate.
2. Before the meeting begins, introduce interpreters, captioners and other service providers to the participants who are using these accommodations. Ensure that seating, lighting and equipment are in place so that the accommodations are effective. For example, people who are deaf or have hearing loss need to be able to see the interpreter. If the room lights are lowered for audio-visual presentations, you may need separate lighting on the interpreter. See Tip Sheet 2: Choosing and Using Interpreters.
3. Ensure that assistive listening systems are in working order with sufficient battery power for the entire meeting.
4. Make sure there are no temporary barriers to participation such as protruding objects or blocked aisles. Refer to Tip Sheet 7: The Day of a Meeting: Arranging Accessible Space.
5. Be sure speakers and participants know these guidelines before beginning:
  - > They should speak clearly at a moderate pace. This allows sign language interpreters and captioners time to facilitate clear communication.
  - > They should describe slides and flip charts briefly, particularly photos and graphics.
  - > Only one person should speak at a time.
  - > They should speak into the microphone(s) so that the assistive listening devices pick up the sound.
6. Remind speakers that if there is discussion or a question-and-answer period, they should speak directly to an individual speaking or signing, not to an interpreter or personal assistant.
7. At the beginning of the meeting, announce the locations of emergency exits, rescue assistance and evacuation chairs.
8. If there is a separate time for questions and answers, make an announcement at that time that speakers will repeat questions before answering them. Remind everyone to speak into the microphones and to speak one at a time.



Remind speakers to speak clearly and at a moderate pace so sign language interpreters and captioners have time to facilitate communication. Speakers should also speak into the microphone so assistive listening devices can pick up the sound.

## MAINTAINING ACCESS

Once you've made sure that your building, service areas and locations for meetings or events are accessible, you should be sure to keep them that way.

1. **Maintain accessible equipment and features** such as lifts, elevators and automatic doors. Write a requirement for a prompt response time into your maintenance contracts, and have a back-up plan to provide access when these fail temporarily.
2. **Keep parking and sidewalks clear.** Remove snow promptly and make sure plowing crews don't use the accessible parking spaces and curb ramps as a place to dump snow. Don't let tree branches become protruding objects. Don't let planters, equipment or other items intrude on the accessible route.
3. Be sure **accessible entrance doors and restroom doors** are unlocked whenever the building is open and that the approach space and space to the latch side of the door isn't limited by the items listed in 2.
4. If some **entrances** are not accessible, be sure there are signs at those entrances indicating the closest accessible entrance.
5. At elevators, keep areas under **call buttons** free of obstructions like planters and trash cans.
6. Maintain clear floor space at the approach to the doors to **restrooms**, in turning spaces, and at accessible lavatories and paper towel dispensers. This means not keeping trash cans, boxes or other items under the sink, under the paper towels, next to doors or in the extra space that's there for accessibility purposes.
7. Keep accessible paper towel **dispensers**, toilet paper holders and soap dispensers filled.
8. At **meetings**, keep access clear to seating, to the stage or dais, through aisles, and at the registration and refreshment areas. See Tip Sheet 7: The Day of a Meeting: Arranging Accessible Space.
9. For **special events**, see Tip Sheet 10: Special Events.



Keep obstructions like planters and trash cans away from the buttons at an elevator to ensure accessibility.

## SPECIAL EVENTS

Special events, especially those at which you expect large attendance or those that are held outside, require special attention. Follow the suggestions in Tip Sheets 2, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9. In addition, keep these tips in mind.

1. All advance publications should list a phone and, if you have one, TTY number for those who may need accommodations, auxiliary aids or other consideration due to a disability.
2. Event handouts like brochures and maps should be provided in alternate formats such as large print and Braille.
3. For large events, provide a map of accessibility elements.
4. Where parking is provided, provide accessible parking, including temporary event parking, in the required ratios of accessible and van-accessible spaces.
5. Accessible routes should be provided from the accessible approaches and entrances to all booths, spaces and other areas that are available to the public. The routes should be stable, firm and slip resistant, 36 inches wide, and kept accessible and free of obstructions. These routes should not be on dirt paths, loose gravel or grass.
6. A sufficient number of accessible toilets on an accessible route should be provided.
7. Exhibits should be accessibly designed and located.
8. At least one of each type of sales counter at each sales location should be lowered.
9. Protruding objects should be eliminated or cane detectable. Overhead obstructions should be eliminated or shielded. Protruding objects include hanging lanterns, signs and tent tie-downs that protrude more than 4 inches into a circulation path at a height from 27 inches to 80 inches.
10. If transportation is provided such as a shuttle service, accessible transportation should be provided.
11. Provide assistance for those who need help traversing long distances.
12. Train staff about your policies and the location of accessible services and facilities.
13. Plan for emergency announcements and evacuation.



Accessible routes at special events should be stable, firm and slip resistant.