

Helpful (and Low-cost!) Tips for Accommodating People with Disabilities

Many professionals assume that accommodating people with disabilities in their programs will be prohibitively expensive. In fact, many accommodations are cost-free or quite inexpensive. The key to finding low-cost solutions is to foster open communication with the person with a disability and to think broadly about the possibilities and resources available to them and to your organization.

Do not be surprised if the disabled person does not require any special accommodations. Many people with disabilities own the equipment they need for everyday life and will only need minimal assistance from others. Remember that each individual will have a unique approach to his or her own disability. Recognize that finding reasonable adaptations is a process of creative problem solving.

Accommodating People who Use Wheelchairs

- Buildings with few steps can be made accessible with portable ramps. People use everything from homemade wood ramps to motorcycle ramps, up to more expensive ramps designed specifically for wheelchair use. Use the resources available in the local community.
- Some people with disabilities may need to have tables, chairs or beds adjusted for their use. To make tables higher, place blocks of wood under the legs. To lower tables or chairs, cut the legs down with a hand saw.
- Another issue to consider is the availability of accessible toilet facilities. A portable commode can be an excellent solution to this problem. This can also double as a shower chair or a seat. Commodes can be rented or purchased through medical equipment suppliers. This simple adaptation can create improved access for people with physical disabilities.
- Shower chairs make it possible for many people with mobility impairments to shower independently. Shower chairs come in many shapes and sizes; consult individual participants to find out what works best for them. Plastic resin lawn chairs make inexpensive shower chairs if a regular shower chair is not available.

Accommodating Blind or Visually Impaired People

- Have tape recorders available for blind or visually impaired individuals who may wish to use them for note taking. Tape recorders can be used to respond to questions and conversations in which others are writing responses.
- In group discussions, activities and demonstrations, be aware of gestures and illustrations that must be seen to be understood — develop the habit of describing these things as they are taking place or being demonstrated. Sometimes during a visually oriented activity, a visually impaired person may request that a sighted partner carry on a running description of the action.

Accommodating People with Hearing Impairments

- When possible, plan ahead by including the cost of interpreters as part of the program budget. For formal situations, such as orientation meetings, seminars or class sessions, hire skilled interpreters as needed. For informal situations, it may be possible to make do with gestures, writing back and forth and other creative solutions.
- Purchase a TDD (Telecommunications Device for the Deaf — costs about \$300) for program offices. Devices can be purchased through telephone companies, vocational rehabilitation centers or speech and hearing centers.
- Within the U.S., utilizing the National Relay Service is a free and dependable way to communicate with someone who uses a TDD. The relay systems work when a relay operator, who has access to a TDD, acts as an intermediary between two parties. The relay system makes it possible for someone who uses a TDD to have a conversation with someone who does not have a TDD. If a relay call is placed, an operator will explain procedures for communicating with the TDD caller. The National Relay Service number is 711.

Accommodating People with Learning Disabilities

- Often people with learning disabilities can use taped materials in place of printed materials. Tape recorders may provide an option for people with learning disabilities when taking notes or writing documents and reports.
- When a person with a disability has difficulty with reading, use drawings, symbols, and actions rather than written words to illustrate ideas.