

## FACT SHEET 2

# Providing Effective Communication



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## FACT SHEET 2

# Providing Effective Communication

Places of public accommodation are required to ensure that customers or clients with disabilities affecting hearing, vision, speech, or cognition are provided with effective communication through **auxiliary aids and services** that enable them to fully benefit from facilities, services, goods, and programs. A place of public accommodation is not required to provide any auxiliary aid or service if doing so would “fundamentally alter” the operation (i.e., alter the essential nature of the goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages, or accommodations offered), or if providing communication aids and services would result in an “undue burden” (i.e., significant difficulty or expense).

To determine whether your facility is a public accommodation and, therefore, subject to the auxiliary aids and services requirement, read **Fact Sheet 1: Who Has Obligations Under Title III?**

Auxiliary aids and services include a wide range of communication techniques and devices, many of which are discussed below. Use of advanced technology or the costliest service option is not necessary if effective communication can be provided through other means.

It is strongly recommended that places of public accommodation take into consideration the preferences that individuals with disabilities may have for particular aids and services, but ultimately it is the decision of the owner or operator which aids and services are provided. In choosing among the alternatives, *effectiveness* should be the critical deciding factor. For example:

A restaurant would *not* be required to provide menus in braille if it provides reading by a waiter or host upon request; **however**, a research library in a private university that

provides copies of written materials to students *would* be responsible for providing those materials in an accessible format upon request (i.e., large print, braille, audio cassettes, or computer disk).

A place of public accommodation would not be required to have a TDD available for receiving or making telephone calls that are part of business operations. It should, however, train staff to be prepared to receive calls through the telephone relay service (see page 5). On the other hand, TDDs must be provided when customers, clients, patients, or participants are permitted to make outgoing calls on “more than an incidental convenience basis.” Hospitals and hotels, for example, would generally be required to provide TDDs for their patients or guests.

The American Foundation for the Blind and National Center for Law and Deafness’ ADA Communication Accommodations Project (ADA-CAP) provides technical assistance to help businesses deal with communications barriers. They have two hotlines and produce pamphlets on communication accessibility (see “For More Information,” page 8).

This fact sheet describes several methods of making information and communication accessible. Other options are also possible, and new ones will be available as the technology continues to develop. Always ask the people who will be using these services which accessible information formats or communication methods they need or prefer.

Whichever aids and services are offered, be sure to publicize their availability with the appropriate signage and symbols (contact ADA-CAP for information). Many people who would benefit from these services may be reluctant to request them unless they know such assistance is available.

## **For People with Visual Disabilities**

For people with visual disabilities, the auxiliary aids and services requirement means that information regularly provided in visual formats must also be available in audible or tactile forms. For example, the information in printed brochures can be made available in braille or on audio tape. Restaurants can offer menus in braille or have staff read the selections and prices when necessary. Movie theaters can provide telephone tapes with their film schedules for people who do not have access to the printed listings in the newspaper. Annual reports can be provided on computer diskette. These and other methods of providing access to information are described below.

### **Large Print Materials**

Many people with disabilities have some usable sight and can read large print. Large print materials can often be made at low cost using a photocopier or a personal computer. Use a 16-point type size or larger (18 is best). The type should be double-spaced and printed on a high-contrast background. When you are planning a conference or other event, estimate the number of large print materials needed by asking participants to notify you in advance about their specific needs. (If you are providing printed materials, it is always a good idea to have a few large print copies available.) Places that display information on wall signs can offer large-type printed versions; for example, fast food restaurants can provide large-print menus for those who cannot read the wall menu.

### **All Printed Materials**

Prepare text according to the following principles to maximize legibility (this benefits everyone, including people with limited vision):

- Set type in columns that are not too narrow or too wide (for 11- or 12-point type, 3 to 7

inches is a comfortable column width). Use only one column if possible. Leave right margins ragged; this leaves words evenly spaced, making ragged-right text easier to read than justified text.

- Use lower case letters with initial capitals; this is more legible than all capitals.
- Black lettering on yellow or off-white paper provides maximum legibility, with less glare than plain white paper.
- Use simple serif typefaces. Simple fonts work best; don't use thin, bold, italic, or fancy typefaces. Restrict the use of sans-serif type to headlines, column headings, and other short pieces of information. Do not use more than two typefaces on a page.

### **Braille**

If brailled materials are needed, there are a number of resources that provide transcription services. The National Federation of the Blind and the National Braille Press have free public service brochures describing many of these resources (see for "For More Information," page 8).

Be sure to make arrangements for transcription before you offer materials in braille. Some organizations will work from a computer disk, others from printed material. There is a great range in price for producing brailled materials, depending on turnaround time, the capacity of the providing organization, and the type of equipment used and services offered. Services offered by some transcription organizations include high-speed braille, interpoint (two-sided) braille, and tactile reproductions of pictures and graphics.

For assistance, contact the Information Access Center of the National Federation of the Blind for technical information on providing published materials in nonvisual accessible formats, or contact the ADA-CAP vision issues hotline (see "For More Information," page 8).

## **Audio Tapes**

Recording program materials on cassette tape is a good alternative to written information. Some people who are blind or visually impaired cannot or prefer not to read braille or large print, and find tapes more useful. Tape duplicators, found on many stereo cassette decks, make copies easily and inexpensively. You can make the recordings yourself if your machine records with good, clear sound quality, or you may wish to have your material recorded professionally.

Professional recorders can use two-track or four-track cassettes. Two-track cassettes can be used on any type of tape player, and so can be more widely circulated. Four-track cassettes must be played on a specially adapted tape player, but more information can be recorded on one four-track than on one two-track tape. In addition, four-track tapes can include "tone indexing," which allows users to forward to any page. If you do not know what type of equipment will be used to listen to your recorded material, you might want to have it recorded on two tracks, so that anyone can use it (especially if the material is not extremely long). You may also consider having the material recorded on both two- and four-track tapes. (Note that once a recording is made, it *can* be remastered onto another format, so even if you do not start out with both two- and four-track tapes, you will be able to respond to specific requests.)

### **Recording tips for doing it yourself:**

- On each side of the tape, identify the side number, the document title, and the page range being read. The cassette label should include the title and tape number (e.g., "Tape 1 of 4") in type and in braille.
- At the end of the recording, identify the reader. ("*Your reader has been Joe Smith.*")

- Make sure the recording is done in a room where there is no background noise.
- Read at a moderate pace and articulate words clearly.

## **Readers**

If brailled or taped materials are not available, designate someone to read information aloud, when necessary, to people who are blind or visually impaired. This is a stop-gap measure, but it will work if there is not a large volume of material to be read.

## **Computer Diskettes**

Computer diskettes provide an efficient, simple means of transferring print information to audible communication. Many individuals now have computers with voice output that can "read" data aloud. The diskette can also be used to print out braille text or large print. This electronic process is often the fastest way to convert print text to an accessible format. This alternative is excellent for providing conference materials, reports, minutes of meetings any print information of any length. The National Federation of the Blind can advise on this process (see "For More Information," page 8).

## **Radio Reading Services and Telephone Tapes**

Radio reading services and telephone tapes provide people who are blind or visually impaired with a wide range of information. Radio reading services regularly read newspapers, periodicals, weather reports, and event calendars. Telephone tapes provide information about services and programs. These services are a great source of advertising once you have made your business accessible.

## **For People with Hearing or Speech Disabilities**

For people with hearing or speech disabilities, auxiliary aids and services include communication devices such as text telephones or TDDs, assistive listening systems, and services such as interpreters or alternative methods of communication.

Many communication access improvements are inexpensive and easy to implement. In addition to those listed below, other useful methods may be as simple as making paper and pencil available for writing messages and maintaining a clear-sounding, adequately amplified public address system. If there is someone in particular for whom you will be providing communication aids or services, you should always ask that person what he or she needs or prefers.

### **Telephone Amplifiers**

The telephone company can install amplification devices on pay phones that are required to have them. There is a nominal monthly charge for this service. For amplification on other phones, contact AT&T's National Special Needs Center (see "For More Information," page 8). Their receivers work only on AT&T equipment. Portable amplifiers for individual use are also available.

### **Captioning**

Captioning is the process by which the audio part of a videotape or film is transcribed and made visible on the screen to be read by people with hearing disabilities. **Closed captions** are visible only if the television is equipped with a decoder; **open captions** are always visible.

## **Telecommunication Devices for the Deaf**

A telecommunication device for the deaf (TDD), also called a text telephone or a TTY, allows a person with a hearing or speech disability to communicate with other TDD-users over the telephone using a keyboard and visual display and/or printer.

Portable TDDs are easy to use and affordable. Prices range from \$150 to \$1000, depending on the features provided. You may decide to use a TDD on an existing phone line or to get a separate dedicated line. If the same line is used for voice and TDD, everyone who answers the phone must be trained to recognize the TDD tone and to know how to respond. If you have a dedicated TDD line, be sure to train employees in its use.

Publicize the availability of a TDD number by listing your telephone number in all of your publications and publicity materials in the following format: **(800) 123-4567 voice/TDD**  
**Or abbreviate: V/TD**

Telecommunication Relay Services (TRS) enable someone using a TDD to communicate with someone using a voice telephone. Operators (communication assistants) at the relay service act as a communication bridge between hearing people and people who have hearing or speech disabilities, or people who need voice or hearing carry-over service (a feature required of all relay services, allowing people who have hearing disabilities to use their own voices and allowing people with speech disabilities who can hear to type their messages but hear the other party directly). You can use a relay service if you have a TDD and want to contact a hearing person, or if you are a hearing person and want to call someone who uses a TDD.

## **Telecommunication Relay Services**

The Americans with Disabilities Act mandates that, by July 26, 1993, all telephone companies must provide telecommunication relay services. Many states already provide intrastate relay services, so check with your telephone company, vocational rehabilitation agency, or state commission for the deaf and hard of hearing to obtain the phone number.

Because of the low cost of a TDD and the efficiency and desirability of one-to-one communication, it is recommended that businesses, services, and agencies that carry out a high volume of business by phone consider making themselves directly accessible through TDDs, rather than relying on relay services.

## **Assistive Listening Systems**

If your facility has a meeting room, theater, or auditorium, an assistive listening system will enhance the sound for people who are hard of hearing. Several systems are available: the **induction system**, the wireless **AM or FM system**, and the wireless **infrared system**. The choice of systems is dependent upon a number of factors, including the intended users, the location, and the need for portability. For technical assistance, contact Self Help for Hard of Hearing People (see "For More Information," page 8) or the ADA-CAP hotline on hearing issues, or request the "Assistive Listening System" brochure from the Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board (see "For More Information").

In new construction of assembly areas where audible communication is integral to the use of the space, such as concert and lecture halls, theaters, and meeting rooms, an assistive listening system must be provided. If the assembly area has fixed seats for at least 50 people or has an audio-amplification system, an assistive

listening system must be permanently installed. In open gathering spaces in places such as shopping malls, where concerts or other events may occasionally be held, but which do not have fixed seating, an induction system is recommended. In other cases, either a permanently installed system may be provided or adequate electrical outlets or other necessary wiring must be provided to support a portable system. (Refer to the ADA Accessibility Guidelines for complete scoping and technical requirements.)

## **Interpreters**

People who are deaf or hard of hearing often request interpreters or transliterators in order to participate in conversations, meetings, and events. Interpreters translate from spoken language to American Sign Language (ASL) and vice versa. Translitterators interpret from spoken English to Pidgin Signed English, Manually Coded English, or Cued Speech, and vice versa. Oral interpreters paraphrase or mouth silently the spoken message and, if necessary, voice-interpret the speech of a person who is deaf or hard of hearing. The person who is deaf or hard of hearing should be consulted as to his or her preferred type of interpreting.

Fees for interpreters generally range from \$25 to \$35 an hour with a two-hour minimum fee. Information on fees, use of interpreters, and other related information is available from state vocational rehabilitation agencies or state commissions for the deaf and hard of hearing. In order to assure the availability of an interpreter, be sure to make your request as soon as your meeting or event is scheduled, preferably at least four weeks in advance.

For more information about sign and oral interpreting, contact the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, Inc. (see "For More Information," page 8).

## **Computer-Aided Real-Time Reporting (CART)**

A relatively new type of translation service, called computer-aided real-time reporting or real-time captioning, has become available as an option for people who are deaf or hard of hearing and who read English fluently. Real-time reporters, often trained as court stenographers, type what is said in a meeting, and the text is simultaneously displayed on a computer or video monitor or projection screen. For assistance in obtaining this service, contact your local court stenotypist organization, the Association of Late-Deafened Adults (see “For More Information,” page 8), interpreting agencies, or other organizations serving people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

## **Working with Interpreters and Stenotypists**

Depending on the length and the nature of the assignment, varying numbers of interpreters or stenotypists will be needed. For most assignments lasting no longer than two hours, only one professional may be needed. The professional should be provided at least one break during that time. For those assignments that involve many people, such as round table discussions where more than one mode must be interpreted voice-to-sign and oral interpreting or where the information being communicated is particularly complex, two or more interpreters may be needed.

Under some circumstances, clients might assume that even though a meeting runs three hours, only one interpreter is needed since the meeting is “informal” and there will be coffee breaks. The danger in this assumption is that especially when the setting is informal, there tends to be more people talking over each other, which makes it difficult to effectively interpret all of the conversations being exchanged. The idea that coffee breaks will provide a break for

the professional is also erroneous. The exchanges that occur in the hallways or around the lunch or refreshment table are often the places where a great deal of the important “work” is done. The interpreter often works at these times as well.

Interpreters need frequent breaks, both for mental processing reasons and for the prevention of physical damage due to Repetitive Motion Syndrome/Injury (RMS) or other overuse syndromes. At least one 10- to 15-minute break per hour should be provided.

Interpreters should always be in a visible, well-lit place near the presenters. When slides or films are shown, a spotlight may be used to illuminate the interpreter, taking care not to have the light directly in the interpreter’s eyes. At all events, an area close to the interpreter and presenters should be reserved for people who are deaf or hard of hearing and for those sitting with them. In small group meetings, it is important that both the people who are deaf or hard of hearing and the interpreter have an opportunity to select where they sit so that they can see and hear all participants. Round tables or circular seating arrangements are preferred. In interactive meetings such as group discussions and workshops, the moderator should enforce a rule that only one person may speak at a time, so that all comments can be interpreted by the interpreter.

Artistic interpreters, who transliterate and interpret dramatic literature, poems, plays, and concerts, require written material and recorded music anywhere from one day to several months prior to the performance, depending on the nature of the assignment. Interpreters for speeches and presentations from dignitaries, politicians, and the like also require advance review of a script in order to ensure the most accurate delivery possible.

## **For People with Cognitive Disabilities**

The most important service for people with cognitive disabilities is the provision of clear information. Everyone appreciates printed information and announcements that are easy to understand. People who have cognitive disabilities especially appreciate the use of graphic symbols, color, and other supplements to the meaning of verbal information. For example, illustrations in restaurant menus make them easier to comprehend for someone who does not read well.

All employees should be trained to provide information clearly, and to have patience with people who might not understand the first time or the first way it is presented. (For more information on communicating effectively with people with cognitive and other types of disabilities, refer to **Fact Sheet 3**.)

### **FOR MORE INFORMATION...**

The following organizations are referred to in this fact sheet, and address aspects of communication accessibility.

#### **ADA Communication Accommodations Project (ADA-CAP)**

American Foundation for the Blind  
Governmental Relations Department  
1615 M Street, NW, Suite 250  
Washington, DC 20036  
Hotline on vision issues: (202) 223-0101 voice/  
TDD. Hotline on hearing issues: (202) 651-5343  
voice/TDD

#### **Association of Late-Deafened Adults**

P.O. Box 641763  
Chicago, IL 60664  
(312) 604-4192 TDD

#### **National Braille Press**

88 St. Stephen Street  
Boston, MA 02215  
(617) 266-6160 voice

#### **National Federation of the Blind**

Information Access Project  
1800 Johnson Street  
Baltimore, MD 21230  
(301) 659-9314 voice

#### **AT&T's National Special Needs Center**

2001 Route 46, Suite 310  
Parsippany, NJ 07054-1315  
(800) 233-1222 voice  
(800) 833-3232 TDD

#### **Self Help for Hard of Hearing People**

7800 Wisconsin Avenue  
Bethesda, MD 20814  
(301) 657-2248 voice  
(301) 657-2249 TDD

#### **Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board**

1331 F Street, NW, Suite 1000  
Washington, DC 20004-1111  
(800) USA-ABLE voice  
(202) 653-7834 voice  
(202) 272-5449 TDD

#### **Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, Inc.**

8719 Colesville Road, Suite 310  
Silver Spring, MD 20910-3919  
(301) 608-0050 voice/TDD