

## Trustee Essentials

Chapter 21: Library Board and Accessible Services

### Role of the Board / Role of the Director

- The board is the governing body for the library and, as such, has a responsibility to assure that the library and its policies are in compliance with all laws, including the federal Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).
- The library should consider all special populations when discussing issues of access - physical and otherwise. Defining and identifying special populations depends on each library community. Special populations include - but are not limited to: English language learners, people who are homeless and/or live in poverty, people who are displaced or live in residential care, foster care, detention, or treatment facilities, people in underserved areas or with diverse backgrounds, people with disabilities, and people with limited literacy or information skills. The library director has the responsibility to stay abreast of current issues related to making services accessible and to present the options to the board for its consideration.

### ADA Background on Accessible Services

- The ADA, passed in 1990, was written to ensure that people who had disabilities would not be denied access to the services and buildings that everyone else had access to. The requirement to provide accessible services is not dependent on a building's being accessible. Public library services must be made available in some way if the building is not accessible. The best way to provide access to most library services is to have an accessible building.

### Types of Disabilities that may Require Accommodations

- People who use wheelchairs, crutches, and/or braces may have difficulty accessing library services, even if they can get into the building. Other people may also need accommodations, if they have limited ability to walk, or to reach, or turn pages.
- Tables and seating areas should be designed so those patrons who use wheelchairs have adequate access to them. Computer workstations can be adapted in several ways to make use of computers easier for people who use wheelchairs.

### Types of Disabilities that may Require Accommodations

- The service desk is required to have at least one section that is no higher than 36 inches. Service dogs (certified dogs should be wearing a collar or backpack that identifies them as trained service companions) must be allowed to accompany their owners in public buildings.
- All library patrons, including those who have any type of disability, should be welcomed, and staff should try to talk directly to them, rather than to friends or family who may be with them. Children with physical disabilities should be welcomed at programs that are developmentally appropriate for them.

### Types of Disabilities that may Require Accommodations

- Public libraries frequently act as an intermediary in connecting people who are blind with the Wisconsin Talking Book and Braille Library, where they can receive audio recordings of books and Braille materials.
- The library can purchase or borrow DVDs that have descriptive narration and captioning. Library materials in Braille can be added to the collection.
- Large-print The Library Board and Accessible Services TE21-3 materials should be available for both adult and child patrons who have some vision but can more easily read large-print. Library brochures and fliers should be routinely printed in large print, or large print versions should be made available.

## Types of Disabilities that may Require Accommodations

- As with many disabilities, the biggest barrier to service for people who are deaf is often other people's attitude. People who are deaf may use sign language, read lips, use an interpreter, write their communication, or use a combination of all of these when they want to access public library services. Service desk staff need training to understand how best to offer services to people who are deaf or who have a significant hearing loss.
- Programs for both adults and children and all public meetings should routinely include sound amplification by the use of a microphone. This single accommodation is typically enough to meet the needs of most people who are hearing impaired.

## Types of Disabilities that may Require Accommodations

- People who have a developmental delay, have suffered a brain injury, or have emotional or mental illness may need accommodations when they are in the library. Staff should be trained to treat all patrons with respect, to enforce all rules fairly, and to be tolerant of behavior that may be unusual but not threatening or may be involuntary.
- Age restrictions for programs are sometimes relaxed for people who have developmental delays and for whom the programs might be appropriate for their mental age rather than their chronological age.

## Discussion Questions

1. What would the impact be on the library if it could increase its services to about ten percent more of the community who are not currently being served? (Ten percent is the general estimate of people with disabilities in most communities.)
2. If people in wheelchairs, or who are blind, or deaf, or have developmental disabilities are not currently using the library, what barriers do you think the library has to overcome so that these people become library patrons?
3. Make a list of at least five things that have no new cost the library could do to make its services accessible.