DEVELOPING A LIBRARY ACCESSIBILITY PLAN

A Practical Guide for Librarians

REBECCA M. MARRALL

Developing a Library Accessibility Plan

PRACTICAL GUIDES FOR LIBRARIANS

ⓖ About the Series

This innovative series written and edited for librarians by librarians provides authoritative, practical information and guidance on a wide spectrum of library processes and operations.

Books in the series are focused, describing practical and innovative solutions to a problem facing today's librarian and delivering step-by-step guidance for planning, creating, implementing, managing, and evaluating a wide range of services and programs.

The books are aimed at beginning and intermediate librarians needing basic instruction/guidance in a specific subject and at experienced librarians who need to gain knowledge in a new area or guidance in implementing a new program/service.

ⓖ About the Series Editor

The **Practical Guides for Librarians** series was conceived and edited by M. Sandra Wood, MLS, MBA, AHIP, FMLA, Librarian Emerita, Penn State University Libraries from 2014 to 2017.

M. Sandra Wood was a librarian at the George T. Harrell Library, the Milton S. Hershey Medical Center, College of Medicine, Pennsylvania State University, Hershey, PA, for over thirty-five years, specializing in reference, educational, and database services. Ms. Wood received an MLS from Indiana University and an MBA from the University of Maryland. She is a fellow of the Medical Library Association and served as a member of MLA's Board of Directors from 1991 to 1995.

Ellyssa Kroski assumed editorial responsibilities for the series beginning in 2017. She is the director of Information Technology at the New York Law Institute as well as an award-winning editor and author of thirty-six books including *Law Librarianship in the Digital Age* for which she won the AALL's 2014 Joseph L. Andrews Legal Literature Award. Her ten-book technology series, *The Tech Set* won the ALA's Best Book in Library Literature Award in 2011. Ms. Kroski is a librarian, an adjunct faculty member at Drexel and San Jose State University, and an international conference speaker. She is the winner of the 2017 Library Hi Tech Award from the ALA/LITA for her long-term contributions in the area of Library and Information Science technology and its application.

Titles in the Series

1. *How to Teach: A Practical Guide for Librarians* by Beverley E. Crane
2. *Implementing an Inclusive Staffing Model for Today's Reference Services* by Julia K. Nims, Paula Storm, and Robert Stevens
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4. *Outsourcing Technology: A Practical Guide for Librarians* by Robin Hastings

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Rebecca M. Marrall

Contents

Acknowledgments

This book was several years in the making. Essentially, I wrote the text I wish I had received years ago, when I first started out as a brand-new librarian with more energy than experience or common sense. While undertaking accessibility efforts within my organization over the course of several years, I greatly benefited from working alongside experts who shared ideas and experiences that enhanced my professional growth *and* my ability to contribute to making my library a more inclusive and accessible space for people with disabilities. Thus, I must thank everyone who has shared knowledge and experiences with me throughout my career. It has absolutely influenced how I wrote this text.

I also need to extend a sincere thank-you to my editor, Ellyssa Kroski, whose flexibility, grace, and structured support were incredibly helpful throughout this writing experience. I only wish all writers had the guidance of such an excellent editor. Likewise, I also deeply appreciate my employer and my colleagues, both across the organization and within my department. Your patience with my research leave (and the backlog of tasks and projects that come with prolonged absences) is matched only by your celebratory support of my scholarly endeavors. I can't imagine having better colleagues and I feel incredibly fortunate that I get to work with you. Thank you so very much.

Lastly, my deepest gratitude goes to my family and friends. As I wrestled this text into existence, you listened with patience and humor, asked thoughtful questions, and always offered encouragement. You are all simply the best.

Preface

Accessibility in libraries is a complex conversation. While libraries aspire to be community spaces with collections and programs for all types of patrons, inaccessible spaces, materials, and services are found everywhere. Historic building practices, changes in disability legislation, rapid changes in technology, and myriad other details conspire to create inconsistently accessible spaces for patrons with disabilities within libraries throughout North America. Thus, it's incredibly challenging for library leaders and professionals to determine what to fix, in what order, and how to fix these inaccessible spaces, services, and materials.

Developing a Library Accessibility Plan: A Practical Guide for Librarians is designed to provide library professionals with the knowledge, tools and templates, and practical examples necessary for developing a tailored and comprehensive accessibility plan for their institution. The goal is simple and actionable: After reading the text, library professionals will understand how to inventory, prioritize, design, implement, and assess a comprehensive improvement plan for electronic, physical, and instructional and/or programming-related accessibility issues within their library.

In part I, the text provides foundational knowledge about disability experiences in libraries, including an overview of existing legislation and a breakdown of the disability community in the United States. This portion of the text also names and defines the impact of different accessibility barriers within online, physical, and instructional settings for different populations. In part II, the text outlines the initial stages of developing a comprehensive plan for resolving accessibility issues. These chapters include discussions on conducting an environmental scan/inventory of existing problems, identifying potential partners in the resolution of said problems, and how to prioritize which projects. This section also highlights the importance of investing in employee professional development with regard to accessibility issues. Training library personnel to engage effectively in accessibility initiatives expands the organization's capacity to serve people with disabilities.

In part III, the text provides several practical, real-life examples of projects and initiatives drawn from my professional experiences. These case studies offer a summary of each accessibility project along with the corresponding impact, finished by an analysis of lessons learned from the experience. A copy of all tools, templates, and other planning documents are available in each chapter itself. It's my hope that my experiences can save you time and effort as you build your library's accessibility plan.

So what qualifies me to write about these topics? As the current director of Technology and Discovery Services at Western Washington University Libraries, I am a librarian, a teacher, and a user experience and project management professional. Furthermore, I have both personal and professional experiences with accessibility issues. As a deaf/hard of hearing woman, I used university accommodations for much of my collegiate career. I also had the opportunity to work as a disability accommodations counselor for two years, which provided me with a unique insight into the disability community within higher education. Furthermore, I've worked on accessibility and inclusion issues within Western Washington University since 2010. For example, I proposed, founded, and currently convene my library's Accessibility Working Group, an organization-wide working group dedicated to identifying, developing, and sharing accessibility practices and resolving issues.

Because of my personal and professional experiences, I have a deep commitment to ensuring that library spaces are inclusive and accessible. In my current and prior professional roles, I have initiated and managed several projects and initiatives designed to foster understanding about the disability experience in higher education (e.g., employee professional development) and to enhance or develop workflows that result in enhanced accessibility in online, physical, and instructional settings.

Ultimately, the goal of this text is to provide library professionals with practical advice and examples of accessibility initiatives in action. Ideally, these case studies, templates, and other tools will save you time and energy as you strive to make your library more accessible for people with disabilities.

ACCESSIBILITY IN LIBRARIES

Disability Experiences in Libraries: Definitions, Demographics, Theory, and Legislation

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IN THIS CHAPTER

▷ Definitions of the term "disability" within the United States and the world

▷ Demographic information about people with disabilities in the United States

▷ Overview of disability types and common forms of assistive technology

▷ Overview of federal disability legislation in the United States

▷ Overview of disability theory (and why it matters for libraries)

◎ Definitions

BEFORE ANYTHING ELSE, it's necessary to discuss definitions of the term "disability." Knowing these definitions empowers any organization that seeks to serve this community of historically marginalized individuals. Having a firm grasp on the definitions will illustrate just how large and diverse the disability community is; furthermore, understanding that disability is not a monolithic experience can allow a library to better plan inclusive and accessible services, programs, and spaces.

The legal definition is usually the easiest place to start. The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (commonly referred to as the ADA) defines a disability as follows: "The term 'disability' means, with respect to an individual (A) a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities of such individual; (B) a record

▲ **3**

of such an impairment; or (C) being regarded as having such an impairment (as described in paragraph (3))." The act goes on to define major life activities and the importance of having a record of an impairment.[1] The World Health Organization expands on the definition with a three-part statement:

1. Impairment in a person's body structure or function, or mental functioning; examples of impairments include loss of a limb, loss of vision, or memory loss.
2. Activity limitation, such as difficulty seeing, hearing, walking, or problem solving.
3. Participation restrictions in normal daily activities, such as working, engaging in social and recreational activities, and obtaining health care and preventive services.[2]

These three definitions can provide a helpful starting place for understanding the breadth of what may constitute a disability. So how many people in the United States have a disability? The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimate that one in four people in the United States has some kind of disability; thus, the total is roughly 26 percent, or sixty-one million adults. Within that population, mobility and cognition-related disabilities are the highest reported types of disabilities, followed by hearing- and then vision-related disabilities. Disabilities occur with higher frequency in adults who are sixty-five or older; they also occur with more frequency in indigenous, Native, and First Nations communities. According to the US Department of Labor in 2016, roughly 18 percent of the disability community is employed; however, as the numbers of people with disabilities has increased, the general income level has decreased. This general information is intended to provide a broad-strokes picture of the disability community in the United States.[3,4,5]

The number of people with disabilities in the United States has increased over the last several decades. These increases do not strictly stem from increases in the general population but rather a combination of several factors, including changes to the legal definitions of "disability" and improved data gathering by state and federal census entities. The growing numbers of people with disabilities in the general population of the United States may mean that libraries will likely see a corresponding rise in patrons with disabilities who will use library spaces, materials, and services. Furthermore, the civil rights legislation dedicated to ensuring that those with disabilities can expect accommodations within public venues and modes of transportation means that more people are using these services.

This knowledge is important for library leaders and administrators to understand: whether they are employees or patrons, people with disabilities will always be present in libraries. Thus, it is best to proactively plan for their presence, rather than attempt to react to a series of problems. While there are always excellent risk management arguments for why a library should develop service and space plans for accommodating those with disabilities (for example, library leadership will risk fewer lawsuits over inaccessible spaces and materials), the true argument is far simpler: it is more humane and just to create a library that is inclusive of all members of a community. If libraries are for everyone, then they must be managed so that philosophy is a reality and not merely an aspiration.

Demographics

When people think of the word "disability," they likely think of the ubiquitous blue-and-white image used to indicate accessible stalls in bathrooms, elevators, and parking lots: an

individual seated in a wheelchair. While this ubiquitous icon is identifiable and intuitive for most users in the United States (and thus is very useful for wayfinding and navigation purposes), the icon represents the experience of merely one subset (specifically, those individuals who use wheelchairs) within a much larger and diverse community.

> ### UPDATED DISABILITY SYMBOL
>
> The disability symbol recently underwent an upgrade: the individual now leans forward in their wheelchair. This update was made by designers and advocates in an effort to accurately convey the active and engaging nature of people with disabilities.

Figure 1.1. Old and new icons that indicate a disability

Obviously, no single community has a purely homogenous population, and the disability community is no exception to this understanding. Furthermore, because the diverse nature of the disability communities has direct planning, space (for both physical and online environments), and budgetary ramifications for libraries, it's useful to have a working knowledge of different kinds of disabilities, as well as a good grasp of what kinds of accommodations a member from these communities may be entitled to.

Person-First or Identity-First Language?

A quick discussion on linguistic terms is necessary. In examining the world at large, you will notice different terms employed interchangeably to refer to people with disabilities. These terms include but may not be limited to "disabled," "person with a disability," and "impaired." Within the community, there is an ongoing conversation about whether to identify with person-first language or identity-first language. To briefly summarize, person-first language is when an individual describes themselves as a "person with a disability," or perhaps say, "I have a disability" (as opposed to "I'm disabled") or "I have an impairment." The goal of person-first language is to identify as a person first, then acknowledge the disability second. Proponents of person-first language appreciate the focus on the individual rather than the disability because it emphasizes that disability is as much a social phenomenon or experience as a physical manifestation. Person-first language stemmed from a desire to use a respectful term to describe members of a community in lieu of problematic and dated ones, like "handicapped" or "crippled."

In contrast, identity-first language is when an individual acknowledges the disability first, then appends the personhood after the statement of disability. Proponents of this approach will often identify as "disabled." A more specific example would be saying, "I'm deaf." People who identify in this manner believe that the disability is a fundamental aspect of their entire identity, and given how significantly it impacts or alters their daily existence, they would prefer to frame that experience front and center. Indeed, they may feel that they wouldn't be the same person without the disability and wish to demonstrate how thoroughly the disability and their identity are intertwined.

Simply put, there is no consensus within the disability community about whether to use person-first or identity-first language. Everyone who has a disability must decide for themselves how they wish to personally describe themselves to the world. The decision to adopt person-first or identity-first language is an individual one, and an individual's choice of identity can evolve or change over a lifetime. However, there is a difference between how one person identifies and how the world identifies that same individual. For libraries, which are an organization and not an individual with a disability, consider using person-first language on web presences, external communications, and other public-facing spaces, signage, and more. The choice to default to identification of people with disabilities is respectful at best and inoffensive at worst; the former scenario is a win for libraries while the latter scenario is at least a neutral outcome. Useful strategies for adopting person-first language are available at the ADA National Network, which has published a factsheet called "Guidelines for Writing about People with Disabilities." See the recommended resources section at the end of this chapter.

Disability Types and Common Assistive Technology

This subsection provides an overview of different types of disabilities, followed by an overview of some of the many assistive technologies that people with disabilities use in daily activities. Briefly, assistive technologies refer to aids, devices, strategies, and even animal companions, all of which are designed to mitigate the effects of a disability. Please note that the assistive technologies listed in table 1.1 are not the *only* devices used by people with disabilities but rather a brief summary of common devices. Likewise, the summaries of each disability type are meant to convey an overview of experiences and cannot hope to capture the complex spectrum of disability experiences within a community. To add further complexity, even two individuals with the same diagnosis (for example, partial sight) can have an entirely different array of disability management mechanisms depending on several factors, such as

1. **Length of Disability Experience:** This refers to when the individual first experienced the effects of the disability. For example, an individual with a congenital disability has a different experience than someone who developed the disability late in life.
2. **Scope of the Disability:** This refers to the extent of the disability. For example, the same diagnosis can manifest in varying levels in different individuals.
3. **Access to Supplementary Resources:** This refers to the availability of resources an individual with a disability may access to mitigate the effects of the disability. Examples include self-advocacy skill development, medication, assistive technology, financial resources, accessible transportation, and more.

Vision

Vision-related disabilities refer to a vast spectrum of experiences that interfere with the visual acuity of an individual, and the subsequent ability to infer meaning about the surrounding environment through visual eyesight. These disabilities include partial sight,

Table 1.1. Common Assistive Technology for Vision Disabilities

Adaptive Computing Devices	Adaptive computing devices refers to a spectrum of modified computers, keyboards, and other forms of hardware that allow individuals with disabilities to autonomously interface with web environments. Examples include keyboard overlays for braille, modified keyboards and mice, and other kinds of devices.
Alternate Text for Images (for Web Presences)	Alternate text for images is a text-based description of an image on a web presence. Formatted correctly, the text can provide a meaningful overview of the visual content.
Audiobooks	Audiobooks (or talking books) are audible presentations of print text.
Audio Clips of Newspapers	More and more databases are providing audio recordings of the content within a newspaper article.
Braille	Braille is a system for accessing text content through a series of dots. Designed for those with vision disabilities, hearing disabilities, and/or any combination of both, braille information and materials are available at the National Library for the Blind. Furthermore, traditional (i.e., print) text materials can be converted to braille with the right equipment through either contracting with specialized vendors or contacting the National Library for the Blind.
E-books and Texts	E-books are computer text files. With either the built-in audio capability or the use of third-party software (such as screen reading technology), people with vision-related disabilities can listen to the content. A word of warning: Many e-books come in a variety of formats (e.g., EPUBs, PDFs, etc.), many of which are inaccessible by screen reading technology because the document hasn't been formatted appropriately. Libraries can always negotiate with vendors to ensure that the e-texts are accessible by screen reading technology; furthermore, they can offer an auto-conversion service for inaccessible e-texts in order to provide prompt service delivery to patrons with vision disabilities. See chapter 2 for more information.
Large Print	Large-print texts simply present the otherwise traditional text in an enlarged font. These versions can also be helpful for elderly members of the library community.
Screen Magnifier	A screen magnifier is a device that enlarges the display of the contents of a computer screen through magnification. As information and computer technology have improved over the last decade, most office software and web browsers have built-in magnification features that often eliminate the need for an external device. However, it may be prudent for a library to have one on hand.
Screen Reading Technology	Screen reading technology is software that scans an electronic or web display and narrates aloud the contents displayed within. This technology allows those with either vision-related disabilities or learning disabilities (or both) to access print-based content through audible means. While presenting information audibly is an obvious strategy for making visual text accessible to those with vision disabilities, what may not be as obvious is that screen reading software can serve the needs of those with ADD/ADHD and other neurodiverse experiences. Like all forms of technology, screen reading software comes in free and proprietary versions, and along a wide spectrum of capabilities (simply put, some software programs have better features than others).
Voice Recognition Software	Voice recognition software is essentially dictation software. Dragon NaturallySpeaking is a common proprietary product used by people with (and without, for that matter) disabilities. Voice recognition software assists those with vision or chronic health disabilities by reducing their reliance upon a keyboard, which further aids nonsighted people and reduces the overall fatigue that comes from typing for those with chronic health disabilities.

different types of blindness (including colorblindness), and much, much more. Common assistive technology and strategies for vision-related disabilities in library environments include the resources and devices displayed in table 1.1.[6]

Hearing

Hearing-related disabilities cover a wide spectrum of sensory experiences that pertain to the functionality of the human ear. These experiences range from deafness to hearing loss or being hard of hearing (commonly abbreviated HoH); tinnitus, which is persistent ringing in the ear; vertigo; and much more. The causes of hearing loss range from congenital to genetic inheritance to environmental (for example, rock concert deafness). Furthermore, hearing loss can occur in both ears or just one, and hearing loss can be inconsistent across both ears, meaning that an individual can hear more (or less) in one ear in contrast to the other. Common assistive technology and strategies for hearing-related disabilities include (but aren't limited) to the following resources and devices in table 1.2.

AN IMPORTANT NOTE

Some members of the deaf and hard of hearing community identify as culturally Deaf, usually symbolized with a capital *D*, meaning that they participate in and draw a deep sense of meaning from the shared values and beliefs of the Deaf communities in the United States and around the world. Examination of the rich and complex cultural Deaf identity is an anthropological or sociological treatise unto itself and is beyond the scope of this text. However, it's worth simply being aware of that information.

Table 1.2.   Common Assistive Technology for Hearing Disabilities

Closed Captioning (Subtitles)	Closed captioning, commonly called subtitling, is the activity of displaying a text transcript of audiovisual content for deaf and hard of hearing individuals. The captions may include some description of nonverbal audio phenomena (such as background noises or environmental sounds). Closed captions/subtitles are useful because they provide an additional way for viewers to gather information about the audiovisual event. However, captions don't simply aid those with hearing-related disabilities; captions can also help English as a Second Language learners access films and shows through the provision of a second language in two modalities (print and verbal/audio). At minimum, library personnel should know how to turn on closed captions for public showings or events; how to develop and deploy original captions for videos created by the library personnel (of events or other activities); and, when purchasing materials for circulation, how to evaluate the vendor and the product for inclusion of closed captions. Lastly, library professionals should consider simply displaying captions as a default whenever films or videos are shown as part of library-sponsored events. The default display of captions will enhance access of the content for deaf, hard of hearing, and English as a Second Language learners and individuals.

FM Systems and Bluetooth	Frequency Modulation (FM) is a type of assistive technology that amplifies sound for individuals in loud environments, such as a public event or a classroom.[1] An FM system has a microphone (which can be a handheld microphone, a lapel device, or a tabletop microphone, among others) and a receiver (which can be a setting on an individual hearing aid, a receiver worn around the neck, or something else) worn by the intended recipient. FM systems amplify sound for deaf and hard of hearing individuals, which in turn reduces the mental and physical fatigue from straining to listen for sounds in noisy environments, provides improved clarity of sound, and reduces irrelevant background noise.
Hearing Aids	Hearing aids are devices that amplify sound for an individual. They run the gamut in terms of complexity: some are simply designed to amplify all sound (analog hearing aids), whereas others are programmed to specific frequencies and decibels (usually digital hearing aids). Libraries are obviously not responsible for recommending, purchasing, and/or circulating personal aid devices to patrons, but library personnel will likely encounter patrons with hearing aids. While it can be common to expect hearing aids in elderly patrons, don't make assumptions; many members of younger generations also wear hearing aids. The Hearing Loss Association of America estimates that approximately forty-eight million people in the United States have some kind of hearing loss (15 percent of these individuals are eighteen or older), and that almost twenty-nine million of these individuals would benefit from hearing aids.[2] When interacting with a patron who wears hearing aids, face the person directly.
Lipreading	Many deaf and hard of hearing individuals rely on some form of lipreading, which is the activity of trying to visually discern an audible statement through watching someone's lips move as they speak. Again, libraries are not directly responsible for this strategy but library personnel should be aware that deaf and hard of hearing individuals use this strategy—among many others—to gather information about the conversation or event at hand. Thus, if library personnel have been notified that a person is deaf or hard of hearing, it is best practice to face the individual with the hearing loss so that they can read the speaker's face and lips.
Sign Language	Sign language is a hands-based, visual language used by people with hearing disabilities (and by the family, friends, school professionals, and work colleagues who interact with them). There is no universal or global form of sign language; many nations have their own sign language. Furthermore, many of these national languages have regionalisms, "accents," or dialects—hand gestures and symbols that are specific to the region from which the dialect originated. It's important to note that not all deaf or hard of hearing people speak sign language. Since it's a language like any other, and must be taught to others, not all deaf or hard of hearing people have access to those lessons. Library professionals who do not speak sign language, or who aren't comfortable with their own fluency, should use text-based communications with a deaf or HoH patron if the patron has indicated that works for them.
Text-Based Communications	For communication purposes at service points, library personnel can elect to use text communication, in either written or typed form, assuming there is a shared language. It may be worth it to ask patrons to indicate in their accounts within the catalog whether they wish to communicate via e-mail, via mail, or over the phone, if the latter option is feasible and sustainable for the library to employ.

1. Mandy Mroz, "FM Systems for People with Hearing Loss," HealthyHearing.com, September 6, 2019, https://www.healthyhearing.com/help/assistive-listening-devices/fm-systems.

2. Hearing Loss Association of America, "Hearing Loss Basics," accessed October 20, 2019, https://www.hearingloss.org/hearing-help/hearing-loss-basics/.

Mobility

Mobility disabilities refer to a wide array of movement-related impairment and experiences. Whatever the cause, from an accident resulting in an acute disability to genetics to degeneration (a decline slowly over time), mobility experiences may require architectural, furniture, or spatial modifications to accommodate navigation. Many of these spatial modifications will be covered in depth in chapter 3. It is also important to know that not all individuals who use a wheelchair, a cane, or another device rely upon only that single device. For example, many individuals can use their limbs to navigate short or even longer distances but choose to use a chair to avoid fatigue and for ease of navigation. Common assistive technologies include but aren't limited to the following:

Table 1.3. Common Assistive Technology for Mobility Disabilities

Adaptive Computing Devices	Adaptive computing devices refers to a spectrum of modified computers, keyboards, and other forms of hardware that allow individuals with disabilities to autonomously interface with web environments. Examples include keyboard overlays for braille, modified keyboards and mice, and other kinds of devices.
Audiobooks	Audio books (or talking books) are audible presentations of print text. These can be beneficial for those with motor disabilities who are unable to hold a print text for long periods of time.
Audio Clips of Newspapers	More and more databases are providing audio recordings of the content within a newspaper article.
Canes, Forearm Crutches, Walkers, and Walking Sticks	Canes, forearm crutches, walking sticks, walkers, and other walking aids are used to assist human-powered transportation. They come in a variety of sizes, types, and functionalities, depending on the needs of the individual.
E-books and Texts	E-books are computer text files. With either the built-in audio capability or the use of third-party software (such as screen reading technology), people with vision-related disabilities can listen to the content. A word of warning: many e-books come in a variety of formats (e.g., EPUBs, PDFs, etc.), many of which are inaccessible by screen reading technology because the document hasn't been formatted appropriately. Libraries can always negotiate with vendors to ensure that the e-texts are accessible by screen reading technology; furthermore, they can offer an auto-conversion service for inaccessible e-texts in order to provide prompt service delivery to patrons with vision disabilities. See chapter 2 for more information.
Screen Reading Technology	Screen reading technology is software that scans an electronic or web display and narrates aloud the contents displayed within. This technology allows those with either vision-related disabilities or learning disabilities (or both) to access print-based content through audible means. While presenting information audibly is an obvious strategy for making visual text accessible to those with vision disabilities, what may not be as obvious is that screen reading software can serve the needs of those with ADD/ADHD and other neurodiverse experiences. Like all forms of technology, screen reading software comes in free and proprietary versions, and along a wide spectrum of capabilities (simply put, some software programs have better features than others).
Voice Recognition Software	Voice recognition software is essentially dictation software. Dragon NaturallySpeaking is a common proprietary product used by people with (and without, for that matter) disabilities. Voice recognition software assists those with vision or chronic health disabilities by reducing their reliance upon a keyboard, which further aids nonsighted people and reduces the overall fatigue that comes from typing for those with chronic health disabilities.
Wheelchairs (Powered and Manual)	Wheelchairs are a common type of assistive technology, and they come in a wide variety of sizes, types, and functionalities, depending on the needs of the individual.

Speech and Language

Speech- and language-related disabilities refer to a vast array of experiences that have to do with the physiological expression of sound and the use of sound to convey meaning (i.e., language). Speech disabilities range from difficulty speaking at all to stuttering to mutism and many other experiences; language disabilities occur in myriad manifestations and often revolve around the individual having difficulty with comprehension, reading, and writing. Assistive technology or aids can include the use of sign language, breathing exercises, and other strategies tailored to the needs of the individual.[7]

Acute and Temporary Disabilities

Acute and temporary disabilities are disabling experiences that affect an individual for a short duration of time. Broken and sprained limbs are a common example of temporary disabilities. Library professionals may encounter patrons and colleagues with acute disabilities and may need to alter the environment in short-term ways in order to make an accessible space. Assistive technology for these temporary disabilities are of course tailored to the needs of the individual.

Invisible Disabilities

Invisible disabilities (also called "hidden," due to a lack of visible indicators of the condition) refers to a vast spectrum of experiences that include neurological and/or cognitive disorders, learning disabilities, chronic health issues (such as chronic pain or fatigue), mental health issues (such as depression and anxiety), and many more disabilities.[8] These diverse experiences don't have a visible indicator that the disability is present, often leading people to say to the affected individual, "You don't *look* like you have a disability." However, these disabilities often require individuals to develop strategies and coping mechanisms for navigating an inaccessible world. These strategies may include but aren't limited to acquiring assistive technology at sometimes prohibitive costs simply to participate in the world and/or having to educate others about invisible disabilities. Because the people around these affected individuals cannot see any manifestation of a disability, through curiosity or skepticism they often inquire for further details. All of these factors result in emotional, financial, and sometimes physical fatigue.

It's worth spending a few moments discussing the autism spectrum disorder. Commonly abbreviated as ASD (and including what used to be known as Asperger syndrome), this disorder is a neurological and developmental disability that often manifests in childhood and lasts throughout a person's life. ASD affects how the impacted individual interacts with, communicates, and learns from, family, friends, and the community in general. Like all spectrum disorders, ASD can manifest in a range of symptoms, some of which may include problems communicating with people, an inability to look at people's faces or eyes when talking with them, repetitive behaviors (physical and verbal), and preoccupation with order. The increased number of diagnoses, combined with civil rights legislation that mandates access to common public spaces such as schools and libraries, over the last two decades means that library professionals may encounter patrons with ASD. As always, assistive technology or aids are tailored for the individual's needs. Additionally, a library may wish to be aware of best practices for supporting patrons with ASD.

Library personnel cannot, of course, magically read minds in order to anticipate the needs of patrons with invisible disabilities. However, in addition to exploring and implementing the strategies found in chapters 2, 3, and 4, another simple strategy is to keep an open mind. Don't make assumptions about patrons, and if they disclose that they need assistance with an item or an action, identify how best to meet that need and try to accommodate it at that point in time. Sometimes library personnel express frustration or skepticism when asked to accommodate a disability and say that they feel that people with disabilities "take advantage," "play the disability card," or "game the system." This attitude is detrimental in myriad ways, including harming the patron by placing another obstacle for them to overcome in order to participate in the world: the attitude of the library employee and the corresponding gatekeeping of important library services.

Frankly, this kind of skeptical scrutiny results in emotional harm and may make the patron less inclined to use the library in the future. (It's worth noting that patrons with more obvious disabilities do not face the same kind of skepticism.) The fear that patrons with disabilities are "gaming the system" also harms library employees and library spaces. Library employees with an unfortunate attitude lose the opportunity to build empathy for patrons and learn more about a worldview that's different from their own. This regrettable paradigm robs library personnel from imagining how to create an inclusive space for all patrons. If libraries are truly for all people, it is important that library professionals try (within the bounds of available funds, training, and resources) to make spaces, services, and events as inclusive and accessible as possible.

Multiple Disabilities

An individual can have multiple disabilities and these combinations can occur in myriad ways. For example, a person could experience deaf-blindness, or an autoimmune disease and mobility impairment, or many other variations. It seems an obvious statement to assert, but it's worthwhile for library professionals to be aware that patrons may not contend with the effects of a single disability but rather many at the same time. This affects how these patrons may navigate the world, and how they access services and spaces.

Service, Therapy, and Emotional Comfort Animals

While not strictly a form of assistive technology, animal companions that are trained to mitigate the effects of a disability or provide comfort for a group of people are common forms of assistive support or aid for those with disabilities.

Service animals are animals trained to mitigate specific effects of a disability for an individual. According to federal civil rights legislation (the Americans with Disabilities Act), a service animal is a dog.[9] Bear in mind that some states may have more permissive definitions for service animals; furthermore, in an effort to be more humane and/or to manage litigative risk, some public institutions within these states have adopted these state-level policies.

Therapy animals have been trained to provide comfort and reduce anxiety in a group of people, and often behave in docile and nonthreatening ways. Both service and therapy animals can be found in a wide variety of public settings, and library personnel should expect to see them in library environments and at events. Some libraries even engage

therapy animal programs and invite these animals (and their human trainers and companions) for special events. *Emotional comfort* animals are personal companions for individuals with a disability and are typically reserved for personal homes and spaces rather than public settings.

Determining whether an animal companion is a service, therapy, or emotional comfort animal is a difficult endeavor. Because library personnel are not medical or social work professionals, they should not attempt to make a judgment about whether the person in question has a disability. Furthermore, library professionals should not attempt to determine whether an animal is a service animal unless the animal in question is disrupting the environment or menacing other patrons. This is a complicated and often contentious topic in library circles, and one far too rich in nuance to be covered in a brief summary within a single chapter. See chapter 14 for a deeper discussion, and consult literature that covers best practices and provides advice about addressing service animals in library spaces.

Disability Legislation in the United States

A great deal of civil rights legislation for people with disabilities has been implemented within the United States in the last fifty years. Due to the limitations of this subsection, this text will focus on all relevant (i.e., that which pertains to libraries and the communities they serve) federal legislation that is currently on the books. All libraries should understand their state and county legislation, and what the resultant obligations are. Also, depending on library type, some of these laws may not be especially relevant. While the legal definition of disability is undeniably important, examining theoretical definitions can offer a more holistic understanding of the lived experiences of those with differing abilities.

Disability Studies Theory: The Medical and Social Models

While the legal definition of disability is undeniably important, examining theoretical definitions can offer a more holistic understanding of the lived experiences of those with differing abilities. The language, attitudes, and cultural conversation around disability have shifted in the last several decades. For example, the term "disability," as it pertains to a class of people, didn't emerge until the twentieth century.[10] Disability studies scholars have chronicled the ways in which the social and physical constructs of disability have evolved over time. To understand how the rest of this book is organized, it's worth spending some time reviewing two theoretical models through which the concept of disability is defined. Understanding the contrast—and the interdependence—between these two models is foundational for comprehending the subsequent philosophical choices that library professionals can make while planning and implementing accessibility initiatives.

Why Does Theory Matter?

Why is an awareness of disability studies theory important for libraries and library professionals? Theory provides a lens for understanding contemporary disability experiences within the United States and further insight into prior cultural attitudes and perceptions about disabilities. Likewise, cultural mores and attitudes—and the resulting laws and legal protections—toward those with disabilities have changed significantly over the last

Table 1.4. Relevant Legislation

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 and 2008	The Americans with Disabilities Act, passed in 1990 and reaffirmed in 2008, is a comprehensive suite of civil rights legislation designed to protect those with disabilities. The purpose of the act is to prevent discrimination on the basis of disability in public accommodations, transportation, telecommunications, employment, and local, state, and federal governments (among many other things). There are several sections, or titles, of the act. Three titles affect all library types; one additional title may be relevant to government or state libraries. Title 1, Employment, describes the rights and protections around employment of individuals with disabilities. This, of course, is relevant for libraries of any type because all libraries engage in the recruitment and hiring of personnel. Title II, State and Local Government Activities, addresses the obligations that state and local governments have to people with disabilities and is less likely to affect all library types. Title III, Public Accommodations, covers public and some privately owned spaces, and includes basic nondiscrimination clauses that protect against exclusion and/or segregation. Due to the basic nature of most libraries (i.e., circulating materials to the public or to a community), this title has far-reaching ramifications for them. Title IV, Telecommunications, requires all Internet service providers and related companies to ensure their devices and service are accessible by those with disabilities. Because so many resources provided by libraries now rely on telecommunications of one kind or another (such as article databases, the library catalog, streaming audiovisual content, and much more), this title has significant impact on libraries in the United States. The remaining title, Public Transportation, is likely less relevant to libraries.
Architectural Barriers Act (ABA) of 1968	This act, which went into effect on August 12, 1968, requires that environments and spaces either built by or altered with federal funds be accessible by those with disabilities. (This act also covers buildings and spaces that are leased with federal funds.) Facilities built prior to 1968 are not covered by this law; however, any alterations since are addressed by this legislation. The legislation coverage ranges from post offices to national parks, federal office buildings and prisons, and more. It also covers any nongovernmental spaces that received federal funding (which is why it may apply to certain libraries). Four federal agencies are responsible for the creation and publication of the standards that govern the act: the Department of Defense, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the General Services Administration, and the US Postal Service.
Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), first passed as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975	The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act is a law that ensures that relevant accommodations (commonly referred to as special education and/or related services) are provided to children with disabilities at no cost in a K–12 environment for the duration of their academic career. While not strictly relevant to most libraries, it's possible that a school library in a K–12 setting may encounter or serve students who receive assistance and support from IDEA policies. If warranted, such a library may want to partner with the school's special education program on specific initiatives.

Workforce Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504 and Section 508)	Like its legislative descendant, the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Workforce Rehabilitation Act of 1973 has several sections. Sections 501 and 503 prohibit employment discrimination against people with disabilities who otherwise have appropriate qualifications for the advertised position. However, each section addresses different kinds of employers. For example, Section 501 covers employers in the federal government (examples include but aren't limited to the US Postal Service and the Smithsonian Institution); in contrast, Section 503 covers employers that have contracts with federal agencies and/or receive at least $10,000 in funds from a federal agency and prohibits them from discriminating against people with disabilities during recruitment and hiring. If a library type falls into this category, it is subject to the section's policies.

Section 504 prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities seeking to participate in programs or activities that receive federal funding, and includes public education programs, services, and degrees at every level (preschool, elementary, secondary, and postsecondary programs). Thus, libraries associated with public education programs are subject to Section 504 and must comply with the requirements.

Section 508 covers information technology and specifies that information and communications technologies purchased and/or used by federal agencies must be accessible to people with disabilities (whether in the community or as employees of the agency). Section 508 insists that the electronic infrastructure, the content or information itself, and the hardware supporting all of the above be accessible. It's worth noting that Section 508 applies only to federal agencies; however, many nonfederal organizations and entities have chosen to ensure that their websites and telecommunications are accessible. There are a great many freely available Section 508-related resources for libraries on the web. Please see the Recommended Resources section of chapter 2 for more information. |
| Telecommunications Act of 1996 | When passed in 1996, the Telecommunications Act was the first major piece of legislation dedicated to telecommunications (which includes, but is not limited to, phone and broadcast services) since the Communications Act of 1934. For the first time in the United States, Internet services were included in the legislation. While the act is primarily concerned with definitional terms and the corresponding regulatory practices, the legislation contains several provisions that address access to electronic information technology by people with disabilities. Specifically, Section 255 requires manufacturers of telecommunications equipment and telecommunications service providers to ensure that the hardware and the services are accessible by people with disabilities.

Additionally, Section 713 requires that video programming include closed captions for those with speech- and/or hearing-related disabilities. How does the Telecommunications Act of 1996 affect libraries? Libraries acquire audiovisual materials for circulation and programming purposes; furthermore, they purchase hardware and software for both patron and employee use. It is important to vet all purchases for accessibility; see chapter 2 for more information. |

Table 1.5. Medical and Social Models of Disability

MEDICAL MODEL	SOCIAL MODEL
The medical model of disability focuses upon the medical diagnosis, nature, and treatment of the disability. The medical model supposes that the disability is an impairment or a disorder of a specific kind, visited upon an otherwise "normal" body, to be remedied by a relevant medical professional with the use of the appropriate treatment and/or accommodations. Criticisms of this paradigm for understanding disability experiences stem from two main arguments. The first of these is that focusing upon only the medical details of a disability depersonalizes the individual with the disability. Instead of seeing an entire individual with an intersectional identity (composed of elements like race, ethnicity, gender, class, religion, orientation, and much more), the medical model sees only a disabled presence that needs modification and accommodation. A second criticism of this model is that individual is seen as flawed—as opposed to the structures, systems, and other spaces (whether electronic, cultural, or physical) simply being inaccessible to all people. In summary, some theorists argue that the medical model is a limited and an incomplete paradigm for understanding disability experiences.	The social model of disability, a reaction to the medical model, maintains that inaccessible cultural and systemic constructs are the true disability—that these exclusive spaces and systems are intended only for nondisabled individuals. These are what prevent individuals from participating in society, rather than an individual's experience. Rather than focusing on what must be "fixed" in the individual with a disability, the social model of disability examines how society needs to change in order to remedy general inaccessibility. This model challenges people to examine attitudes toward disabilities and people with them, presentation of languages, physical spaces and formats for electronic and print information, and much more. One goal of the social model is to transfer the perceived fault of a disability from the individual to the society.

century. An awareness of those changes, and of the corresponding theory, can help library professionals make proactive and informed choices about how they want to ground accessibility efforts. Instead of following a strictly medical model, which informs and drives much of the disability-related efforts that occur in contemporary libraries, consider integrating a social model approach when crafting accessibility efforts in your library. When applied to practice, the models are not incompatible; for example, a library can offer assistive technology at service points while understanding (and acknowledging) that the physical spaces are inaccessible. Understanding the theory allows a library to make key decisions about how they create services, spaces, and materials, and how to frame the narrative around these services.

Key Points

- Definitions of the term "disability" within the United States and the world.
- Demographic information about people with disabilities in the United States.
- An overview of disability types and common forms of assistive technology.
- An overview of federal disability legislation in the United States.
- A quick overview of disability theory (and why it matters for libraries).

⊚ Recommended Resources

ADA National Network. "Guidelines for Writing about People with Disabilities." https://adata.org/factsheet/ADANN-writing.

⊚ Notes

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Electronic Accessibility

What Is Electronic Accessibility?

WITH THE ADVENT OF THE INTERNET, and its rapid growth over the last few decades, the learning, cultural, and financial opportunities afforded by what some scholars call the Third Industrial Revolution are abundant and transformative. However, like the physical/analog world, the Internet and all electronic resources within come with accessibility barriers for people with disabilities. This section covers, in brief, a definition of electronic accessibility and some of the international standards that help information technology professionals, library professionals, and vendors identify barriers and begin to remove them.

Electronic accessibility refers to the ease (or lack thereof) with which people with disabilities can access web- and computer-based platforms, content, and services (commonly called information and communication technologies).[1] The standards that govern electronic accessibility are called the Web Accessibility Content Guidelines (WCAG). These standards are published by the Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI), a subsidiary of the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C), the international body that sets the standards for the global Internet. The WCAG standards (Version 1.0) were first published in May 1999 and comprised a checklist of fourteen guidelines. The next version of WCAG standards (predictably titled WCAG 2.0) were significantly updated in 2008 and outlined a robust array of terminology, strategies, and advice while using the 2.0 standards. These

include principles, guidelines, success criteria, and sufficient and advisory techniques. The 2.0 standards also introduced the POUR methodology for evaluating information and communication technologies for accessibility purposes.

POUR is an acronym for the following standards:[2]

Table 2.1. POUR Evaluation Criteria

Perceivable	Information and user interface components must be presentable to users in ways they can perceive.
Operable	User interface components and navigation must be operable.
Understandable	Information and the operation of the user interface must be understandable.
Robust	Content must be robust enough that it can be interpreted reliably by a wide variety of user agents, including assistive technologies.

Each principle of the POUR acronym comes with supporting documentation on how to understand the principle, what success looks like for the principle in question, and strategies and instructions for how to achieve that principle. Lastly, the WAI published the WCAG 2.1 standards in 2018. These standards were updated in order to accommodate information and communication technology (ICT) users with a more diverse range of disabilities and to improve the overall accessibility of mobile experiences for people with disabilities.[3]

It's important for library professionals—particularly the web and information technology specialists responsible for ICT within library environments—to be aware of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines. Familiarity, and eventual fluency, with these standards will equip them with the knowledge necessary for evaluating e-resources (i.e., electronic products and/or services) prior to purchase and installation. Alternatively, knowledge of these standards can allow IT professionals to build electronically accessible platforms from scratch or to modify/repair existing web and e-resource platforms. Furthermore, knowledgeable library professionals can use the WCAG standards as conversation starters with vendors, in hopes of persuading vendors to build accessibility into their products—or simply walking away from an inaccessible product whenever possible.

Types of Electronic Accessibility Barriers and Their Impact upon Patrons

The following section outlines common resources used in library environments, followed by a summary of accessibility barriers inherent in these platforms. The section also provides a summary of how these accessibility barriers impact library patrons with specific kinds of disabilities and shares possible solutions for these issues. The prospective solutions listed are not the entirety of possible solutions, merely a subset that may be useful. Furthermore, not all solutions may be applicable to every library due to the organizational differences (e.g., different library types) and available funding and/or expertise. Lastly, some solutions should not be borne by the library but by the associated school, the vendor, etc. Thus, every library will need to identify which strategies are appropriate and feasible

to adopt while balancing the ethical and legal questions of how much responsibility to take on, and why.

Article Databases, Library Catalogs, Institutional Repositories, and Third-Party Software

This subsection distinguishes between the electronic platform and the content within the platform (which is covered in the next subsection). For definitional purposes, electronic resource platforms often have several of the following features:

1. Search bars/boxes and pre-search modifiers
2. A post-search menu for refining search results
3. Item record displays
4. Research guides or help page
5. A patron account portal with fine payment and/or research storage options
6. Controlled vocabulary dictionary
7. Scholar directory (offered by some institutional repositories)

Common accessibility barriers found in these platforms are lack of headers, absent keyboard navigation indicators, and no indication of an image. Because some people with disabilities use screen reading technology and keyboard navigation to access these e-resources, an improperly formatted e-resource prevents patrons with disabilities from (a) locating a feature on the platform, and (b) accessing the information within that environment. For example, if a search bar is not tagged and labeled appropriately in the electronic infrastructure, a nonsighted person may not be able to locate the search bar—let alone input search terms and review search results.

Remedying identified issues discovered in e-resource platforms is difficult in many ways. First, not all libraries are fortunate enough to have dedicated information technology professionals, let alone those who are familiar with accessibility issues and can remedy them. Furthermore, most licensed platforms are heavily locked down by the vendor, meaning that even if a library has accessibility-proficient information technology professionals at the ready, these professionals often aren't able to access the necessary code or programming needed in order to effect any changes to the platform. Lastly, contracts with licensed platforms may very well strictly forbid tampering with the electronic infrastructure of a platform.

Strategies and Solutions

- **Communicate with the Vendor:** If a library has a list of (or even a few) desired accessibility fixes, communicate those identified issues to the vendor systems support team. Most large electronic information technology vendors have a systems support channel through which library professionals can submit trouble tickets or enhancement requests.

- **Review Accessibility Documentation:** Additionally, the vendor may already provide accessibility-related documentation for the platform. Review this documentation and seek clarity from the systems support team whenever necessary.
- **Share Documentation with Library Personnel:** Consider circulating the accessibility documentation to instruction and/or service point personnel (e.g., workshop leaders, circulation or reference staff) so that they have ready access to the information should a patron request support or assistance within the library.

Content within Databases and Other E-resource Platforms

Database content refers to the materials housed within the licensed databases to which libraries subscribe. These materials vary according to the collection scope of the database and can include, but aren't limited to, diverse materials such as newspapers, refereed and trade articles, columns and essays, full-length texts, chapters or excerpts, images, transcripts, audio recordings, government documents, and much, much more. In addition to the accessibility barriers found in the electronic structures within a database, the materials within a database also have embedded obstacles around which people with disabilities of all kinds must navigate.

Common barriers include improper implementation of headers in document structures and lack of alternate text for images. The insertion of headings into electronic documents allows screen reading technology to identify subsections within a document and provide an audio narrative of the content in an organized, meaningful way. If an electronic document lacks headers, the person with a disability—whether it's visual or cognitive in nature—cannot use screen reading technology to listen to the content and retrieve the information. Briefly, screen reading technology is a type of software program that reads the text displayed on a computer (whether it's a website or an electronic document within a database) and presents the information in an audio or braille format. This software is useful for people with vision and learning disabilities; it's also helpful for those who struggle with literacy.

However, screen reading technology is useful only if the electronic document or content is formatted correctly (i.e., with headers and more); an improperly formatted document or one that lacks accessibility features entirely sounds like gibberish to a patron who uses screen reading technology. Likewise, the absence of alternate text for images (which refers to a brief caption that summarizes the activity of an image for nonsighted patrons) means that those with vision-related disabilities cannot make sense of an image that may convey useful or necessary information.

Computer Labs

While this chapter is dedicated to electronic materials and the platforms that house them, it's worth spending a moment reflecting on the hardware that supports these discovery portals. Many libraries offer a computer lab for patron use, which is an environment with computers, desks, chairs, and other hardware (e.g., headphones, speakers, etc.) necessary to support a lab. These physical spaces needed to be configured in such a way that people with disabilities can navigate with little modification of the environment on the patron's part. Inaccessible physical spaces within a computer lab are often literal barriers to a patron's participation in an activity or use of the Internet in a library environment.

- **Evaluate the Physical Space:** If a library receives a report that the computer lab is inaccessible, conduct an evaluation of the space. Guidelines and standards from the Americans with Disabilities Act provide recommended measurements for aisle space, appropriate desk heights, and assistive technologies (such as an enlarged keyboard or a different kind of computer mouse) that may make the computer lab more accessible for those with mobility-related disabilities. Essentially, libraries can choose to modify the physical infrastructure of a space in order to promote better access to the digital resources.
- **Purchase Accessible Furniture:** Other strategies include purchasing height-adjustable desks on which to house computers. Locate these height-adjustable desks near lab entrances (but away from traffic flow that would interfere with access and privacy), and use signage to indicate that these desks are prioritized for patrons with disabilities.
- **Create Accessible Pathways:** Measure the aisles to ensure that the width is wheel-chair accessible.
- **Install Free Screen Reading Software:** Consider installing free screen reading software so that patrons with visual or cognitive disabilities can access the content displayed on the computer screen. Communicate that headphones are available for circulation. When using electronic or physical advertising, communicate that patrons can contact the administration or library leadership team with a specific request.

Learning Management Systems

Learning management systems refer to the online environments designed to facilitate communication and learning in K-12 and higher education institutions. Common examples of a learning management system (LMS) include Blackboard, Canvas, and Moodle. Online spaces need to be configured in such a way that people with disabilities can navigate with little modification of the environment on their part. Briefly inaccessible learning environments are often literal barriers to a patron's participation in a learning activity. Additionally, features within an LMS may be inaccessible—such as quiz or survey functions, electronic grading books, discussion boards, announcement feeds, and many more. Quiz and test functionality built into the online environments are designed to facilitate communication and learning in K-12 and higher education institutions.

Libraries in K-12 and higher education environments often don't have input into which LMS a school district or an institution adopts. They often simply have to accept whatever system is selected, and address whatever foibles come along with the selected system. However, with increasing awareness about the need for (and the legislation tied to) electronic accessibility, many LMS vendors are developing built-in accessibility features and publishing those guides on the web. Library professionals should visit the vendor website and/or check the vendor support portal (a common place to check for all forms of systems documentation, not just accessibility-related issues) in order to search for any available accessibility documentation.

- **Review Accessibility Documentation:** If the vendor has made this information available, library professionals may want to place a link to these resources on the organization's intranet or internal website. This serves two purposes: placing a link to this information facilitates ease of access to these documents; furthermore, the presence of this link (perhaps alongside a short annotation on the purpose of this link) provides library employees with a visible reminder that electronic accessibility is important and worth daily consideration and/or high visibility.

Streaming Video

Streaming video refers to audiovisual content that is available through a web or online streaming service. Audiovisual content needs captions in order to ensure that hard of hearing and deaf patrons can understand what is being communicated to the audience. If the audiovisual content does not have captions, the affected patron can neither understand the contents of the video nor meaningfully participate in any related activities (such as a discussion groups). Additionally, audio description for the blind refers to an audio-based narrative of the nonverbal behaviors and actions occurring on the screen. (This service is also known as audio description or descriptive video [DV].) Describing the non-speech actions that occur on television provides more information for people with vision-related disabilities.

In an ideal world, all streaming video would have captions and descriptive video features. Alas, that's not often the case. Many vendors still do not have these features inherent in their content, so it's left to libraries and educational institutions to attempt to rectify the gap on behalf of their patrons and/or students. Furthermore, if the film or audiovisual event in question was made prior to the 1990s, it's unlikely that the item ever had captions or descriptive video features.

Strategies and Solutions

- **Acquire Captions:** If the film in question lacks closed captioning or descriptive video, and it's possible to purchase an updated version of the film with these features at a reasonable cost, the simplest solution may be to purchase the updated version of the content. That would be the fastest way to provide an accessible version of the content in a meaningful way.
- **Acquire Transcripts:** If such a purchase is not possible, seek a transcript of the film. Increasingly, these transcripts are more and more available to the public—precisely because people with hearing-related disabilities and/or library professionals have encountered the same issue. To get a transcript, contact the publisher or producer, and inquire if they have a copy; alternatively, a simple search on the Internet may yield useful results. If seeking transcripts for a specific patron, simply deliver that transcript to them upon arrival.
- **Managing Film Events:** If a library is hosting a film event and the film lacks captions or descriptive video, it is a good practice to have a print copy of the transcript available at the event or provide an accessible electronic copy via a link. If an academic or school library is using an inaccessible film for instructional purposes, and if the institution can obtain the appropriate permissions, it may be able to provide

a third-party vendor (such as 3Play Media) with a copy of the film in order to get captions integrated or the descriptive audio embedded.

Websites

As a combination of discovery platform and content, websites have the combined accessibility challenges found in both improperly formatted, tagged, and labeled platforms and content. The possible solutions and strategies in the relevant chapter subsections provide some tactics for addressing these barriers. Furthermore, it's important to note that different content management systems (e.g., Drupal, WordPress, and other website platforms), whether proprietary or open source (meaning that the software is freely available to any web developer), have unique (in)accessibility configurations and must be addressed on a system-by-system basis.

Strategies and Solutions

- **Review Accessibility Documentation:** The vendor may already provide accessibility-related documentation for the platform. Review this documentation and seek clarity from the systems support team whenever necessary.
- **Share Documentation with Library Personnel:** Consider circulating the accessibility documentation to instruction and/or service point personnel (e.g., workshop leaders, circulation or reference staff) so that they have ready access to the information should a patron request support or assistance within the library.

Applications and Software (Open-Source or Homegrown)

Some libraries have homegrown, or locally (i.e., unique and/or belonging to the organization) developed and implemented software or applications. In an ideal world, these systems are accessible by employees and patrons with disabilities. However, that's not often the case. If these programs are public-facing—meaning that they are accessed by the community— it's especially important to have a relevant information technology professional evaluate the system for accessibility issues, recommend solutions, and implement them.

An additional note about open-source software: Open-source systems are freely available to developers and can usually be modified to add further functionality or remedy bugs. The open-source community is informed by an ethos around sharing information, code, and other kinds of resources, and many developers and programmers will share their code for open-source functionality or systems on platforms like GitHub. Why is this information relevant? Because library professionals may be able to find fixes to known accessibility barriers found in these open-source systems on sites like GitHub. These fixes are often available for free, though they may have an attribution statement or some other contingency, and with the appropriate technological support, a library may be able to resolve an issue with an open-source system.

E-resource Accessibility Evaluation Procedures

Before moving into an overview of an e-resource evaluation process, it's important to discuss a useful tool that more and more vendors are adopting: the voluntary product

assessment template, or VPAT. The VPAT is a proprietary evaluation tool provided by the Information Technology Industry Council (ITI), a global leader in the electronic accessibility conversation, and is freely available to all entities, public or private. Designed to be completed by vendors, this standardized template provides an in-depth checklist of questions to which vendors can respond. Mapped to the federal requirements outlined in Section 508 of the Workforce Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and with a revised edition published in April 2019, this document is a self-disclosure of vendors to prospective clients about the accessibility (or lack thereof) inherent in their products.

The concept of the VPAT is as follows:

While an excellent concept, the reality of the VPAT completion process proves trickier in application. Let's examine the barriers to a successful VPAT experience.

1. **Prospective Purchaser Lacks Familiarity with Accessibility Principles:** The client may be unfamiliar with accessibility guidelines and standards, and either doesn't ask a vendor to complete a VPAT and/or doesn't know how to evaluate the results meaningfully. Thus, the client's lack of awareness can lead to acquiring a product that's inaccessible to users or patrons.
2. **Prospective Vendor Lacks Familiarity with Accessibility Principles:** The vendor may not be familiar with accessibility guidelines and standards or may be aware of these legal requirements but unsure how to implement them in the software or product. This means that the vendor has to be educated about what electronic accessibility looks like in their product, and needs to (a) identify the right kind of web development or programming expertise that will build accessibility into the product and then (b) hire that expert to make the proposed changes a reality—a possibly expensive endeavor that a vendor may choose to forgo or delay, despite the legal and financially punitive risks associated with this tactic.

All of these considerations place libraries in a difficult position because the information and communication technology vendors used by libraries make up a small pool of vendors (especially compared to the global ICT vendor ecosystem), meaning there simply aren't that many alternatives for libraries to consider. Library professionals should bear in mind that the VPAT process is an imperfect one. However, the VPAT is a useful conversation starter and the template is best used as such, rather than the definitive tool by which a vendor is selected.

Another aside about electronic resource evaluation: Given the complexity of the information and communication technology ecosystem in every library, platform evaluation needs to occur on a system-by-system approach. This means that library professionals should seek a VPAT for each platform. Yes, even those platforms owned by the same vendor—it's possible that one inaccessible platform was acquired by a vendor that otherwise has a good history with implementing accessibility features. Alternatively, a homegrown system (i.e., a platform built by a programmer within the library or the community) should be built with accessibility at the forefront. If that's not possible, or if the system is so old that it predates some of the Section 508 guidelines (some systems do very simple functions and can work perfectly well for decades), the homegrown system needs to be evaluated and remedied independently from other platforms.

The following subsections aim to outline a prospective process for evaluating the accessibility of e-resource platforms and accompanying content. Given the workload inherent in this process, it's worth dedicating a team of library professionals to com-

plete this work. Ideally, this small team (approximately two to four individuals) would be cross-functional, meaning that they work in different areas throughout the library. The different technical expertise and anecdotal experiences offered by these individuals can provide a diversity of perspectives around the information needs of library professionals (i.e., what accessibility-related knowledge do library professionals need to be successful in providing effective and inclusive services?) and common pain points reported by patrons throughout the library. This cross-functional approach to identifying and addressing accessibility barriers and issues is one way to gather information about issues and pain points throughout an organization. Aside from a cross-functional team, for some stages of this e-resource evaluation process, consider hosting work parties within the library. Briefly, work parties are one-time information gathering events or activities during many library personnel can assist with identifying useful resources (such as accessibility documentation).

Stage One

Collect accessibility documentation on each platform. This information usually includes the VPAT and the supporting technical documentation. If the VPAT exists, this document is typically made available upon request by the client.[4] While it may not be posted on the vendor website, some vendors are choosing to do so in a goodwill effort to be transparent about their products. The latter documents, the supporting technical materials, may contain additional accessibility information—such as how to enable and use built-in accessibility features—and are often found in the vendor technical support portal. The portal can be found via Internet searches, a client portal, or through a simple request to the vendor for the URL. Again, it's wise to collect documentation on each platform.

Table 2.2.

Platform	
Vendor	
VPAT/Documentation?	[ ] No. [ ] Yes. If so, what is the URL?
Audit Date	
Representative URLs	
Counts	Features Elements
	Errors Alerts
Summary	
Prioritized Fixes	Sample Fix (Deadline) Sample Fix (Deadline) Sample Fix (Deadline)
Responsible Party	
Communication Strategy	

Stage Two

Evaluate the information. Once the library professional(s) have gathered the information, now is the time to evaluate the VPATs. During the information-gathering process, several scenarios may emerge, each of which requires its own strategies and responses. Please see below for an overview.

Table 2.3. Overview of VPAT Process

SCENARIO ONE

In this scenario, the VPAT and/or accessibility technical documentation is completely absent. Submit a request that the vendor complete a VPAT prior to acquiring the product or platform. If the vendor refuses to do so, this resource poses a significant legal risk. If possible, do not adopt this product. Consider what alternatives are possible (if any).

1. **Document Barriers:** Identify, document, and communicate accessibility problems to the vendor. Be as specific as possible, and consider including short videos and screenshots to illuminate the problems. Not sure how to identify accessibility problems within the organization's electronic resources? Consider reaching out to a disability rights organization within the community and inviting members of that organization to partner on identifying inaccessible platforms. While some libraries may balk at employing this tactic because they don't wish to advertise inaccessible content and platforms, the reality is that most people with disabilities already know that the content and the platforms are inaccessible. Inviting them to help identify and communicate those problems to the vendor can be a goodwill gesture to the disability communities, and a chance to strengthen relationships between the library and those communities.
2. **Communicate Concerns:** Communicate to the vendor that the product carries a high risk of being inaccessible to patrons with disabilities, and that to avoid lawsuits and to be truly inclusive to all library patrons, specific features need to be built into the product.
3. **Request Remediation Roadmap/Plans:** After communicating the accessibility barriers found in the platform, request that the vendor demonstrate progress toward remediating problems by a specified date. These documents are often called an accessibility remediation roadmap, and if negotiated into the language for licensed contracts, libraries may consider requesting that the vendor charge less than full price for the product until full remediation is made or if the vendor misses important milestones.
4. **Train Library Personnel:** Once the issues have been identified, develop in-house (i.e., within the library and to be completed by library personnel) workarounds, internal workflows, and/or service modifications to address known problems in the short term. Communicate these modifications to library stakeholders, and train library personnel.
5. **Address Legal Liability:** If at all possible, shift the legal liability to the vendor when negotiating the contract for licensed materials and platforms. Unfortunately, this tactic may be an unrealistic and untenable negotiating position for many libraries, due to a lack of financial bargaining power or any acceptable alternative electronic resource platforms from which to choose. However, it's worth attempting.

SCENARIO TWO

In this scenario, the vendor has completed a VPAT and/or has existing documentation on accessibility features and has made the document available to the client. While it is a good sign that a vendor has provided a VPAT to the client, it is up to the client to verify that the statements with the document are accurate. Because there is still growing (but not universal) awareness of electronic accessibility issues, it's possible for a vendor to believe its product is accessible and to self-report accordingly, all with the best of intentions. However, a library professional or a trusted expert (be it a volunteer with accessibility experience or a contracted third-party professional) will need to double-check the claims in the VPAT.

Here are a few things to watch for.
- **Absent or Missing Information:** Has the vendor completed every checkbox within the template? Absent or missing information is an opportunity for further dialogue with the vendor about the specific issues that haven't been checked or addressed.
- **Additional Notes:** If the vendor checked every box on the template, has it included additional information or notes about known issues? Or perhaps a link to its accessibility documentation portal? A VPAT can be a sparse document if the vendor simply checked every box; however, it's a good sign if the vendor has spent time to thoroughly go through the document and add comments that better communicate to the client.

- **Currency:** Prior to acquiring an electronic resource or product, a library professional can always request a complete VPAT. However, what should one do when the library has already purchased a product or subscribed to a service? Library professionals can always request that the vendor complete a VPAT, regardless of when a product or a service was acquired. Thus, when evaluating a VPAT for an existing electronic resource, check the date. When was this VPAT completed? If the VPAT is older than two or three years, request an updated version. Furthermore, to which standards is this VPAT mapped? The WCAG standards have evolved alongside technology. As of 2019, the current standards are WCAG 2.1 (rather than the commonly cited 2.0 standards). If the VPAT is mapped to WCAG 2.0, consider asking that the vendor revise the VPAT results in accordance with the 2.1 version of the guidelines. Lastly, to which level of standards is the VPAT mapped—A, AA, or AAA? Knowing which level of accessibility compliance the VPAT ascribes to provides further information to the library professional about whether to acquire the product or, if the product has already been purchased, whether to submit requests for accessibility-specific enhancements and updates to the product through the customer service portal or vendor representative.
- **Remediation Roadmap:** If the vendor has completed every box on the template and included notes about known issues, has it also included a timeline of proposed fixes for known issues? Often called an accessibility remediation roadmap, this information can be a separate document with specific deadlines by which the self-reported accessibility issues will be developed and published to the production environment. Alternatively, this information may simply be included in the VPAT itself. It's an excellent sign of goodwill and transparency if the vendor acknowledges the accessibility flaws in a product and produces a specific timeline of proposed fixes (which would ideally occur within twenty-four months of the first disclosure). While the remediation roadmap doesn't fix the issue immediately, its presence allows library professionals to communicate to impacted patrons that (a) the barrier is a known issue, (b) the vendor is currently working on a fix, and (c) the library professional can provide alternative and immediate access to the content. While the aforementioned scenario isn't ideal, it is better than doing nothing at all.
- **Presence of Third-Party Evaluations:** When conducting research for VPATs and other types of accessibility documentation, keep an eye out for evaluation reports tied to a specific product. In a goodwill effort, a vendor may have solicited appropriate third parties (i.e., electronic accessibility experts) to test their products and to share the corresponding results. Such a report should include the name, credentials, and contact information of the relevant third parties. This is not yet a terribly common practice; however, if such a document is present, it speaks to the confidence of the vendor in its own product.

Stage Three

The last stage of the evaluation process is to retain accessibility documentation in a shared internal site (such as an intranet or a private LibGuide), to review the documentation on an annual or otherwise regular basis, and to update as appropriate. All accessibility documentation and communications related to this process should be retained for informational and training purposes. It's useful to have easy and quick access to the accessibility documentation in case a patron lodges a complaint about a product. Having this information at the ready, and being able to converse with an upset patron about the ongoing electronic accessibility efforts in which the library is engaged, can signal to the patron that the library is at least attempting to mitigate these issues in the short term and improve/fix them in the long term.

With regard to training purposes: Both new and existing library professionals should be trained on how to locate general accessibility documentation and any existing accessibility-specific workarounds or workflows (e.g., document conversion, creating captions for a video, and more). Associated training should be offered at least once a year; likewise, supporting documentation should be updated once a year.

All accessibility documentation should be periodically reviewed for accuracy and currency. For example, perhaps a new version of the WCAG standards was published. How significant are the differences between the versions? Keeping the documentation up to date is necessary to ensure its value to library professionals; outdated information can

be a hindrance, especially when working with a patron on a reported issue. Furthermore, a point person with the library must be responsible for following up on the accessibility remediation roadmap. Sample queries to the vendor could include the following: The remediation roadmap provided by vendors offers deadlines and milestones, and when those dates roll around, library professionals should contact vendors with a simple request for a status update. When will the vendor release the fix into the production environment? Will it introduce new problems? Is there a beta environment in which the organization's information technology professionals can test the new fixes? Routine follow-up with the vendor signals the library's commitment to electronic accessibility and results, ideally, in enhanced inclusivity for patrons with disabilities.

◎ Sustainability: How to Manage These Processes

This chapter covered a great many recommendations around enhancing electronic accessibility within a library's information and communication technologies ecosystem. The strategies and activities within this chapter may seem idealistic, unlikely, or downright impossible for a small library or for the many libraries whose personnel are already overstretched. That's an understandable reaction—most people already tasked with a great many things greet the news of additional work with a grim smile or an outright refusal. However, here are some suggestions for keeping this work sustainable while still making progress on an important goal—which is to make the library an inclusive space for all patrons, including those with disabilities.

- **Form an Accessibility Team:** Consider dedicating a team of library professionals to start an accessibility team. Ideally, this small team (approximately two to four individuals) would be cross-functional, meaning that they work in different areas throughout the library. The different technical expertise and anecdotal experiences offered by these individuals can provide a diversity of perspectives around the information needs of library professionals and common pain points reported by patrons throughout the library. This cross-functional approach to identifying and addressing accessibility barriers is a good way to gather a holistic array of information about issues and pain points throughout an organization.
- **Identify a Charge, Projects, and Other Roles:** Once the team is formed (with an accompanying charge, roles and responsibilities, terms of service, etc.), that team can be the lead for accessibility issues within the organization. Sample responsibilities include but are not limited to creating accessibility trainings, providing routine communications to library personnel and patrons about accessibility issues, communicating enhancement requests and needs to web professionals and vendors, and maintaining the gathered documentation (such as VPATS), among other things. This approach addresses the sustainability issue in myriad ways: a cross-functional team ensures that the accessibility-related information and training needs of an organization are covered while multiple team members—as opposed to a single point person—ensure that the work is distributed. A side note: In the event of creating an accessibility team, make sure that the individuals have access to professional development and training opportunities to enhance and expand expertise (or at least the dedicated work time to learn on their own, through resources found on the Web). Furthermore, be sure to remove other job duties (as needed) from the affected individuals to ensure that these personnel do not exceed a forty-hour work week.

- **Host Work Sprints:** A sprint is a practice found in ICT communities in which web professionals participate in a development marathon—meaning they work several hours on a specific set of tasks in hopes of making significant progress in a quick manner. Libraries can borrow from this practice in a variety of ways, but with regards to accessibility practices, it may be worth it to host a sprint to gather accessibility documentation. Since many libraries own or license content from several vendors, and because gathering that information may seem daunting over a long period of time, consider having a half-day sprint and inviting colleagues to help gather accessibility documentation during this event. This raises awareness across the libraries about accessibility issues, distributes the work across the organization, and achieves a great deal of work in a short amount of time.
- **Look for Existing Documentation:** Lastly, look to other libraries for shared resources, practices, repositories, and even VPATS. (Please note that some vendors may restrict public distribution of VPATs.) One example of these shared resources is the VPAT Repository, which can be found at https://vpats.wordpress.com. It's a simple site that contains a table with vendors and associated documentation; several other similar resources exist. In the interest of saving time and effort, it's worth searching out these resources as part of the information-gathering process.

◉ Sample Accessibility Team Charge

Interested in starting an accessibility team at your library? Here is an example of a team charge or directive document.

Table 2.4. Template Charge for Accessibility Team

Charge: The Library Accessibility Team (LAT) will inform, create, and promote accessibility initiatives that support teaching, learning, and research. The LAT will serve as a resource on accessibility issues by providing guidance and coordination for relevant activities that improve instructional practices and physical and online spaces.

Responsibilities of the LAT:
- Serve as a forum for communication, collaboration, and knowledge-sharing of accessibility-related issues.
- Promote awareness of accessibility concepts and techniques. Identify and/or provide accessibility-related training needs and opportunities.
- Foster a culture that values proactive implementation of accessible and inclusive spaces.
- Develop and promote effective guidelines and tools for accessibility practices.
- Provide consultations or referrals on accessibility guidelines, tools, and best practices.

Leadership: The LAT is convened and managed by [insert name and position].

Membership and Reporting: The LAT is a working team composed of representatives from throughout the library and/or those with a relevant area of responsibility. These representatives are named by the respective department head and are expected to contribute a minimum of five hours per month to the prioritized initiatives. The LAT reports to [insert the name of the relevant leadership body].

Nature of Work and Deliverables: The LAT will meet as needed; furthermore, independent work will be necessary. The work will focus upon accessibility issues inherent in instructional practices and physical and online spaces. Deliverables may include but are not limited to the following.
- Identify and refer electronic accessibility needs to the information technology department.
- Connect library professionals with the relevant experts in the community.
- Develop best practices, tools, resources, and in-house workshops to support colleagues in their work.
- Collaborate with other departments or external organizations when relevant opportunities arise.

⊚ One Last Thing

It is crucially important to remember that electronic accessibility work is complex, involves multiple stakeholders with differing levels of responsibility, and can be fraught with stigma and fear. The desired outcomes of this kind of work will not occur overnight. Simply put, this is a long game. Thus, while libraries should not accept substandard service and products that adversely affect patrons with disabilities, library professionals should also know in advance that this is an intensive and long-term dialogue between the library profession, the ICT and e-resource vendors, and patrons with disabilities.

⊚ Key Points

- Given the ubiquity of the Internet and how integrated it has become in the world at large, electronic accessibility is very important for libraries. Noncompliance comes with legal and ethical risks for libraries.
- Electronic accessibility barriers manifest in both the system/platform and the content housed within that system.
- Evaluation for e-accessibility needs to be conducted on a system-by-system basis.
- In order to make quick progress on these issues, form a cross-departmental team charged with identifying and addressing the issues.

⊚ Recommended Resources

Association of Specialized and Cooperative Library Agencies. "Accessibility to Library Databases and Other Online Library Resources for People with Disabilities." http://ascla.ala.org/toolkit/index.php?title=Accessibility_to_Library_Databases_and_Other_Online_Library_Resources_for_People_with_Disabilities.

Big Ten Academic Alliance. "Library E-Resource Accessibility—Standardized License Language." https://www.btaa.org/library/accessibility/library-e-resource-accessibility---standardized-license-language.

Big Ten Academic Alliance. "Library E-Resource Accessibility—Testing." https://www.btaa.org/library/accessibility/library-e-resource-accessibility--testing.

European Standard. "Accessibility Requirements Suitable for Public Procurement of ICT Products and Services in Europe." https://www.etsi.org/deliver/etsi_en/301500_301599/301549/01.01.02_60/en_301549v010102p.pdf.

Information Technology Industry Council. "Voluntary Product Assessment Template." https://www.itic.org/policy/accessibility/vpat.

Library Accessibility VPAT Repository. https://vpats.wordpress.com/.

World Wide Web Consortium. "Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) Overview." https://www.w3.org/WAI/standards-guidelines/wcag/.

⊚ Notes

1. World Health Organization, "What Is e-Accessibility?" September 2013, https://www.who.int/features/qa/50/en/.

2. World Wide Web Consortium, "WCAG 2.0 Layers of Guidance," December 11, 2008, https://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG20/#intro-layers-guidance.

3. World Wide Web Consortium, "Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1," June 15, 2018, https://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG21/.

4. University of Washington, "Procuring Accessible IT," https://www.washington.edu/accessibility/procurement/

Physical Accessibility

IN THIS CHAPTER

▷ Definition of physical accessibility

▷ How physical accessibility barriers manifest in libraries

▷ Overview of remediation strategies for physical barriers in libraries

▷ How to make physical accessibility practices sustainable in libraries, where labor and finances are often limited

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LET'S IMAGINE A SCENARIO: A young man who uses a wheelchair would like to visit a library. After arriving at the library, he parks in the dedicated accessibility spot, and he's further pleased to find that the building entrance has an accessible, automatic door that opens in response to a button when pushed. The young man enters the building and is able to get to the second floor on an elevator. So far, so good. However, the young man has visited the library to work on a high school history project and needs desk space to spread out his notes in order to review them. Unfortunately, he isn't able to find an accessible, height-adjustable desk to use. He suffices with a nearby table but has to wrangle a few heavy wooden chairs out of the way.

After an hour of studying, he realizes that he needs to retrieve some materials from the history section of the library and, after gathering his notes, makes his way up to the fourth floor. Upon his arrival, he realizes the stacks in which the collections are housed are nestled together far too closely—there's no way he will be able to navigate down an aisle. Disheartened, he decides he'll go home instead and use web-based resources that he can download rather than the print texts that are in front of him but well out of his grasp. On his way out of the library, he realizes that the entrance to the bathroom doesn't have an accessibility button on the exterior. Given that lack of accessibility, he assumes the restroom stalls are likewise inaccessible. He makes a mental note to avoid using the library restrooms in the future. He then exits the library and drives home.

◎ What Is Physical Accessibility?

The scenario above illustrates several possible and prospective barriers a person with a disability—whether mobility, motor, vision, chronic health, or other—may have to contend with should they want to visit and use a physical location. If the definition of accessibility refers to the ability to access a space, function, or service with ease and without barriers, physical accessibility refers to the ability of people with disabilities to enter, navigate within, and use physical spaces within a given location—or the services, expertise, and materials within a given space. Libraries are often complicated case studies with regard to physical accessibility. Depending on the size and composition of the building (or buildings), along with when it was built (i.e., before or after 1990, when the Americans with Disabilities Act was signed into law) and whether the building has seen any renovations since, most library spaces are partially, intermittently, or wholly inaccessible. (Intermittent accessibility might mean the building entrance is accessible but the classroom space is not.)

Being able to locate and then navigate through physical spaces within a library can seem like an obstacle course by the time a patron with a disability has entered the building, found an accommodating space, and determined whether the restrooms, elevators, collections stacks, and other spaces are accessible—all before actually using library services and expertise in a meaningful way. This, of course, is not what any library professional wants for their community. On the other hand, the funds needed to meaningfully change the structure and space allocation of a library building are often simply unavailable. In the face of these troubling and expensive issues, it's important for library personnel to acknowledge the issues, to frame them as a community-wide concern (meaning that a library often lacks the funds and connections to change these spaces by themselves), and to communicate alternatives to patrons with disabilities. Before delving into action steps, let's explore the different examples of barriers people with disabilities can experience within a library.

◎ Types of Barriers, Impact upon Patrons, and Possible Remedies

The following section outlines common physical spaces found and used in library environments, followed by a summary of accessibility barriers inherent in these spaces. The section also provides a summary of how these accessibility barriers impact library patrons with specific kinds of disabilities, and shares possible solutions for these issues. The strategies provided are not the entirety of possible solutions, merely a subset that may be useful. Furthermore, not all solutions may be applicable to every library due to the organizational differences (e.g., different library types, sizes, etc.) and available funding and/or expertise. Lastly, some solutions should not be borne by the library but by the associated county, affiliated institution (such as a university), vendor, etc.

Every library will need to identify which strategies are appropriate and feasible to adopt. Lastly, ensure that permissions and support have been granted by the appropriate authorities before implementing any changes and communicate these planned changes to colleagues throughout the libraries and to community patrons. Unplanned changes in a physical space, even if made with the best of intentions, can wreak havoc on daily operations and cause a great deal of unnecessary frustration and suffering.

Entrances

There are many entrances into various spaces within a library. They include but aren't limited to:

- Building entrances
- Elevator entrances
- Restroom entrances
- Doors to the restroom stalls
- Study and event room entrances
- Library service points

Entrances pose unique barriers to patrons with vision, motor, and mobility disabilities. In the instance of building entrances, intermittent or inconsistent doorway accessibility can be the norm rather than the exception. For example, one entrance may be accessible while another isn't—thus halting the progress of the patron with a disability through the physical space and limiting their options for accessing a library space or service.

Strategies and Solutions

In an ideal world, library buildings are built with accessibility in mind, which would mean all entrances are already accessible. Since no one lives in this enviable and nonexistent world, here are the modifications that make an existing entrance an accessible experience for people with disabilities.

- **Building Entrances:** For building entrances, ensure that they have an automatic door opener that responds when prompted by a light push. Furthermore, make sure that the doorways are wide enough to accommodate a wheelchair. The Americans with Disabilities Act articulates specific measurements for legal accessibility.
- **Room Entrances:** Inside the building, also ensure that the doorways to restrooms, study rooms, classroom and event spaces, and collections spaces are wide enough to accommodate a wheelchair user. Furthermore, if a library elects not to install the automatic door opener, find the appropriate hardware (a specific kind of door handle) that allows a person with a motor function disability to easily grasp the handle and open it.
- **Restroom Accessibility:** Within restrooms, ensure that the accessible bathroom stalls have entrances (and for that matter, the space within) that are wide enough to allow the admittance of a wheelchair user.

Be aware that all of the listed modifications require funds and professional expertise (e.g., electricians, plumbers, etc.), which can be an obstacle for many libraries. While documenting these issues and communicating them to the appropriate funder (i.e., the governing body responsible for funding such changes), libraries can communicate to patrons the efforts undertaken to create and/or advocate for accessible physical spaces through a statement on the organization's website. Ideally, such a statement would provide instructions for the easiest and safest ways to enter and navigate within the building, along with any modifications to library services that are designed to better serve patrons with disabilities.

Restrooms

In addition to the aforementioned accessible restroom stall entrance considerations, a truly accessible restroom stall needs toilets, toilet paper dispensers, and seat covers (if available in other stalls) installed at an appropriate height for a wheelchair user. An accessible restroom stall also needs grab bars to permit an easy transfer to and from the toilet seat, again at an appropriate height for a wheelchair user. Lastly, restrooms need an accessible sink, a soap dispenser, and a paper towel dispenser (or hand dryer), all installed at an appropriate height. An accessible sink is a specific type of basin with faucet handles that are that easy to use for those with mobility and motor function–related disabilities; there should also be space underneath the basin to allow for wheelchair navigation.

Strategies and Solutions

- **Prioritize Low-Hanging Fruit:** Of the above list, the least expensive items to fix or adjust in order to create a more accessible restroom include the door handles, toilet paper dispensers, seat cover dispensers, grab bars within the restroom stall, and the soap and paper towel dispensers within the restroom itself. In contrast, relocating and/or replacing a toilet or a sink, along with installing an automatic accessibility door opener, are quite expensive endeavors. And depending on how the restroom is configured (i.e., available space, tile versus drywall, etc.), even if there are available funds and ready access to the expertise needed to complete these minor wins, it may not be possible for a library to accomplish these fixes.
- **Communicate:** Whenever improvements or fixes aren't possible, the library should default to communication: find the nearest truly accessible restroom, and through signage tell patrons with disabilities where it's located.

Pathways

A path within a library refers to the formal and informal navigation routes that permit patrons to traverse the library environment. Disability legislation outlines specific standards by which an aisle or a route is accessible, and it's good practice to organize pathways and routes in accordance with those standards. However, spaces designed before 1990 do not often permit true compliance with disability legislation. To make matters even more complicated, a challenge to good intentions and practices can emerge from an unexpected quarter: other library patrons. Often library patrons will move a desk, a chair, or other furniture in an effort to accommodate their own activity. This often reconfigures a space and transforms a previously accessible route into an inaccessible and obstacle-filled path for people with mobility, motor, and vision-related disabilities.

Strategies and Solutions

- **Signage:** It's often difficult to truly control or restrict an organically shifting space like a library, given how many parties use it every day and for sometimes wildly different or even competing reasons. However, it is possible, through signage on the walls (or even on the floors), to dedicate main routes within the library as accessible routes that should remain barrier free. While this signage won't prevent patrons from placing chairs and other furniture square in the middle of these accessible

routes, it does provide a library professional with the necessary documentation and the policy-based impetus to require that the obstacle be removed.

- **Communications Campaign:** If a library chooses to adopt dedicated accessibility routes along the main thoroughfares, the leadership should publish that information on the organization's website and in an e-mail newsletter (or the appropriate communications platform adopted by the library).

Ramps

A ramp is an incline that leads to a building or a space. To be considered legally accessible, a ramp must gradually incline—rather than go sharply upward—in order to permit wheelchair users who operate manual wheelchairs to navigate the ramp with ease and/or without an undue amount of physical labor. However, ramps are often physical structures that were built before disability civil rights and legal protections were signed into law. Alternatively, a ramp could have been attached as part of a later renovation to the existing building. Given these scenarios, truly accessible ramps within libraries can be few and far between.

Strategies and Solutions

- **Document Inaccessible Ramps:** Due to the expense, the needed professional expertise and labor, and the time associated with fixing an inaccessible ramp, most libraries cannot address this issue right away. Libraries should document the inaccessible ramp(s) throughout the building and communicate the need for repairs or replacement to the appropriate funder.
- **Communicate Alternative Navigation:** If there are alternative, more accessible ways to enter the same space, be sure to communicate that to the patron via signage at the appropriate junctures. Appropriate junctures in this context refers to the strategic placement of signs in the locations that inform patrons as early as possible in the journey throughout the library, so as to better inform the patron's decision-making about what route to use. See the section titled "Wayfinding and Navigation Signage" for more information.
- **Install Rails and Nonslip Grip:** Other strategies that can assist in making a space safer for all patrons include using nonslip grip on ramp floors, to help prevent an uncontrolled descent, and rails along the side of the ramp.

Elevators

Elevators are a carriage by which patrons travel from one floor to another, and these travel mechanisms are used by many patrons and employees, not just those with disabilities. However, an inaccessible elevator can introduce barriers to patrons with mobility, vision, and motor function disabilities. The United States Access Board, a federal body tasked with outlining the specific requirements needed to make a space accessible in accordance with federal law, has an entire section within the Guide to the ADA Standards dedicated to elevators.[1] These regulations include requirements for landing spaces outside of elevators; width of elevator doors; accessibility considerations within an elevator (i.e., floors and width of elevator carriage); height of elevator call buttons (along with the requirements associated with the size of the buttons, the space between the buttons, and size of

braille lettering that includes floor numbers); vocal indicators of floor travel for nonvisual patrons (i.e., the verbal announcements of which floor a patron has arrived on); and many, many more details.

Frankly, elevators can be an intimidating project for a library to tackle. The combination of the complexity of the electronics and perhaps an uncertainty about what to prioritize can stymie otherwise excellent intentions for creating a better, more accessible experience for patrons. While the electronics should always be left to professionals and any modifications approved (and paid for) by the appropriate authorities prior to initiation, there are some strategies for making an elevator more accessible that are well within the means and control of a library. The areas in which library professionals can institute immediate changes are signage, floor/landing space outside of the elevators, and floor conditions within the elevator carriage.

Strategies and Solutions

- **Evaluate Elevators:** First, talk with the library's facility manager (if one is present/employed). A facilities manager typically has responsibilities involving the management of the library building(s) and likely has some credentials or at least access to best practices about making physical spaces accessible. If the library in question lacks a facilities manager, and an enterprising library professional has permission from the administration to investigate and recommend strategies for making the elevators more accessible, here are some suggestions. Assuming the library in question lacks a physical accessibility inventory (don't worry—most libraries do!), start by making a spreadsheet of elevator locations. Ask questions like the ones provided in table 3.1:

Table 3.1.

Signage	Examine the signage: Is it at the right height? Is it presented in braille? Is it clear and obvious which floors and spaces this elevator ascends and descends to?
Landing Spaces	Then examine the landing spaces outside the elevators. Are these spaces adjacent to the elevator doors? Are they clear of obstacles? Essentially, is there space for a wheelchair user to rest while waiting for the elevator?
Elevator Interior	Lastly, examine the interior of the elevator. Is the signage readable from a height of thirty-six to forty-eight inches? Is the signage clear about where this elevator travels to? Is the floor of the elevator carriage clear of obstacles and debris? If warranted, is there nonslip material on the floor?

While these small changes can seem like a drop in the bucket compared to the large-scale and expensive renovations needed for full accessibility, every little bit makes a difference in the experience of all patrons, not just those with disabilities.

Water Fountains

Water fountains are a wonderful convenience for many library patrons. However, if the water fountains are installed at an inaccessible height and/or lack an accessibility-friendly handle for those with motor function disabilities to manipulate, the water fountain can

be an obnoxious obstacle to overcome or avoid entirely. Again, whenever improvements or fixes aren't possible, the library should default to communication: find the nearest truly accessible water fountain, and through signage tell patrons with disabilities where it's located.

Public Phones

Like water fountains, public phones can be a delightful convenience for library patrons who forgot their mobile device at home or don't own a mobile device at all. However, if the public phone lacks volume amplifiers, patrons who are hard of hearing or have some kind of deafness aren't able to use the phone meaningfully and with ease. Unless the library is willing to invest in accompanying telecommunications devices and services for deaf and hard of hearing patrons, consider removing the public phone entirely as to reduce inequity in access to technology. Favoring a visual medium, many deaf and hard of hearing patrons would prefer to text or e-mail recipients, and given the increasing numbers of patrons who have personal mobile phones, public phones can introduce more trouble than they are worth.

Collections Stacks

The stacks are a series of physical shelving units that house texts, print journals, and other artifacts. Because space is a contested and valuable commodity in many libraries throughout the United States, and given the trend to transform spaces into patron-centric programming and events arenas, libraries often cluster stacks or shelving units quite closely together in an effort to use the allotted space most efficiently. This very understandable scenario often results in narrow aisles between the stacks. Additionally, stacks and shelving units are designed to house as many texts as possible and thus are quite tall, standing at six feet or more. If a patron cannot fit between the stacks due to narrow aisles or reach the top of the stacks, then they cannot access the collections with ease, or in some cases at all. These limitations are bound to affect individuals with mobility, motor function, and vision-related disabilities.

Strategies and Solutions

- **Alternate Modes of Access, Retrieval, and Delivery:** If a library is unable to modify the shelving arrangements to accommodate wider aisles and/or shorter shelving units, it must provide alternate modes of access and communicate those modes of access at every opportunity. One alternate mode of access is arranging for library personnel or pages to retrieve items for patrons upon the submission of an electronic request through the catalog. The communication modes include appropriate signage at elevator and library wing entrances, and a statement on the organization's website. Sample signage could read thus: "Need to retrieve a book or journal? Submit a request through your patron account in the library catalog." Keep the language neutral and simple, and don't identify specific patron types with the signage. A retrieval service could be a boon to many library patrons (e.g., the elderly), not just those with disabilities.

Service Points (e.g., Circulation Services, Self-Checkout, Reference or Research Desk)

A service point is a physical and/or electronic location in which a library colleague who is responsible for, or associated with, a library service or program that routinely interacts with the public. Examples of different types of service points within a library include circulation services, reference or research consultation desks, course reserves, and more. Typically, a service point has a desk or some kind of physical location, a library member staffing the desk, and a service that's performed. These services can be:

- Instructional (e.g., teaching a patron how to use a specific kind of software)
- Outreach and programming (e.g., an event or a guest speaker)
- Directional (e.g., the infamous query, "Where's the restroom?")
- Referential (e.g., how to conduct research or locate information)
- Transactional (e.g., payment of fines or picking up materials held at a circulation desk)

When evaluating service points for physical accessibility, ensure that the service being performed is also accessible to the patron. An inaccessible service at an otherwise accessible physical space is a frustrating experience for patrons with disabilities.

Strategies and Solutions

With regards to the physical space associated with a service point, consider the following questions: Is it possible to access this service point from a nearby elevator? Is there an accessible restroom nearby? If there is a service desk at this location, is it height-adjustable or at least installed at a height that is welcoming and accessible to a wheelchair user? Are the common supporting elements—such as a stapler, writing utensils, and a keyboard—within reach of a wheelchair user? Are any print handouts, such as authentication instructions for a database or a community station, available in large print upon request? While it is expensive and will require time to modify physical infrastructure like elevators and restrooms, with forethought and planning, library professionals can modify physical spaces with small furniture substitutions, signage, and consistent practices.

Increasingly in libraries, a physical service point may have an electronic, or web-based, counterpart. Common examples include a chat interface or an e-mail web form. While most of the relevant electronic accessibility recommendations have already been addressed in chapter 2, it is important to consider electronic accessibility practices while assessing physical accessibility issues within a library. Lastly, with regard to the services associated with a physical service point location, consider the following questions: Can a service point employee enlarge the font on print handouts or electronic displays? Can personnel provide alternate modes of access to information, such as braille—or have a plan in place to outsource that task to a credentialed third-party professional with a quick turnaround time? Can personnel modify the physical delivery of materials to the patron upon request (e.g., retrieving patron requests from the circulation holds area within the library)?

Given the diversity of spaces and services within any given library, let alone those across library types, sizes, and regions, it's almost impossible to anticipate every scenario that presents accessibility issues to a patron. Frankly, it may not be the best use of time to

generate every possible scenario and attempt to plan for it. However, there are common strategies to employ along these lines:

- Ensure that a library employee, at any point, can modify a physical space (through the use or temporary movement of furniture and adjacent tools) to better welcome a person with a disability.
- Ensure that a library employee, at any point, can modify a service, through the strategic use of alternative instructions or modes of access, to better welcome a person with a disability.
- Inventory the services associated with each service point and imagine how to alter the delivery of the service for different kinds of disabilities.

Archival and Special Collections Spaces

While technically a service point, archival and/or special collections spaces warrant a separate discussion because of some unique considerations. Often, the materials within a special collections or an archive are unique and possibly have some monetary and/or historical value. Thus, many units choose to keep their collections in a closed/private, climate-controlled, and surveilled area in order to maintain the security necessary to protect the collections within. Combined with the already discussed value of space as a commodity (meaning that special collections units and archives need to use every inch of available space), not many library patrons—let along those with disabilities—have access to these physical spaces.

Special collections units and archives also often have some of the most original and exciting materials in the library, due to the historic nature and/or the narrower scope of the collection. Thus, it is a fun form of community outreach to offer tours of the closed/ private collections as a "sneak peek" or "behind the scenes" look at a library. However, if the private stacks have narrow aisles, have obstacles within the aisles (such as artifacts that stick out into the aisles), or aren't accessible via an elevator, this means a patron with a motor function, mobility, or visual disability cannot meaningfully participate in the tour. Thus, the library loses an opportunity to build a relationship with a community member. The following are a few suggestions to make a tour inclusive for patrons with disabilities.

Strategies and Solutions

- **Accessibility Statement:** Assuming that the special collections unit or archive location is accessible by a wheelchair user and/or a patron with a mobility or motor function disability, the relevant library professionals can offer a tour with some modifications and a little advance planning. When advertising the tour, include an accessibility statement and the relevant contact information on physical and electronic advertisements (examples of these statements and practices can be found in chapter 4). With the addition of the accessibility statement, a patron can choose to contact the tour leader and request specific disability-related accommodations. This knowledge forewarns the relevant library professional, and they can plan to make the event as accessible as possible based on the information disclosed to them.
- **Modify the Tour Journey:** If the aisles are simply too narrow to permit a wheelchair user to navigate the closed stacks, consider modifying the tour route

altogether. Instead of taking patrons back into the stacks for a show-and-tell session, bring out a selection of the most exciting materials to a nearby room and locate them on an (ideally) height-adjustable table. From there, a tour leader can provide the same information but in a different—and accessible—location.

- **Evaluate the Reading or Research Room:** Reading rooms (also called research rooms) are excellent spaces in which community patrons and visiting scholars can conduct research on and with unique materials. Often, these reading rooms were designed before disability civil rights legislation was enacted and some of the spaces and the furniture will likely be inaccessible to patrons with disabilities. However, and again assuming that the special collections unit or archive location is accessible by a wheelchair user and/or a patron with a mobility or motor function disability, it's possible to modify the physical arrangement of the reading room through moving furniture to create wider aisles for navigation and purchasing a height-adjustable desk for the express use of people with mobility or motor function disabilities.

Wayfinding and Navigation Signage

Wayfinding refers to an information and symbol system that allows people to plan a route through a specific space. Navigation signage, composed of a combination of language, symbols, and maps, provides a visual representation of a physical and/or an online environment. Navigation signage, commonly and more simply called maps, is usually accompanied by a legend with icons and library-specific terminology (i.e., jargon). Libraries are notorious for offering patrons either no wayfinding systems or complex ones, or some confusing middle ground on that spectrum.

Visual depictions of library wayfinding, either in physical or electronic environments, obviously offer challenges and barriers to patrons with vision-related disabilities. Low contrasting colors, use of green and red (which predominantly affect those with a specific type of colorblindness), small font, and confusing lines make for a meaningless and frustrating experience. Library professionals can ensure that all maps through the physical space of a library offer a braille translation of room numbers, collection names, and spaces; there are third-party vendors to whom a library can outsource the translation. Bear in mind, though, that not all people with vision-related disabilities were taught to read braille; thus, braille is not the only format to consider when drafting signage or wayfinding materials.

If a visual depiction of library spaces isn't appropriate for a patron with a vision-related disability, what are the alternatives? Some enterprising libraries have experimented with homegrown (i.e., locally narrated and spoken) audio tours of library spaces, or with the application of beacon technology, in an effort to orient people with vision-related disabilities to specific library locations. One proprietary company is even training artificial intelligence to act as a guide service of sorts.[2] Thus far, these efforts are fascinating and the future implications are exciting—a truly equitable translation of visual information into an audible format in real time. However, each of these projects comes with the challenges associated with widespread adoption: not all libraries have the infrastructure, the bandwidth, the funds, or the necessary expertise to adopt and implement these admittedly innovative and exciting projects.

For example, depending on how large and complex a library is, it may be difficult to provide an audio narrative on navigating through the physical spaces within. Furthermore, updating those audio narratives whenever space allocation changes requires a significant

amount of time. Or perhaps when adopting beacon technology, which technology should a library choose? What are the ongoing or permanent costs? What operating systems are required, and is the application compatible across multiple operating systems?

These questions aren't meant to suggest that libraries shouldn't use innovative technology to solve accessibility problems in wayfinding scenarios (especially if the library has the in-house expertise to do so), but instead to advocate for being thoughtful and deliberate when adopting a prospective solution. Rather than adopting what is easy or cheap in the short term, consider the longitudinal perspective on technology adoption and implementation—and what that means for patrons with disabilities. Furthermore, if a library can implement an innovative solution and make it replicable across libraries, consider marking it as open source and share as widely as possible. Let's save other libraries from reinventing the wheel.

Printing Stations, Makerspaces, and Computer Labs

Increasingly, libraries are providing patrons with access to different types of technology and teaching these patrons how to use them. Common examples include computer labs, printing stations, and makerspaces, the latter of which often features a 3D printer, a poster printer, or other kinds of learning-based technology. Like service points in a library, a technology center comes with several accessibility considerations: the physical space in which the center is housed, the technology itself, and the associated instruction and/or services attached to the technology center.

Many libraries offer a computer lab or a makerspace for patron use, which is an environment with computers, desks, chairs, and other hardware (e.g., headphones, speakers, etc.) necessary to support a lab. These physical spaces need to be configured in such a way that people with disabilities can navigate with little modification of the environment on the patrons' part. Inaccessible physical spaces within a computer lab are often literal barriers to a patron's participation in an activity or use of the Internet in a library environment.

Strategies and Solutions

- **Evaluate the Space:** If a library receives a report that the computer lab is inaccessible, conduct an evaluation of the space. Guidelines and standards from the Americans with Disabilities Act provide recommended measurements for aisle space, appropriate desk heights, and assistive technologies (such as an enlarged keyboard or a different kind of computer mouse) that may make using the computer lab more accessible for those with mobility-related disabilities. Essentially, libraries can choose to modify the physical infrastructure of a space in order to promote better access to the digital resources and/or the technology within a makerspace.
- **Accessible Furniture:** Other strategies for making a lab or makerspace more accessible include purchasing height-adjustable desks on which to house computers. Locate these height-adjustable desks near lab entrances (but away from traffic flow that would interfere with access and privacy), and use signage to indicate that these desks are prioritized for those with physical disabilities.
- **Evaluate Paths and Aisles:** Measure the aisles to ensure that the width is wheelchair accessible, and remedy any inaccessible routes.
- **Install Free Screen Reading Software:** Consider installing free speech reading software so that patrons with visual or cognitive disabilities can access the content

displayed on the computer screen. Communicate that headphones are available for circulation.

- **General Communication:** When using electronic or physical advertising, communicate that patrons can contact the administration or library leadership team with a specific request.

Study or Group Rooms

These spaces are usually a small, private rooms within a library that can be reserved by a patron in order to facilitate a group project. Physical accessibility considerations associated with study or group rooms typically revolve around entrances, desk heights, access to any available technology, and enough space within the room to navigate. Considerations include but aren't limited to the following:

- Can a wheelchair user or a person with a motor function disability enter into the room without accommodation? (i.e., Is there an accessible door handle at an appropriate height? Is the actual room entrance wide enough?)
- Can a person with a disability modify the desk height as needed?
- Can they navigate within the space without having to move a great deal of furniture?
- If there is technology housed in the room, such as a laptop and a presentation screen, can a person with a disability access these devices without assistance?

Again, while some of infrastructure changes are costly and require time and external expertise to enact, thoughtful furniture arrangement and/or substitutions can result in small changes to the environment that enhance the overall level of accessibility.

Cafes

Libraries are increasingly offering cafes and other kinds of eateries within the building. These popular spaces offer patrons a place to get coffee and to visit with friends or colleagues. Because a cafe is a physical location that provides a service to patrons, the physical accessibility considerations associated with cafes largely mimic those of other service points (e.g., accessible service counters, wide doorways, accessible modes to retrieve or receive a product, etc.). However, the cafe scenario warrants a separate discussion because of a simple but profound issue: ownership. If the cafe is owned by another entity, the library will need to partner with the owners to identify and enact shared accessibility goals. Often the contract outlines and determines the specific use of the cafe space; if appropriate, consider that as a starting point for additional conversation.

Advocating for and Implementing Accessible Spaces

Quite simply, the costs and efforts associated with transforming a library's physical spaces into an accessible haven can seem prohibitive and overwhelming. However, the legal reality is equally simple: public spaces, especially those receiving federal and/or state funding, must be accessible to people with disabilities. While libraries cannot force funders to operationalize large projects to the tune of millions of dollars, libraries can get creative

and innovative in their local (i.e., within their own library) problem-solving efforts. Thus, if programmatic efforts resemble a stock and investments portfolio, a library should invest in a combination of ongoing advocacy, grant-seeking, and small, direct actions to improve and enhance the physical accessibility of the space. Please note that the following suggestions are based on the assumption that there are little to no funds available for improving physical accessibility within the library and, correspondingly, that all efforts stem from advocacy, personnel efforts, and local endeavors.

Get Permission

First things first: library professionals should seek permission from the library administration or relevant authorities to explore and recommend action items. Consider forming an exploratory and short-term taskforce designed to identify and implement accessibility action items. Alternatively, consider forming a permanent accessibility committee for the library. (See part II of this book for more details.) When forming the permanent or temporary working group, decide what the scope and responsibilities are for the group. Lastly, communicate the formation of the group to colleagues (and if warranted, community patrons). If the library shares space with other entities (e.g., businesses, governmental organizations, etc.), determine if the neighbors will be impacted by an exploratory accessibility study. If relevant or appropriate, consider inviting them to join the endeavor.

Inventory the Physical Spaces

This subsection is written with the assumption that the library professional reading this text does not already have an accessibility inventory. To clarify, an accessibility inventory is simply a document, spreadsheet, or list of physical accessibility barriers found within the library. Ideally, this document includes a location, a brief description of the inaccessible feature (e.g., doorway is too narrow, signage lacks braille, etc.), and some space allotted for an action item that is designed to resolve the identified barrier. Of course, this inventory can be organized by buildings and by floors within buildings.

A library may absolutely wish to pursue and develop an electronic accessibility inventory as well. But given the complexity and nuances of accessibility barriers in both physical and electronic spaces, and how they manifest and overlap in different ways, it may be wise to separate these documents. Focusing on one environment at a time can allow library professionals to identify specific action items to a high degree of granularity.

STRATEGY ALERT

If a library is situated within a larger institution (e.g., a university, a K-12 school, or other type of organization), seek out any existing information about accessibility barriers. Large institutions, especially those that receive federal funding, that bear responsibility for several buildings usually have some kind of documentation about accessibility issues. If the institution already has an array of documentation, it's an excellent place from which library professionals can start.

Lastly, if the library in question does not wish to pursue a DIY approach to identifying accessibility barriers (which is understandable, as this kind of effort requires some expertise and a lot of walking around with a tape measure), the library's leadership may wish to outsource the task to a credentialed third-party company that has the expertise and can quickly produce a report with recommendations.

In this context, an inventory by itself is, quite simply, a list of likely expensive and certainly complex problems. While that may seem discouraging to some, the value of such an inventory lies in subsequent ability to use the information within in a proactive way. Once the information is compiled into the document (or documents, if the complexity of assorted buildings warrants multiple documents), library professionals can identify themes and patterns that present themselves and begin discussing strategies for addressing some of these issues. It may be worth developing an internal tagging or categorization scheme to indicate different types of responses, estimated costs, responsible parties (if the library is situated within a larger institution), and many other ways to code specific types of problems. For example, furniture-related barriers could be tagged as "New Furniture—Grants" or "Space Planning," or both. These tags serve as a form of communication to other employees, and they indicate that spatial adjustments are needed to resolve some barriers, or that perhaps new furniture needs to be purchased and the library will seek a grant in order to accomplish this.

Prioritize Local Fixes

Typically, it is important to prioritize fixes to restrooms, entrances, and pathways. These areas represent the fundamental needs for access and use of space with ease and dignity. However, many of the fixes that fall into this category are expensive and require large-scale renovations since many libraries operate in buildings that predate disability rights legislation. If those fixes aren't immediately available, seek out small fixes that are doable and can be achieved within the next six months. For example, perhaps the paper towel dispensers in restrooms can be relocated to a lower height, or the garbage cans removed from underneath the sinks to permit a wheelchair user closer and more efficient access to a washbasin. These seemingly little modifications are inexpensive and serve several functions: they contribute to an overall more accessible space for library patrons, and they give the library personnel a sense of accomplishment for completing something.

Continue with Advocacy

Once an (in)accessibility inventory exists, this important document is not only a blueprint for next steps and action items, but also an advocacy instrument. Large-scale fixes to the building(s) in which a library resides will cost a considerable sum. Demonstrating that the associated sum of the combined fixes is beyond the financial scope of the institution allows the administration to reframe the conversation in important ways. Instead of "The library is inaccessible and that never changes," the conversation can transform into "The library wishes to be inclusive to all patrons, regardless of ability. We have identified specific desired modifications throughout the building, and wish to implement these fixes in order to welcome all members of our community."

Keeping an updated (in)accessibility inventory demonstrates a continued commitment to resolving these issues and allows the library to change the tone and nature of the conversation with prospective community members, funders, and other relevant parties.

Instead of a defensive and reactive position ("We know but we can't do anything about it"), the inventory allows the conversation to widen and focus on creative solutions ("We know, and we have the following wish list items that will ensure that our spaces are accessible by all").

Seek Funds and Grants

In addition to using the inventory as an accessibility advocacy tool, use the inventory as an opportunity to seek grantmakers for specific projects that result in enhanced accessibility for library patrons. (Alternatively, a library may wish to seek a grant in order to hire a credentialed, external company to create the inventory for the organization.) For example, consider submitting a grant application with the purpose of buying assistive technology for the computer labs or the makerspaces. Or perhaps an application that, if funded, would purchase accessible desks and furniture for a study commons or an events space. One-time funding that results in modest but useful enhancements that improve the overall accessibility and functionality of a space within a library are absolutely worth pursuing. Small, one-time grants can help a library move that much closer to the goal of overall accessibility in a comparatively quick way.

Grantmakers are found in the federal government, in private industry, and in philanthropic circles, so get creative about approaching all possible entities. Be aware that the costs associated with the effort of pursuing grant funding are time, attention, perhaps some professional development support, and labor. Grant-writing requires significant effort. If a library is fortunate enough to have in-house grant-writing or fundraising expertise, bring that person onboard this effort. Lastly, in an effort to keep this work sustainable, it may be worth it (or even necessary) to identify and prioritize only three or four opportunities from the inventory. That way, the workload is manageable.

Communicate the Efforts to the Community

When a library improves upon existing services and spaces, it often seizes the opportunity to share this excellent news with the attached community and extend an invitation to come explore the new service, space, or program. With accessibility-related improvements or renovations, some library professionals hesitate to deliberately share and celebrate that news with the community for fear of drawing attention to how inaccessible some of the remaining spaces or services are.

However, the unfortunate reality is this: patrons with disabilities already know how inaccessible the library is. Fearing that a public discussion about accessibility will draw unfavorable scrutiny is a waste of time in some respects because most people with disabilities are already accustomed to (and, indeed, are experts in) navigating an inaccessible world. Thus, the knowledge that the local library contains some inaccessible spaces will surprise absolutely no one. In contrast, accessibility efforts and initiatives will likely be greeted as a welcome change of pace by most people with disabilities.

Furthermore, if a library advertises that accessibility improvements are forthcoming and invites feedback from patrons with disabilities on how to further improve library spaces, the library is building important relationships with members of historically marginalized communities. People with disabilities are experts in inaccessible spaces, an expertise that's built over a lifetime—meaning that they are situated to provide excellent insight and advice on how to make a space accessible. A library that can respectfully ask

to include that perspective in any spatial planning or improvements is capitalizing on available expertise.

Update Documentation

Once the inventory has been completed, and as local fixes are implemented throughout the library buildings, it's important to update the documentation on at least an annual basis. Ideally, updating the inventory results as they are modified would be even better as the inventory could then serve as a communication tool amongst library professionals, prospective grantmakers, and other relevant stakeholders. Furthermore, updated documentation allows a library to demonstrate at a moment's notice any outstanding needs for large-scale fixes within the buildings.

◎ Sustainability: How to Make These Processes Sustainable

Like the electronic accessibility efforts outlined in chapter 2, many of the aforementioned suggestions can seem overwhelming, especially when most library employees already have full-time jobs and/or may feel out of their depth with regard to accessibility issues. Here are a few suggestions for keeping the work sustainable. Hopefully, these strategies will allow library employees to move past the feeling of being overwhelmed and on to a sense of curiosity or even enthusiasm.

The first suggestion is a familiar one to those who have already read chapter 2: form an accessibility team within the library. For specific details about the desired or ideal makeup of the proposed team, refer back to chapter 2. A cross-functional approach distributes both the work and the necessary professional development growth across multiple people (rather than one point person). However, here is an added recommendation: if the library shares a physical space with other entities, and they wish to partner in a combined effort, make the team cross-organizational (rather than merely cross-departmental or -functional). This ensures that implemented accessibility efforts are consistently applied across all organizations within a space.

One Thing at a Time

There is a quote that's attributed to Edward Everett Hale (with myriad variants popping up throughout the web): "I can't do everything, but I can do something. The something I ought to do, I can do." This is especially relevant for accessibility practices in libraries. Quite simply: something is better than nothing. Perfection is, practically, impossible; thus, it's important to focus on making some kind of change. There is more information on developing a comprehensive plan in part II of this text, but for now, understand that it's important to identify priorities, establish timelines, and work on one set of initiatives at a time.

◎ Key Points

- Physical accessibility barriers in libraries affect navigation and access to services, spaces, personnel, and materials.

- Create a physical accessibility inventory for your library in order to identify and prioritize fixes. Communicate efforts to the community and seek expertise.
- In order to make quick progress on these issues, form a cross-departmental team charged with identifying and addressing the issues.
- Seek out grants for small, one-time accessibility fixes. Every little bit does make a difference.

⑥ Recommended Resources

Association of Specialized, Government and Cooperative Library Agencies. "Library Services for People with Disabilities Policy." http://www.ala.org/asgcla/resources/libraryservices.

Association of Specialized, Government and Cooperative Library Agencies. "Resources." https://www.asgcladirect.org/resources/.

Irvall, Birgitta, and Gyda Skat Nielsen. *Access to Libraries for Persons with Disabilities—Checklist.* International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions report no. 89. https://archive.ifla.org/VII/s9/nd1/iflapr-89e.pdf.

⑥ Notes

1. United States Access Board, "Chapter 4: Elevators and Platform Lifts," accessed October 21, 2019, https://www.access-board.gov/guidelines-and-standards/buildings-and-sites/about-the-ada-standards/guide-to-the-ada-standards/chapter-4-elevators-and-platform-lifts.

2. Aira, homepage, accessed October 21, 2019, https://aira.io/.

Accessibility for Instruction, Programming, and Outreach

IN THIS CHAPTER

▷ Overview of accessibility barriers found in library services, events, and workshops

▷ Overview of tools and strategies that can alleviate these accessibility barriers

▷ How to make service modifications and accessibility practices sustainable in libraries, where labor and finances are often limited

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GIVEN WHAT HAS ALREADY BEEN COVERED in chapters 2 and 3, why write this chapter? What does accessibility for instruction and outreach look like? It's absolutely the truth that different library types provide different services to vastly different demographics; however, most of them provide an electronic and a physical environment through which patrons can interact with library professionals. Furthermore, many libraries perform some kind of outreach to the surrounding community, from exhibits and displays to events and activities programming. Many more also provide some form of instruction, whether it's a credit-bearing course that occurs over the span of a quarter or semester, or a one-off workshop that's intended to serve as a quick introduction to library resources or a "How to Use" demonstration of a particular database.

All of these services, activities, and materials may be quite common or may be especially unique to a library; however, all of them likely have accessibility issues to consider. Thus, this chapter is dedicated to examining the accessibility issues inherent in many library services and to providing suggestions for alleviating or removing the barriers.

⑥ Programming, Outreach, and Events

Many libraries host events, create exhibits and displays, and offer activities or programs to the surrounding community. The purposes associated with this array of activity are to:

- Highlight specific library materials and collections, perhaps in combination with a temporal significance of some sort (e.g., Black History Month, Women's History Month, etc.)
- Provide services and entertainment for a community demographic (e.g., Drag Queen Story Hour, arts and crafts activities, etc.)
- Offer community enrichment through specific events and guest speakers
- Provide educational and/or growth opportunities to community members (e.g., workshops on how to write a résumé or how to find a job).

Regardless of the activity type, the ultimate goal is to enrich, educate, and serve the community. For library professionals, each of these outreach or activity modes presents different opportunities for incorporating accessibility best practices into daily operations.

Events

Events are a valuable form of community enrichment for libraries, and there are several ways to enhance the general level of accessibility of events. They include but aren't limited to communications, space planning, and prepared modifications upon request. When a library hosts an event, personnel typically advertise the date, time, and location, along with a descriptive blurb intended to entice community members into attending the event.

Strategies and Solutions

- **Accessibility Statement for Advertisements and Fliers:** Before circulating the event flier or advertisement, consider drafting an accessibility statement to include on the physical document (and on any electronic copies of the same advertisement). Sample language can be generic and as simple as the following: "X Library values inclusivity and is committed to making all services, spaces, and programs accessible by all patrons of all abilities. If you require accommodations for this event, please contact us at [e-mail address]." An e-mail address is the bare minimum needed to start a conversation between a patron and a library professional. If instead a library chooses to direct patrons to a web form through which they can request event accommodations, please ensure that the web form is formatted appropriately and accessible by screen reading technology.

Because many libraries exist in buildings erected prior to the enactment of disability civil rights legislation, many libraries have few options for event and programming spaces. Thus, when considering the opportunity to host a community event, strive to pick the most accessible venue possible. Oftentimes, this can equate to the least offensive venue with regards to accessibility needs. If a library is fortunate enough to have multiple spaces from which to choose for events, consider the questions in tables 4.1 and 4.2, which are grouped by associated/impacted ability and event component. Please note that this isn't

As an aside, consider adopting an accessibility statement for all forms of outreach and external communications. Such a statement will signal to the community that the library is committed to creating an inclusive space for all patrons, regardless of ability, and consequently, some patrons may elect to attend an event that has an explicit invitation over one whose advertisement lacks any kind of signal or statement. The caveat, of course, is that if a library adopts the strategy of including an accessibility statement and uses the language on all forms of external outreach, the library must then also be prepared when a community member inquires about alternate modes of access or the physical layout of an event space. In order to prevent role-based ambiguity (i.e., who should respond to an accessibility-related e-mail?), it makes eminent sense (a) to clearly articulate these roles and responsibilities within the organization, and (b) to assign this responsibility to a team or a point person.

a comprehensive list but rather a starting place from which library professionals can ask further questions.

Mobility and Motor Functions (Wheelchair Users and Patrons with Motor Function, Mobility, and Vision Disabilities)

Table 4.1. Common Challenges with Library Events and Programs for Patrons with Mobility and Motor Function Disabilities

PROSPECTIVE ISSUE	POSSIBLE SOLUTION
Are the doorways wide enough to admit, without assistance from others, a wheelchair user?	Yes: Continue using this space. No: Choose another event space, if at all possible.
Is the furniture adjustable in height and/or moveable (i.e., can a library professional move it out of the way)?	Yes: Move the furniture in order to create an accessible and obstacle-free navigation route. No: Consider using an alternative space or establishing alternate pathways throughout the event space.
Is there sufficient floor space and seating available to those who use wheelchairs or other forms of assistive mobility technology?	Yes: Ensure that the space is clearly identified for program attendees. No: Create this space, and clearly identify the location and purpose for program attendees.
Are there accessible restrooms near the event space?	Yes: Proceed with using the event space. No: Consider moving to a different event space if at all possible. Alternatively, post signage that clearly communicates where the nearest accessible restroom is located.

Hearing

Table 4.2. Common Challenges with Library Events and Programs for Patrons with Hearing Disabilities

PROSPECTIVE ISSUE	POSSIBLE SOLUTION
Will there be a podium and a microphone? If so, does the room in which the event will occur have a built-in FM system or loop for hard of hearing and deaf patrons?	Yes: Continue using this space. No: Choose another event space, if at all possible. A side note: Rooms with looped or other forms of hearing amplification may be few and far between as of 2019. However, it's a good idea to keep this feature in mind whenever a library's event spaces are up for renovation.
Will event/program attendees be invited to share questions and comments during a question and answer session?	Yes: Ensure that there are portable microphones available to audience members, and that there is an available library member to ferry the device between attendees. Alternatively, set up a dedicated microphone station that audience members can approach and use. No: Proceed.
Will there be preferential seating (i.e., close to the podium) for hard of hearing and deaf patrons in order to best facilitate lipreading?	Yes: Proceed with this event space. No: Create this space, and clearly identify the location and purpose for program attendees.
Will an audiovisual component be included during the event? If so, does the film or video have closed captions for deaf and hard of hearing patrons?	Yes: Proceed. No: See if it's possible to acquire a transcript of the audiovisual component, and have copies of the transcript at the event.
Are sign language interpreters (volunteers or paid professionals) available upon request?	Yes: Excellent. If the event is a long one, ensure that there are multiple sign language interpreters present in order to offer breaks/respite. Station the sign language interpreter on the stage, close to the event speaker. Be aware that the interpreters may request advance copies of slide decks and speaking materials in order to best prepare for the upcoming event. No: Conduct a search for volunteer or paid sign language interpreters, and initiate a conversation about fees, services, and other details. A brief aside: Please be aware that not all hard of hearing people speak American Sign Language (ASL). Some participate in the oral/hearing culture to a greater degree than others. Nor do all deaf people speak ASL. There is no universal sign language throughout the world; different nationalities have their own language and dialects.

Vision

The aforementioned questions help proactively evaluate the accessibility of event spaces, services, and other details. Again, it's not a comprehensive list but rather an invitation to be creative in solving accessibility problems before they present themselves. Some of the suggested solutions also lend themselves to a checklist of general practices that fall into a sequence of events: pre-event, event occurrence, and post-event. Be aware that the bulk of these activities occur during the pre-event and event occurrence stages.

Table 4.3. Common Challenges with Library Events and Programs for Patrons with Vision-Related Disabilities

PROSPECTIVE ISSUE	POSSIBLE SOLUTION
Will an audiovisual component be included during the event? If so, does the film come with descriptive video narratives for those with vision-related disabilities?	Yes: Proceed. No: Consider asking for a copy of the film and, if at all possible, outsourcing the descriptive video transcription to a credentialed third party. Alternatively, contact the vendor for an accessible version. If the library already has an inaccessible version from the vendor, consider asking for an accessible copy for a reduced price.
Will the guest speaker or panel use a visual presentation of some sort (e.g., slide decks, PowerPoint presentations, Prezis, etc.)?	Yes: Determine if the slides can be made available before or after the presentation for patrons with vision-related disabilities. Also, ask if the slides are formatted appropriately to allow access to screen reading technology. No: Proceed.
Will there be preferential seating (i.e., close to the podium) for patrons with vision-related disabilities in order to best facilitate listening to the speaker?	Yes: Proceed with this event space. No: Create this space, and clearly identify the location and purpose for program attendees.
Will there be handouts or visual instructions, a bibliography, or some other kind of physical print document distributed to attendees?	Yes: Determine if the handouts are available before the presentation for patrons with vision-related disabilities. Create large-font versions of these handouts, and if the document contains color, consider adding a brief caption that describes the colors and the image. Also, ask if there are electronic copies available, and if they are formatted appropriately to allow access to screen reading technology. Communicate this information to patrons at the start of the event. No: Proceed.

Pre-Event Accessibility Strategies

- Communicate in advance that the library wishes to receive requests for disability-related accommodations through externally focused (i.e., intended for patrons) outreach and marketing materials.
- Respond to any requests for accommodations as soon as they arrive. Document preparations and communicate the needs to the person or group responsible for fulfilling the accommodations requests.
- Evaluate the event space for physical route navigation, adjacency to accessible restrooms, and inaccessible furniture. Make modifications as needed.
- Plan and reserve space for preferential seating for those with vision-, hearing-, and mobility-related disabilities.
- If the guest speaker permits it, arrange to acquire handouts and slide decks prior to the presentation. Create large-font versions of handouts and bibliographies; alternatively, ensure that there are electronic copies (which are accessible via screen reading technology) that can be distributed upon request.
- If an audiovisual component will be shown at the event, try to acquire an accessible version of the film prior to presentation. Ensure that it has closed captions for deaf/hard of hearing patrons and descriptive video for patrons with vision-related disabilities.

Accessibility Considerations During the Event

- Establish and clearly communicate to event attendees which areas are reserved for patrons with vision-, mobility-, and hearing-related disabilities. Do not identify specific demographics with language such as "Reserved for Hard of Hearing Patrons." Instead, simply designate a row or half a row as preferential seating, and install a sign that uses generic language such as "Reserved for the use of people with disabilities. Thank you."
- Communicate at the start of the event that the presentation materials include slide decks, video, etc., and that accessible copies of these materials are available upon request. Refer people to the e-mail address to solicit requests for accommodations.
- If sign language interpreters are present, situate them on stage and close to the speaker. Make sure they are in the direct line of sight for hard of hearing and deaf patrons.
- Respond as effectively as possible to last-minute requests for handouts, special seating, assistive technology, and more. Sometimes patrons simply don't notify libraries in advance of requested accommodations because they did not see the notice on the fliers, didn't realize the event was occurring until that day, or simply forgot. Hopefully, some of accessibility preparation will alleviate any anxiety associated with a last-minute request.
- Insist that all attendees use a microphone during the question and answer session. Given the diversity of spaces in which library events occur, and the correspondingly bizarre acoustics, hearing, hard of hearing, and deaf people all benefit from this simple tactic.

Post-Event Accessibility Wrap-Up

- After the event, send electronically accessible copies of presentation slides, film clips, and other materials directly to patrons who have asked for them.
- Libraries often post a celebratory event summary on social media. Consider asking for feedback about the event's accessibility measures. This strategy accomplishes several goals all at once, the most obvious of which is soliciting feedback. A less obvious benefit is the subtle signal that such a request sends to the library community—that the library is committed to being an inclusive space for all patrons.

Every now and then, a library employee will report that they are certain that they have witnessed a patron who does *not* have a disability use physical spaces, resources, and other services reserved for those with a disability. If indeed that is the case, that is an unfortunate incident. However, it is crucially important to avoid making judgments about whether a person has a disability or not. Library professionals are not medical professionals, and they are not qualified to offer a medical diagnosis for any patron. (In the extremely unlikely event that a library professional is also a medical professional, they are still not the patron's dedicated medical professional and thus don't have access to all of the facts in that particular situation.)

There are many invisible disabilities that would benefit from resources and accommodations, and a library patron isn't required or obligated to disclose whether they have a disability or the nature of the disability. Don't inquire. It intrudes upon patron privacy and violates the rights of the individual. Ultimately, library professionals should abstain from judgment and give the benefit of the doubt to library patrons.

Displays and Exhibits (Online and Physical)

Displays and exhibits are a hallmark outreach strategy performed by libraries and special collections across the United States. They are an excellent way to highlight collections and to demonstrate participation in and relevance to cultural and temporal events occurring in society at large. Since displays and exhibits are primarily a visual medium, there are a couple of accessibility strategies that library professionals can incorporate into displays and exhibits that improve the overall accessibility of this type of outreach activity.

Table 4.4. Common Challenges with Library Events and Programs for Patrons with Vision Disabilities

FORMAT OF DISPLAY AND EXHIBIT	RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES
Print/In Person	1. Include large-print texts that are in keeping with the display or exhibit theme. 2. If there is a descriptive blurb that discusses the theme of the display, enlarge the font. Alternatively, create an audio narrative of the blurb (through either a quick recording on a smartphone or a free podcasting tool like Anchor). Once completed, provide the abbreviated URL, along with instructions on where to access the audio narrative. 3. If there are accompanying bibliographies or recommended/related reading lists, either provide large-font copies of the bibliographies within the display itself or indicate where a patron can access one. Ensure that it is easy to access a large-print bibliography.
Electronic	1. Before acquiring electronic exhibition software, determine if the system has a VPAT and other kinds of accessibility documentation (see chapter 2 for further strategies). 2. If working within the constraints of already existing and purchased exhibition software, seek out the vendor's accessibility documentation and include a link to this site when publicizing the new online exhibit. 3. Online exhibitions often combine images and descriptive blurbs about the significance of the images. When adding images to an online exhibition, be sure to include alternate text for images—a brief summary of the contents of the picture. 4. If using audiovisual components within the exhibition, ensure that captions and descriptive video are available for those with hearing and vision-related disabilities, respectively. 5. If the exhibition has a significant amount of audio narrative, consider adding a link to the script to the exhibition landing page or homepage. A transcript can improve access to the electronic exhibition content but should be readily available to patrons without further assistance by library personnel.

Guest Services and Programs

Some libraries, including public libraries and others, have invited guest services and programs into the library building in order to best serve patrons by providing several types of services under one roof—making such services truly accessible by patrons who are unable to or have difficulty traveling to several destinations. Common examples include social workers from the Department of Human Services, or counselors from the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation. The accessibility considerations associated with guest services and programs are a combination of physical space issues and accessibility of electronic and print documents. If the space dedicated to the guest services and programs is managed by the library, then library personnel should see that the space and the furniture within are accessible (see chapter 3 for common considerations). Materials and documents, regardless of format, that are associated with or provided by the guest service are solely the responsibility of the guest, not the library.

Credit-Based or Ongoing Instruction

Some libraries, such as collegiate or K-12 libraries, offer credit-bearing courses that occur over the span of several weeks. Other libraries may host or conduct their own courses that, while not credit-bearing, require students and/or patrons to enroll. These classes often take place in a physical location but can occur solely or simultaneously in an electronic environment (i.e., within a learning management system like Canvas or Moodle). Physical spaces, of course, needed to be configured in such a way that people with disabilities can navigate with little or no modification of the environment on the students' part. Likewise, electronic accessibility strategies should result in reduced barriers experienced by the students enrolled in the course. Common strategies include but aren't limited to the following.

Table 4.5. Strategies for Making Displays and Exhibits Accessible

TYPE OF ACCESSIBILITY RESPONSE	STRATEGIES
Physical Spaces and Furniture	• Purchase height-adjustable desks on which to house computers. Locate the height-adjustable desks near entrances, and use signage to indicate that these desks are prioritized for those with physical disabilities. • Measure aisles to ensure that the width is wheelchair accessible. • Ensure that accessible restrooms are nearby and easy to travel to. • Ensure that emergency and evacuation routes are clearly marked.
Electronic Spaces and Supporting Hardware	• Consider installing free speech reading software so that patrons with visual and cognitive disabilities can access the content displayed on the computer screen. • Ensure that whatever learning management system that is employed is accessible. Link to the vendor accessibility documentation within a course handout or on the syllabi. • Communicate the availability, and be prepared to set up, any assistive technology for the website or hardware used in the instructional space.
Instructional	• If a library is situated within a college or university, include links to the institutional disability services center. Consider adding a list of disability or equity, inclusion, and diversity resources to the course syllabus. • If a library is situated within a college or university and the library professional is the instructor of record, they may receive a notification that a student within their course needs accommodations. The notice will likely include the specific details of these accommodations, which the library professional must comply with and keep private. The notice often comes from a counselor within the disability services office, and the library professional should contact the counselor with questions and requests for advice. • Consider adding an inclusion statement to the syllabus or workshop overview/lesson plan. Sample language is given below. The purpose of this inclusion statement is to indicate to people with disabilities that the instructor values inclusivity; the statement is an invitation to directly contact the instructor. • Print documents and images need to be made accessible to those with visual disabilities. Without enlarged font and/or alternate text for images, patrons with vision impairment may not be able to access the content meaningfully. • For one-off workshops, plan ahead. If the library professional is aware that a participant or patron may need enlarged font on a document, print out a copy (or two) with size 18–20 font. Even if no notice or request has been advanced, consider printing one just in case. • As an organizational development opportunity, consider hiring a consultant to train relevant library professionals in Universal Design for Learning principles. This knowledge, combined with a commitment to growing in-house expertise, can transform an instruction program with regard to accessibility.

INCLUSION STATEMENT: SAMPLE LANGUAGE

An inclusion statement ideally is integrated into a syllabus or a workshop description. The purpose of this statement, while functional, is largely affective: it is designed to invite a direct conversation about learning needs in a classroom or workshop environment. Sample language could look like the following:

> I value an inclusive learning environment in my [courses/workshops] and strive to make the materials I use accessible across demographics and abilities. I expect all students to respect one another and to co-create an inclusive learning community, where these identity demographics are respected: ethnicity, religion, color, national origin, gender, gender expression and/or gender identity, age, sexual orientation, marital status, political affiliation, veteran status, and disability. If you have any circumstances where a disability may impact your performance in the class, please advise me and/or [relevant office].

While this language isn't strictly limited to those with disabilities, it provides an example of an inclusion statement.

Workshops

Workshops, defined as one-off educational offerings provided by a library professional to the community, are quite similar to credit-bearing courses. Both formats offer information and resources that contribute to an intended learning outcome (i.e., the desired goal that the instructor has for the student learners). As an aside, sometimes workshops are called one-offs, bibliographic instruction (BI), and a host of other descriptors.

Workshop instructors have a few unique accessibility challenges that warrant discussion. Oftentimes, an instructor travels to a location with which they are unfamiliar and teaches an entirely new-to-them audience. This often means that they are required to respond to accessibility requests without preparation—which can result in anxiety and frustration for the instructor and frustration and disappointment for the person with a disability.

Strategies and Solutions

The key to integrating accessibility into workshops is planning in advance. Consider workshops as mini-events that occur in someone else's space—much of the preparatory work is similar to that of hosting an accessible event. See below for some suggestions. A quick caution, followed by a recommended solution: whether in a K–12 or collegiate classroom or a public library branch, library professionals should never inquire about a specific individual's disability nor ask any questions that could identify any individuals. Instead, ask the instructor or host if they are aware of an existing need for disability accommodations and which accessibility strategies are required. That way, the library professional can prepare an accessible workshop while protecting the privacy of the individuals within the workshop. Strategies that may assist a workshop instructor include the following:

- **Communicate in Advance:** Communicate to the host or classroom teacher in advance that the library professional wishes to receive requests for disability-related accommodations. This can be covered in a quick e-mail; remember, ask about awareness of needed accommodations, not for any specific details about an individual's disability.
- **Be Responsive:** Respond to any requests for accommodations as soon as they arrive. Confirm whether the accommodation requests can be met.
- **Share Materials in Advance:** If possible, share handouts and slide decks with the students or attendees prior to the workshop. Create large-font versions of handouts and bibliographies or ensure that there are electronic copies (formatted for screen reading technology) that can be distributed upon request. Alternatively, send electronically accessible copies of presentation slides, film clips, and other materials directly to patrons who have asked for them after the workshop has occurred.
- **Provide Accessible Versions of Films and Videos:** If an audiovisual component will be shown at the event, try to acquire an accessible version of the film prior to presentation. Ensure that it has closed captions for deaf/hard of hearing patrons and descriptive video for patrons with vision-related disabilities.
- **Communicate Post-Workshop Plans:** Communicate at the start of the event that the presentation materials include slide decks, video, etc., and that accessible copies of these materials are available upon request.
- **Accommodate Sign Language or Live Captioners:** If sign language interpreters are present, situate them close to the speaker (in this situation, the library professional). If live captioners (those who caption classroom or workshop events while they occur, the contents of which are received by a patron with a hearing-related disability), be sure to respond to any requests they make.

Library Tours

A library tour, defined as a physical journey through a space within a library led by a library employee or a volunteer, is an excellent form of outreach to the surrounding community. However, tours come with unique accessibility challenges. As covered in chapter 3, most libraries have intermittently or wholly inaccessible spaces—making what is a fun experience for some patrons into a logistical nightmare for those with mobility-, motor function–, or vision-related disabilities.

Strategies and Solutions

Like event and program preparation, integrating accessibility practices into library tours requires advance thought and some planning, and ideally, advance notice. Here are some strategies for making library tours more accessible:

- **Create a New Route:** Simply modify the library's existing route. Use an accessible route that includes wide aisles, avoids jutting furniture, and makes use of elevators. Furthermore, use this new route for all library tours rather than using an alternate tour route specifically for patrons with disabilities. This avoids the appearance of a separate and possibly inequitable library tour that inadvertently discriminates based on ability.

- **Develop a Script:** If one doesn't already exist, develop a script of the library tour. Include brief descriptions of physical spaces at each stop so as to provide valuable information for patrons with vision-related disabilities. Provide a copy of the library tour transcript to hard of hearing and deaf patrons upon request. Keep a large-print copy at the ready for surprise requests. As an added bonus, this script can be used to train future library employees and volunteers. See below for a script template that can be modified for every library's purpose.
- **Talk with Attendees:** Before starting the tour, check in with attendees: "Would anyone like a copy of the tour transcript? We cover a great deal of information in a short amount of time, so it may be useful for you." Don't make the offer about accommodating a disability but rather one of convenience for all patrons; that way, the library professional isn't inadvertently singling out an attendee for unwanted scrutiny.
- **Online Tours:** If a library has an online version of the tour, be sure to use the same script (for the dual purposes of not reinventing the wheel and consistency). Use alternate text for images where appropriate, and descriptive video and closed captions if warranted. Lastly, make sure the electronic platform and the library tour content (i.e., the talking points) are accessible via screen reading technology.

Visiting Researchers and Scholars

Many libraries, especially those with special or unique collections, host or welcome visiting scholars and researchers. Scholars often reach out to the collections managers to inquire about collection scope, specific items, use policies and permissions, and other relevant details affiliated with the research process. And because of the original nature, rarity, and other unique considerations, such as stewardship agreements (i.e., terms of use and care, stipulated by the donor), associated with most items in a special collection or an archive, collection managers simply can't alter the original artifact with enlarged font, or employ other common accessibility strategies, without some creativity. Thus, integrating accessibility practices into daily operations in order to accommodate visiting scholars with disabilities requires some thought. The following practices are recommended:

- **Advance Communication:** When a scholar sets up an appointment to visit the special collection or archive, they may receive a copy of the rules and responsibilities in using the collection. Consider adding some language inviting the prospective scholar to notify the library or archive of any need for disability-related accommodations. Additionally or alternatively, communicate that information on the collection website. Again, never ask about the specific nature of the disability or for the patron to disclose their disability. Instead, inquire which accommodations would be most helpful in order to facilitate meaningful access to the content. Lastly, do not ask for any proof of a disability, such as documentation or a doctor's note, as that constitutes a violation of the individual's right to privacy.
- **Enlarged Copies:** If at all possible, create enlarged facsimiles of the original material. That way, the visiting scholar can access the content in the facsimile while maintaining the integrity of the original artifact. Be aware that it may be expensive to reproduce artifacts; consider doing so only when it's requested and/or necessary.
- **Magnifying Glass:** Consider keeping a magnifying glass or screen within the special collection or archive. A magnifier is a deceptively simple way to increase

access to documents by people with vision-related disabilities. Furthermore, scholars without disabilities may benefit from a magnifier—original artifacts and documents are sometimes difficult to read.

- **Recorded Oral Histories:** Some archives and special collections units have recorded (i.e., audio) oral histories of local luminaries, figures relevant to the collection scope, and more. If not already available, consider developing a transcript of all oral histories to ensure that scholars with hearing-related disabilities can access the content. If the oral history is in another language, one that differs from the main language spoken within the community, create a transcript and have a copy of the transcript rendered in braille. A library can choose to outsource these tasks as the requests come in or, if they are lucky enough to have in-house expertise, can complete the project without outside support.
- **Online Exhibits:** If the library has an online exhibition of the materials in which the visiting scholar is interested, and if this exhibition was created with accessibility in mind (i.e., the platform is accessible by screen reading technology, and descriptive video, captions, and alternate text for images are included), consider referring the visiting scholar to the online exhibition as another resource.

◎ Sample Script for Tours, Workshops, and Other Programming

Throughout the chapter, there have been several mentions of a script, often in the context of events, tours, videos, and many other formats. But what does that truly mean? For this text, a script is a written narrative that

- Outlines the goals of a workshop/event/educational effort
- Describes the content referenced with specific learning outcomes and temporal milestones
- Offers specific cues for guides or instructors to follow when going through the script

A script accomplishes many goals at once: Widespread adoption of the script results in improved consistency of service and messaging (i.e., how library professionals across service points talk about the same library services, which results in less confusion and ambiguity for the library patron); furthermore, a script is a wonderful training tool for new employees, or for those who have transferred in from another branch or unit. Most important, a script provides library personnel with an easy and quick way to make tours, workshops, classes, and events more accessible for a wide variety of library patrons with different kinds of disabilities. For example, a print copy of the script that's circulated at the start of a library tour gives patrons with hearing and cognitive disabilities another way to participate in the tour. Or an electronic copy of a workshop script, accessible via screen reading technology, allows a patron with a vision disability to follow along with the workshop in real time—rather than trying to play catchup after the workshop, or missing the content altogether.

Below is a sample script designed to walk patrons through discovering resources in a database. The bones of this script can be modified to accommodate almost any instructional or informational need. Please note that the time increments are in minutes.

Table 4.6. Sample Script and Content for a Workshop

Sample Session Details
- **Format:** Informational session about the purpose of and functionality within an article database
- **Audience:** General, focused on teaching participants how to use the discovery layer
- **Necessary Tech:** Computer, web connectivity, projector
- **Title**: Discovering Resources through [Database Name]

Sample Session Script
[Prepare for session by pulling up article database and displaying it on the projector screen.]
00:00 Welcome
Welcome, and thank you all for joining me today!
You're here because you've heard about [database name], and you've registered for this informational session in order to learn more. Here is a quick overview of what you can expect during this next hour:
1. You'll learn about [database name], what it is and what it isn't.
2. You'll learn what collections are already in [database name].
3. I'll provide a quick demonstration of some of the functionality within [database name].
4. We'll end with a Q and A session.

After we finish, I will send a short evaluation survey about today's session. It's only three questions, all of which are designed to gather information about how I can improve this demonstration.
Any questions about today's schedule or the survey?
[Pause, answer any questions that participants have.]
00:07 Let's get started. So, what is [database name]? [Database name] has the following materials and formats, designed to support the scope of the database. [Add additional content here.]
00:10 What is currently in [database name]? How is it useful to me?
Currently, we have [specific] collections within [database name] . . .
00:15 [Database name] is not . . .
00:20 Are there other databases that are similar to [database name]?
00:25 Demonstration
Now I'd like to transition into a brief demonstration of [database name].
[Gesture to the homepage on the screen. Conduct the following tasks, providing a verbal narrative to attendees about what they are seeing on the screen. Answer participant questions as they come up.]
- Demonstrate a search within [database name].
- Demonstrate how to review search results in [database name].
- Demonstrate how to review a specific search result, and comment on the various metadata fields (and how they are useful for different scenarios).
- Outline use cases for instructional purposes.

00:40 Q and A
Now it's time for our Q and A. What questions do you have for me?
[Pause, answer any questions that participants have.]
[If there are no questions, segue into the closing.]
00:50 Conclusions and Thank You
That's it—we're done for today. Thanks so much for your time! I appreciate your questions and your attention. Have a wonderful day.

Sample Follow-Up E-mail to Participants
Greetings,
Thank you for attending the introductory [database name] session! As mentioned during the session, I'm writing to share a brief feedback survey and some additional useful links. If you have any questions about the session or about [database name], please don't hesitate to reach out to us at [relevant e-mail address].
- Provide your feedback on the session here [Insert link to survey; see sample questions below].
- Learn more about [database name] through the Frequently Asked Questions [insert link].
Regards,
[Library professional's contact information]

Send assessment survey with three short questions:
- What was the most useful thing you learned today?
- Given what you learned today, how would you describe [database name] to a friend or to a colleague?
- Do you have any additional feedback about the presentation?

Imperfection Is the Norm

A friendly reminder about scripts (and other tools, such as checklists): Even if a perfect script were possible (and, alas, it is not), library professionals will sometimes miss a cue, forget an entire section, or move away from the script in order to be responsive to a patron's queries and interests. That happens all the time. However, be aware that should a library professional veer from the script, the missing information may impact a patron's ability to access and use spaces, services, and information within a library. Thus, the e-mail follow up is an opportunity to further support patrons with disabilities by directly inviting their feedback.

Key Points

- Libraries provide an array of events, instruction, and programming activities, each of which has its own unique considerations for accessibility.
- Advance planning and proactive communication can help a library better prepare to meet the needs of patrons with disabilities.
- Tools like scripts, checklists, and other resources can result in better accessibility for patrons with disabilities.
- Integrate newly developed practices into all services and events within the library whenever possible.

Recommended Resources

Burgstahler, Sheryl. "Equal Access: Universal Design of Libraries. A Checklist for Making Libraries Welcoming, Accessible, and Usable." http://www.ala.org/alsc/sites/ala.org.alsc/files/content/NI14Handouts/Universal%20Design%20Checklist.pdf.

CAST. "About Universal Design for Learning." http://www.cast.org/our-work/about-udl.html.

Cornell University. "Accessible Meeting and Event Checklist." https://accessibility.cornell.edu/event-planning/accessible-meeting-and-event-checklist/.

Oregon State University. "Accessible Event Planning." https://accessibility.oregonstate.edu/events.

University of North Carolina Asheville. "Event Accessibility Checklist." https://accessibility.unca.edu/event-accessibility-checklist.

BUILDING AN ACCESSIBILITY PLAN FOR YOUR LIBRARY

Creating an Accessibility Plan

W HY CREATE AN ACCESSIBILITY PLAN, or even a program, for a library? And what exactly is such a thing? In order to start from a shared understanding, a plan or program is simply a statement of commitment to a suite of activities that have correspondingly desired outcomes for a group of stakeholders. A plan is a useful document that provides a map of sorts. The document articulates where the library currently is and identifies where it wants to be within three to five years. To be truly useful, the plan must also articulate the *how*. How will a library achieve its goals with regard to accessibility? By when will that occur? What are the goals of the plan, and how will the described activities within the plan help the library achieve those goals? In fact, the commonsense approach of who, when, what, how, and why (commonly touted in journalism, education, and other fields for fact and information gathering) is a great place to start.

Before delving too far into the plan components, a quick conversation about goals is warranted: several of the chapters in part I of this text suggested strategies for implementing fixes and removing common accessibility barriers found in physical, electronic, and instructional environments. These suggestions are intended to enhance the user experience of library patrons with disabilities; thus, they are externally focused, or intended to serve library users. These efforts should absolutely be captured in an accessibility plan.

However, when drafting an accessibility plan for an organization, another audience should be considered: library employees. Oftentimes, library employees are uncertain about how to respond to an accessibility-related inquiry or request because they haven't encountered the request before. Alternatively, they aren't familiar with the needs and

▲ **67**

experiences of people with disabilities, and thus aren't able to anticipate or respond to reported barriers effectively.

Thus, it is important that any accessibility plan a library adopts have at least two tracks: making library services, spaces, and materials accessible and equipping library employees with the knowledge and skills to respond effectively to accessibility concerns. For ideas and suggestions centered around creating an employee professional development program designed to enhance skills, knowledge, and comfort with accessibility topics, see chapter 8. The remainder of this chapter is dedicated to developing a plan that results in enhanced accessibility of services, spaces, and materials.

Plan Components

Developing an accessibility plan is essentially a suite of projects (with intended outcomes and audiences) that a library has agreed to commit to over the duration of three to five years. Thus, this text borrows from project management principles when examining plan components and suggesting strategies. Project management refers to the activity of ideating, planning, implementing, maintaining, and finishing a single project. There are many, many different types of project management paradigms and frameworks—and even more strategies, tactics, and other mechanisms, all designed to finish a project on time and with the previously determined goals realized. This text doesn't recommend that libraries adopt a specific project management framework but rather consider the common project management components that result in the successful completion of an initiative. Since it's entirely possible to get overinvolved in *developing* a plan instead of *completing* the plan, libraries should choose which project management strategies will best support their own organization in actualizing a plan.

But first let's examine the possible components of a successful project. Components include but aren't limited to the elements listed in table 5.1. Be aware that specificity is incredibly useful when developing the plan, as a high degree of granularity and clarity makes it easier for library employees to imagine how the plan will be implemented. Furthermore, specificity makes it easier for the project managers or the library accessibility team to revisit the planning documents six months or even a year into the future, and still understand what the team had hoped to accomplish. Lastly, depending upon the needs of the project and the needs of the library personnel tasked with implementing this project, not all of these components may be required or even necessary for the successful completion of the project. Table 5.1 is meant to inspire conversation during the planning stage rather than prescribe requirements for every single project within an accessibility plan.

Project Lifecycle

Every project has components that contribute to the successful completion of an initiative. However, projects also occur in stages over time and it's worth briefly examining those stages. Including information about a project status can be a useful indicator of whether additional resources—such as more labor or time—are needed to complete the project. For example: if a project has rested in the planning phase for seven months,

Table 5.1.   Building a Library Accessibility Program

COMPONENT	DESCRIPTION AND QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER
Project Description and Goal	This refers to the proposed activity and to the desired outcome or goal. Questions to consider when drafting objectives and goals: • What does the library wish to accomplish? • When completed, how will this goal improve the user experience of library patrons with disabilities? • What does success look like for this initiative? How will the library know it is successful?
Audience/Customer	This refers to the intended audience for the initiative. It is possible for an initiative to have multiple audiences. For example, an initiative dedicated to gathering VPATs for every licensed article database in order to facilitate conversations about accessibility improvements with vendors serves multiple audiences: patrons who have visual, hearing, and motor function–related disabilities and will (ideally) have improved access to library content, and library employees who have newfound skills in advocacy for library patrons by an improved ability to talk with vendors about accessibility needs. Questions to consider: • Who is the primary (i.e., the most important) audience? • Are there secondary and tertiary audiences? • Does the library need to communicate the completion of this initiative or project to the primary, secondary, or tertiary audiences?
Responsible Party	This refers to the library employee, or employees, responsible for developing, implementing, and finishing the initiative. Questions to consider: • Who is responsible for implementing this initiative? • Is this responsibility in addition to an already full (i.e., forty-hour) workload? If so, what responsibilities need to be redistributed? • Does the library employee need additional training or expertise in order to complete the initiative? A brief aside about projects or initiatives that require modifications to the architecture of the library building(s): These projects often are expensive, are time-consuming, and require permissions from governing bodies or other authorities to whom library administrators report. Due to the complexity associated with these types of projects, ensure that this section of the project documentation reflects shared responsibility.
Impacted Stakeholders	This refers to other parties within the library who are impacted by the outcome associated with, or the work that goes into, the proposed initiative. For example, an initiative that proposes the development of a VHS conversion process affects library staff in the Acquisitions and Circulation Services unit. Thus, they may need to be involved at different stages of the project, in order to provide information and ask questions. Questions to consider: • Who within the library will be impacted by this project? • Do these individuals need to be involved in planning or implementing the project? • What communication mechanisms (e.g., format, frequency, etc.) will keep all stakeholders within the library informed of the latest news and developments?
Estimated Costs of Needed Resources	This refers to the costs associated with employee labor, the costs of any necessary employee professional development, and the onetime and/or ongoing costs of adopting technology or practices that support the completion of the initiative. Questions to consider: • **Technology:** Does the proposed initiative require the adoption of technology and/or the purchase of hardware to support the technology? Is the technology proprietary or open source? What are the monetary costs of this technology—both up front and ongoing? Does the library have the requisite information technology personnel to support this new technology?

(continued)

Table 5.1.   *(continued)*

COMPONENT	DESCRIPTION AND QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER
	• **Professional Development:** Does the success of this initiative require one-time or ongoing professional development? If so, what are the monetary costs per employee? • **Labor:** How many employees need to contribute to the success of this initiative? Are they allowed to reschedule or delay other existing projects to make space and time to contribute to this initiative?
Estimated Time	This refers to the amount of time needed to complete the project. It is an estimate only (unless driven by a specific deadline). Consider adding two weeks to a month of time to timelines associated with complex (i.e., multifaceted) projects. For every query posed below, be prepared to add more time to the overall timeline. Typically, more complexity equals more time. Questions to consider: • How many stages are involved in this project? • Is there a specified deadline by which this project needs to be completed? • How many impacted stakeholders are involved? • Do any involved employees need additional training or support?
Milestones	This refers to dates or deadlines by which specific actions tied to the success of the project have been accomplished. Milestones are a common project management strategy and serve multiple functions: they can indicate a problem if milestones aren't accomplished and prompt a conversation about what's needed to ensure that they do occur; they also can be an excellent indicator of progress for long-term projects. Lastly, milestones should be sequenced appropriately: What efforts need to occur before subsequent efforts can follow? A generous timeline and appropriate sequencing can make project milestones an incredibly useful tool for participants. Questions to consider: • What action items (i.e., project steps) need to occur first? • Which ones should follow, and in what order? • How much time should elapse between milestones? Remember, more complexity in the project typically means more time. • What accountability measures are built into the milestones? Who is notified when milestones are accomplished—or not?
Accountability	This refers to the transparency mechanisms associated with an initiative. Questions to consider: • How will the responsible parties notify library employees, library leadership, or other stakeholders of project status? Of project completion? • What reporting mechanisms are most useful for the stakeholders associated with this initiative—e-mail, staff meetings, etc.?
Communication Strategies	This refers to the communication strategies needed to inform stakeholders of project progress, complications, and completion. Often, a project has multiple stakeholders (i.e., those who have a vested interest in, or are impacted by, the outcome of the project), and communication strategies should be tailored to the information needs of every group. Questions to consider when drafting communiques: • **Audiences:** How many stakeholder groups are associated with this project? Examples could include library employees, patrons with disabilities, administration officials, other library professionals in the profession at large, and/or the community in general. • **Information Needs:** What are the information needs of each audience? For example, library employees may already be aware of ongoing efforts to enhance accessibility in the library and thus do not require a great deal of project background information when updates are published to the organizational intranet. In contrast, the typical community patron may have little to no awareness about what accessibility is, and more important, why the library is committed to this work. Thus, when crafting communication updates about accessibility projects, consider the information needs of the audience. How much awareness do they have about accessibility? Why should they care? How will this information impact the intended audience?

COMPONENT	DESCRIPTION AND QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER
	• **Format:** What communication format best delivers the needed information easily, effectively, and in a timely manner? Formats include e-mail (either a curated e-mail distribution list or a general listserv), social media posts, a website, a print or electronic newsletter, and much more. Depending on the information needs of each stakeholder group, each audience could have one or more formats through which the library publishes communication updates about accessibility initiatives. • **Remember the Big Picture:** When drafting communication updates, it's easy to fall into a pattern of reporting on statistical information, or the who, when, what, etc. Depending on the intended audience, consider adding a brief summary about why this project matters now and will continue to matter over time. Communicate how this project fits into the larger narrative associated with the library, such as the organization's commitment to inclusivity or a commitment to superb user experience. Telling an audience why a project matters seems like an obvious or overly simplistic thing to do but, in addition to conveying a series of facts, describing how a project fits into the larger picture of a library can signal to the reader that the library is committed to the community.
Celebrate	This refers to efforts to recognize the excellent work completed by library personnel. A quick note: Celebration may seem like an unusual project management component and, to be honest, it may not be strictly necessary or required. However, excellent work—especially that which improves the overall accessibility of library spaces, services, and materials—is worthy of recognition and acclaim. The celebration mechanism need not be complex, and could be as simple as a coffee and doughnuts break, followed by a library-wide e-mail that acknowledges the accomplishment. Alternatively, the project leaders could host a quick presentation for the library personnel—with doughnuts, of course—about what the project leaders did and how it improved library operations for people with disabilities.

what's happening there? What is needed to transition this project into implementation? Additionally, the project status indicator can be a useful way to quickly report out at staff meetings, through e-mail, or on the organizational intranet. Depending on the project needs or the complexity inherent in an initiative, be aware that not every project may need each of these stages. If a project doesn't involve many of these stages, it may be a complex task rather than a project.

When Plans Change

Plans are incredibly useful tools that provide a roadmap by which project participants can travel, even if the plan spans several years. However, the only constant in life is that everything changes. Thus, it's important to check in with library administrators, colleagues, and community patrons on at least an annual basis. Ask if the project is still a priority for the organization, and if the feedback indicates that the plan should be altered or scrapped entirely, do so. New information, technology, or resources present themselves all the time, and they may offer game-changing or plan-breaking consequences. Be adaptable. Be flexible, and don't be afraid to retire an initiative if it's no longer needed or useful. There is always another project or set of tasks to work on, one that may better serve the needs of the community.

Table 5.2. Project Lifecycle for Accessibility Initiatives

LIFECYCLE STAGE	DESCRIPTION
Ideation	This first stage refers to brainstorming, or when the idea first emerges. Library professionals should ask themselves whether the project is truly needed.
Planning	This stage comes after the responsible parties have agreed that the proposed initiative is a good one, and that the library is willing to adopt and complete the project. Planning refers to the concrete identification of the details discussed in the previous section of this chapter. Once a plan has been developed, ensure that the project team or employee has the support and permission to proceed from the appropriate library administrators.
Implementation	The stage refers to the start or launch of a project. Often the bulk of the preparatory activity (e.g., communications to impacted stakeholders, requests for personnel time or funds from the library administrators) occurs in this stage. Project leaders will likely encounter the highest interest and/or questions from colleagues at this stage.
Monitoring/Maintenance	This refers to a project that has been planned and launched, and is now in the maintenance or monitoring stage. This is the stage during which project milestones—those specific action items that need to be accomplished by certain deadlines—occur, and they provide valuable indicators about the overall "health" of a project: that is, whether the project is going well or needs additional support or resources. Depending on the complexity of the project, this stage may involve the least amount of work or the most.
Closure	This refers to the last stage of a project, during which involved stakeholders determine the following: Was the project successfully completed? What strategies were successful in completing the project? Did anything go wrong? If so, what could have been improved? Will this project need further work or follow-up activities? If so, what are they? Do these activities require a new or an updated/expanded project plan? Who needs to be notified that the project was completed and/or that future activities are planned? Due to lack of time or because library employees feel a sense of urgency (e.g., "Let's just get it done" or "I need to move on to the next thing now"), many people miss out on the opportunity to reflect on the completed project. There is considerable value in taking even a quick hour to meet with project participants and answer the questions listed above. These reflections can inform and refine future processes, whether they are accessibility-based or not.

⑥ Key Points

- Organize library accessibility efforts into a plan so that the responsible personnel know what needs to be done, in what order, and by what date. This comprehensive document should then be shared throughout the library so that all personnel have access to the information.
- Communicate all accessibility efforts to the community. Consider publishing an abbreviated version of the plan to the organization's website.
- Don't be afraid to retire initiatives that are currently unfeasible or are no longer relevant.

Recommended Resources

Michigan State University. "The MSU Libraries' Five Year Accessibility Plan." https://lib.msu.edu/general/access-plan/.

Sample Accessibility Implementation Plan. https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=http%3A%2F%2Fmn.gov%2Foet%2Fimages%2FTA_Toolkit_Implementation_Plan_Sample.doc.

Where to Start When Developing an Accessibility Plan

IN THIS CHAPTER

▷ The need for inventorying barriers within a library

▷ Strategies for documenting accessibility barriers in electronic and physical spaces and in library services

▷ How best to begin translating documented barriers into a comprehensive plan

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🌀 Inventorying Accessibility Barriers

A LIBRARY CAN COMMIT TO MAKING improvements to the overall accessibility of spaces and services; however, it is helpful to know which barriers exist, where they are located, and what is required to alleviate and/or remove them. The answer? Create an inventory of accessibility barriers. An inventory of accessibility barriers identifies the existing barriers associated with physical, electronic, and service point spaces. In short, it is a map of problems unique to the library.

In addition to serving as an up-to-date roster of problems within the library, it is an incredible communication tool. Knowing the array of existing accessibility barriers allows the organization to articulate needs for additional funding and/or resources at any given moment. What follows is an overview of strategies for inventorying different types of accessibility barriers. These suggestions are meant to be illustrative but not exhaustive; no template can possibly accommodate the myriad variations that occur across library types, sizes, and locations throughout the United States.

⓺ Inventorying Electronic Barriers

The quickest and easiest way to create an inventory of electronic accessibility barriers is to outsource the work to a credentialed third party. While this approach does come with a cost, library professionals increasingly have more affordable and effective options. Many software-as-a-service (SaaS) vendors provide services that automate the problem identification process, and often suggest solutions, too. These vendors may offer both one-time and ongoing services, and the library in question can choose which suite of options works best for the organization. If a library professional elects to conduct the electronic accessibility inventory or audit themselves, here are a few suggestions for the process:

1. **Gather:** Make a list of the e-resources, web presences, and other electronic platforms that should be evaluated throughout the electronic accessibility inventory process. For article databases and other third-party electronic resources, double-check to ensure that the vendor has a Voluntary Product Assessment Template. If the vendor has supplied a completed VPAT, remove the electronic resources from the evaluation list—that's one less platform to which the library needs to devote time and attention.

2. **Organize and Prioritize:** Once a library has a list of electronic resources that should be evaluated for web accessibility barriers, it is important to review the list and determine which platforms will be evaluated first. One commonsense approach may be to first examine high-traffic/high-volume electronic resources, such as the library catalog or popular article databases. That way, any corresponding recommendations that can be implemented quickly will have the highest return on investment for the library personnel and patrons.

3. **Assess on a System-by-System Basis:** Once a library has determined which electronic resources will be evaluated and in what order, evaluations need to be conducted on a system-by-system basis. Because each system is unique due to code, creator, functionality, and a host of other factors, it's important to treat each system separately. Furthermore, some large systems—especially those with discovery layers such as library catalogs or databases—contain so much functionality that it may be worth focusing on evaluating common pages, such as
   a. Basic Search
   b. Advanced Search
   c. Search Results
   d. Single-Item Display (Brief and Full Details, E-mail/Export Functions, etc.)
   e. Pre-search Results Refine/Filter Menu
   f. Post-search Results Refine/Filter Menu
   g. Patron Account
   h. Citation Options

4. **Document and Communicate:** Once a library has documented the accessibility barriers within a system, personnel can then communicate requests for fixes to either the vendor or the local information technology support team. Once one system has been evaluated, the library professional can move on to the next system.

Tracking the Electronic Accessibility Inventory Results

If library personnel have decided to conduct the electronic accessibility audit by themselves, there are several details to gather and monitor. It's crucial to track this information,

as it informs what work should be done and in what order. First, you will need a full content audit of the library's online presence (or at least a list of what web presences exist). This knowledge will directly inform the next steps.

For this list, consider inventorying all the systems and tracking affiliated content types (e.g., articles, streaming media, etc.), any relevant analytics, and affected stakeholders. Then select an automated accessibility checker. A common and popular one is WebAIM's WAVE accessibility checker, available at https://wave.webaim.org. Please note that WebAIM offers other tools, like a contrast checker and a checklist for homegrown evaluation efforts. Library professionals should incorporate automated checkers into their electronic accessibility evaluation efforts, as these tools offer more consistency than a manual search-and-click approach; furthermore, these tools are simply more efficient at gathering information quickly.

Since many library platforms are large and contain a great deal of content, gather a representative sample of pages from the platform. These samples should give the library a sense of where the common problems are and how to fix them. Then run the selected webpages through WebAIM's WAVE checker (or your chosen evaluation tool). Record the data that the automated accessibility checker yields, and be sure to capture the number of errors, alerts, and other features. Consider taking screenshots of the results pages; these screenshots are excellent for data-tracking purposes but also serve as an educational tool for library employees. The results page makes visible often invisible accessibility barriers, and can communicate the extent of the problems on a given electronic platform. When gathering the information, here are a few details to consider tracking:

- **Page Title and Corresponding URL:** If a library elects to go with a representative sample of web pages to run through an electronic accessibility checker, be sure to collect the page titles and URLs for each page that is evaluated. In addition to simply being a good data management practice, this information will assist in any subsequent reporting practices.
- **Platform (Vendor):** When evaluating a web presence, be sure to capture the platform (e.g., article database or website) and either the owner (i.e., the author or responsible party for a given web presence) or the vendor. Tracking the owner or vendor contact information is useful when it comes time to advance recommendations for solutions to accessibility barriers.
- **Date and Time:** Web presences are dynamic environments that change rapidly and frequently. For web presences, both content authors (personnel who update webpages with new information) and web developers (personnel who build the infrastructure on the back and front ends of the web presence) often make near-continual updates to a library's web presence. For vendor-owned and -supported third-party electronic resource platforms, information technology teams often release new features, upgrades, and fixes in a near-continuous cycle in order to enhance the overall functionality of the web presence. Given these routine occurrences, a library professional can run an electronic accessibility checker on a web presence twice in a single week and receive vastly different results from the checker. Thus, a library professional responsible for conducting an electronic accessibility audit should track the dates and times the check was conducted.
- **Screenshots:** While entirely optional, a screenshot (i.e., a snapshot) of the results page from an electronic accessibility checker may be a useful data point to track, particularly if the responsible library professional adds annotations to the screenshot capture that are helpful for a subsequent analysis.

- **Results (Type and Frequency):** Once the accessibility checker has been implemented across the representative sample of web pages, be sure to track the data gathered by the checker. This includes tracking the type of issue found, and the frequency with which it is discovered throughout the pages.
- **Platform Summary:** It's often worthwhile to provide a brief summary of the patterns that emerge from the accessibility checker. This is helpful for both the library professional conducting the audit/inventory and for communicating the results out to other library personnel, particularly those who are unfamiliar with accessibility issues. This can also be a perfect place to indicate a priority level: How bad are the accessibility issues within this platform? Should the recommended solutions and fixes be prioritized over platforms, and if so, why?
- **Recommendations:** It's also worthwhile and very necessary to document specific recommendations that will resolve identified issues. These recommendations should be actionable and directed to the party responsible for enacting them, such as a vendor, an information technology unit at a library, etc.
- **Timeline, Action Items or Tasks, and Contact Person:** Lastly, library professionals should organize the recommendations into a series of tasks, appropriately sequenced and scheduled for completion over a specified timeline. Furthermore, all tasks should be associated with a contact person. This ensures that library personnel know whom to contact when they have questions about the project or the tasks; furthermore, it reminds the contact person in question that they have a responsibility to complete the action item.

Once a library professional has gathered the necessary data, they of course should evaluate the results. Since most automated checkers yield errors, warnings, and other useful signifiers, the library professionals responsible for conducting the audit should tabulate the frequency of each issue and write a brief summary about why each issue matters. A summary statement for each platform can be useful for non–information technology library professionals, and a valuable way to build engagement around these issues. Furthermore, if a specific platform has proven to be particularly problematic, the library professional can advocate for assigning a higher priority level to this web presence—meaning that the library should focus on resolving the issues discovered within the identified platform before focusing on others.

Electronic Accessibility Inventory Template

Table 6.1. Electronic Accessibility Audit Template

Platform Name: Vendor: Date and Time of Audit: Name of Responsible Library Professional(s): Name of Electronic Accessibility Checker:	
Representative Page	Title: URL: Screenshot Link:

Representative Page	Title: URL: Screenshot Link:
Representative Page	Title: URL: Screenshot Link:
Representative Page	Title: URL: Screenshot Link:
	Results, Summary, and Recommendations
Results	
Platform Summary	Summary: Priority Level:
Recommendations	Based upon the results yielded by the electronic accessibility checker, here are the corresponding recommendations: Sample recommendation (responsible party) Sample recommendation (responsible party) Sample recommendation (responsible party)
Timeline What will have been accomplished by the . . .	Three-Month Mark Tasks: Lead Library Professional:
	Six-Month Mark Tasks: Lead Library Professional:
	Nine-Month Mark Tasks: Lead Library Professional:
	Year Mark Tasks: Lead Library Professional:

Additional Strategies

As the library continues to make progress on the recommendations and action items garnered by the electronic accessibility evaluation, be sure to invest in other strategies designed to enhance overall accessibility awareness within the library and to build the corresponding skillset. For example, continue to support web developers and content authors within the library by offering regular workshops on web accessibility. Consider crafting a web accessibility toolkit, a repository of documentation, best practices, checklists, and other resources aimed at supporting library professionals in a variety of web settings. Also, consider liaising with disability offices and/or local nonprofits and organizations to seek feedback on how to enhance the overall web presence. Lastly, WebAIM provides an incredibly useful checklist for web authors and developers.[1] This checklist could easily be integrated into a library's electronic accessibility evaluation procedures; alternatively, it could serve as a checklist for web authors and developers as they build new web presences.

Inventorying Physical Barriers

Conducting an inventory of physical barriers within the library can be a time-consuming and large project, depending on the size of the organization and the complexity of services, spaces, and other details. Thus, it's important to consider a couple of options at the beginning. First, can the library afford to outsource this project to a credentialed third party? Are there credentialed third parties that offer that service in the region? If so, take that route. This is the easiest and quickest way to obtain a list of accessibility barriers within a library. Otherwise (and operating on the assumption that the library doesn't have an accessibility expert in residence), a library professional (or several) will need to seek out the requisite professional development to develop and complete an accessibility inventory. The latter scenario is undoubtedly a good investment for the long-term picture (building expertise is always a good idea), but it won't result in quick developments and correspondingly quick solutions.

If the library cannot afford to outsource an accessibility assessment to a third party, or if there are no regional experts available to hire, and it still wishes to make an inventory of physical accessibility barriers, it is important to make the project manageable. Remember, most library employees tasked with doing this work are integrating these duties into an existing workload, so it is crucial that both the library professional and the library itself can meaningfully and sensibly make progress on these issues. Thus, it is prudent to divide the work into four main stages:

1. **Document One Suite of Problems at a Time:** When conducting the physical accessibility barriers, focus on one room type or physical/building landmark at a time. For example, inventory the barriers found in all bathrooms throughout the building.
2. **Organize the Results:** After those problems have been documented, then identify what can be done with existing resources and which solutions require additional funds and external expertise (e.g., construction companies, etc.).
3. **Communicate, Implement, and Advocate:** Communicate those proposed tasks and needs to the library administrative team and/or other relevant parties. Implement what fixes are possible at the library. Advocate for funds and other relevant resources for the larger infrastructural problems that can't be immediately resolved.

4. **Move On and Repeat:** Once one suite of problems has been documented and addressed as effectively as possible, given the available resources at the library, move on to the next room type or building landmark.

Table 6.2. Physical Accessibility Audit Template

FEATURE/ROOM TYPE	CHECKLIST FOR BARRIERS/NOTES
Bathrooms 1. How many bathrooms exist? 2. Locations? 3. Entrances?	
Bathroom Interiors	Stalls
	Sinks and Hardware
	Navigation and Garbage Cans
Building Entrances	
Collection Stacks	
Computer Labs	Desk Height
	Chairs
	Hardware (Desktop, Monitor, Mouse, Keyboard)
	Assistive Technology
Elevators	Signage
	Descriptive Audio
	Entrances
	Space
Event Spaces	
Hallways	
Instructional Spaces	
Ramps (Internal)	
Ramps (External)	
Signage	
Special or Archival Collections Unit	

Please note that the list above may not be exhaustive, as it is impossible to anticipate all of the possible variations of physical spaces within a library. Additionally, there are some wonderful resources that provide checklists for nonexperts who wish to improve the overall accessibility of a space.

Inventorying Service Points and Services

Creating an inventory that sufficiently captures the accessibility barriers in service points, services, and instructional spaces can be difficult because the library professional is attempting to track the (in)accessibility of both a space and the experiences and interactions that occur within that space. However, it is doable to inventory the barriers to both space and interactions by focusing on key factors. First, focus on one service point at a time. Each service point in a library has unique considerations that deserve separate evaluatory attention. Second, once a library professional has decided to evaluate a specific service point, they can explore the accessibility barriers within the spaces (e.g., electronic and physical) and types of interactions that occur.

A comprehensive approach for evaluating the accessibility of a service associated with a service point is to consider the lifecycle of the customer journey. Borrowed from the information technology industry, the customer journey refers to the user experience of a customer (or in a library's case, a patron) as they initiate, receive, and then leave a specific site or point of interaction.[2] It is a sum of the experiences a customer has when interacting with a service point. Thus, for a library service point, it may be worth organizing the evaluation process along the customer journey. See below for an example of marrying a customer journey exercise with possible accessibility barriers.

Table 6.3. Customer Journey in Library Service Points

Discovery	At this stage, the customer has discovered a service within the library (either through electronic or in-person means), and wishes to learn more. Here are some considerations for the customer experience at this stage, organized by disability type:

Hearing

[ ] **Audiovisual Content:** Are any videos present on the website or at the service point? If so, are those videos captioned or do they provide a transcript of the text at point of discovery/access?

[ ] **Instructional or Informational Materials:** Is there a written copy of instructions or informational handouts (in lieu of verbal or auditory instructions)?

[ ] **Accessibility Statement/Contact:** Is there a statement that a deaf/hard of hearing person can request a sign language interpreter at the given service point (either through the website or at the service desk during an in-person visit)? Or an e-mail address through which a person can request support services?

Mobility

[ ] **Desk Height:** If there is a desk at this service point, what is the height? Can it be adjusted to accommodate wheelchair users?

[ ] **Navigation within Space:** Is the space around the service point navigable by a wheelchair user or a person with mobility-related assistive technology?

[ ] **Space for Task Performance:** Is there sufficient space to perform a task, such as check out a book or pay a fine, without assistance from library personnel?

[ ] **Web Presence:** Is the website keyboard navigable for those who do not use typical computer mice?

Vision

[ ] **Web Presence:** Is the service point website accessible by screen reading technology? Do all images within the documents have alternate text for image captions?

	[ ] **Instructional or Informational Content:** Is the content, across all formats (e.g., PDF, Word, HTML, etc.), accessible by screen reading technology? Do all images within the documents have alternate text for image captions? [ ] **Descriptive Audio for the Blind/Vision Impaired:** Are there any videos at the service point or on the website? If so, do the videos offer descriptive audio for those with vision impairments? [ ] **Accessibility Statement:** Is there a statement that a patron can request alternate-format versions of documents? Or an e-mail address through which a person can request support services or report accessibility barriers?
Interaction	At this stage, the customer is interacting with the library service point (either through electronic or in-person means) and wishes to obtain services, materials, or information. Here are some considerations for the customer experience at this stage, organized by disability type: *Hearing* [ ] **Audiovisual Content:** Are any videos present on the website or at the service point? If so, are those videos captioned or do they provide a transcript of the text at point of discovery/access? [ ] **Instructional or Informational Materials:** Is there a written copy of instructions or informational handouts (in lieu of verbal or auditory instructions)? [ ] **Accessibility Statement/Contact:** Is there a statement that a deaf/hard of hearing person can request a sign language interpreter at the given service point (either through the website or at the service desk during an in-person visit)? Or an e-mail address through which a person can request support services? *Mobility* [ ] **Desk Height:** If there is a desk at this service point, what is the height? Can it be adjusted to accommodate wheelchair users? [ ] **Navigation within Space:** Is the space around the service point navigable by a wheelchair user or a person with mobility-related assistive technology? [ ] **Space for Task Performance:** Is there sufficient space to perform a task, such as check out a book or pay a fine, without assistance from library personnel? [ ] **Access to Technology:** If there is computing technology available at the service point, is the device accessible to those with a disability? Is assistive technology available upon request? Is there signage or some mechanism that communicates to that effect? [ ] **Alternate Mode of Material or Item Retrieval:** If the physical destination is inaccessible to wheelchair users, is there a library professional available to retrieve the requested item or information? *Vision* [ ] **Web Presence:** Is the service point website accessible by screen reading technology? Do all images within the documents have alternate text for image captions? [ ] **Web Tools:** Will the patron be required to interact with a web presence in order to fulfill their information or task need? If so, is the tool accessible by screen reading technology? [ ] **Instructional or Informational Content:** Is the content, across all formats (e.g., PDF, Word, HTML, etc.), accessible by screen reading technology? Do all images within the documents have alternate text for image captions? Are there handouts or instructional materials? If so, are there large-font alternatives available? [ ] **Descriptive Audio for the Blind/Vision Impaired:** Are there any videos at the service point or on the website? If so, do the videos offer descriptive audio for those with vision impairments? [ ] **Accessibility Statement:** Is there a statement that a patron can request alternate-format versions of documents? Or an e-mail address through which a person can request support services or report accessibility barriers?
Departure	At this stage, the customer has left the library service point (either electronically or in person); however, they may wish to revisit the website and/or service point for continued access to services. Many of the considerations listed in the first two stages of the customer journey apply to this stage as well. However, there are additional important considerations for this stage: • **Continued, Autonomous Access:** Ensure that patrons with disabilities can continue to access services, materials, and other types of library information independently of library personnel support or modification of services. If a library professional has to continue to modify a service on behalf of a patron, it's worth exploring how to redesign the service so that the patron can exercise their own agency and access the library offering at any point. • **Reporting Channel:** It's also crucial that patrons have an anonymous and electronically accessible reporting channel through which they can submit feedback about inaccessible library service points and resources. This allows library professionals to receive honest feedback, upon which they can then act.

Other strategies for identifying and removing (or alleviating) accessibility barriers at service points include the following: Usability activities—such as focus groups, surveys, and qualitative interviews—with patrons with disabilities may yield some helpful feedback on how to improve the spatial organization and service design of the library's service points. Be sure that any tools used to gather this information are accessible by those with disabilities. Furthermore, both the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Universal Design frameworks may be a useful resource for library professionals who wish to redesign service points from an accessibility standpoint. UDL is an instruction framework designed to enhance learning experiences for all participants, and it may be a good fit for the instructional nature of the work at that occurs at some service points. The Universal Design framework is largely reserved for physical spaces and, as such, may offer insight on how to reorganize service point spaces.

◎ Analyzing Problems, Implementing Remedies: Prioritizing and Managing Accessibility Efforts

Once the inventory has been completed, it is then time for analysis and the organization of subsequent efforts to remedy the barriers. Reviewing the inventory can seem truly overwhelming, as it amounts to a long list of problems with few easy solutions in sight. However, here are a few strategies for organizing the problems and corresponding responses.

- **Physical Alterations:** Many of the physical inaccessibility barriers require expensive and time-consuming alterations to the building. Until those alterations can be funded and implemented, it is important that libraries communicate the locations of the most accessible restrooms, ramps, learning spaces, and service points through the organization's website, newsletter, and other forms of communication (e.g., social media, blogs, etc.).
- **Electronic Accessibility:** Electronic accessibility remedies can be grouped by system or function. In a system-by-system approach, a library can choose to go through each system and deploy remedies and fixes. In a functional approach, a library can review the inventory for all inaccessible images and fix those, before moving on to identifying all missing headers and fixing those—and so on. Whatever approach is adopted is likely going to be informed by the complexity and diversity of the library's web presence.
- **Events, Classes, and Other Educational Spaces:** Some of the easiest fixes for these kinds of spaces are one-time purchases of accessible and adjustable furniture, followed by a simple reorganization of the spaces.

Once a library has identified a prospective remedy for each barrier, it has further decisions to make: What needs to be remedied first? What is the most pressing priority—the easily completed but low-impact tasks, or advocacy for the expensive physical building alterations that would make the space truly inclusive? In short, what makes sense for the library, given the demographics and needs? There is no perfect answer to the question of prioritization. Since no one can do everything at once, and because most libraries wish to feel as though they are making progress on some issues, it may make sense to create a multiyear roadmap of planned accessibility remedies that contains a blend of both

low-hanging fruit and difficult tasks or projects. This document would articulate planned efforts to resolve identified barriers over a specified period, with designated reporting frequencies and audiences to ensure regular progress is being made on these tasks and projects.

◎ Library Accessibility Remediation Roadmap Template

Table 6.4. Accessibility Program Template

QUARTER	DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITIES
First	Project: Resources Needed: Responsible Party: Project: Resources Needed: Responsible Party: Project: Resources Needed: Responsible Party: Progress Report Due: [Insert Date] Summary of Next Steps:
Second	Project: Resources Needed: Responsible Party: Project: Resources Needed: Responsible Party: Project: Resources Needed: Responsible Party: Progress Report Due: [Insert Date] Summary of Next Steps:
Third	Project: Resources Needed: Responsible Party: Project: Resources Needed: Responsible Party: Project: Resources Needed: Responsible Party: Progress Report Due: [Insert Date] Summary of Next Steps:

(continued)

Table 6.4. *(continued)*

Fourth	Project: Resources Needed: Responsible Party: Project: Resources Needed: Responsible Party: Project: Resources Needed: Responsible Party: Progress Report Due: [Insert Date] Summary of Next Steps:

⦿ Key Points

- When developing an accessibility plan, which is a suite of projects with specific tasks, timelines, and audiences to be undertaken during a particular time period, it's important to start with an inventory of barriers—electronic, physical, and services.
- Once you have an up-to-date inventory, begin prioritizing efforts and action steps.
- Other elements of a comprehensive accessibility plan include investing in employee professional development and building community partnerships. See chapters 7 and 8 for more details.

⦿ Notes

1. WebAIM, "WebAIM's WCAG 2 Checklist," accessed October 21, 2019, https://webaim.org/standards/wcag/checklist.

2. Kate Kaplan, "When and How to Create Customer Journey Maps," Nielsen Norman Group, July 31, 2016, https://www.nngroup.com/articles/customer-journey-mapping/.

Building Consensus and Support within the Organization through Employee Professional Development

AWARENESS OF ACCESSIBILITY PRACTICES, legislation, and resources by library employees throughout the United States and across library types is inconsistent, at best. This lack of overall awareness makes a certain sense, given how relatively recently disability civil rights legislation was signed into law. To illustrate how recent the legislation is, consider that many millennials were under ten years of age, or weren't yet born, when the Americans with Disabilities Act was passed in 1990. However, the relatively young age of civil rights legislation shouldn't serve as an excuse for not knowing how to build accessible spaces, services, and collections for people with disabilities. Instead, it's an invitation or a call to action: How do libraries integrate accessibility into their work, understanding that this knowledge is new to many practitioners?

This chapter explores several strategies for promoting an organization-wide, accessibility-specific professional development program for employees. The goals of the professional development program? To increase awareness of accessibility practices; to

integrate them into library operations by revising existing workflows, or building entirely new ones; and to build empathy for and connection with members of a historically marginalized community.

Additionally, building an employee professional development program has affective, or emotional intelligence, benefits. Often, employees often don't know how to respond to an accessibility request, and may decline the request or avoid the interaction entirely for fear of responding in the "wrong" way. This kind of fear-based avoidance is detrimental to the library and the community in myriad ways. The employees experience a form of panic and/or anxiety about not serving a patron well, or somehow transgressing the requirements of disability law and further hurting the patron, the library as an organization, or themselves (i.e., risking job security by doing the wrong thing).

Thus, a lack of accessibility-related knowledge, combined with the lack of opportunity to gain valuable skills and experiences, can create significant discomfort for employees faced with reports of accessibility barriers within the library. A professional development program can go a long way in addressing the emotional elements (the fear, and the corresponding reluctance) associated with accessibility discussions.

An accessibility-specific professional development program yields significant rewards for library administrators. One of the oft-unspoken responsibilities of a library administrator is risk management—the strategies, tactics, and communications used to keep an organization out of any legal or public relations fires. Simply put, inaccessible library spaces, services, and collections can prompt many of these fires. Thus, if library administrators invest in an employee development program that is designed to raise awareness about accessibility practices and to integrate these strategies and alterations into existing workflows, they will see a fantastic result: a more confident and knowledgeable workforce that is attempting to ensure that the library is accessible for all patrons, regardless of ability. This means less uncertainty and anxiety for library personnel, and continual progress on being a better space for library patrons. Furthermore, the library administrators can publicize these efforts through externally focused newsletters and social media posts, as part of an ongoing demonstration of the organization's commitment to inclusivity.

A quick aside to all library administrators: For an employee-centric accessibility professional development program to gain traction and change an organization's culture, library administrators must commit to and support this kind of work—through funds, connections, and simple permissions to get started. These programs cannot be successful without organizational commitment from the top. Thus, administrations need to make accessibility a priority by including it in strategic and tactical (i.e., annual or biennial) planning. Talk about the program frequently in public meetings and celebrate any and all accomplishments that stem from the program.

Lastly, and most obviously, patrons with disabilities benefit greatly from an accessibility-specific employee development program that results in increased accessibility within spaces, services, and collections. Enhanced access to information and support from library professionals can be a transformative experience for any patron; but for those who belong to a historically marginalized community, improved access to the privileges attached to information discovery and retrieval can be life-changing.

Who Is Going to Start All This?

Another contributing factor to the ambiguity library professionals experience when faced with an accessibility-related inquiry or request is this: Who exactly is responsible for this?

A lack of clear roles and responsibilities across the organization can result in frustrating conversations that, in the wrong circumstances, descend into the blame game. A reasonable solution, then, is to assign a group of people to be responsible for developing and implementing an accessibility professional development program. Depending on the size and type of the library, the individuals charged with creating an employee professional development program may be the exact same individuals charged with identifying and resolving accessibility barriers found throughout the organization. (See chapters 2 and 3 for more information on the concept of an accessibility team.) However it happens, it is important that there is a responsible party for drafting, revising, deploying, and maintaining the employee development program. Without that dedicated team, it will be difficult to sustain the program; furthermore, employees won't know whom to turn to when seeking these professional opportunities.

What Activities Make Up a Professional Development Program?

No one can do everything, especially all at once. Thus, the dedicated team charged with developing a professional development program should identify specific and concrete goals, or intended outcomes, for the program. The goals should be grounded in improving the user experience and accessibility of the library by patrons with disabilities. In order to create an employee professional development program that enhances awareness and builds skills across different types of accessibility, consider arranging and offering skill-building workshops along several different tracks. Similar to the tracks at a professional conference, many of which are organized around topical interests or shared goals, seek out and organize different types of trainings. Possible tracks include but aren't limited to electronic accessibility, print and circulating collections, instruction and outreach, and physical spaces. See below for examples of possible workshop topics associated with the relevant program track.

Table 7.1.   Sample Track Goals for Physical and Electronic Accessibility

PHYSICAL ACCESSIBILITY: SAMPLE TRACK GOALS
1. Raise awareness about what types of physical barriers exist in the library (e.g., furniture, unclear pathways, ramps, restrooms, etc.) and promote integration of awareness into daily operations.
2. Reduce or remove physical accessibility barriers in bathrooms, in learning spaces, and at service points.
3. Develop response plans for service point and/or all library personnel to implement when notified by a patron of an accessibility barrier.

ELECTRONIC ACCESSIBILITY: SAMPLE TRACK GOALS
1. Raise awareness about what types of electronic/digital accessibility barriers exist in the library electronic resource platforms and promote integration of awareness into daily operations.
2. Reduce or remove electronic accessibility barriers in library websites.
3. Collect Voluntary Product Assessment Templates from third-party vendors and create an in-library repository of accessibility documentation.
4. Communicate requests for improvements to third-party vendors.
5. Develop response plans for service point and/or all library personnel to implement when notified by a patron of an electronic accessibility barrier.

Structure of Professional Development Workshops and Trainings

One very reasonable criticism of the single workshop approach—and another argument in favor of developing a program rather than hosting a series of one-off workshops—is as follows: "I attend an hour-long session to learn a new skill, and then I never have the time to reflect on how to apply this skill in my work." Or, "We attend trainings but don't discuss, as an organization, how best to apply this new information." When employees are invited (or pushed) to attend workshops but lack the time to meaningfully engage with the material and begin true skill-building, this results in disengagement and cynicism. ("Oh, yet another workshop where nothing gets done.") And given the importance of the topic, it would be a shame to waste valuable commodities (attention and time) because of poor planning.

These very understandable complaints can be prevented by a thoughtful application of structure to the workshops. Consider the learning and professional development needs of the library employees who attend these workshops:

- What is the topic?
- What will they have learned by the end of the workshop?
- How is the presented information relevant to the attendee's work?
- What format of workshop are they attending—skill-building, panel, etc.?
- Does the environment best facilitate that type of learning? (e.g., A computer is a good place to host an Alternate Text for Image sprint; a board room is not a good fit for that kind of activity.)
- How does this offering align with the goals of the professional development program? The library at large?
- How can an attendee apply these new skills to their work? Will they have the time to practice?

All of these questions should be considered when developing workshops designed to result in enhanced skills and awareness. The sample workshop outline in table 7.2 demonstrates how to arrange a workshop in a way that accommodates the information needs of employees.

Other strategies associated with developing a program include the following practices. When attendees—whether guests or library employees—offer suggestions for how to improve accessibility practices within the library during workshops, follow through and be sure to implement the suggestion if at all possible. Following through on good suggestions is basic common sense, of course, but more than that, it demonstrates respect for the time, attention, and creativity that the attendee contributed to the workshop. Ignoring good ideas by simply forgetting to follow through can result in disenchantment or, worse, disengagement. Furthermore, ensure that the appropriate personnel implement the suggestion rather than the volunteer—this ensures that library employees will continue to voice suggestions if they understand that they won't be "volunteered" into implementing the idea simply because they spoke up.

Lastly, as a participation incentive, consider creating and awarding a certification of completion for employees that have completed a certain number of workshops within a specific track, or have completed a series of workshops across all program tracks. These certificates fall into the category of continuing or professional education, and they offer a tangible line item to include on a résumé or CV—something that may be attractive to

Table 7.2.   Managing the Accessibility Workshop Lifecycle

WORKSHOP STAGE	STRUCTURAL COMPONENT
Before the Workshop	**Develop Goals:** Identify the goals of the workshop. Determine how much time is needed, what type of expertise is required, and what workshop structure will result in/achieve the identified goals. **Communicate:** Share (via e-mail, calendar invitations, and/or in-person announcements) the following information with prospective attendees: • Session title • Track alignment • Date, starting time, length of session, location, and name and contact information for any guest speakers • Brief, descriptive blurb about the contents of the session • Intended outcomes associated with the session. Describe them in terms of skills learned and/or new practical knowledge. • Contact information for workshop organizer with an accompanying invitation for questions and concerns from prospective attendees
During the Workshop	**Set an Agenda:** Briefly remind attendees of the goals associated with the workshop. Go over the workshop outline or agenda. Answer any questions that present themselves. **Facilitate:** Facilitate the workshop, or support the invited speaker as they facilitate the workshop. Respond to requests for writing implements and other queries. **Remind:** Remind attendees to complete the workshop evaluation form that will be distributed within twenty-four hours of the workshop.
After the Workshop	**Distribute Evaluation:** Distribute the evaluation to attendees. Review the responses for useful suggestions and ideas. **Follow Up on Suggestions:** Integrate the recommendations into practice. Notify the attendees who made the suggestions, and thank them for their contributions. **Send Thank-You Notes:** If an external expert led the workshop, send an appreciative note for their time. Consider including a short summary of the new practices that will be adopted as a result of their training. This tactic is a wonderful way to demonstrate to a guest speaker that their presentation had an impact on the library.

an employee. Depending on library size and type, certificate programs could be implemented for library employees across several branches within a public library system or several libraries within an academic environment. Be sure to celebrate and publicize the occasion when library personnel receive these certificates, and don't forget to collect the data of how many certificates have been awarded.

How many trainings, workshops, etc., should a library offer to employees? Well, that decision is directly informed by the goals of the organization, the availability of funding and local expertise, how many people have been dedicated to implement this initiative, and myriad other factors. An employee professional development program dedicated to enhancing accessibility need not be an enormous undertaking, and could in fact comprise three or four strategic workshops a year, depending on the size and type of the respective library. The most important thing is to create a tailored program that meets the needs of the library personnel while advancing the overall goal of enhancing the accessibility of library services, spaces, and programs.

🌀 Find Your Experts

After those responsible for a library professional development program have identified the program goals, tracks, and desired outcomes at the big-picture level, it's time to start structuring workshops and finding the necessary experts to lead them. Seek expertise in local and regional nonprofit organizations that specialize in accessibility workshops and trainings. Also search for specialty organizations that, while not nonprofit in nature, may be able to fulfill a niche training need. Be aware that specialty organizations (e.g., consultants) often charge fees. When submitting an inquiry, ask if there is a discount for libraries and other types of public service or educational entities. Additionally, many government offices offer training or funds for training. It is worth conducting some research to determine what's possible, and what—if anything—aligns with the library's needs. Lastly, be sure to seek out grantmakers and prospective donors with requests to fund professional development opportunities for library employees. Be sure to refer to the program documentation, statistics, and other details about the corresponding impact upon the community when submitting a request to a prospective donor or funder.

🌀 Evaluate

How do you know you've been successful? When evaluating a program, there are several metrics to use as indicators for success. But what matters most is the library's specific goals. Upon the development and implementation of the program, where does the library wish to be in five years? Ten years? Does success simply reflect the numbers associated with employee participation in the program? Or is it the number of existing workflows, spaces, collections, and access points to collections that have been modified or reinvented with accessibility practices in mind? Before gathering statistical information on programmatic activities, determine what success looks like to the organization. It's important to have specific and achievable goals because those in turn determine the metrics by which a library evaluates the organization's success.

Please refer to Table 7.3 for an overview of which metrics will best illustrate the success of an employee development program.

Why collect all—or any—of this information? Collecting statistical information about an employee professional development program should demonstrate progress toward the already determined and adopted goals. Collecting statistics may allow library or program administrators to demonstrate an ongoing need for further resources to be allocated to the program in order to ensure its continued success. Lastly, having updated numbers about the levels of employee participation in a professional development effort—especially dedicated to better serving those who belong to a historically underrepresented community—allows the library administrators (and any supporting public relations personnel) to tell a holistic story about the organization's commitment to inclusivity. Thus, a library is not obligated to collect data in all areas but should collect information where it makes the most sense, given the predetermined goals and given what leverage the gathered information can provide.

Table 7.3. Common Success Metrics for Accessibility Initiatives

METRIC TYPE	DEFINITION AND EXAMPLES
Participation	Because this chapter is devoted to creating an accessibility-specific employee professional development program, participation should be an internal metric, meaning the numbers record how many employees within the organization attended workshops and trainings. Tracking this information can be as simple as counting the number of events on an annual basis and conducting headcounts at each event.
Completion	This metric refers to the completion of certificates, online courses, and other types of professional development training. If the library paid for the training, that information should be recorded for budgetary reasons alone. This information can be tracked by requesting that employees volunteer/ self-report it, and these certificates can be internal (i.e., unique to the library) or from external sources.
Operations	This metric refers to changes made to library operations as a result of an initiative, a training, or other types of programmatic activities. Relevant questions include the following: • How many previously inaccessible spaces were altered or remedied due to an initiative or training? • How many accessibility-specific workflows were introduced and are used within the organization (e.g., document conversion, in-house captioning in response to a request, etc.)? • How many VPATs did the library gather for its electronic resource subscriptions? This metric can refer to a wide array of changes to library operations, so it may be worth it to categorize the desired goals and changes into the following categories: Accessibility and Physical Spaces; Accessibility and Electronic Environments; Accessibility and Print Collections; and Accessibility and Library Services (Outreach, Instruction, and Service Points).
Partnerships	This metric refers to the number of community partnerships created while building the employee professional development program. To clarify, a community partnership isn't simply an invitation for a local entity to present to library employees once, but rather a reciprocal, resource-sharing (whether it be space or expertise) partnership between a library and a non-library entity. The relationship is usually informal but can evolve into something more formal over time. A possible partnership could look something like this: a library providing space for a nonprofit to host drop-in hours, during which the nonprofit provides services to its constituents, in trade for the nonprofit offering a specific type of accessibility training for library employees. While it may not be possible to be exactly reciprocal across all community partnerships, it is important to be aware of the times a library is seeking expertise from another person or organization, especially if the library in question can't pay for consultancy fees or offer something in return. And, no, publicity isn't a sufficient payment. Exposure doesn't pay the bills. Tracking this information in a quantitative way may not capture the nuances of the partnership; consider a qualitative approach (i.e., a narrative-based dataset) to collect this information.
Grants and Funds	This metric refers to the number of grants received by external organizations and donors in order to facilitate and support training and professional development of library employees. Be aware that grantmakers and donors often have stipulations attached to the money given to organizations, and that recipients should honor those agreements.

🔊 Share Results and Resources with Other Libraries

Libraries, as a profession and an industry, are not renowned for having a great deal of extra money. Often, new initiatives and programs have to be built through ingenuity, a shoestring or nonexistent budget, and persistence. Thus, if an organization has successfully designed an employee professional development program that has resulted in the improved accessibility of a library's environment, consider sharing that success story with colleagues at state, regional, and national conferences and events. Share the strategies,

templates (such as scripts, checklists, workshop materials, and more), lessons learned, and other resources. Not only will a library establish a regional reputation for expertise (which makes everyone involved look great, from the dean or director on down), but the overall accessibility of libraries will be enhanced for all patrons. Quite simply, sharing useful and effective resources across libraries is a win-win for all involved parties.

⊚ Celebrate

This may seem like a throw-away section to include in this chapter. However, it's worth a discussion: When library employees move past their discomfort with the unknown and engage in learning new skills that enhance the overall quality of customer service for patrons with disabilities, it is important to celebrate that within the library community. The celebration can range from simple acknowledgment at staff meetings to nominating the team responsible for the employee professional development program for an external and/or community service award. It's crucial for library leadership to recognize these efforts as pivotal and transformational to the organization's culture and to acknowledge that fact publicly and frequently.

⊚ Employee Professional Development Program Components

Building an employee professional development program that's designed to enhance awareness about accessibility issues and to build new skills among library personnel requires varying amounts of time, attention, and labor at specific points throughout the overall process. Program development, implementation, and management is a blend between employee development, organizational development, integration of library and/or industry standards, and project management skills. Here are some of the components and considerations that go into program development.

Table 7.4. Accessibility Program Components

PROGRAM ELEMENTS	DESCRIPTION AND CONSIDERATIONS
Goals and Outcomes	This section identifies the goals and outcomes associated with the suite of activities. Goals are the described aspirational activities the library in question hopes to complete, and outcomes are the intended learning moments, knowledge, or action items that the designed activity (or activities) should result in.
Tracks	Accessibility barriers manifest in a variety of ways (e.g., electronic, service point, instructional, physical, etc.). Thus, depending on what the library hopes to accomplish with an employee development program and depending on what expertise is available in the region, a library may want to develop tracks—or areas of focus—for the overall program. When library employees complete these tracks, the employee development program administrator could award certificates or badges for completion. Note: It's important to distinguish between the goals and intended outcomes of the tracks, and the workshops that make up the programmatic track.
Activities	This refers to a description of the efforts, learning opportunities, and other educational details that result in practical skill building for library employees. Activities should be directly informed by the goals and intended learning outcomes of both the tracks and the program.

PROGRAM ELEMENTS	DESCRIPTION AND CONSIDERATIONS
Evaluation	This refers to the evaluative measures a program administrator can implement to track participation, impact, and other useful metrics that communicate an overall picture of the program's efficacy.
Milestones	Milestones are specific dates by which a certain amount of progress has been made on the overall program timeline. When crafting milestones—or any goal, really—it is important to be as specific as possible. Consider using the popular SMART acronym (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Timely) to identify milestones.
Strategic Alignment	Libraries are often embedded in host institutions, or are a part of a multibranch system. Thus, it's important to ensure that any program around employee professional development is aligned with the strategic plan and vision of the host organization. Using the strategic plan can be an effective way to weed out projects and ideas that are attractive but not the best use of the organization's time, attention, and labor resources.
Prospective Partners	To paraphrase a popular idiom, no library is an island. Not only do strategic or tactical partnerships make sense from a labor and resource-sharing perspective, partnerships also allow for enhanced ideas and projects through shared brainstorming and can result in community building.
Communication Strategies	Communication is crucially important to the success of any program. An effective communication strategy (or a suite of them) can tell a story about the library's journey to becoming a more inclusive and accessible space. Furthermore, it's important to tailor the communication strategy about program activities to the audience. No single outreach strategy suits all audiences, and it's important to be flexible in approaches. Elements to consider when crafting a communication strategy include but aren't limited to the following. • **Audience and Outreach Strategies:** Who is the intended audience? What is the best strategy for meeting them where they are (e.g., direct e-mail vs. an in-person invitation)? • **Platform:** Where best can a library reach a specific audience? Does this platform communicate the right signal for the intended message? For example, social media may be a perfect space for celebratory updates about the number of participants in a recent workshop; however, it may not provide sufficient space nor convey the appropriate gravity needed for communicating a strategic plan and roadmap for the library's future. • **Timing:** When is the best time to approach an audience about upcoming events? • **Frequency:** How often does a library remind a specific audience of upcoming events or workshops? Where should those reminders and/or invites be posted? • **Contact Information:** Is it clear to prospective participants whom they should contact for more information? Is it clear to library employees to whom they should refer prospective participants?

Workshop Outline Template

What follows is a sample template for creating a single workshop or professional development event. Remember: a single workshop is aligned with programmatic goals (and possibly a specific track) within the program.

Table 7.5. Accessibility Workshop Template

Workshop/Event Details

Session Title:
Programmatic Track, Goals, and Outcomes:
Date, Time, Location:
Learning Outcomes for Participants:

Pre-Workshop Activities

[ ] Develop workshop outline and intended learning outcomes.
[ ] Reserve learning space/room. Create and publish (either in print or electronic format) any supporting materials for the workshop.
[ ] If relevant, arrange for the appropriate experts to serve as guest instructors/speakers. This may include payment; it will definitely include communication.
[ ] Communicate relevant details to prospective participants and any other parties affected by the workshop.
[ ] Develop evaluation materials, and prepare for dissemination after the workshop.

Workshop Timeline

(*Note*: Increments are in minutes.)
00:02 Welcome and reminder of e-mailed details
00:05 What attendees will get from today's session
00:07 Start of workshop content
00:20 You've learned this—now practice!
00:40 More workshop content
00:50 Small group activity—Prompt: How does this newfound skill apply to your work?
1:05:00 Group report to colleagues: What was the most important thing you learned?
1:12:00 Solo reflection: Identify one action item—How will you integrate what you've learned today into your daily workflow?
1:20:00 Wrap-up: Thank the guest speaker, remind attendees that a workshop evaluation survey is forthcoming. Alternatively, hand out print evaluation materials.

Post-Workshop Activities

[ ] Distribute evaluations.
[ ] Review feedback. Suggest integration of feedback into relevant activities and workflows. Communicate those recommendations to the appropriate personnel (or the guest speaker).
[ ] If relevant, send a thank-you note to the guest speaker.
[ ] Add workshop occurrence into tracking spreadsheet/software. If running a certificate program for library employees, be sure to note that information.

◎ Key Points

- Creating an employee professional development program in accessibility topics and practices builds personnel skillset and investment.
- Library administrators need to support the programs through funds, dedicated time, and public celebrations of achievements.
- An internal employee professional development program should be tailored to organizational and personnel needs. Don't overcomplicate the program if it's not needed.

Crafting Community Partnerships for Enhanced Accessibility

Why Are Community Partnerships Important?

ONCE A LIBRARY HAS INVENTORIED THE opportunities for removing accessibility barriers within their own organization, one of the most important considerations when developing a plan is community partnerships. What does that mean, and why is it important? For the purposes of this chapter, community partnership refers to a partnership between a library and a non-library entity for a shared goal of removing or alleviating an accessibility barrier (or several barriers). But why engage in partnerships? The nature of accessibility barriers often poses legal and public relations risks, and highlighting those risks through a partnership may seem foolish. However, there are several reasons to partner with others on these tasks. They include but aren't limited to the following advantages.

- **Expertise:** People with disabilities, or organizations that advocate for them, are experts in inaccessibility. Partnering with organizations that can assist in identifying barriers (including ones that wouldn't present as barriers to nondisabled people)

and recommend meaningful solutions is simply a good use of time and an effective way to get good information.

- **Efficient and Informed Use of Labor:** By seeking experts in the community, a library can then use the recommendations and/or feedback to inform and prioritize the ensuing activities. Instead of debating what to do, or how best to complete a task or project, getting feedback about a desired priority or how to resolve a specific issue is an incredibly efficient way to articulate what needs to be done, and in what order.
- **Goodwill/Good Faith:** Lastly, by seeking the expertise and experiences of people with disabilities, or those organizations that advocate for them, a library can demonstrate intentional respectfulness toward the disability community and a commitment to improving the library spaces for all patrons. This goodwill can mean a great deal to library patrons who routinely experience inaccessible spaces in nearly all other areas of their life. If the library is making an effort, and getting results, patrons can feel seen and included—which truly manifests the motto, "Libraries are for everyone."

⊚ Community Partnerships for Different Library Types

Different library types (and branches within those systems) will clearly have different opportunities as informed by the results of their own inventory and the available expertise in their community. However, here are some additional prompts or ideas to consider on the topic of community partnerships.

Table 8.1. Prospective Accessibility Project and Program Partners by Library Type

LIBRARY TYPE	PROSPECTIVE PARTNER	RATIONALE
Academic	Disability Services Office	Connecting with the disability services office in a university or college setting is one of the most important relationships a library can build. This connection can inform the subsequent development of best practices for referrals or media alteration, and can cut down on confusion and ambiguity for library personnel (i.e., "To whom do I send this student?"). Furthermore, the personnel in the disability services office can often recommend meaningful connections with additional offices or departments that work with students with disabilities. Some relationship management strategies to consider implementing: • Identify a point person within the library to liaise with the disability services office for consistency in communications. • Update contact information and communication preferences on an annual basis. • Consider meeting once a quarter or semester to discuss known issues, projects, and other topics of mutual interest.
	Students with Disabilities Association	Like the disability services office, connecting with a student organization dedicated to students with disabilities can be an important opportunity for the library to communicate its commitment to being an inclusive space. Students often welcome any opportunity to exercise agency over their educational experience, and will likely have firm opinions to offer a library about improving the overall accessibility.

LIBRARY TYPE	PROSPECTIVE PARTNER	RATIONALE
		Some relationship management strategies to consider implementing: • Consider sharing the library's accessibility improvements plan with the student association leaders. Attempt to integrate any feedback they share, and demonstrate to them how their feedback will be used. • Identify a point person within the library to liaise with the student association leaders for consistency in communications. • Update contact information and communication preferences on an annual basis. • Make sure that the student association leaders can direct students to a public feedback channel, whereby students can share concerns and/or complaints anonymously.
	Facilities Department	An academic library is embedded in a host institution, which is a university or a college. These organizations often have a facilities department, comprising experts who may be able to recommend accessibility fixes to the building itself. If nothing else, they can convey whom a library should contact with concerns and complaints. Some relationship management strategies to consider implementing: • Consider sharing the library's physical accessibility improvements plan with the facilities department personnel. Attempt to integrate any feedback they share, and demonstrate to them how their feedback will be used. • Identify a point person within the library to liaise with the facilities department for consistency in communications. • Update contact information and communication preferences on an annual basis.
	Information Technology Department	An academic library is embedded in a host institution, which is a university or a college. These organizations often have a web shop or information and communications technology department, comprising experts who may be able to recommend accessibility fixes to the library's web presence. Furthermore, many collegiate institutions have a chief information officer (CIO). It may be worth the library's time and effort to seek out guidance and/or advice from the office of the CIO with regard to electronic accessibility fixes. Note: Most academic libraries have dedicated IT support. Ensure that these individuals have the professional development support they need in order to implement fixes to the library's web presence(s). Some relationship management strategies to consider implementing: • Consider sharing the library's proposed electronic accessibility improvements plan with the facilities department personnel. Attempt to integrate any feedback they share, and demonstrate to them how their feedback will be used. • Identify a point person within the library to liaise with the university's or college's information and communications technology department for consistency in communications. If relevant, do the same for the CIO's office. • Update contact information and communication preferences on an annual basis.
	Community Organizations	Local organizations with relevant expertise, such as disability advocacy and/or consultancy, may represent an excellent opportunity to obtain expertise and advice in resolving or alleviating accessibility barriers. These organizations may be nonprofit or otherwise; regardless of the 501(c)(3)

(continued)

Table 8.1. *(continued)*

LIBRARY TYPE	PROSPECTIVE PARTNER	RATIONALE
		status, be aware that some organizations will charge a fee for rendered services or recommendations. Some relationship management strategies to consider implementing: • Consider what specific topic, problem, or task the library wants to address (along with an ideal outcome associated with the partnership) before approaching the community organization. • Offer some form of reciprocity, either through consultancy fees or an alternative arrangement. If there is no fee charged for the expertise, consider offering a thank-you note and/or a customer testimonial for their social media or web presence. Alternatively, perhaps offer a library space in which the organization can host drop-in consultancy hours. Whatever the arrangement, be sure to offer some form of reciprocity for the expertise rendered. • Obtain the permission of the relevant organization, then publicize the library's partnership with the organization and the purpose of the partnership (i.e., improving library accessibility for people with disabilities).
K–12	Special Education Department	Many K–12 school districts have some form of a special education department, through which students with disabilities are identified and then provided relevant resources and services that are designed to enhance their academic success. A library professional may wish to seek out for prospective partnerships and/or employee professional development (i.e., educational) opportunities. *Note:* This type of student information (i.e., disability status) is highly confidential and protected. Thus, when a library professional chooses to partner with a special education team, be sure to provide a general offer of support that avoids identifying any specific students.
	Relevant School District Resources	There may be other departments or programs throughout the school district and/or the region that a library professional can seek out for prospective partnerships and/or employee professional development (i.e., educational) opportunities.
	Community Organizations	Please see the Academic entry for Community Organizations. Many of the recommendations remain the same. The only caveat is that external (i.e., non-district affiliated) organizations may need to undergo a vetting process prior to working with, or presenting to, individuals who are minors. Double-check with library administration or the library district for any necessary permissions and requirements that should be met before partnering with any community organization.
Public	Federal or State Human Services Offices	Public libraries have a unique opportunity to seek out state or federal human services experts, either for employee professional development purposes and/or to host the service in a space where patrons can access the services. For example, the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation may wish to host a job fair for clients—and the library has the perfect place for such an event. Or another department wishes to host weekly consultation hours in an alternate location that is on a particular bus route. These partnerships are opportunities to serve patron needs in unique and meaningful ways. If a library is concerned about committing to a service or program for the long-term without knowing if the intended outcomes are truly useful for that community's population, consider seeking feedback through a survey or focus group. Alternatively, a library can run a pilot program for a short duration and seek voluntary feedback from participants.
	Community Organizations	Please see the Academic entry for Community Organizations. Many of the recommendations remain the same.
Specialty Library, Archives, or Collections	Community Organizations	Please see the Academic entry for Community Organizations. Many of the recommendations remain the same.

It is of course important to distinguish between the partnership needs of different library types. However, it's also worth noting that different branches within the same public library system or different academic libraries within the same host collegiate institution will also have different partnership opportunities and employee development needs. Thus, the community partnership process needs to be informed by the results of each individual branch or library's accessibility inventories (electronic, physical, and services).

Approaching Prospective Partners

When approaching prospective partners for support, advice, or other accessibility-related resources, it is important to remember that this inquiry is yet another task or request aimed at a partner—one that likely adds to an already full workload in most cases. Remembering that these organizations are already quite busy is not meant to deter library professionals from approaching prospective partners at all, but rather to encourage them to be deliberate and thoughtful about how and when to approach prospective partners, and what information to share throughout the process, in order to facilitate a streamlined conversation that yields improved accessibility for the library.

Consider some of the following topics before approaching the prospective partner:

- **Why and What:** Why does the library want to partner with this organization/person? What expertise do they offer, and why is the library professional interested in working with this group? What information does the library professional seek? Specifically, what information, advice, and/or feedback is needed to complete an accessibility-related project at the library? When drafting the first e-mail or phone call, consider being very specific about why the library is seeking out these individuals. This clarity allows the organization to understand early on what sort of help a library is seeking and, if necessary, to make an informed referral to a different organization that can better suit the library's information needs.
- **Reciprocity:** If the organization doesn't charge a fee, what reciprocal action can the library offer to the prospective partner as thanks for their expertise?
- **Format:** Be clear, concise, and respectful of time. Briefly describe the barrier and how the assistance of the organization may result in a meaningful solution. If the organization can't help, thank them for their time before moving on to the next opportunity.

Managing Community Partner Relationships

Building community partnerships is an investment of time and attention. If a library chooses to partner with a community organization in order to alleviate or remove entirely an accessibility barrier, here are some additional (and mostly low-effort) etiquette suggestions that may enhance the relationship. For one-time workshops or events, be sure to send notes of appreciation and gratitude to the community entity in question. Furthermore, if the community organization has a web or social media presence, ask if a customer testimonial would be useful and/or appreciated. If so, be sure to deliver a thoughtful statement about the impact of the organization's workshop or event.

Ongoing community partnerships require more time and attention in order to prosper. Thus, consider assigning a library professional to serve as a point person to manage the relationship. The responsibility of this point person is to keep contact information up to date, respond to inquiries, and provide liaison services between the library and the community organization when arranging events, workshops, consultant meetings, and more. This ensures that people within the library and people within the community organization know whom to contact when questions arise. Lastly, with any community partnership that results in enhanced library services for a patron population, the library should publicize the relationship and the intended outcomes. This signals to the community that the library is committed to finding solutions to barriers and, more important, that the library cares about the well-being of all its patrons.

Key Points

- Community partnerships enhance accessibility efforts in libraries because of the shared efforts, expertise, and ideas.
- Relationships with community organizations can take time and attention. Be sure that at least one individual in the organization serves as a liaison between the library and the partner.
- Reciprocity matters. If an organization is offering its expertise and time, find a way to meaningfully reciprocate.
- The combination of accessibility inventories (chapter 6), an employee professional development program (chapter 7), and community partnerships allows a library to create a comprehensive accessibility plan that is designed to educate patrons and personnel and to transform the library into an inclusive, accessible space.

Recommended Resources

These resources do not have specific recommendations for building community partnerships with organizations that support people with disabilities. However, they offer excellent case studies on how to build community relationships in general and may provide inspiration.

Koen, Diane, and Traci Engel Lesneski, eds. *Library Design for the 21st Century: Collaborative Strategies to Ensure Success*. IFLA Publication no. 179. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Saur, 2019.
Smallwood, Carol, ed. *The Frugal Librarian: Thriving in Tough Economic Times*. Chicago: American Library Association, 2011.

CASE STUDIES IN ACCESSIBILITY EFFORTS

Deploying a Document Conversion Service for Patrons with Disabilities

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IN THIS CHAPTER

▷ Definition of electronic accessibility

▷ How electronic accessibility barriers manifest in libraries

▷ Overview of how one library, in partnership with two other organizations, deployed a document conversion service in order to empower people with disabilities to convert inaccessible documents at any time

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WITH THE LICENSED CONTENT AND E-RESOURCES it provides, the library is often the biggest purveyor of inaccessible content within a university or regional community. Libraries share materials in a variety of formats that may be inaccessible by those with disabilities. For example, video cassettes and some DVDs lack closed captioning for the deaf and hearing impaired. Many articles and documents within licensed databases lack the proper document formatting necessary to allow screen reading technology to access the content within the documents. Likewise, online content provided by third-party vendors (such as e-books or magazines) often lack the website structure that also allows screen reading technology to perform its work. In short, it is difficult to ensure that all licensed and homegrown content and formats that are accessible to all people with disabilities.

However, according to the 1996 Chafee Amendment, it is possible for academic library professionals to convert inaccessible materials into accessible versions for single, not-for-profit, and educational use by patrons with visual disabilities.[1] School libraries in K–12 may also be covered by the Chafee Amendment; however, public library professionals need to consult their legal representation to ensure that fair use or some other kind

▲ **105**

of legal standard applies to single-use scenarios. This chapter describes how an academic library sought partners to purchase a conversion service in order to provide students, staff, and faculty with accessible versions of previously inaccessible content in a timely and cost-effective manner.

⊚ Overview

In order to access documents used in everyday life, such as syllabi, articles, and other forms of paperwork, individuals with specific kinds of disabilities may need to employ text-to-speech, or screen reading, technology to read the document. However, before a patron can use screen reading software to access the document's contents, the document first needs to be formatted to ensure that the assistive technology can read and deliver a coherent audio narrative of its contents to the person with a disability. Many documents aren't formatted appropriately because many individuals aren't aware of this barrier and/or they don't know how to resolve it. In university and collegiate settings, many requests for document conversion for accessibility purposes go through the disability services office. However, many library professionals lack the knowledge of how inaccessible formats affect people with vision-specific disabilities or neurodiverse experiences; furthermore, they are often not sure how to resolve the problem nor whether they have the authority (and legal permission) to resolve the issue.

SensusAccess is one conversion service that makes documents searchable and accessible for individuals who use text-to-speech technology. This service allows users to convert inaccessible documents, such as course readings or assignments, into accessible versions. Furthermore, the self-service solution can be initiated by users—meaning that patrons don't have to rely upon a library employee to begin and complete a document conversion. Typical conversion rates vary due to a variety of factors, but the usual turnaround time is less than twenty-four hours.

After receiving notice about a service that would meet the needs of the library, a point person at a specific university reached out to two other entities and began conversations about how to implement the service across the university. These conversations involved discussions about where to host the service (that is, where on the institutional website); who would pay for the service; and who would be responsible for responding to patron inquiries and liaising with the vendor in order to troubleshoot reported problems. Overall, this process took about three months. If your library (or library system) is interested in implementing a document conversion service or process, here are a few considerations to review.

Research Your Needs: Homegrown or Vendor Service?

When exploring how best to conduct document conversion, library professionals have a few options. If funds are unavailable, or the demand for document conversion for accessibility purposes is too infrequent, a library may choose to adopt an in-house conversion workflow process. Simply put, this means that a library could convert a document when notified by a patron with a disability and, upon a successful conversion, deliver the newly formatted document to the patron via e-mail. However, this approach may pose some challenges: Library professionals must know how to convert and reformat a document so that the content is accessible by screen reading technology. Furthermore, library profes-

sionals need to provide the newly converted document to the patron as soon as possible. This is a problem if the designated employee or point person responsible for document conversion is out sick for the day or away on vacation. It means that the patron experiences a delay in receiving content in an accessible format—something their peers without disabilities don't have to deal with.

Instead of developing an entirely in-house conversion service, which requires time for growing expertise among personnel within an organization, a library may choose to license the services of a document conversion service vendor. This allows a patron to initiate a document conversion event by themselves (provided that they know the service is available through the library website); alternatively, a library professional may complete the simplified conversion process and send the reformatted document to the patron in question. Prior to purchase, adoption of a specific product should start with a robust list of criteria. When evaluating a product, it's important to consider the following components.

Table 9.1. Considerations for Conversion Service Purchase

Service Goal	What will be accomplished if this product is purchased?
Desired Audience	Who will this service/product serve?
Sustainability	How easily can this service be managed by nonexperts? Who will manage the service and serve as a point person/responsible party?
Costs	What are the associated costs, human and financial?
Legality	Are there legal considerations associated with the use of this product by patrons?
Technical Considerations	What technical (e.g., hardware and IT infrastructure) requirements are associated with this product? Does the purchasing organization have the resources to support this service through installation, maintenance, and troubleshooting? Or will the vendor provide technical support? What are the associated costs and limitations of that support?
Alternatives	Are there other/competing products available for review?

Prospective Partnerships

Once you've determined which product to use, consider approaching other entities or organizations with a proposed partnership. While sharing the ongoing costs of a service with one or more entities makes good financial sense, the real benefit is through increased reach: if more partners pay for a shared service, each partner will publicize both the partnership (an example of community organizations working to enhance the collective well-being of a region) and the services rendered by the partnership. This will hopefully result in increased use of the service, and the use statistics associated with a service can contribute greatly to the decision to retain the service over time.

Training Personnel

After adopting a document conversion service (or building one from scratch), employees will need training on how to manage the process in a timely and effective manner. The trainings should consist of an in-person demonstration and a referential "how to" or best

practices document for after the session. The best practices document need not be complicated—it could be as simple as the following instructions.

DOCUMENT CONVERSION: BEST PRACTICES

Urge the patron to use the library's new document conversion service, [Insert name]. If the patron is unfamiliar with the service, you may wish to offer to help them during the first conversion experience. However, if you are unfamiliar with this service, please contact [Insert the name and contact information of the Library Accessibility Team or the responsible party].

Steps for Document Conversion:

    a. Go to [Insert URL].
    b. Select the file that needs conversion and click "Upload."
    c. Select the desired format. *Note*: This often will be the option titled "Accessibility conversion."
    d. Select the desired output. *Note*: Please select the tagged PDF or Word .doc option.
    e. Add the patron's e-mail address and select "Submit."
    f. You should get a receipt page.

    [Insert screenshot of the document submission process]
    [Insert screenshot of document submission confirmation]

Want to know more? Review the vendor documentation here [Insert URL].

Likewise, consider seeking out and hosting related continuing professional development for library personnel. For example, perhaps a community expert could teach personnel how to insert alternate text for images into public-facing online documents. Or another expert could instruct library employees on how to create accessible documents in common word processing software. Or perhaps combine these activities into a series of ongoing accessibility workshops designed to build skills and raise awareness throughout the organization. These activities, in combination with developing the workflow associated with the document conversion service, will create aware, responsive, and skilled employees who can respond to a variety of accessibility-related requests.

External Communications and Marketing

Once the service (either licensed or homegrown) has been implemented, the library needs to communicate the new service to the community. Libraries should adopt multiple strategies for sharing this new service with patrons in an effort to reach the community members who will most benefit from the service. A few strategies include but aren't limited to e-mail newsletters, news updates on the organization's website, and a demonstration workshop offered by library personnel to community patrons.

Ongoing Maintenance

Because the software is a third-party application, if a library chooses to adopt a document conversion service it will need some information technology support. This support entails locating the service on the library webpages and ensuring it has the behind-the-scenes infrastructure to function as expected. If a library instead chooses to develop an entirely in-house document conversion process, a point person who specializes in e-resources is likely the best fit for updating documentation about processes and liaising with public-facing service points and with information technology support.

Different Examples of Document Conversion Use—and Limitations

While a document conversion service like SensusAccess is undoubtedly an excellent resource for patrons with disabilities who rely upon screen reading technology, the software also meets the accessibility needs of library professionals. Here are a few examples of how different library stakeholder groups can use a document conversion service for their service point or departmental activities.

Table 9.2.   Document Conversion Examples

Instruction or Programming Activities	When providing electronic handouts for instructional or programming purposes, library professionals can convert inaccessible documents should they be notified of the need. While ideally such documents would already be formatted for accessibility, having a document conversion service at the ready will assist libraries in being more accessible for people with disabilities.
Service Point Personnel	If library personnel, particularly those at public-facing service points, need to convert an existing document into an accessible version, they can then e-mail the newly accessible document to the patron upon the completed conversion.

Prospective users should know that document conversion is excellent is for documents under thirty to forty pages. Simply put, the shorter the document, the less complexity that the conversion service has to wrangle with (and possibly get wrong). Thus, if there are print-impaired individuals who require the conversion of large texts into accessible versions, these individuals should contact the disability services office at their university or college or use an alternative resource provided by a community organization for assistance and support. Furthermore, a library may consider contacting the vendor for an alternate format of the text, such as an audiobook version.

Resources Needed for Implementation

Whether licensing a third-party vendor or choosing to develop an entirely internal document conversion workflow, a library will need the following resources to establish and maintain such an initiative.

- **Lead:** A lead library employee, charged with designing, developing, implementing, and maintaining the service

- **Communications Professional:** A colleague who is responsible for communications, programming, and outreach activities
- **Budget Authority:** If relevant, a budget authority who is responsible for paying the bills
- **Technology Liaison:** If relevant, an information technology liaison who will support the technology and liaise with the vendor as needed (for systems upgrades, reporting and resolving issues, etc.)

Key Points

- Given the ubiquity of the Internet and how integrated it has become in the world at large, electronic accessibility is very important for libraries. Noncompliance comes with legal and ethical risks for libraries.
- Libraries may be able to mitigate those risks by establishing a document conversion workflow on behalf of patrons with vision and print disabilities. Alternatively, they may wish to license the services of a proprietary third-party vendor, such as SensusAccess.

Recommended Resources

National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled, Library of Congress. https://www.loc.gov/nls/.

National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled, Library of Congress. "Braille and Audio Reading Materials." https://www.loc.gov/nls/braille-audio-reading-materials/.

National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled, Library of Congress. "Directory of Producers of Accessible Reading Materials." https://www.loc.gov/nls/resources/custom-books-transcription-services/.

Note

1. National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled, Library of Congress, "Chafee Amendment: 17 U.S.C. 121," August 2019, https://www.loc.gov/nls/about/organization/laws-regulations/copyright-law-amendment-1996-pl-104-197/.

Conducting an Electronic Accessibility Audit to Improve Library Web Presences

PROVIDING TIMELY AND BARRIER-FREE access to relevant information is an essential role of libraries. However, electronic accessibility is challenging when most library websites are often a combination of various web applications and platforms, with differing vendors (and corresponding levels of accessibility built into the products). To get a sense of how inaccessible their website truly was, one library performed an accessibility audit of the entire web presence. This chapter outlines the methodology, results, and corresponding lessons learned during an electronic accessibility audit. After reading this chapter, readers should feel confident in starting a full or partial electronic accessibility audit of their own library.

Project Overview: Methodology and Results

First things first: the audit process can be time consuming and effort intensive. Furthermore, for the results to be effective, the organization that wishes to engage in an

accessibility audit needs to have some control over their own web presence in order to implement fixes and troubleshoot accessibility issues. Institutions without the staffing and/or time available to conduct a full audit can still be served by this chapter. Smaller libraries can focus on auditing one platform at a time. This removes the possibility of simultaneously contrasting multiple platforms when reviewing the audit results but makes the entire process more sustainable for small organizations. If an institution does not have much authoring or developmental control over their website, an audit—and the subsequent report—can still be a useful advocacy tool.

Start with the Inventory

The first step in the accessibility audit was to inventory the library's web presence in order to know what to assess. The inventory collected the following information: name of each system or platform, domain URLs, and vendors. After gathering a representative sample of pages from each platform or web presence, each URL was run through WebAIM's WAVE checker. After each sample emerged through the WAVE checker, the results were organized into positive results (features and elements) and issues to investigate and/or fix (errors and alerts).

One immediate result? Raw data from an online accessibility checker can difficult to understand and may offer misleading counts of both positive and negative results. Thus, a summary statement of the results for each platform or web presence was necessary in order to make meaning and sense from the data. Ultimately, the electronic accessibility audit results were the positives and negatives counts into meaningful groupings combined with a qualitative assessment of the platform (which often included details such as user traffic, importance to general or academic library activities, and more). This combined assessment allowed the library to rank platforms by general level of accessibility before creating a remediation roadmap that documented the urgent and prioritized fixes needed by the less accessible platforms and web presences. While automated electronic accessibility audits are now widely available, human interpretation and prioritization (e.g., what to fix first?) is absolutely essential for a successful electronic accessibility audit.

The Accessibility Audit: Lessons Learned

Most libraries have an online presence that best resembles a patchwork quilt: multiple applications, platforms, services, documents, and systems, all of which are stitched together with code and/or through a larger content management system (e.g., Drupal, WordPress, etc.). Furthermore, these systems are either maintained and supported by a vendor or have been "homegrown"—that is, developed within the organization by a library professional and specifically for that organization's use. This means that each system may have a unique infrastructure and a unique information technology support arrangement. Thus, the strategy for resolving electronic accessibility issues must be tailored to each system and IT support solution. In short, the identified solutions will likely differ across systems and it's best to assume that resolving the identified accessibility issues will occur on a case-by-case basis.

Table 10.1. Web Presence Evaluation Template

Platform	
Vendor	
VPAT/Documentation?	[ ] No. [ ] Yes. If so, what is the URL?
Audit Date	
Representative URLs	
Counts	Features Elements
	Errors Alerts
Summary	
Prioritized Fixes	1. Sample Fix (Deadline) 2. Sample Fix (Deadline) 3. Sample Fix (Deadline)
Responsible Party	
Communication Strategy	

Identifying the electronic accessibility barriers associated with a website is merely the first step. The next steps are to identify which systems need to be fixed, ascertain what information technology support is needed to resolve each specific issue, and prioritize which problems get fixed first. For example, are there headers that need to be employed in the site infrastructure to allow screen readers to access that information? Or are there missing alternate text tags for the images on the website? Which issues can be easily and quickly resolved? Which issues will offer the highest quality of life enhancement once employed?

Conducting an audit gives library professionals a great deal of information, but a project plan transforms the data into action items. Consider using table 10.1 as a template for conducting an audit. Don't be limited by the fields of information currently on the table. Add more data fields in order to make the audit truly useful for your library.

Outreach Strategy

Once you and/or your organization have prioritized the order in which each accessibility barrier will be addressed (if possible), consider publishing a streamlined version on any planned efforts to improve the accessibility of the library's web presence for your patrons. While it can seem like a risk to publish known accessibility barriers and issues to the community, it is also an opportunity to be candid and transparent about the organization's efforts to be better and more inclusive for all patrons. Most patrons with disabilities already know that the library website is inaccessible in one form or another. Thus, the publication of known issues won't come as a surprise. However, the publication of both a list of known issues *and* a plan for resolving them within a specified timeline is an

opportunity to raise awareness about these issues and to communicate to the community that your library is a place for all patrons.

Professional Development for Web Developers and Content Authors

A library website has an array of text and images embedded on web pages *and* a series of documents, photos, and videos uploaded to the site. For the former, web developers need to structure the online environment/website so that it is accessible by screen reading technology. However, accessibility training is not often a mandatory component of information technology education or curriculum, and many web developers can create sites that are (however inadvertently) inaccessible. Thus, your organization may need to invest in additional, accessibility-specific training or professional development for your information technology professionals before you can implement the identified solutions.

While web developers may needed professional development support in order to learn how to create an accessible online environment, other library professionals may also need professional development support in learning how to create accessible documents, images, videos, and more. Each of these formats requires a different skillset—and again, most library and information science curricula and employee training programs do not include a robust overview on how to create accessible content (or to fix existing inaccessible formats). Thus, authors of content that is published to a website need support and resources for creating accessible content. You cannot hope to improve the overall electronic accessibility of a web presence without equipping all developers and authors in your organization with the right tools to do so.

◎ Conducting an Audit at Your Library

This timeline overview is designed to give you a sense of how long these projects can take, and what the lifecycle approach to web accessibility looks like. The estimated time needed to complete each step of this process varies across organizations due to the various sizes, types, and organizational structures of different libraries; thus, the estimated time has been presented in a sliding scale.

Reviewing the Results

When reviewing the results of the e-accessibility audit, you can organize your next steps in a few different ways. There is no perfect or best way to prioritize since every library will have a different composition of available staff, expertise, time, and funds. Thus, each library should adopt the solution that works best for them.

As your organization makes progress on identifying issues to resolve, consider communicating short progress reports to library personnel. These reports raise awareness about the issues but also invite new ideas, enthusiasm, and possible participants from within the library. And as mentioned earlier, communicating planned accessibility enhancements to the external library community can demonstrate the organization's commitment to inclusive practices. Consider developing a web presence through which patrons can report inaccessible content and web pages. This can be a simple form, an e-mail address, or a phone number. E-mails, calls, and submissions through the webform should be routed to the appropriate personnel.

Table 10.2. Stages Involved in an Accessibility Audit

Identify the Team Responsible for the Audit (Time Needed: one week to one month)	In order to be truly effective, the accessibility audit requires a team of individuals. If your organization has an accessibility team in place, assign the responsibility of the audit to this team. However, if you do not have an accessibility team—and many libraries do not due to limited personnel, expertise, and resources—create a small, temporary working group to address these issues. Given the nature of the project and the type of resources involved (i.e., online systems, databases, websites, and more), it makes sense to have an e-resources specialist (ideally, someone who manages the library databases and has a relationship of some kind with the associated vendors) and a library information technology specialist in this working group.
Systems Inventory (Time Needed: one week to one month)	A systems inventory is, in its simplest form, a list of the systems your organization uses to provide services and information to patrons. At this point, you may also want to consider the scope of your audit. Once you have an updated list of systems that you wish to evaluate and you have decided the scope of your audit, you are ready to conduct the audit.
Conduct the Accessibility Audit (Time Needed: one week to two months)	The time needed to conduct the accessibility audit depends greatly upon the following factors: the amount of available personnel, the complexity of your organization, the scope of your audit (i.e., how many systems you are evaluating), and the selected methodology. If you pay for a proprietary evaluation (such as Siteimprove), your audit will be automated and expedited with little requirement for human involvement; furthermore, many of the proprietary options provide recommended solutions to the licensee. However, if you are limited by funds or preference to a free accessibility checker, this approach will take more time. If you choose this approach, consider selecting a representative sample of pages within a given system (ideally selected because of high user traffic) rather than testing each and every page. For example, run the homepage, advanced search, a search results page, and a single item record of a database through an accessibility checker. Selecting a representative sample saves your personnel time and effort and gives you a sense of what needs to be worked on without sinking too much time and attention into one system of many. Be sure to take screenshots of the pages, record the dates of the audit, and take screenshots of the results for referential purposes.

Table 10.3. Evaluation Factors in an Accessibility Audit

Ease	Many alerts are simple fixes, such as adding alternate text for images or altering the header structure within a web environment. Because these fixes are relatively simple (provided that you have the IT support to ensure that this happens), there is a certain common sense in addressing these first and making rapid changes that improve the web presence.
Severity of Inaccessibility (Type)	Organize audit results by the severity of reported inaccessibility. For example, group all reports of features, documents, or functions that cannot be used by screen reading technology and give them a specific priority. Once you've grouped your problems by severity, you can stagger the timeline for implementing solutions. For example, solutions for one set of issues can be implemented during the first six months.
High-Impact Systems	It may make sense to prioritize high-impact/high-use systems first so that any accessibility fixes can benefit the largest group of people.

Long-Term Maintenance

Once you have an implementation plan for your identified solutions, the team responsible for electronic accessibility issues can move into the development, testing, and deployment stages. Determine a frequency and format for checking up on accessibility issues. Once a year? Twice a year? And should the team meet in person? Or via e-mail or video conferencing? (Library systems with several locations may choose to meet via video conferencing.) Regardless of which format and frequency are chosen, it is important for this team to meet on a semi-routine basis to ensure that these issues are reviewed, discussed, and acted upon. Arranging a meeting series at six-month intervals ensures that effort is invested in enhancing the overall accessibility of the library's web presence. Furthermore, be sure to gather any accessibility documentation the vendor provides and develop electronic accessibility license language for the e-resource specialists within the libraries when it comes time to negotiate new or existing contracts with vendors.

ⓖ Key Points

- Because of the wealth of good information and free online tools, most library professionals have the resources available to conduct a basic electronic accessibility evaluation of their online presence. However, be aware that conducting an audit is simply the first stage of a larger journey.
- Once you have the results, identify the most important priorities for your organization.
- The entire process can be distilled into a few stages: Identify a sustainable methodology to employ. Evaluate your results. Prioritize and follow through.

ⓖ Recommended Resources

Association of Specialized and Cooperative Library Agencies. "Accessibility to Library Databases and Other Online Library Resources for People with Disabilities." http://ascla.ala.org/tool kit/index.php?title=Accessibility_to_Library_Databases_and_Other_Online_Library_Re sources_for_People_with_Disabilities.

Big Ten Academic Alliance. "Library E-Resource Accessibility—Standardized License Language." https://www.btaa.org/library/accessibility/library-e-resource-accessibility---standardized -license-language.

Big Ten Academic Alliance. "Library E-Resource Accessibility—Testing." https://www.btaa.org/ library/accessibility/library-e-resource-accessibility--testing.

WebAIM WAVE Web Accessibility Evaluation Tool. https://wave.webaim.org/.

World Wide Web Consortium. "Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) Overview." https://www.w3.org/WAI/standards-guidelines/wcag/.

Web and information technology specialists who wish to improve their electronic accessibility expertise can find autonomous courses at Coursera, Udemy, Codecademy, and many other credentialed online learning platforms.

Case Study: Building Employee Knowledge through Voluntary Product Assessment Template Workshops

SINCE MANY DEGREE-BEARING PROGRAMS and/or onboarding practices within library organizations do not provide training on how to evaluate an electronic system for accessibility compliance, many library professionals—through no fault of their own—lack knowledge on how to evaluate a system for accessibility issues. Some library professionals may have experience with accessibility issues through personal or tangentially personal experiences (i.e., a loved one has a disability). However, many library professionals cite a lack of awareness and/or comfort with accessibility practices, and often simply don't know where to start.

The definition of e-resources refers to both the content provided by the vendors *and* the platform or system through which library users access these e-resources. E-resources often contain the following barriers:

- **System:** Platform or system is inaccessible by screen reading technology. (See the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines for more details.) Thus, a library user cannot navigate the database easily or at all, depending on how the system is designed/structured. If the library user with a disability cannot navigate the database or system through screen reading technology, they cannot hope to conduct a search and examine search results for relevant information and data. This means that an entire avenue of discovery and retrieval is closed to them (but not to others). Obviously, this isn't great in terms of equity across library patrons.
- **Content:** The content within a search result display or item—such as item record details (fields), attached documents, photos, videos, and much more—can be inaccessible. Since much of the content is aggregated from multiple publishers by the vendor, the accessibility of items can vary across search results. Each format (e.g., still image versus streaming video) has different accessibility requirements (and solutions), which further complicates the situation; each item may require a different kind of modification. For example, one PDF associated with a search result may be perfectly accessible by screen reading technology while the very next search result is completely inaccessible—and thus useless to the library user with a disability.
- **Reporting Channel:** Some vendors now offer an accessibility statement on their web presence and/or database homepages. These presences often have details about built-in accessibility features, and instructions on how to use these features. They also often include a generic support contact e-mail address for library patrons to use if they have questions or encounter an accessibility issue. However, these reporting channels go directly to the vendor and may not include the host library in the subsequent communications. Thus, your organization may consider implementing a local reporting channel through which users can report accessibility issues to the e-resources team at your library/organization. The advantage of this reporting channel is that it both fosters quick communications with the vendor about a potential solution and provides the user with good customer service (e.g., personalized response, provision of an accessible version of the requested item, etc.). Furthermore, once you have tracked the reports of inaccessible content, systems, or just general questions around accessibility over a period of time, you will have a better sense of how often these issues come up for the patrons associated with your organization. With data, you can lobby for more resources (e.g., professional development and training for library personnel, proprietary accessibility support, dedicated personnel and/or team tasked with monitoring and alleviating accessibility issues, and more) and potentially have a different kind of conversation with vendors when it comes time to renegotiate licenses for e-resources.
- **Technical Documentation:** Accessibility statements on vendor websites are often generic overviews of what's available to library users; thus, the information may not contain a great depth of information. Consider requesting the technical documentation for the system from the vendor, and make sure your information technology support team receives a copy of that information. Even if it's not possible for your local IT team to implement fixes to the database or system in question, they could review the documentation and—in combination with the local reports of problems and questions, gathered through the reporting channel—request that the vendor's development team implement fixes and/or enhancements that would result in greater accessibility.

✺ Case Study: Accessibility Workshops

In this case study, a library designed and hosted a series of accessibility workshops dedicated to educating library personnel about electronic accessibility and VPATs. First came the workshops on electronic accessibility issues and instructional accommodations in the higher education environment. These workshops were necessary for building a baseline of shared knowledge and vocabulary. Without these prior sessions, the subsequent training on VPATs would not have been as successful because the attendees would have spent more time asking for definitions related to electronic accessibility, and for examples of different kinds of barriers. Arranging workshops designed to build foundational knowledge prior to implementing the VPAT training allowed the library's accessibility team to scaffold and sequence skill building among library colleagues.

After the foundational workshops had been conducted, the one-hour VPAT workshop was designed for any library professional who had responsibilities for acquiring software, managing online presences or applications, or managing other products from a third-party vendor. The goals of the workshop were straightforward and tailored to the time limitations: having attended the session, participants would understand what a VPAT is, and how using VPATs can result in enhanced conversations with vendors about accessibility requirements in third-party products. Other outcomes included fostering the ability to judge whether VPATs are relevant to their work, and to ask informed questions about integrating this assessment tool into their practices.

Lastly, attendees would learn how to contact community experts for further support. This outcome was incredibly important for the eventual sustainability of this practice (i.e., using VPATs in local library environments). Instead of always going to an external expert (which required additional time and funds, and relied on the willingness of other people to provide that expertise), another goal of the workshop was to build expertise, experience, and comfort among local library professionals. With the growth of local knowledge and comfort on these issues, your organization may be able to stop outsourcing them to external experts and begin to rely upon your own.

VPAT Introductory Workshop

The workshop began with an overview of relevant legislation. In this case study, the overview (and subsequent discussion) included state laws that had more specific guidelines for accessibility compliance than the federal guidelines. The overview then segued a citation of lawsuits and settlements that have occurred in higher education scenarios throughout the United States in the last ten years. It was a somber reminder that lawsuits are a reality. But while the background information was useful, the bulk of the workshop was devoted to outlining three practical steps: solicit accessibility information, validate that information, and include accessibility assurances in contract information. Here is a short summary of the content and strategies.

✺ Resources Needed for Sustainable Implementation

Should a library professional wish to implement a similar suite of activities and efforts at their own library, here are a few of the resources needed for success.

Table 11.1. Overview of VPAT Evaluation Processes

Seek Accessibility Documentation	Ask the vendor for a VPAT that conforms with the latest WCAG guidelines and standards. Is there any accessibility documentation available for patrons? For systems and information and communications technology experts? Ask if available third-party accessibility has been completed. If so, are the results available?
Confirm Accessibility Documentation	Once received, be sure to test or validate the accessibility information provided by the vendor. Alternatively, ask the vendor to demonstrate the accessibility features or functions without a mouse or assistive technology. It is important to try to develop capacity in-house to conduct e-accessibility evaluations. This will allow a library to make better-informed decisions without having to depend on external parties (that may charge for their expertise and time).
Negotiate with the Vendor	If a library discovers that some element of a product is inaccessible, go back to the vendor and ask for an accessibility remediation roadmap—a document that has specific and measurable fixes on an articulated timeline. When negotiating new contracts and renewals, be sure to include accessibility license language. If the vendor proves reluctant for whatever reason, encourage them to see this as an opportunity to expand their customer base through better and more inclusive products.
Track and Update Documentation	Retain accessibility documentation in a shared internal site (such as an intranet or a private LibGuide), review the documentation on an annual or otherwise regular basis, and update as appropriate. All accessibility documentation and communications related to this process should be retained for informational and training purposes. It's useful to have easy and quick access to the accessibility documentation in case a patron lodges a complaint about a product. Having this information at the ready, and being able to converse with an upset patron about the ongoing electronic accessibility in which the library is engaged, can signal to the patron that the library is at least attempting to mitigate these issues in the short term and improve/fix them in the long term.

Table 11.2. Resources Needed for a VPAT Workshop

Point Person or Team at the Individual Library	Someone should be responsible for leading the organizational conversation about identifying accessibility issues, advocating for solutions, and attempting to raise collective (i.e., organization-wide) awareness. Depending on the size and complexity of the organization, a team (rather than a single individual) dedicated to these issues may be a better approach. Any team should be representative across the different work centers within a library and/or across different library branches or specialties within a system.
e-Accessibility Expertise	If a library lacks an individual who has the requisite e-accessibility expertise, the library either needs to find a consultant or invest in growing the expertise within the current employee roster through funding relevant professional development activities. While the latter scenario requires more time before the library has in-house expertise, it may be worth it to make that long-term investment.
Relationships with Vendors and Vendor Liaisons	Once a library has a sense of what requests to submit to vendors, the library personnel responsible for communicating with vendors need to develop a strategy for articulating requests for improvements.

⚙ Strategies for Different Library Types

Here are a few strategies for pursuing VPAT-related activities at a library. These strategies are illustrative, not exhaustive, as different library types, sizes, and other factors inform what activities and efforts are best suited for the institution in question.

Table 11.3.   Sustainability Strategies for Electronic Accessibility Evaluation Processes

Consortial Leverage for Accessibility Features	Library systems or consortial alliances have an opportunity to come together to share resources and ideas, and to spend collective money where their values lie. While it's easier said than done, of course, using consortial leverage can potentially change the conversation between libraries and vendors.
System-Wide Accessibility Team for e-Resources and Initiatives	It's hard to do this work alone. Since many organizations face similar kinds of e-accessibility problems, consider banding together with other libraries and/or community partners in order to share problems, ideas, and potential solutions. As always, you should publicize cross-organizational efforts that result in improved customer service and patron experiences.
Library Accessibility Teams	Again, it's hard to do this work alone. Consider developing a library-wide accessibility team that's responsible for identifying issues and attempting to resolve them and/or advocate for them. A representative team (i.e., one member from each area of the library) is ideal because members bring a full array of accessibility barriers to the table. They also bring the greatest opportunities for improving customer service.
Data-Gathering Events	Libraries often license many third-party databases and resources, and gathering the VPATs all of these resources can be an overwhelming task. Thus, consider hosting a VPAT gathering party. This event can enhance overall awareness about electronic accessibility while crowd-sourcing the labor across the organization.
Community Expertise	Invite community expertise whenever available. A non-library perspective can enhance workflows and services.

⚙ Prospective Timeline

The time needed to implement these activities will vary across libraries, given type, size, and organizational complexity (e.g., consortial library system versus a single library). However, the preparation and implementation of a VPAT workshop can be a simple and quick endeavor, taking typically less than a month if the library has residential electronic accessibility expertise. If the library then wishes to host a data-gathering workshop, that is likely another month dedicated to preparation, communication of the event, and the actual hosting. Reviewing the VPAT submissions for subsequent analysis and developing recommended requests to articulate to vendors is a prolonged endeavor that will likely take several months to a year.

⚙ Key Points

- Given the ubiquity of the Internet and how integrated it has become in the world at large, electronic accessibility is very important for libraries. However, it is a complex topic. Building employee knowledge around these issues will take time and structured learning activities, such as professional development workshops.

- Electronic accessibility barriers manifest in both the system/platform and the content housed within that system.
- Evaluation for e-accessibility may need to be conducted on a system-by-system basis.
- Increasingly, vendors are providing channels through which patrons can report inaccessible content or features. Additionally, more and more vendors are being proactive in sharing accessibility documentation.

◎ Recommended Resources

Access Technology Higher Education Network (ATHEN). https://athenpro.org/.

Association of Specialized and Cooperative Library Agencies. "Accessibility to Library Databases and Other Online Library Resources for People with Disabilities." http://ascla.ala.org/tool kit/index.php?title=Accessibility_to_Library_Databases_and_Other_Online_Library_Re sources_for_People_with_Disabilities.

Big Ten Academic Alliance. "Library E-Resource Accessibility—Standardized License Language." https://www.btaa.org/library/accessibility/library-e-resource-accessibility---standardized -license-language.

Big Ten Academic Alliance. "Library E-Resource Accessibility—Testing." https://www.btaa.org/library/accessibility/library-e-resource-accessibility--testing.

European Standard. "Accessibility Requirements Suitable for Public Procurement of ICT Products and Services in Europe." https://www.etsi.org/deliver/etsi_en/301500_301599/301549/01.01.02_60/en_301549v010102p.pdf.

Information Technology Industry Council. "Voluntary Product Assessment Template." https://www.itic.org/policy/accessibility/vpat.

Library Accessibility VPAT Repository. https://vpats.wordpress.com/.

World Wide Web Consortium. "Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) Overview." https://www.w3.org/WAI/standards-guidelines/wcag/.

Creating an Accessibility Response Plan for Employees

▷ Definition of an accessibility response plan

▷ Considerations when drafting an accessibility response plan for a library

▷ How to ensure that a response plan is up to date and useful for library personnel

WHETHER A LIBRARY EMPLOYEE WORKS at a public-facing service point, such as a research consultation or circulation services desk, or in the interlibrary loan department, a common issue reported by employees is that they don't know how to respond to accessibility issues, concerns, or complaints when they arise. And because they don't know the "correct" way to respond to an issue, this uncertainty creates ambiguity and in some cases fear that can be apparent to the patron. It's a multifaceted problem that can be compounded by several factors, as outlined below.

Library employees want patrons and users to have a positive and inclusive experience in the library. They strive to be respectful, but due to lack of training and experience, they may feel ill-equipped to make decisions or respond effectively to common accessibility complaints. The tension that comes from a desire to be respectful to all patrons but feeling ill-equipped to respond to presented issues stems from lack of training and experience. This creates a frustrating environment for both employee and patron: the employee feels as though they are not doing enough to support the patron, while the patron feels unheard and excluded from library services and spaces. However, even a little training combined with some organizational development can address these issues.

This chapter discusses the creation of an employee-centric response plan that employees refer to, and use, when presented with disability issues at a variety of service

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Table 12.1. Common Reasons Library Personnel May Feel Ill-Equipped to Respond to Concerns

Lack of Experience	Often employees feel like they don't have enough training and/or information to respond effectively to the issues presented to them. This uncertainty often stems from both a lack of exposure to disability issues and the lack of a routine organizational development process that fosters conversations around best practices in addressing disability-related concerns. Unfortunately, this natural uncertainty about how to respond to disability-related complaints and/or concerns can come across (to the patron or user) as the library employee not caring about these populations.
Lack of Authority	Employees may feel as though they don't have the requisite authority to make a decision at that precise moment and worry that a decision—especially a "wrong" one—may unduly affect the patron, themselves, and/or the organization. Again, this natural uncertainty can create a hesitancy about which decision to make and can come across as the library not caring about the well-being of its patrons with disabilities.
Frequency of Reports	The frequency of disability concerns and complaints will vary across libraries due to size of the organization, demographics and population density (e.g., differences in urban, suburban, and rural settings), and library type (e.g., academic, public, etc.). Furthermore, the concerns and complaints can be unpredictable; it's hard to anticipate when and how often these complaints will surface. And if the library employees are forced to rely on memories of a verbal edict passed down through a staff meeting several months ago, it is almost a guarantee that the employees in question will forget the agreed-upon practices. Thus, it's important to(a) document agreed-upon practices, (b) update the document at regular intervals, and (c) store the document in a widely shared, internal location. An updated document will remove the burden of trying to remember what the best practices are by presenting them in a simple-to-use fashion.

points (public-facing or otherwise). A response plan is a fairly simple concept: It is a best practices document that maps the reported disability issue with the agreed-upon organization-wide response to that issue, along with any further documentation steps. The desired outcome of creating and maintaining this kind of document is the provision of inclusive library services for patrons/users with disabilities that's consistent and thoughtful across all library service points and all visits to the library. Essentially, the goal is to deliver consistent and equitable experiences at all times. Consistency of experiences in a library environment enables the library to gain trust from the library community as expectations are first established and then fulfilled, time and time again.

This chapter discusses the stages involved in creating a document and conducting training in the use of this document with library employees; it also presents recommendations for ensuring the sustainability and usefulness of the accessibility response plan. The response plan is intended for library employees to use and/or refer to when a patron or user provides feedback about a disability-related issue. By its very nature, a response plan is reactive—it assists and reminds employees of agreed-upon strategies and protocols at the point of need. Thus, while the following statement is a bit obvious, it should be said that a response plan is one tactic of a larger, organization-wide strategy for proactively identifying, responding to, and alleviating disability barriers. Furthermore, a committee, a working group, or a single point person should bear responsibility for managing and updating the document on an annual or semiannual basis to ensure that the practices are relevant and up to date, which, in turn, continues to ensure its usefulness for the library employees.

Stages Involved

A best practices document has its own lifecycle. Here are the stages involved in creating an employee response plan, and the work involved in those stages.

Gather Information

The purpose of a response plan is to craft a document that's useful for employees and allows them to better serve the library through the delivery of consistent and inclusive user services. Because this document is intended for library employees, it's useful to get a sense of what accessibility issues have been reported by library employees across all service points (public-facing or otherwise). Identifying the common reports of accessibility issues provides the library an opportunity to conduct an inventory of "pain points"—situations or scenarios in which the workflow or service delivery was interrupted by some kind of problem: lack of information, uncertainty on how to proceed, etc. Inventorying these pain points can provide a useful starting place to for figuring out (a) how many problems exist, (b) the nature of these problems, and (c) what additional resources are needed (beyond the response plan) to truly resolve these problems.

There are multiple tactics for gathering information about reported issues:

Table 12.2. Possible Outreach Strategies

Statistics/Analytics	Review the library's patron interaction records for statistical data about complaints and/or concerns. Be sure to look over website submissions, too. Get a sense of how many complaints occurred in a specific time period, and what the nature of those complaints were. The complaints can directly foster organization-wide conversations about resolving them.
Internal Focus Group or Survey	Draw on the anecdotal data that employees have. What incidents made an impression on them? What issues would they like to address? This tactic accomplishes a couple of outcomes: By drawing upon collegial experiences, the organization is inviting colleagues to participate in the conversation about possible solutions, which, in turn, builds a kind of investment in improving the organization together. Furthermore, asking colleagues to share their expertise and to contribute to a best practices document is demonstrating respect for their knowledge and experiences. The library in question may choose to conduct an in-person focus group, which is a user experience methodology through which a facilitator proposes a series of questions to a specific group of individuals for the purpose of information gathering. Alternatively, an electronic survey with questions similar to that of a focus group can be disseminated to the entire organization. This method ensures that every employee has the means by which to contribute (an electronic survey). A survey, however, has different considerations to think of: It's a unidirectional tool (i.e., meaning that survey respondents are contributing information in one direction rather than participating in a conversation). Furthermore, a survey requires time to complete and the support of administration that the survey is a workplace priority.
External Focus Group or Survey	Alternatively, the library may wish to invite feedback about accessibility issues from library patrons. A focus group or a survey would work for information-gathering purposes. Likewise, a simple comments box (either online or at a service desk) or whiteboard could also serve as a low-effort way to gather feedback about desired changes to accessibility practices within a library space. However, if you invite feedback from the community, it's important to respect and act upon the contributions. For example, once you've conducted a focus group or a survey, publish a summary of the results. In the summary, include a roadmap with a list of prioritized action items and a corresponding timeline. After the initial publication of the summary, be sure to publicize regular updates and progress reports about how the library is working to accomplish the identified priorities.

(continued)

Table 12.2. *(Continued)*

Accessibility Committees	If you have an accessibility committee within the library, or one that spans the library region and/or community (and includes several library branches and/or types), reach out to it. Ask if the committee is willing to share information and to partner on (or even co-lead) efforts designed to create consistent practices in responding to accessibility concerns. These partnerships share resources and build capacity in unique and exciting ways.
Accessibility Community Organizations	If you have an accessibility-centered community organization within your region, reach out to it. Ask if it is willing to share information and to partner on (or even co-lead) efforts designed to create consistent practices in responding to accessibility concerns. Talking with experts can expedite the overall timeline for creating employee-centric resources by reducing the time and effort spent in the information-gathering stage. A couple of additional considerations: A. Expense: Some community organizations do charge for their time and expertise. If you plan to reach out to an organization for supporting expertise, determine what the financial costs will be. B. Recognition: Even if the community organization in question is willing to provide expertise for free, its time and knowledge is valuable. Consider a public acknowledge of some kind (e.g., a blog post or a social media "shout out") when the best practices document is done and/or in progress. Alternatively, invite the organization to host a workshop or a program in a library space. The reciprocity is equal parts appreciation, courtesy, and good publicity.

Regardless of whether your audience is internal (i.e., library employees) or external (i.e., library users), whenever you invite participation via provision of knowledge, experiences, and so forth, it's important to convey two things: the purpose of the survey, focus group, or other vehicle used to gather information, and how the gathered information will directly impact and inform library services or planning. Being clear—and following through—about how the gathered information is being used may reassure participants that their time and content is appreciated, valued, and will be integrated into subsequent iterations of library services, spaces, or programs.

Create the Product

Once your organization has gathered sufficient information to begin drafting the response plan, it's time to format and house the information in a user-friendly way. Here are a few considerations when organizing the newly gathered data into a response plan. Perils of perfectionism: it's tempting to wait until the finished product (i.e., a document, an internal website, etc.) is near perfect before moving to the training stage. However, it's almost always more important that employees have information about best practices protocols sooner rather than later.

Train Employees

Once you've drafted (and likely revised) the content and decided on a format for delivering the content of an accessibility response plan, it's important to decide what kind training is required. Consider offering a workshop to library employees about the nature and intended use of the response plan. Even a brief presentation and discussion at a staff meeting can foster the adoption and use of the response plan more effectively than an organization-wide e-mail. If you decide to arrange a workshop, the format in table 12.3

Table 12.3. Before Writing the Response Plan

Content Organization	After the information-gathering stage, the organization has a great deal of information to share in the form of best practices. Remember that the purpose of this plan is to create a reference document at the point of need; thus, a wall of text will not allow employees to locate information quickly or easily. Consider arranging the information in the form of FAQs or a table. This will ensure that employees can locate a known issue, and the corresponding best practice, by scanning the document and locating the most relevant keyword. This makes the document easier to use, and thus people are more inclined to truly use it. For a quick gauge of the overall usability of the response plan, have a colleague from every department perform a quick read of the document and provide feedback about the content organization. Then integrate the suggested revisions into the document prior to dissemination throughout the organization (and/or training).
Suggested Language	Consider adding suggested language and/or statements for service desk personnel to use when confronted with accessibility issues. These statements, focused on accessibility issues and included in the response plan, can be a helpful reminder to personnel of how to respond to upset or angry patrons during a heated moment. Examples of these suggested statements can be found at the end of this chapter.
Format	When presenting this information to your employees, consider which format will be most useful. An internal webpage on the organization's intranet? A private LibGuide? A PDF that can be downloaded and saved to the desktops of service point computer stations? A knowledge base with relevant FAQs that is searchable by library employees through keyword and specific tags (i.e., a relational database with FAQs)? Query library colleagues and get a sense of what format is most helpful for easy access and the quick dissemination of information. Part of the value of useful information is the delivery or the vehicle in which that information resides.
Maintenance	Regardless of content organization or format decisions, the library will need a responsible party for the care and maintenance of the new response plan. Out-of-date information—especially information that pertains to historically underserved and underrepresented populations—is at best an inconvenience to both employees and patrons. At worst? It can be a liability to the organization. Thus, a point person, a committee, or a specific unit should bear responsibility for regularly performing reviews and making updates to this document. If your organization chooses to host routine training and/or professional development around the response plan, consider either making the unit or person responsible for providing updates part of the professional development workshop team.

may be useful in fostering active learning and the subsequent adoption of the response plan into existing workflows within the libraries.

Ensure Document Effectiveness

Once you've gathered information, created a response plan, and trained employees on how to use the response plan in different scenarios, the response plan moves into the maintenance stage. The importance of updated information has already been discussed; however, it's also important to integrate new information about reported issues and agreed-upon best practices for the library into the response plan as these reported concerns are identified by library employees. This ensures that the response plan continues to grow in value and relevance for colleagues throughout the library.

Table 12.4. Organization of Response Plans

Reminder of Purpose, Intended Audience, and Intended Use	At the start and at the end of the workshop, remind attendees that the response plan is an internal (i.e., library employee only) document designed to serve as a reference at the point of need. This reinforces the knowledge that the response plan has a purpose and that it should be integrated into existing workflows.
Response Plan Contents	During the workshop, go over the different sections of the response plan. Describe the purpose of each section, and invite (and answer) questions. Inquire how the document can be made even more useful or valuable, and integrate those suggestions whenever possible. This builds investment into the response plan as employees see themselves (and their contributions) folded into subsequent versions of the document.
Scenarios	It may be useful to posit scenarios to the workshop attendees, and then invite participants to imagine how they would use the accessibility response plan in responding to the scenario. This imaginative exercise allows employees to visualize using the response plan in everyday work situations and will hopefully contribute to employee adoption and use of the response plan. This step is not necessary, and it does require more time and effort from the workshop leader/response plan trainer to bear fruit. However, it is a useful strategy in promoting an organization-wide conversation about responding to accessibility issues. Instead of a unidirectional e-mail or simple presentation (both of which are commonly a distillation of information aimed at participants), scenarios invite an exchange of ideas among multiple people.
Considerations for Different Employee Types	Managers responsible for supporting a variety of employee types—from full-time to part-time, student employees to volunteers, all of whom may work on different days or at different times of the day—should be encouraged to consider how best to reach all employees. In most situations, volunteers should be trained to refer accessibility concerns immediately to an employee with the authority and training to make any necessary decisions.

Resources Needed for Sustainable Implementation

In summary, the resources needed to design, develop, publish, and train from an accessibility response plan include but are not limited to the following:

- **People:** Likely a team of two to three people who are responsible for the various stages of the accessibility response plan.
- **Time:** Depending on the number of personnel involved in creating the accessibility response plan, their availability to work on the plan, and the size of the library, this project could take between three and five months to complete.
- **Publication Venue:** Think about impact and reach when considering where to publish the internal response plan. The organization's intranet? A private LibGuide? What venue will allow library employees to find the document quickly?
- **Expertise:** Access to accessibility expertise may inform how quickly the response plan can be created.
- **Consultation and Associated Expenses:** Access to expertise may incur additional financial costs.

Timeline of Events

In summary, the estimated timeline associated with creating an accessibility response plan is as follows:

Table 12.5. Lifecycle of Accessibility Response Plan

Gather data about library personnel information needs with regards to accessibility practices.	One to three months
Create the accessibility response plan. Seek feedback and revise.	One to two months
Train personnel on using the document.	One to two weeks
Maintain and update the accessibility response plan. Review and any resulting updates should occur at minimum on an annual basis.	Ongoing

◎ Sample Accessibility Response Plan

Table 12.6. Accessibility Response Plan Template

Document Purpose: This document outlines the steps for responding to different accessibility issues and is intended for library personnel only. Questions? Contact the Library Accessibility Team at [Insert phone number].

ACCESSIBILITY PROBLEM TYPE	PREFERRED RESPONSE FROM LIBRARY PERSONNEL
Inaccessible Document	[Insert workflow] Suggested Language for Responding to Patrons:
Inaccessible Video or Streaming Content	[Insert workflow] Suggested Language for Responding to Patrons:
Inaccessible Website or Online Presence	[Insert workflow] Suggested Language for Responding to Patrons:
Inaccessible Physical Space	[Insert workflow] Suggested Language for Responding to Patrons:

◎ Key Points

- An accessibility response plan is intended for library employees. It should be drafted with their information needs in mind, be simple to use (e.g., workflows and suggested language), and housed in a location that is easily discoverable (such as the organization's intranet).
- Keep the accessibility response plan up to date. Outdated information can result in inconsistent services for patrons with disabilities and frustration for the library employee who is trying to serve those patrons.

Raising Library Employee Awareness of Mental Health Issues

IN THIS CHAPTER

▷ Definition of mental health

▷ Discussion of how library personnel benefit from professional development opportunities in order to learn more about often misunderstood mental health issues and disabilities

▷ Overview of a workshop series designed to enhance knowledge of and build comfort in responding to mental health issues that manifest in library settings

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MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES FACE A GREAT DEAL of misunderstanding, lack of awareness, and stigma. They are further complicated by the fact that mental health isn't monolithic or consistent: an individual's experience of their own mental health challenge(s) can vary from day to day, and can often be exacerbated by environmental or personal triggers. Furthermore, the legislation around mental health being considered a disability has changed considerably in the last two decades—which can make it difficult to determine what's an accessibility issue and what is good practice for being a shared community space. Because most libraries are a learning and community space that's open to the public, library professionals often encounter a patron with acute mental health issues at some point in their careers. During these encounters, many library professionals can feel out of their depth due to lack of training; furthermore, some library professionals feel that it's simply not a part of their job description to support individuals experiencing mental health issues.

Mental health disorders and experiences run the gamut and can be hard to identify. Fortunately, library professionals aren't required to diagnose and/or treat individuals with

mental health issues. However, a library can make choices about how best to support its patrons. If a library has the resources—that is, time, human labor, expertise, and possibly financial resources—to create a respectful and supportive place for those with mental health issues, and chooses to do so, that's wonderful. However, it's worth examining how much of the library resources are available to address some or any of the issues. Some libraries simply don't have the funds or other kinds of wherewithal to meaningfully address these issues. It may be helpful to consider first the level of engagement that is appropriate for the library. Here is an approximate spectrum of engagement:

Table 13.1. Levels of Engagement by Libraries

LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT	OVERVIEW
Patron Management	In this scenario, the library does not have a best practices protocol nor has it engaged in training for library personnel. Library employees respond to patron issues as they present themselves, and often simply remove patrons if they become disruptive or harmful to others.
Informed Referral Only	In this scenario, the library develops a workflow that involves informed referrals when issues present themselves. The informed referral can be as simple as a list of local mental health support resources, or as complex as a workflow that's mapped to specific behaviors demonstrated by the patron. It's important to confirm with library employees that this workflow is helpful for both the patron and the organization in question; it may be worth asking a local mental health advocacy organization to vet the informed referral document to ensure that it is appropriate and effective. Once the document is available, offer trainings for personnel on how best to use the instrument. Assess the use and impact of the workflow. Refine as necessary, and update any documentation on an annual basis.
Community Engagement and Informed Referral	In this scenario, the library can actively seek out and partner with community organizations that provide support for mental health issues and offer expert training/consulting to arrange a workshop (or a series of workshops). Communicate the purpose to, and seek engagement from, library personnel. Frame these workshops as professional development opportunities within the library. Assess the use and impact of the program. As necessary, develop and refine any ensuing documentation, service modifications, or other changes adopted as a result of the training.

Again, depending on the available expertise in the area, the resources within a given library, and the frequency with which personnel report interactions with patrons who have mental health challenges, a library may choose not to focus on drafting best practices for responding to patron issues. In short, there may be no need for such a document (or any corresponding training). However, it can be useful to develop organization-wide best practices for responding to mental health crises and to train library personnel on these best practices. Not only does it build awareness of and comfort with a seldom-addressed topic for library personnel, but a workshop or training can result in enhanced empathy for patrons. Lastly, a library can choose to partner with regional or community social services to provide further support for patrons. Examples of these partnerships range from bringing therapy animals into the library during stressful times (such as final or midterm exam weeks at colleges and universities) to hosting drop-in hours for guided meditation to providing office space for local/regional support services like housing or food assistance programs. This chapter provides an overview of some practices that fall into the Informed Referral and Community Engagement categories.

⊚ Process Overview

At one library, the personnel reported a sharp increase of interactions with patrons who demonstrated mental health issues. These demonstrated behaviors varied greatly but often manifested as patrons talking to themselves at a loud volume, crying or being visibly upset, and other symptoms that seemed outside the range of common behaviors. While reporting the increase of these new behaviors, employees often expressed frustration at not knowing how best to respond. While they understood that, as library employees responsible for mostly brief interactions at various service points, they weren't mental health professionals (and, frankly, had no desire to be), they still wished they had some protocol to follow when confronted with unusual behaviors.

In response to these expressed concerns, a point person within the library met with a regional mental health professional to discuss the possibility of creating and hosting a professional development workshop, along with specific desired outcomes of the training. The resulting workshop was designed for library personnel at a variety of service points, and consisted of regional mental health professionals providing an overview of common causes of stress, upset, and other behaviors among patrons; suggested language for responding to distressed patrons when the situation presented itself; an overview of local mental health professionals and free or low-cost social services programs; and a question and answer session for attendees.

During the workshop, a realization occurred among library personnel: they felt that they would never remember all of the useful information they had learned during a one-time event, let alone apply that information in a consistent manner across multiple service points. Thus, an ensuing request emerged: Would it be possible to translate the resources covered in the workshop into a best practices document? And transform the workshop's question and answer session into a series of frequently asked questions (FAQs) for future library employees? The same point person who arranged the event volunteered to develop the requested best practices document, to have the document vetted by mental health experts, to integrate existing resources and best practices from national standards within the library profession whenever possible, to publish the document, and to update and/or revise as new information presented itself or new practices within the library were adopted.

⊚ Resources Needed for Implementation

If a library wishes to implement a mental health response protocol, or to create a repository of useful resources, it is important to ask personnel what resources would be most helpful to them. After all, they are the employees who will likely need to use or consult these resources, and in perhaps distressing situations. A quick survey, or even a discussion at a staff meeting, can gather this information, which can then be used to inform subsequent efforts. Also, keep in mind that different service points may have different information and support needs. For example, an interlibrary loan department within a library may have vastly different informational and professional development needs around supporting patrons with mental health issues than the circulation services or reference department. Also, inquire about the format of these resources: Would a single-page PDF with a quick list of useful strategies be more helpful than an internal website—or vice versa? Gathering information about employee information needs is a crucial first step in shaping the ensuing resources.

Once the employee needs have been assessed, determine whether there is a need for supporting documentation and then develop the resources accordingly. The goal is to craft documents or internal websites that best support library employees in addressing or dealing with a patron, in what can often be upsetting or stressful situations. Prioritize the development of quick referential support materials, and front-load that information into any best practices or workflows. Add any further resources (e.g., an annotated bibliography of recommended reading or an annotated list of support organizations within the community) after the referential employee support.

Once a document has been developed, it is important to host an informational session on the purpose, scope, and intended use of the document. Not only are these sessions useful for providing a general overview of a new employee resource, but they can also serve to remind library employees of what they learned in the original workshop, and to answer any new questions that emerge in response to the new resource. Rehashing recently learned knowledge or information in a public setting may be helpful in transforming the shared ideas into shared practice. Furthermore, any new questions that emerge may be excellent candidates for an internal Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) repository.

Limitations

There are some limitations associated with crafting a best practices document. The most simple challenge is ensuring that there are available resources for maintaining and updating this kind of resource. This type of document will require a point person who is responsible for updating the document on at least an annual basis. However, the most obvious limitation is simply this: it is impossible to anticipate every scenario that a library employee will encounter, whether at a service point or simply walking through the building. Though it's impossible to develop best practices for unknown scenarios, it may still be worthwhile to develop response scenarios for this reason: shared response protocols across service points can enhance the consistency of employee performance and treatment of patrons.

Furthermore, regardless of the perceived effectiveness of a response protocol, library employees may feel better having some kind of guidance available to them, rather than nothing at all. Furthermore, this best practices protocol should take into account (and indeed, be added to) any active shooter or natural disaster emergency response planning efforts. It should be clear to employees, ideally written into the documentation and communicated at training opportunities, when one document supersedes another as emergency situations evolve.

Sample Mental Health Protocol for Library Employees

Table 13.2.   Sample Response Plan

Document Scope: This document is intended to provide a resource for public services personnel at [Insert Name] Library when assisting a patron who is experiencing mental and/or emotional duress. All personnel should make every effort to protect a patron's confidential information before, during, and after an occurrence. Furthermore, the urgency scale in the next section serves as an indicator of threatened safety and the corresponding levels of response needed to address changes in the safety level.

Personnel Response Scenarios: Urgency Scale and Corresponding Options	
1. Approach the person and ask if you can talk with them.	• "Can I help you?" • "Do you want to talk? Are you okay?"
2. Take the person aside or speak with them in a private place. Plan, and reinforce, next steps for accessing support services within the community.	• "Do you have anyone to talk to about this situation?" • "Do you need help?" • "I can provide the contact information for the community counseling center."
3. Talk to a colleague who is present with you—two heads are better than one!	
4. Get your supervisors involved. Seek their feedback.	
5. Refer the patron to a local counseling center to consult with an expert.	• Consult with a psychologist; arrange an appointment or discuss a same-day (urgent) appointment between 9:00 a.m. and 4:30 p.m.: [Organization, Phone Number] • After-hours telephone number: [Organization, Phone Number]
6. If this is a potential issue of safety, call library security or the local police.	• Library Security: [Contact Personnel, Phone Number] • Local Police: [Police Liaison Officer, Nonemergency Phone Number]
7. If this is an emergency, call 911.	

◉ Additional Resources—Local, Regional, and State

Table 13.3. Examples of How to Organize Community Resources for Library Employees

RESOURCE & CONTACT INFORMATION	PURPOSE
Police Liaison Name Contact Number Contact Address Contact E-mail Address	If you are concerned that a patron may pose a safety risk to library employees or other patrons, call the police at _____. In addition to responding to immediate situations, they can consult with you about strategies for safety planning for your office.
Counseling Center Liaison Name Contact Number Contact Address Contact E-mail Address Regular Hours / After Hours	Sample Overview: The Counseling Center serves members of the community. They provide individual counseling in a brief and focused model, and urgent appointments are available for community members in crisis. The community member should tell the receptionist their need is urgent. For after hours appointments, call the appropriate number and select Option 1 to speak with an after-hours counselor. General information can be found on the website: [Insert URL].
Human Services Department Liaison Name Contact Number Contact Address Contact E-mail Address	Human and health services for community members are available through this organization. For further questions about mental health access or resources, refer patrons to the following website: [Insert URL].
Other Mental Health Resources	Regional Community Crisis Line National Suicide Prevention Hotline Trevor Project: Preventing Suicide Among LGBTQIA+ Youth Veterans' Crisis Line

⟲ Key Points

- Mental health disorders and experiences run the gamut and can be hard to identify. Fortunately, library professionals aren't required to diagnose and/or treat individuals with mental health issues. However, a library can make choices about how best to support its patrons through training and a proactive discussion about shared practices.
- A mental health response plan is intended for library employees. It should be drafted with their information needs in mind, be simple to use (e.g., workflows and suggested language), and housed in a location that is easily discoverable (such as the organization's intranet).
- Keep the response plan up to date. Outdated information can result in inconsistent services for patrons with mental health issues and frustration for the library employees trying to serve these patrons.

Service Animals in Libraries: Developing a Response Plan

WHILE NOT STRICTLY A FORM OF ASSISTIVE technology, animal companions that are trained to mitigate the effects of a disability or provide comfort for a group of people are common forms of assistive support or aid for those with disabilities.

Service animals are animals trained to mitigate specific effects of a disability for an individual. According to federal civil rights legislation (the Americans with Disabilities Act), a service animal is a dog.[1] Bear in mind that some states may have more permissive definitions for service animals; furthermore, in an effort to be more humane and/or to manage litigative risk, some public institutions within these states have adopted these state-level policies.

Therapy animals have been trained to provide comfort and reduce anxiety in a group of people, and often behave in docile and nonthreatening ways. Both service and therapy animals can be found in a wide variety of public settings, and library personnel should expect to see them in library environments and at events. Some libraries even engage therapy animal programs and invite these animals (and their human trainers and companions) for special events. *Emotional comfort* animals are personal companions for indi-

▲ **137**

viduals with a disability and are typically reserved for personal homes and spaces rather than public settings. While the Civil Rights Division of the United States Department of Justice is quite clear on the federal definition of service animals, these definitions—and the corresponding legislation—can vary between the state and federal governments.[2] One such example is found in Washington State.[3]

Determining whether an animal companion is a service, therapy, or emotional comfort animal is difficult. And because library personnel are not medical or social work professionals, they should not attempt to make a judgment about whether the person in question has a disability. Furthermore, library professionals should not attempt to determine whether an animal is a service animal unless the animal in question is disrupting the environment or menacing other patrons. This is a complicated and often contentious topic in library circles, and one rich in nuance.

Often library professionals first encounter a service or assistance animal when a patron reports the presence of an animal, most frequently a dog, in the library. And equally often, many library professionals (regardless of library environment or type) are unfamiliar with the legal definitions, rights, and responsibilities associated with service or assistance animals. Thus, this lack of knowledge can create uncertainty and ambiguity about what to do if any action is necessary. The natural solution is to equip said library professionals with knowledge and training for handling complaints or concerns about patrons with an assistance animal in a library. This chapter details one example of how a library addressed personnel concerns about assistance animals, and includes the discussion of the workshop design, implementation, and results.

◉ Overview

When personnel at a library expressed confusion and uncertainty about how to know whether an animal was a pet or an emotional comfort, therapy, or service animal, a point person developed and led a professional development workshop. The goals of this workshop included the following:

Table 14.1. Strategies for Building Awareness and Empathy around Assistance Animals

Educate	Provide an overview of common definitions and legislation associated with service, emotional comfort, and therapy animals in order to increase the understanding of how service animals serve people with disabilities.
Empathize	Through the use of role-based scenarios and constructive language, build empathy for all parties affected by assistance animals within a library.
Practice	Develop and use scenario-based activities at the end of the workshop, testing new knowledge among library personnel. Go over suggested language and answer questions posed by participants.

Before hosting the workshop, some preliminary planning was necessary. Several questions were considered about the design and the desired outcomes of the workshop, questions that are relevant for any institution undertaking such training:

1. **Superseding Policy:** Does the organization, or the host institution, already have a policy and/or an agreed-upon practice about assistance animals?

2. **Available Expertise:** Is there available expertise to provide guidance on best practices when interacting with assistance animals and their human companions? For example, perhaps a local nonprofit organization could provide some training on the purpose of assistance animals.
3. **Legal Review:** Have the contents of the workshop been vetted for legal compliance and accuracy? If not, which department or entity should review the proposed document?
4. **Information Needs of Library Personnel:** What are the information needs of full-time personnel? Part-time personnel, such as pages or student employees at an academic library? Managers and supervisors?
5. **Information Needs of Service Point Personnel:** What are the information needs of personnel at different service points within a library? For example, the Circulation/Access Services team may need more frequent training and/or support than the Interlibrary Loan Department when it comes to addressing assistance animal complaints or concerns.

After gathering information about collegial needs, legal compliance, and available expertise, and gaining approval to proceed from the organization's administration, the workshop commenced. It began with a brief presentation on definitions and legislation, and then participants were grouped into smaller units and given different scenarios to examine and discuss. Each group reported its response to the scenario to all participants, along with any questions the scenario had generated. After the workshop, colleagues expressed a desire to translate the workshop into a referential document that could be accessed by personnel whenever needed. Ideally, such a document would contain the main takeaways from the workshop, along with any suggested language for responding to patrons.

Sample Scenarios

Among the most effective components of the workshop were the scenarios used to generate conversation and, eventually, to arrive at a shared consensus among participants about the best possible response for each scenario, given the requirements of legality and good customer service. Here are a few sample scenarios that could be helpful in your library workshop.

Table 14.2. Sample Scenarios for an Assistance Animal Workshop

Scenario A	An ill-behaved dog with a "service animal" harness is barking at a patron who is not its handler. The patron who is being barked at is visibly upset and is attempting to walk away quickly. Participant Prompt: How should you respond?
Scenario B	A dog accompanies its owner into the library. The dog is quiet, responds to verbal commands quickly, and displays exemplary behavior. However, the dog carries no outward or visible designation as a service animal. Participant Prompt: How should you respond?
Scenario C	A student comes into the library to study—and brings their kitten along. When another patron complains, you approach the student and explain that while service dogs are allowed in the library, all other animals must remain at home. The student with the kitten then insists that the cat is a therapy animal, and therefore is entitled to the kitten for emotional comfort. Participant Prompt: How should you respond?

Best Practices Document

Once developed, a best practices document was vetted by legal experts and was found to be in compliance with state and federal laws. Thus, library personnel could refer to the document whenever such situations arose. Further trainings were requested after the original workshop; when taught, these trainings were tailored to the specific audience (e.g., part-time employees or those situated at a specific service point, such as Reference Services). Here is a sample template of the resulting best practices document.

Table 14.3. Best Practices Document: Sample Subsections

DOCUMENT SECTION	PURPOSE
Scope Statement	Identifies the intended audience for and purpose of the best practices
Author Contact Information and Document Currency	Identifies the party who authored the document and is responsible for updates
Basic Guidelines and Definitions	Provides the definitions of service animals
When to Approach a Service Animal and Its Human Companion	Written in an FAQ-style, houses important information for when to approach a service animal and the human companion with a disability
Addressing Concerns: Scenarios and Responses	Written in response to presented scenarios, provides library personnel with suggested language for responding to patron concerns or complaints
Appendices	Provides general information about assistance animals, such as legislation
Frequently Asked Questions	Written in an FAQ-style, contains additional questions and answers not covered in prior document sections for library personnel

Addressing Patron Concerns

One of the most cited concerns from personnel who participated in the workshop was about other patrons, not those with disabilities and assistance animals. In short, most participants were frustrated with their own inability to respond calmly and effectively when faced with an irate patron who demanded to know why a dog was in the library—and why the library employee hadn't already evicted them from the building. Addressing this need was crucially important; thus, the resulting best practices document included a section titled "Addressing Patron Concerns: Scenarios and Responses." This section outlined common complaints from patrons who did not have a disability (i.e., a passerby), along with a context statement and a suggested response. See below for an example.

Table 14.4. Sample Language for Responding to Patron Concerns

Background Information	The library abides by state, federal, and municipal laws, all of which govern our interactions with service animals. All service animals are welcome in the library. [Insert URL to Relevant Legislation A] [Insert URL to Relevant Legislation B] [Insert URL to Relevant Legislation C]
Suggested Response	"Thank you for sharing your concerns. Please know that all service animals are welcome in the library."

⊚ Building a Response Plan for Your Library

If there is no formal policy or practice currently in place at your library, consider drafting one for your colleagues. The document or protocol doesn't need to be overly elaborate or complex. Instead, a list of steps, with contact information for the appropriate authorities, may be sufficient. The point is this: The best practices document is not merely an exercise in risk management or a public relations management activity, but rather a resource and a tool for library personnel. Whatever the resulting document looks like, the contents should ideally reduce and alleviate ambiguity for employees so that they know what to do when a situation with assistance animals presents itself.

LEGAL COUNSEL

Before implementing any practices or policies that pertain to people with disabilities, please vet all documentation and training materials through any relevant legal counsel (ideally, a firm with a specialization in the Americans with Disabilities Act and other related legislation). While developing these practices will provide library personnel with a useful resource, it is important that the library protect itself with relevant legal counsel.

⊚ Key Points

- Equipping personnel with training and tools for responding to patrons with concerns, questions, or complaints is crucially important. Not only does this serve library colleagues well, it results in more consistent messaging on the topic of assistance animals from the library to community patrons.
- Consult with legal experts when developing the workshop or training, and have all best practice documents reviewed by legal experts. Ideally, library administrators need to articulate public support for library-wide adoption of these new practices.
- Ensure that the response plan meets the information and referential needs of library employees. Given that these situations may arise infrequently, the document needs to offer clear advice and be updated often.

⊚ Notes

1. US Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, "Frequently Asked Questions about Service Animals and the ADA," updated July 20, 2015, https://www.ada.gov/regs2010/service_animal _qa.html.
2. Ibid.
3. Washington State Human Rights Commission, "Guide to Service Animals and the Washington State Law Against Discrimination," October 2013, https://www.wla.org/assets/WALE /2015WALEConference/Service%20Animals%20and%20the%20Washington%20Law%20 Against%20Discrimination.pdf.

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Index

About the Author

Rebecca M. Marrall is the director of Technology and Discovery Services and an associate professor at Western Washington University Libraries. In her current role, Rebecca manages the division responsible for the optimal access to and use of different technologies within Western Washington University Libraries' environment. Division activities include web development, creation and maintenance of unique online learning objects, content strategy, systems management, personnel support in the use of technology, and management of a diverse technological infrastructure.

Over the last decade, Rebecca has had the opportunity to work in several different areas of librarianship. Starting as the Diversity and Disability Services librarian, an instruction professional with a focus on accessibility, diversity, and inclusion initiatives, Rebecca switched gears in 2015 and became an information technology manager and librarian. Her skillset is a unique blend of accessibility initiatives in libraries, user experience activities, project and personnel management, and technology/systems management. Rebecca's research interests include user experience activities, diversity and inclusion efforts, and accessibility practices in library spaces. She has developed and taught original credit-bearing courses, such as Research Strategies for Academic Success (LIBR 197), Literacy through Graphic Novels (LIBR 320), and the Digital Divide (LIBR 397C). Rebecca also coedited and coauthored the open access text *The Research Process: Strategies for Undergraduate Students* (http://cedar.wwu.edu/research_process/).