



Getting Started: Improving Accessibility in Libraries

Below you will find a non-exhaustive list of ways you can improve accessibility for students with disabilities in your library.

1. Prepare a written policy and description of services for people with disabilities in the library including information on how to request accommodations. Distribute these documents to all staff members, and include these documents on the library's website in an accessible format (word doc or readable PDF).
2. Create a procedure that ensures timely response to requests for disability related accommodations or other special assistance.
3. Create an evaluation method for people with disabilities who use the library to rate its accessibility. Some examples might be creating a survey in an accessible format or holding focus groups made up of individuals from the community.
4. Go through library and ensure that all signage (stacks, floors, restrooms, library equipment is identifiable/labelled with large print and braille format. All signage should be dark text on white or light colored background – never light text on a dark background. The National Federation of the Blind provides this resource list on their website for Braille Signs:
<https://nfb.org/resource-list-braille-signs>
5. Ensure that all aisles are wide enough for wheel chair use and clear of obstructions (at least 36 inches). In order for persons using wheelchairs to be able to turn, turning spaces must be at least 60 inches in diameter.
6. If all locations/floors of library are not accessible, create procedures for staff to assist people in retrieving material from inaccessible locations.
7. Provide reading services for persons with print disabilities or visual impairments.
8. Provide alternative methods of doing library research such as reference and circulation services via phone, TTY/TDD, and email. Another example is providing a system for people with print disabilities to receive printed material in alternative formats through electronic databases. Start by scanning high in demand print items into an accessible (readable) PDF format.
9. Utilize these free accessible literary resources and let students with disabilities in your library know that they exist:

New York State Talking Book and Braille Library. It provides recorded and Braille books and tape recorders to adults and children who cannot read print, hold a book, or turn its pages. People qualify for this free, public library service if they have a permanent or temporary visual, physical or learning disability. The Library offers 65,000 book titles and over 60 magazines.
<http://www.nysl.nysed.gov/tbbl/>

Bookshare.org. The Office of Special Education Programs of the U.S. Department of Education has awarded Bookshare.org a \$32 million five-year grant to dramatically expand the Bookshare.org collection and provide all U.S. students with qualifying print disabilities free

access to the service. Bookshare.org will add educational titles in high quality DAISY and Braille formats and deliver millions of books for free to students with disabilities. Bookshare.org is working with publishers, authors and technology companies to gain access to books in digital formats that can be converted to DAISY. <http://www.bookshare.org/web/Welcome.html>

10. Create several private study/reading rooms for persons easily distracted by noise and movement, and for persons who need to bring personal equipment or need the assistance of a reader.
11. Ask vendors about accessibility features (e.g., captioned video, compatibility with assistive technology) before purchasing computers and software.
12. Staff should be aware of the location of all AT devices in library, and should be trained on how to utilize assistive technology devices in the library such as screen readers, screen enlargers/ screen enlarged text features, telecommunication devices for the deaf (TTY/TDD; Telecommunication Relay Service). Training on AT devices can often be provided by vendors of AT, or the disability services office at the county or district BOCES. One library staff member could be the "AT point person" who attends trainings and meetings with vendors. The AT point person could disseminate that knowledge through training sessions for all library staff members several times a year.

References:

Adults with Special Needs, A Resource and Planning Guide for Wisconsin's Public Libraries (2008)
<http://www.dpi.state.wi.us/pld/specialasn.html>

Alan Cantor, The AD-A-P-T-A-B-L-E APPROACH: PLANNING ACCESSIBLE LIBRARIES (1995)
<http://people.rit.edu/easi/itd/itdv02n4/article2.htm>

B Irvall, International Federation of *Library* Associations and Institutions. IFLA Professional Reports, No. 89. *Access to libraries* for persons with disabilities (2005) www.ifla.org/VII/s9/nd1/iflapr-89e.pdf

Sheryl Burgstahler, Equal Access: Universal Design of Libraries (2008)
http://www.washington.edu/doit/Brochures/PDF/equal_access_lib.pdf

World Wide Access: Accessible Web Design video and publication at
<http://www.washington.edu/doit/Video/www.html>

University of Washington, The National Center on Accessible Information Technology in Education, AccessIT, Is PDF accessible? <http://www.washington.edu/accessit/articles?2>

Adobe, Accessibility Engaging experiences for all users: <http://www.adobe.com/accessibility/>

Microsoft, Create accessible PDFs, <http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/word-help/create-accessible-pdfs-HA102478227.aspx>

ADA Accessibility Guidelines for Buildings and Facilities (ADAAG), <http://www.access-board.gov/adaag/html/adaag.htm#4.3>

Section 508 Standards for Accessible Electronic and Information Technology (<http://www.access-board.gov/sec508/guide/>)

Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) (<http://www.w3.org/WAI/intro/wcag.php>)

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