

Tips for Communicating with Persons with Disabilities

The recipient's staff informs customers of its obligation to ensure effective communication and its obligation to provide appropriate auxiliary aids and services.

The recipient has a list, in an accessible format, of all currently available assistive technology devices and services. For example, a recipient might include in its list that VCRs and TV monitors have closed caption capability; that ZoomText has been installed in computers available in resource areas; and that Pocket Talkers are provided for hard of hearing customers.

For customers that are deaf and hard of hearing, the recipient adopts the following strategies to ensure effective communication:

- The staff members secure a qualified sign language interpreter, where necessary, on a timely basis.
- All appropriate employees know how to use a TDD/TTY and the telephone relay service to make and receive calls. TDDs/TTYs are maintained in good working order. Test calls are made on a periodic basis to ensure that TDD/TTY calls are answered to the same extent as voice calls.
- If the recipient has courtesy telephones that the public may use for outgoing calls, it considers making available a portable TDD/TTY for public use (as currently required by the Americans with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines, which are applicable to entities subject to Title III of the Americans with Disabilities Act (public accommodations and commercial facilities) and some entities subject to Title II of the ADA (the Department of Justice currently permits state and local governments subject to Title II of the ADA to follow either UFAS or ADAAG standards)). If the recipient does make a portable TDD/TTY available, it posts a notice at the location of each courtesy telephone advising the public on how the portable TDD/TTY may be obtained, and instructs staff on the location of the portable TDD/TTY and its use.

For customers who are blind and visually-impaired, the recipient adopts the following strategies to ensure effective communication:

- Staff members have materials transcribed into Braille or large print, recorded on audiocassette, or placed on ASCII diskette, on a timely basis.
- If the recipient has a video library for public use, the videos purchased are available with audio descriptions.

For customers with cognitive disabilities (e.g., persons with brain injury, mental retardation, and learning disabilities), the recipient adopts the following strategies to ensure effective communication:

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- Staff members offer assistance with and/or extra time for the completion of forms and written instructions.
- Staff members repeat instructions, provide information in a slower voice, and use simple sentences and words and use graphics, e.g., symbols, pictures.
- Staff members provide a quiet environment for people to read materials if the public area has distractions.

For customers with mobility impairments, the recipient adopts the following strategies to ensure effective communication:

- Staff members put themselves at the wheelchair user's eye level (if possible sit next to the customer when having a conversation).
- Staff members provide a clipboard as a writing surface if counters or reception desks are too high, and come around to the customer side of the desk/counter during interaction.

For customers with speech impairments, the recipient adopts the following strategies to ensure effective communication:

- If a staff member does not understand something, he or she does not pretend to understand. The staff member asks the customer to repeat what he or she said and then repeats it back.
- Staff members ask questions that require only short answers, or a nod of the head.
- If a staff member has difficulty understanding the customer, he or she considers having the customer write or sit at a computer screen as an alternative, but first asks whether this is acceptable.
- If no solution to the communication problem can be worked out, the staff member asks if there is someone who could interpret on the customer's behalf.