



Access Today

PARKS • RECREATION • TOURISM

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Effective Communication in Parks & Recreation

A woman walks to the front of the room and begins to communicate in American Sign Language. The hearing participants look at each other in confusion. Worry is displayed on each person's face as they wonder how will they understand the information presented in the class. For many people with visual, auditory, or cognitive impairments, this scenario can be a daily event. Effective communication is essential for an individual to be able to participate and benefit in programs and activities.



A sign language interpreter can provide effective communication to a person who is deaf.

What is Effective Communication?

Effective communication requires a public accommodation to ensure equal access to programs by including various types of auxiliary aids and services. Equal access for participants with visual, hearing or cognitive disabilities is often achieved by offering the same information in various formats in order for everyone

to have similar understanding of programs, services or activities. A public accommodation can utilize a variety of auxiliary aids and services such as the provision of a sign language interpreter for a person who is deaf during a museum tour or a large print park map for a visitor who is visually impaired.

Under Title III of the Americans with Disabilities Act (28 C.F.R. §36.303),

"public accommodations shall take those steps that may be necessary to ensure that no individual with a disability is excluded, denied services, segregated or otherwise treated differently than other individuals because of the absence of auxiliary aids and services, unless the public accommodation can demonstrate that taking those steps would fundamentally alter the nature of the goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages, or

accommodations being offered or would result in an undue burden, i.e., significant difficulty or expense." In addition, the ADA requires "a public accommodation shall furnish appropriate auxiliary aids and services where necessary to ensure effective communication with individuals with disabilities."

Auxiliary Aids and Services

The Americans with Disabilities Act provides examples of auxiliary aids and services in order to provide effective communication:

- Qualified interpreter
- Note takers
- Computer-aided transcription services
- Written materials
- Telephone handset amplifiers
- Assistive listening systems
- Telephones compatible with hearing aids
- Closed caption decoders
- Open and closed captioning
- Telecommunications devices for deaf persons (TTY)
- Video text displays
- Written notes
- Qualified readers
- Taped texts
- Audio recordings
- Brailled materials
- Large print materials

Planning Programs and Activities

For recreation program coordinators, a critical component in program planning is determining how the program information will be conveyed and methods to provide effective communication for visitors with disabilities. For example, in many museums historical items are kept behind a glass case for preservation. What alternatives could be offered to a person who is blind so that they may benefit from the display of the artifacts? Providing audio description of the artifacts could give the visitor with the visual impairment a better idea of the size, shape, texture and use for the object. In addition, it would benefit all museum visitors by allowing more information to be included in the exhibit.

When determining an effective auxiliary aid or service, take into account:

- Type of communication
- Length of communication
- Complexity of communication

Consider a person who is deaf would like to take golf lessons. When the person initially registers for the golf lessons, the length of communication will most



The National Center on Accessibility is a program of Indiana University's

Department of Recreation and Park Administration and is funded in part by the U.S. Congress through the National Park Service. NCA focuses primarily on accessibility as it relates to parks, recreation, and tourism industries. Major objectives include: conducting research, providing technical assistance, developing resources and training materials, and conducting educational programs.

Access Today is a publication of the National Center on Accessibility. As a continuing service of technical assistance, the National Center on Accessibility has published a series of tech sheets on access to outdoor recreation environments. These tech sheets are intended to be used only a resource. They are not intended to be used as a design guide. As a result of evolving accessibility guidelines, some technical specifications presented herein may change as new accessibility guidelines are released. This publication is available in alternate format upon request.

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likely be short; perhaps all that is needed is for the person to complete registration forms. In this case, the complexity may only require writing short notes from staff to participant to ask and answer questions. However, during the golf lesson itself, the type of communication primarily exchanged with the beginner golfer will most likely include verbal description from the instructor to improve the golfer's technique. For the actual lessons, a qualified sign language interpreter will most likely be needed due to the length and complexity of the lesson and information conveyed.

Appropriateness of the auxiliary aid is another key consideration. For instance, a written script is not beneficial in a movie theater. It is very difficult for a person to both follow along with the actions on the movie screen and read a written narration in the dark theater. A qualified sign language interpreter may also divert attention away from the movie. Captioning would be a better solution. Rear Window (r) captioning is a system that provides closed captioning to individuals at their seat as opposed to placing the caption on the movie screen itself. Reverse captions are displayed on an LED mounted in the back of the theater. Portable reflective panels attach to any theater seat allowing the patron to sit



A qualified interpreter can successfully communicate with the individual with a disability requiring the interpreter. Photo courtesy of the Rockford (IL) Park District.

anywhere in the theater and adjust the reflector to their personal comfort.

Providing An Interpreter

Many situations do require an interpreter. There are differences between a "qualified" interpreter and a "certified" interpreter. The ADA requires that in the event an interpreter is needed, a qualified interpreter be provided. A "qualified" interpreter should meet the prerequisite skills and be able to successfully communicate with the individual with a disability requiring the interpreter. Today, many states now require that interpreters be certified, this can include extensive training

and some type of examination to meet state requirements for certification. When a request for an interpreter comes into a program, it is important that the program coordinator talk with the participant on his or her specific needs for communication during the program. What type of interpreter is needed? During the initial contact with the participant who is deaf, the program coordinator may learn that the individual does not know American Sign Language; instead he signs exact English. This is important new information that will help identify a qualified interpreter that specializes in signed exact English.

Many recreation providers are



A sign language interpreter is used during a summer playground program. Photo courtesy of the Rockford (IL) Park District.

concerned with finding a sign language interpreter at late notice. Consider implementing a policy for advance notification or request for services. Promote the notification policy in marketing materials like program brochures, fliers, web sites. For example, to schedule a tour with a sign language interpreter, indicate in the program brochure for the participant to notify the organization 48-72 hours prior to their visit. This advance notice also allows for information gathering on exactly what the person's needs are and time to make arrangements for the interpreter.

Sign language interpreters can be contacted through an agency such as the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf or a local Center for Independent Living. Many agencies have interpreters on

call 24 hours a day, however, fees may be higher on short notice. In preparation for the possibility of providing an interpreter, agencies should be contacted to establish a procedure for scheduling an interpreter. Important information to inquire about may include:

- Types of interpreters, i.e. American Sign Language, Exact English
- Levels of interpreters, i.e. Certifications
- Any fees associated with providing the interpreter

The National Suburban Special Recreation Association in Northbrook, Illinois maintains a core list of interpreters they call when notified of the need for an interpreter. According to Dawn Schaefer, Manager of Inclusion Services, the

NSSRA attempts to provide one consistent interpreter for each participant throughout an entire season when possible. Often an interpreter can be provided on a days notice. However, in case of an emergency, NSSRA relies on the Chicago Hearing Society, which has a larger pool of interpreters to access at a higher cost.

Laurie Anderson, Therapeutic Recreation Manager at Rockford Park District in Rockford, Illinois states a similar approach; sign language interpreters are on staff seasonally. In addition, many staff currently attending the interpreter program are hired as inclusion program leaders or communicators. They are paid a lower hourly rate and work with participants who may not require as intensive communication as provided through a certified interpreter. Unlike interpreters whose primary role is to translate between participants and staff, the communicators and inclusion program leaders in the recreation programs at the Rockford Park District are encouraged to participate in the activities with the individuals with disabilities, lead activities and facilitate friendships between participants with disabilities and participants without disabilities. In addition, the Rockford Park District has established a relationship



Audio cassettes can provide effective communication to people who are blind or visually impaired.

with the Regional Access Mobilization Project (RAMP), the local center for independent living. RAMP provides back up interpreters in an emergency.

Fees Associated with Auxiliary Aids and Services

Often recreation providers are concerned with covering the cost for the auxiliary aids and services. The ADA specifically states a public accommodation may not impose a surcharge on a particular individual with a disability or any group of individuals with disabilities to cover the cost of measures, such as the provision of auxiliary aids, barrier removal...and reasonable modifications...that are required to provide that

individual or group with the nondiscriminatory treatment required by the Act or this part (28 C.R.F. § 36.301). One creative method to cover the costs of auxiliary aids and services is to raise the admission price a small amount, perhaps \$1, for everyone and allocating the increase to a fund to specifically cover any expenses incurred from providing auxiliary aids and services.

Planning Alternatives for Written Material

Brochures and maps are helpful tools to convey information about parks and other recreation programs. Alternative formats such as Braille, large print and perhaps even guides should

be considered for people who are blind or visually impaired. People with disabilities access information differently. While one format may be effective for one user, it may be ineffective for another. For instance, many people who are blind do not necessarily read Braille, an audio recording would be one such method to supplement the information.

Tapping into Community Resources

It is essential in program planning to understand your customer base. Surveys are an excellent tool to generate feedback. Tap into local centers for independent living for resources involving the local community, wants and needs for programming. Perhaps there is a population not being reached due to inaccessibility of a program. Advocates from local centers for independent living can provide valuable information on how to remove barriers to programs and increase participation by people with disabilities.

Resources

Braille Translation

Access USA
(Translation of Text to Braille)
(613) 969-5158
(800) 263-2750

American Printing House
for the Blind
(800) 223-1839

National Braille Press
(617) 266-6106

Sign Language Interpreters

Registry of Interpreters
for the Deaf
8630 Fenton St, Suite 324
Silver Springs, MD 20910
(301) 608-0050 Voice/TTY
(301) 608-0508 Fax
www.rid.org
E-mail: views@rid.org

Captioning

The Captioning Group Inc
11149 Acama St
Studio City, CA 91602
Voice (800) 717-9707
Fax (877) 822-3394
www.captioning.com
E-mail capgroup@captioning.com

Captioned Media Program
National Association of the Deaf
1447 E. Main St
Spartanburg, SC 29307
(800) 237 6213 Voice
(800) 538-5636 Fax
(800) 237-6819 TTY
www.cfv.org
E-mail: info@cfv.org



Providing a guide is an alternative for written material

National Center for
Accessible Media
Rear Window Captioning
System
125 Western Avenue
Boston, MA 02134
617-300-3400, Voice/TTY
617-300-1035 Fax
http://ncam.wgbh.org/mopix/faq.html
E-mail:ncam@wgbh.org

Rapid Text
1801 Dove St, Suite 101
Newport Beach, CA 92660
(949) 399-9200
www.rapidtext.com
E-mail info@rapidtext.com

Audio Description

National Center for Accessible
Media
DVS Theatrical®
125 Western Avenue
Boston, MA 02134
617-300-3400, Voice/TTY
e-mail:ncam@wgbh.org

American Council for the Blind
1155 15th St NW Suite 1004
Washington, DC 2005
(202) 467-5081
(800) 424-8666

North Texas Taping and Radio
for the Blind
3001 Bookout
Dallas, TX 75201
www.nttrb.org
Email nttrb@nttrb.org

Assistive Communication

Products

HITECH
www.hitech.com
E-mail info@hitech.com

General Resources

U.S. Department of Justice
Civil Rights Division
Disability Rights Section
P.O. Box 66738
Washington, DC 20035-6738
(800) 514-0301 Voice
(800) 514-0383 TTY
www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/adahom1.htm

Disability and Business
Technical Assistance Centers
(800) 949-4232
www.adata.org

National Center on Accessibility
(812) 856-4422 (voice)
(812) 8564421 (tty)
www.ncaonline.org