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Access to libraries for persons with disabilities - CHECKLIST

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PREFACE

Access for all to every library.

In many countries all over the world, access for patrons with disabilities to use libraries is not yet available or even expected. In order to provide equal opportunities for all library users, it is necessary to look with the eyes of these patron groups at the physical condition of library buildings, as well as library services and programs.

This checklist – developed by the IFLA Standing Committee of Libraries Serving Disadvantaged Persons (LSDP) – is designed as a practical tool for all types of libraries (public, academic, school, special) to 1) assess existing levels of accessibility to buildings, services, materials and programs and to 2) enhance accessibility where needed. Accessibility needs of library staff are beyond the scope of this document.

To make a library accessible you need economic resources. Many improvements, however, can be implemented with very small amounts of money – or possibly without any costs. The solution can often be found through a change of staff attitude and thinking in new ways.

 We recommend that representatives from disability groups and support organizations be included in the evaluation process. Input from these individuals, along with the checklist findings, will provide much useful information for immediate enhancement measures, as well as future planning.

Because libraries and buildings are very different around the world, this checklist does not include quantitative measurements. We recommend that library staff apply the pertinent laws and regulations in each country or test with your disadvantaged customers.

Change often occurs slowly – but the main thing is to focus on the most important issue **now:** Making equality of access for **all** persons regardless of disability the guiding principle, whether evaluating existing buildings and services or planning new ones.

Remember that it is **your** responsibility to make persons with disabilities feel welcome in the library.

 Birgitta Irvall & Gyda Skat Nielsen

PHYSICAL ACCESS

Everybody should be able to use the libraries of a country. The surroundings of the library, the entrance, restrooms, stairs, elevators and special rooms should be accessible for persons with different kinds of disabilities. A person in a wheelchair should be able to reach all departments, a visually impaired person should be able to walk with a cane or a guide dog and find his/her way without bumping into obstacles. A deaf person should be able to communicate with library staff. A person with an intellectual impairment should be able to easily find books and other materials. A person with dyslexia or ~~another~~ other reading problem should be able to find his/her way around.

Outside the library

People with disabilities should be able to arrive at the site, approach the library building and enter the building easily and safely. If the main entrance cannot be made accessible, a secondary accessible entrance should be provided, equipped with automatic door opener, a ramp, and a telephone.

- Sufficient parking spaces marked with the international symbol for the disabled

- Parking close to the library entrance

- Clear and easy to read signposting

- Unobstructed and well lighted access paths to the entrance

- Smooth and non-slip surface at the entrance

- If needed, a non-slip and not too steep ramp with railings next to the stairs.

- Railings at both sides of ramp

- Entry phone accessible for deaf users

Getting into the library

A person in a wheelchair or using crutches or a walker should be able to enter through the door and pass through security check points. A blind person with a cane or a guide dog should also be able to enter without encountering obstacles.

- Sufficient space in front of the door to allow a wheelchair to turn around

- Entrance door wide enough to allow a wheelchair to enter

- Automatic door opener reachable by a person in a wheelchair

- No doorsteps -- for easy wheelchair access

- Glass doors marked to warn visually impaired persons

- Security checkpoints possible to pass through with a wheelchair/walker or other mobility aides

- Stairs and steps marked with a contrasting color

- Pictogram signs leading to elevators

- Well lighted elevators with buttons and signs in Braille and synthetic speech

- Elevator buttons reachable from a wheelchair

Access to materials and services

All parts of the library should be accessible. The space should be logically arranged with clear signs and a floor plan posted close to the entrance. Service desks should be located close to the entrance. Wheelchairs should be able to move around inside the whole library. There should be a lift for wheelchairs or a ramp, if the library has more than one level. There should be no doorsteps and all doors should have automatic openers. Ideally, shelves should be reachable from a wheelchair. A certain number of tables and computer workstations should be adapted for persons in wheelchairs. ~~There~~ should be at least one toilet for disabled persons.

The physical space

- Clear and easy-to-read signs with pictograms

- Shelves reachable from a wheelchair

- Reading and computer tables of varying heights throughout the library

- Chairs with sturdy armrests

- Unobstructed aisles between bookcases

- Visible and audible fire alarm

- Staff trained to assist patrons in case of emergency

Toilets

The library should have at least one toilet for disabled persons, equipped with the following:

- Clear signs with pictogram indicating the location of the toilets

- Door wide enough for a wheelchair to enter and sufficient space for a wheelchair to turn around

- Room enough for a wheelchair to pull up next to the toilet seat

- Toilet with handles and flushing lever reachable for persons in wheelchairs

- Alarm button reachable for persons in a wheelchairs

- Washbasin, mirror at the appropriate height

Circulation desk

- Adjustable desk

- Induction loop system for hearing impaired persons

- Chairs for elderly and disabled customers

- Accessible self-service circulation stations

Reference/information desk

- Adjustable desk

- Organized "queue system" in the waiting area

- Chairs suitable for elderly and disabled patrons

- Induction loop system for hearing impaired persons

Children's department

- Clear signs with pictograms leading to children's department

- A colored (yellow for visibility) tactile line leading to the children's department

- Unobstructed aisles between shelves

- Availability of talking books and other special media

- Computers accessible for children with disabilities

- Shelves and picture book containers accessible from a wheelchair

Department for persons with reading, hearing, and other disabilities

Patrons with reading disabilities need special attention when they visit the library. The library staff should be knowledgeable about various disabilities and how to serve patrons with these disabilities. Materials specifically produced for persons with reading disabilities should be easy to find. These materials may include talking books, easy-to-read books, Braille books and large print books, which in some countries are commercially produced and in other countries produced by the Library for the Blind.

- A centrally located department with talking books and other materials for persons with reading disabilities

- A colored (yellow for visibility) tactile line leading to this special department

- Clear signs

- Comfortable seating area with bright reading light

- A tape recorder, CD player, DAISY (Digital Audio Information System) player 1) and other equipment to complement the audiovisual collection

- Magnifying glass, illuminated magnifier, electronic reader or closed-circuit television (CCTV)

- Computers with screen adapters and software designed for persons with reading and cognitive disabilities

1) DAISY, a digital talking book system used by many libraries for the blind.

MEDIA FORMATS

All library materials should ideally be accessible for all customers. There are various ways to achieve this goal. Libraries should acquire talking books, video/DVD books with subtitles and/or sign language, Braille books, accessible e-books, easy-to-read books or other non-print materials. Library staff should know how to borrow such materials from other libraries, including the National Library for the Blind. The following section lists material formats useful for persons with disabilities:

Special media formats for persons with disabilities

- Talking books, talking newspapers, and talking periodicals

- Large print books

- Easy-to-read books

- Braille books

- Video/DVD books with subtitles and/or sign language

- E-books

- Tactile picture books

Computers

Computers for public use should be accessible. Fast and reliable technical support should be available for both computers and adaptive equipment. Staff should be trained to provide on-site support. National and local disability advocacy and support organizations can provide information on how to make computers accessible. Extensive information is also available from the following websites: http://www.w3c.org/wai, http://bobby.watchfire.com

- Designated computer workstations adapted for patrons in wheelchairs

- Adaptive keyboards or keyboard overlays for users with motor impairments

- Designated computers equipped with screen reading programs, enlargement, and synthetic speech

- Designated computers equipped with spelling, and other instructional software suitable for persons with dyslexia

- Technical support for computers (on-site, if possible)

- Staff capable of instructing customers in the use of computers

SERVICE AND COMMUNICATION

Making the library accessible for persons with disabilities includes the provision of services and programs that meet the needs of these user groups. Communication between library staff and patrons should be clear and concise. It is important to make all patrons feel welcome so that they are likely to return. Library staff should keep in mind that persons with disabilities have to overcome not only physical obstacles, but also psychological barriers to come to the library and communicate their needs.

How to train staff

Accessibility to the library should be a clearly defined management responsibility. A designated employee should act as liaison person with disability groups and support organizations. It is, however, important that **all** staff be knowledgeable about various types of disabilities and how to best assist the patron. Staff should also communicate directly with the patron and not through a caregiver. Examples of appropriate staff training include:

- Invite persons with disabilities to staff meetings to talk about their needs as library users

- Distribute e-mails and/or other information to staff on a regular basis about library services to specific disability groups

- Include information about services to special user groups in orientation/orientation package for new staff

Special services to patrons with disabilities

- Home delivery service to persons who are not able to come to the library

- Outreach services to persons in institutions and care facilities

- Reading service for patrons with reading difficulties (e.g., short texts, letters, instructions, articles on tape or CD) or scanning texts to make them accessible on a computer with screen reader

- Regularly scheduled consultations for persons with reading disabilities

How to provide information to patrons with disabilities

The library should offer guided tours of the library for both individuals and groups of persons with special needs. Many of these patrons may have difficulties reading information about the library. Information about access, services, materials, and programs should therefore be available in the alternative formats listed below (select the audio formats that are commonly used by patrons with disabilities in your country):

For visually impaired persons

- Information in large print

- Information on audio tape, CD/DVD, or in DAISY format

- Information in Braille

- Information on the library's accessible website

For deaf or hearing impaired persons

- Information in subtitled and/or sign language videos

- Information via text telephones and/or email

- Information on the library's accessible website (audio information should also be available as text)

- Easy-to-read text for patrons who were born deaf or became deaf before acquiring language skills

For persons with reading difficulties (persons with dyslexia or weak readers)

- Information written in an easy-to-read text

- Information on audio/video tape, CD/DVD, or in Daisy format

- Information on the library's accessible website

For persons with physical disabilities

- Information on audio/video tape or on CD/DVD or in DAISY format

- Information on accessible website

For cognitively disabled persons

- Information in an easy-to-read format

- Information on audio/video tape, CD/DVD, or in DAISY format

- Information on the library's accessible website

Information to patrons with disabilities: media formats required

Disability groups	Large print	Tape/DAISY CD/DVD	Braille	Website	Videos with subtitles and/or sign lang.	Text telephone	Easy-to-read
Visually impaired	X	X	X	X			
Deaf and hearing impaired				X	X	X	X
Reading difficulties	X	X		X			X
Physical disabilities		X		X			
Cognitively disabled		X		X			x

How do you make information easy to understand?

Informational materials should be understandable to all patrons. The following guidelines apply to both information on paper and on webpages:

- Write clear and concise short sentences

- Avoid foreign words

- Insert ample white space between paragraphs and text blocks

- Include illustrations on same page as accompanying text

- Use dark text on white or light colored background – **never** light text on a dark background

See also *IFLA Guidelines for Easy-to-Read Materials!*

Website

The library's website and catalog should be fully accessible for persons with reading disabilities through enlargement capability and screen readers, combined with synthetic speech or Braille displays. Use a clear and logical design that includes written explanations for visual or audio content. Make sure text and graphics can be understood without the use of color. Information about accessible websites can be found at **Web Accessibility Initiative of the World Wide Web Consortium** http://www.w3c.org/wai and **Watchfire WebXact** http://webxact.watchfire.com. You can also consult your National Library for the Blind.

- Make the design logical and easy to navigate

- Make the children's webpage accessible

- Provide software to enlarge text, change font and contrast, length of lines, and space between lines

- Give alternative formats to .pdf and .doc -- preferably unformatted text (.txt)

- Separate contents from design – use style sheets to guide presentation and layout

- Include search capability on your website

- Avoid frames and tables

- Avoid moving figures and texts

- Use relative measurements for text

- Accompany audio with text

How to cooperate with disability organizations and individuals

Cooperation with representatives of disability organizations and individuals is important in order to reach all citizens and establish credibility for the library's services and programs. Such outreach efforts could include:

- A formal invitation to cooperate on various projects

- A joint "brain storming" meeting

- Planned activities in the library, for instance:

    - Campaigns and exhibits to inform the public about disabilities

    - Booths with informational materials

    - Meetings or conferences on disability issues

    - Entertainment for children and adults with disabilities

- Regular meetings with organizations and/or individual patrons to discuss future initiatives

- Instruction for patrons with disabilities on how to use the library, computers and other technical equipment

- Discussion groups

- Joint development projects

- Joint media contacts

Further resources

IFLA Guidelines

Gyda Skat Nielsen & Birgitta Irvall, *Guidelines for Library Services to Persons with Dyslexia* (IFLA Professional Report # 70, 2001) http://www.ifla.org

Bror Tronbacke, *Guidelines for Easy-to-Read Materials* (IFLA Professional Report # 54, 1997) http://www.ifla.org

Nancy Mary Panella, *Guidelines for Libraries Serving Hospital Patients and the Elderly and Disabled in Long-Term Care Facilities* (IFLA Professional Report # 61, 2000) http://www.ifla.org

Useful web addresses in English:

http://www.w3c.org/WAI/

http://webxact.watchfire.com

http://www.rnib.org.uk/xpedio/groups/public/documents/publicwebsite/public_webaccesscentre.hcsp

http://europa.eu.int/information_society/policy/accessibility/web/index_en.htm

http://www.ri.gov/acc_checklist.php

http://www.lgta.org/accessibility/

http://www.daisy.org

http://www.netserv.net.au/doonbank/access-htm

http://www.washington.edu/accessit/index.php