



WVATS

WEST VIRGINIA ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY SYSTEM

Accessible hospitality, travel and tourism: Opening doors to people of all abilities

Increasing your customer base may be as easy as increasing your accessibility. Making businesses and attractions accessible provides more opportunities for individuals with disabilities and provides additional income to the business. It is often difficult to find lodging, dining or attractions that meet the accessibility needs of an individual. Business owners should keep in mind “people with disabilities are part of a larger network of family members, friends, communities, and institutions that may look favorably on businesses that serve this population”.¹

The American’s with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires most businesses and facilities to provide reasonable access and accommodations for all disabled customers, clients and members of the public² The ADA applies to almost all businesses that are open to the public, regardless of size. While your business may be meeting the regulations put forth by the ADA, these regulations are a minimum requirement and leave room for additional improvements.

There are many ways to increase your accessibility at little or no cost to the business. There are a variety of things to consider when addressing accessibility. The needs of individuals with disabilities cover a wide range, and it is unrealistic to think you can meet every need. However, every modification made expands the number of people who can access your business. This document will provide you with tips and suggestions for increasing the accessibility of your business.



General facilities

The first impression customers have with a business is with the physical facility. Providing customers with a pleasant introduction to the business or attraction sets the stage for a positive experience.

Consider the entrance to your business and assess how welcoming it is to someone with a disability.

Can a person with a wheelchair or other mobility impairment enter with ease?

- If you need additional accessible parking spaces for an event, consider using tape to stripe parking lots and temporary signage to create extra accessible spaces.
- Assistive technology, such as removable or portable ramps, can be used to increase access. Keep in mind that power wheelchairs can weigh over 200 lbs. without the weight of the person; makeshift plywood ramps are generally not safe.
- Adjust the tension on doors to make them easier to open if you do not have automatic doors.
- Ensure the travel lanes are free of obstacles and wide enough to accommodate mobility equipment.

How about a person with a visual impairment?

- Limit obstacles in and around the entrance of the facility.
- Limit objects sticking out from walls. An individual using a cane to navigate can steer clear of objects on the ground, but often run into objects sticking out from walls. If you must have objects on a wall, add a barrier on the ground level to assist with navigation.

Ensure signage is available to navigate the facility upon entering.

- Signage should be clear and easy to read. Pay careful consideration to the use of colors in signage; there should be a high color contrast to ensure visibility and information should not rely solely on color in consideration of individuals with colorblindness.
- Adding Braille to signage is a helpful navigation tool. A Braille label maker is an affordable way to make this accommodation. WVATS offers a Braille labeler in the device loan library.

Think about how a person with a disability will interact with the facility staff.

- Provide disability etiquette training to staff interacting with the public. These trainings can often be provided by agencies or online modules for free or at a low cost.
- Have a plan in place to communicate with consumers who are deaf or hearing impaired. There are a variety of low cost assistive technology options available to meet these needs. Assisted listening devices amplify sound for an individual who is hearing impaired. Sign language interpreters are available on demand for a fee and can be accessed via an iPad app. Sometimes a simple piece of paper and a pencil can overcome communication barriers.

Did you know?

Businesses doing alterations to improve accessibility are eligible for two federal tax incentives.



Lodging

Finding lodging to meet an individual's needs can present a serious challenge. When an individual with significant needs finds accommodations that meet their needs, they are almost guaranteed to be a repeat customer.

A frequent complaint from wheelchair users is that they arrive at the hotel where they have made a reservation for a wheelchair accessible room, only to find it has been given to someone else.

- Staff should be reminded of the significance of the accessible rooms and make room changes only when absolutely necessary.
- When a customer requests an accessible room find out what accommodations they will need. The customer may need a room with a shower seat or close to the entrance and not a fully wheelchair accessible room.³
- The ADA states these rooms are to remain open to individuals with disabilities unless all other rooms in the facility are occupied. Contact the customer immediately if a room is no longer available.

Can a person with limited or no mobility comfortably use the room?

- Many hotels use platform beds with a solid base frame. Exchanging the solid base with a bed frame with open access allows someone to use a lift system to move from a wheelchair to the bed.³
- Wheelchairs require additional space to

navigate a room. Check rooms to ensure they have clear paths of travel. If necessary, remove excess furniture.

- As a safety practice, many hotel room doors will automatically swing shut. Individuals with mobility impairments often find themselves or their equipment being hit by a door. Having a doorstop or other method to temporarily hold the door open can overcome this challenge. It may also be beneficial to adjust the doors to accessible rooms to stay open until manually closed.
- Remember to consider the height of counters, mirrors, microwaves etc. in an accessible room.

There is assistive technology available to increase the accessibility of a room for someone who has a hearing impairment. These items can be checked out for an individual room as needed.

- A door knock sensor can be hung over the frame of the door to the room and it will flash when it senses the vibrations from someone knocking on the door.
- A vibrating alarm clock can be provided in place of the standard alarm clock.

Dining

Dining out is a treat for locals and often a necessity for travelers. Individuals with disabilities seek out locations where they can dine comfortably and as independently as possible.

- Have a clear path of travel, large enough for a power wheelchair to access seating as well as restrooms.
- Standard height tables work best for many individuals with disabilities. If your establishment primarily has bar height tables, set aside a few standard tables to use as an accommodation.
- Booth seating is very challenging for wheelchair users. If a booth is the only

option, allow enough room around the table for the wheelchair user to sit at the end of the table without disrupting the path of travel.

- Offer menus in alternative formats if possible. This can include large print, Braille or picture menus.
- If your establishment no longer provides straws, keep some straws handy as an accommodation for customers who require them due to their disability.

Attractions and activities

Tourism attractions draw many people to West Virginia. While many attractions and activities cannot be made fully accessible, making them as accessible as possible is appreciated by customers. Due to the limited number of fully accessible attractions around the country, many families will travel great distances to have an experience that can include the whole family.

- If there is an inaccessible viewing area, consider posting live streaming cameras to be viewed in an accessible viewing station.
- Even if the attraction or activity itself is not accessible, have an accessible waiting or viewing area for family and friends.
- Ensure all equipment for accessibility remains in working order and staff are trained to operate or assist with any equipment. A good example of this is a lift in a pool.³
- Ensure videos are captioned for individuals with hearing impairments.
- Consider the entire process when planning accessible activities. For example, if an accessible activity requires a shuttle ride or other mode of group transportation, ensure accessible transportation is available.

Resources

For more information on how to increase accessibility or assistive technology in West Virginia, contact the West Virginia Assistive Technology System (WVATS) at wvats@hsc.wvu.edu or call **304-293-4692**. Additional information on hospitality and tourism accessibility can be found by visiting

- Wheelchair Travel, wheelchairtravel.org
- Blue Path, blue-path.org

References:

1. Yin, M., Shaewitz, et al. (2018). A Hidden Market: The Purchasing Power of Working-Age Adults with Disabilities. Retrieved from <https://www.air.org/system/files/downloads/report/Hidden-Market-Spending-Power-of-People-with-Disabilities-April-2018.pdf>.
2. Americans With Disabilities Act of 1990, Pub. L. No. 101-336, 104 Stat. 328 (1990)
3. Guide to Accessibility in Hotels. Retrieved January 8, 2020, from <https://wheelchairtravel.org/hotels/>

www.wvats.cedwvu.org

West Virginia University
Center for Excellence in Disabilities
959 Hartman Run Road
Morgantown, WV 26505

Voice : 304-293-4692
Hotline: 800-841-8436
TTY: 800-518-1448



West Virginia University

CENTER FOR EXCELLENCE IN DISABILITIES
WEST VIRGINIA ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY SYSTEM

The Center for Excellence in Disabilities (CED) is designated as the state's lead agency for assistive technology services. All printed materials are available in braille, electronic format, CD and large print. WVUCED/WVATS/20

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