



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Technical Preservation Services

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Delegate Teresa Kelly HB 771 - Bed Height

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PRESERVATION BRIEFS

32

Making Historic Properties Accessible

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Accessible historic building.
Photo: NPS files.

Historically, most buildings and landscapes were not designed to be readily accessible for people with disabilities. In recent years, however, emphasis has been placed on preserving historically significant properties, and on making these properties-and the activities within them-more accessible to people with disabilities. With the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990, access to properties open to the public is now a civil right.



A significant entrance may be difficult to modify. Although a special challenge, sensitive changes can almost always be made to provide access while preserving the unique historic character. Photo: NPS files.

This Preservation Brief introduces the complex issue of providing accessibility at historic properties, and underscores the need to balance accessibility and historic preservation. It provides guidance on making historic properties accessible while preserving their historic character; the Brief also provides examples to show that independent physical accessibility at historic properties can be achieved with careful planning, consultation, and sensitive design. While the Brief focuses primarily on making buildings and their sites accessible, it also includes a section on historic landscapes. The Brief will assist historic property owners, design professionals, and administrators in evaluating their historic properties so that the highest level of accessibility can be provided while minimizing changes to historic materials and features. Because many projects encompassing accessibility work are complex, it is advisable to consult with experts in the fields of historic preservation and accessibility before proceeding with permanent physical changes to historic properties.

Modifications to historic properties to increase accessibility may be as simple as a small, inexpensive ramp to overcome one entrance step, or may involve changes to exterior and interior features. The Brief does not provide a detailed explanation of local or State accessibility laws as they vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. A concise explanation of several federal accessibility laws is included below.

Planning Accessibility Modifications

Historic properties are distinguished by features, materials, spaces, and spatial relationships that contribute to their historic character. Often these elements, such as steep terrain, monumental steps, narrow or heavy doors, decorative ornamental hardware, and narrow pathways and corridors, pose barriers to persons with disabilities, particularly to wheelchair users.

A three-step approach is recommended to identify and implement accessibility modifications that will protect the integrity and historic character of historic properties:

1. Review the historical significance of the property and identify character-defining features;
2. Assess the property's existing and required level of accessibility; and
3. Evaluate accessibility options within a preservation context.

1. Review the Historical Significance

If the property has been designated as historic (properties that are listed in, or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, or designated under State or local law), the property's nomination file should be reviewed to learn about its significance. Local preservation commissions and State Historic Preservation Offices can usually provide copies of the nomination file and are also resources for additional information and assistance. Review of the written documentation should always be supplemented with a physical investigation to identify which character defining features and spaces must be protected whenever any changes are anticipated. If the level of documentation for a property's significance is limited, it may be necessary to have a preservation professional identify specific historic features, materials, and spaces that should be protected.

For most historic properties, the construction materials, the form and style of the property, the principal elevations, the major architectural or landscape features, and the principal public spaces constitute some of the elements that should be preserved. Every effort should be made to minimize damage to the materials and features that convey a property's historical significance when making modifications for accessibility. Very small or highly significant properties that have never been altered may be extremely difficult to modify.

Secondary spaces and finishes and features that may be less important to the historic character should also be identified; these may generally be altered without jeopardizing the historical significance of a property. Nonsignificant spaces, secondary pathways, later additions, previously altered areas, utilitarian spaces, and service areas can usually be modified without threatening or destroying a property's historical significance.

2. Assess the Property's Existing and Required Level of Accessibility

A building survey or assessment will provide a thorough evaluation of a property's accessibility. Most surveys identify accessibility barriers in the following areas: building and site entrances; surface textures, widths and slopes of walkways; parking; grade changes; size, weight and configuration of doorways; interior corridors and path of travel restrictions; elevators; and public toilets and amenities. Simple audits can be completed by property owners using readily available checklists (See Further Reading). Accessibility specialists can be hired to assess barriers in more complex properties, especially those with multiple buildings, steep terrain, or interpretive programs. Persons with disabilities can be particularly helpful in assessing specific barriers.

All applicable accessibility requirements—local codes, State codes and federal laws—should be reviewed carefully before undertaking any accessibility modification. Since many States and localities have their own accessibility regulations and codes (each with their own requirements for dimensions and technical requirements), owners should use the most stringent accessibility requirements when implementing modifications. The Americans with Disability Act Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG) is the document that should be consulted when complying with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements.

3. Identify and Evaluate Accessibility Options within a Preservation Context

Once a property's significant materials and features have been identified, and existing and required levels of accessibility have been established, solutions can be developed. Solutions should provide the greatest amount of accessibility without threatening or destroying those materials and features that make a property significant. Modifications may usually be phased over time as funds are available, and interim solutions can be considered until more permanent solutions are implemented. A team comprised of persons with disabilities, accessibility and historic preservation professionals, and building inspectors should be consulted as accessibility solutions are developed.

Modifications to improve accessibility should generally be based on the following priorities:



This accessibility ramp is compatible with the historic building in scale and materials. Photo: William Smith.

1. Making the main or a prominent public entrance and primary public spaces accessible, including a path to the entrance;
2. Providing access to goods, services, and programs;
3. Providing accessible restroom facilities; and,
4. Creating access to amenities and secondary spaces.



The ramp's scale and materials are inconsistent with the historic character of the building. Photo: NPS files.

All proposed changes should be evaluated for conformance with the Secretary of the Interior's "Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties," which were created for property owners to guide preservation work. These Standards stress the importance of retaining and protecting the materials and features that convey a property's historical significance. Thus, when new features are incorporated for accessibility, historic materials and features should be retained whenever possible. Accessibility modifications should be in scale with the historic property, visually compatible, and, whenever possible, reversible. Reversible means that if the new feature were removed at a later date, the essential form and integrity of the property would be unimpaired. The design of new features should also be differentiated from the design of the historic property so that the evolution of the property is evident.

In general, when historic properties are altered, they should be made as accessible as possible. However, if an owner or a project team believes that certain modifications would threaten or destroy the significance of the property, the State Historic Preservation Officer should be consulted to determine whether or not any special accessibility provisions may be used. Special accessibility provisions for historic properties will vary depending on the applicable accessibility requirements.

In some cases, programmatic access may be the only option for extremely small or unaltered historic properties, such as a two-story house museum with no internal elevator. Programmatic access for historic properties refers to alternative methods of providing services, information, and experiences when physical access cannot be provided. It may mean offering an audio-visual program showing an inaccessible upper floor of a historic house museum, providing interpretive panels from a vista at an inaccessible terraced garden, or creating a tactile model of a historic monument for people with visual impairments.

Accessibility Solutions

The goal in selecting appropriate solutions for specific historic properties is to provide a high level of accessibility without compromising significant features or the overall character of the property. The following sections describe accessibility solutions and offer guidance on specific historic property components, namely the building site, entrances, interiors, landscapes, amenities, and new additions. Several solutions are discussed in each section, referencing dimensions and technical requirements from the ADA's accessibility guidelines, ADAAG. State and local requirements, however, may differ from the ADA requirements. Before making any modification owners should be aware of all applicable accessibility requirements.

The Building Site

An accessible route from a parking lot, sidewalk, and public street to the entrance of a historic building or facility is essential. An accessible route, to the maximum extent possible, should be the circulation route used by the general public. Critical elements of accessible routes are their widths, slopes, cross slopes, and surface texture. Each of these route elements must be appropriately designed so that the route can be used by everyone, including people with disabilities.



The significant building site is now accessible to people with disabilities (note steps in front of ramp). Photo: NPS files.

The distance between the arrival and destination points should also be as short as possible. Sites containing designed landscapes should be carefully evaluated before making accessibility modifications. Historic landscapes are described in greater detail below.

Providing Convenient Parking

If parking is provided, it should be as convenient as possible for people with disabilities. Specially designated parking can often be created to improve accessibility. Modifications to parking configurations and pathways should not alter significant landscape features.

Creating an Accessible Route

The route or path through a site to a historic building's entrance should be wide enough, generally at least 3 feet (91 cm), to accommodate visitors with disabilities

and must be appropriately graded with a stable, firm, and slip-resistant surface. Existing paths should be modified to meet these requirements whenever possible as long as doing so would not threaten or destroy significant materials and features.

Existing surfaces can often be stabilized by providing a new base and resetting the paving materials, or by modifying the path surface. In some situations it may be appropriate to create a new path through an inaccessible area. At large properties, it may be possible to regrade a slope to less than 1:20 (5%), or to introduce one or more carefully planned ramps. Clear directional signs should mark the path from arrival to destination.

Entrances



The historic threshold was made accessible with a 1/2" wood bevel. Photo: NPS files.

Whenever possible, access to historic buildings should be through a primary public entrance. In historic buildings, if this cannot be achieved without permanent damage to character-defining features, at least one entrance used by the public should be made accessible. If the accessible entrance is not the primary public entrance, directional signs should direct visitors to the accessible entrance. A rear or service entrance should be avoided as the only mean of entering a building.

Creating an accessible entrance usually involves overcoming a change in elevation. Steps, landings, doors, and thresholds, all part of the entrance, often pose barriers for persons with disabilities. To preserve the integrity of these features, a number of solutions are available to increase accessibility. Typical solutions include regrading, incorporating ramps, installing wheelchair lifts, creating new entrances, and modifying doors, hardware, and thresholds.

Regrading an Entrance

In some cases, when the entrance steps and landscape features are not highly significant, it may be possible to regrade to provide a smooth entrance into a building. If the existing steps are historic masonry, they should be buried, whenever possible, and not removed.

Incorporating Ramps

Permanent ramps are perhaps the most common means to make an entrance accessible. As a new feature, ramps should be carefully designed and appropriately located to preserve a property's historic character.

Ramps should be located at public entrances used by everyone whenever possible, preferably where there is minimal change in grade. Ramps should also be located to minimize the loss of historic features at the connection points—porch railings, steps, and windows—and should preserve the overall historic setting and character of the property. Larger buildings may have below grade areas that can accommodate a ramp down to an entrance. Below grade entrances can be considered if the ramp leads to a publicly used interior, such as an auditorium, or if the building is serviced by a public elevator. Ramps can often be incorporated behind historic features, such as cheek-walls or railings, to minimize the visual effect.

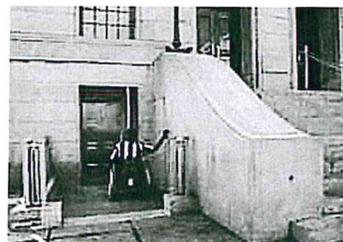
The steepest allowable slope for a ramp is usually 1:12 (8%), but gentler slopes should be used whenever possible to accommodate people with limited strength. Greater changes in elevation require larger and longer ramps to meet accessibility scoping provisions and may require an intermediate landing. Most codes allow a slightly steeper ramp for historic buildings to overcome one step.

Ramps can be faced with a variety of materials, including wood, brick, and stone. Often the type and quality of the materials determines how compatible a ramp design will be with a historic property. Unpainted pressure-treated wood should not be used to construct ramps because it usually appears temporary and is not visually compatible with most historic properties.

Railings should be simple in design, distinguishable from other historic features, and should extend one foot beyond the sloped area.

Ramp landings must be large enough for wheelchair users, usually at least 5 feet by 5 feet (152.5 cm by 152.5 cm), and the top landing must be at the level of the door threshold. It may be possible to reset steps by creating a ramp to accommodate minor level changes and to meet the threshold without significantly altering a property's historic character. If a building's existing landing is not wide or deep enough to accommodate a ramp, it may be necessary to modify the entry to create a wider landing. Long ramps, such as switchbacks, require intermediate landings, and all ramps should be detailed with an appropriate edge and railing for wheelchair users and visually impaired individuals.

Temporary or portable ramps are usually constructed of light-weight materials and, thus, are rarely safe or visually compatible with historic properties. Moreover, portable ramps are often stored until needed and, therefore, do not meet



A new elevator entrance was provided next to the stairs to provide universal access to the services inside. Photo: Courtesy, GSA.

accessibility requirements for independent access. Temporary and portable ramps, however, may be an acceptable interim solution to improve accessibility until a permanent solution can be implemented.

Installing Wheelchair Lifts

Platform lifts and inclined stair lifts, both of which accommodate only one person, can be used to overcome changes of elevation ranging from three to 10 feet (.9 m-3 m) in height. However, many States have restrictions on the use of wheelchair lifts, so all applicable codes should be reviewed carefully before installing one. Inclined stair lifts, which carry a wheelchair on a platform up a flight of stairs, may be employed selectively. They tend to be visually intrusive, although they are relatively reversible. Platform lifts can be used when there is inadequate space for a ramp. However, such lifts should be installed in unobtrusive locations and under cover to minimize maintenance if at all possible. A similar, but more expensive platform lift has a retracting railing that lowers into the ground, minimizing the visual effect to historic properties. Mechanical lifts have drawbacks at historic properties with high public visitation because their capacity is limited, they sometimes cannot be operated independently, and they require frequent maintenance.

Considering a New Entrance

When it is not possible to modify an existing entrance, it may be possible to develop a new entrance by creating an entirely new opening in an appropriate location, or by using a secondary window for an opening. This solution should only be considered after exhausting all possibilities for modifying existing entrances.

Retrofitting Doors

Historic doors generally should not be replaced, nor should door frames on the primary elevation be widened, as this may alter an important feature of a historic design. However, if a building's historic doors have been removed, there may be greater latitude in designing a compatible new entrance. Most accessibility standards require at least a 32" (82 cm) clear opening with manageable door opening pressures. The most desirable preservation solution to improve accessibility is retaining historic doors and upgrading the door pressure with one of several devices. Automatic door openers (operated by push buttons, mats, or electronic eyes) and power-assisted door openers can eliminate or reduce door pressures that are accessibility barriers, and make single or double-leaf doors fully operational.

Adapting Door Hardware

If a door opening is within an inch or two of meeting the 32" (81 cm) clear opening requirement, it may be possible to replace the standard hinges with off-set hinges to increase the size of the door opening as much as 1 1/2" (3.8 cm). Historic hardware can be retained in place, or adapted with the addition of an automatic opener, of which there are several types. Door hardware can also be retrofitted to reduce door pressures. For example, friction hinges can be retrofitted with ball-bearing inserts, and door closers can be rethreaded to reduce the door pressure.

Altering Door Thresholds

A door threshold that exceeds the allowable height, generally 1/2" (1.3 cm), can be altered or removed with one that meets applicable accessibility requirements. If the threshold is deemed to be significant, a bevel can be added on each side to reduce its height. Another solution is to replace the threshold with one that meets applicable accessibility requirements and is visually compatible with the historic entrance.

Readily Achievable Accessibility Options

Many accessibility solutions can be implemented easily and inexpensively without destroying the significance of historic properties. While it may not be possible to undertake all of the modifications listed below, each change will improve accessibility.

Sites and Entrances

- Creating a designated parking space.
- Installing ramps.
- Making curb cuts.

Interiors

- Repositioning shelves.
- Rearranging tables, displays, and furniture.
- Repositioning telephones.
- Adding raised markings on elevator control buttons.



This door handle has been retrofitted to meet ADA requirements. Photo: NPS files.

- Installing flashing alarm lights.
- Installing offset hinges to widen doorways.
- Installing or adding accessible door hardware.
- Adding an accessible water fountain, or providing a paper cup dispenser at an inaccessible water fountain.

Restrooms

- Installing grab bars in toilet stalls.
- Rearranging toilet partitions to increase maneuvering space.
- Insulating lavatory pipes under sinks to prevent burns.
- Installing a higher toilet seat.
- Installing a full-length bathroom mirror.
- Repositioning the paper towel dispenser.



A retractable lift for this historic building foyer was created using "like" materials. Photo: NPS files.

Moving Through Historic Interiors

Persons with disabilities should have independent access to all public areas and facilities inside historic buildings. The extent to which a historic interior can be modified depends on the significance of its materials, plan, spaces, features, and finishes. Primary spaces are often more difficult to modify without changing their character. Secondary spaces may generally be changed without compromising a building's historic character. Signs should clearly mark the route to accessible restrooms, telephones, and other accessible areas.

Installing Ramps and Wheelchair Lifts

If space permits, ramps and wheelchair lifts can also be used to increase accessibility inside buildings. However, some States and localities restrict interior uses of wheelchair lifts for life-safety reasons. Care should be taken to install these new features where they can be readily accessed. Ramps and wheelchair lifts are described below.

Upgrading Elevators

Elevators are an efficient means of providing accessibility between floors. Some buildings have existing historic elevators that are not adequately accessible for persons with disabilities because of their size, location, or detailing, but they may also contribute to the historical significance of a building. Significant historic elevators can usually be upgraded to improve accessibility. Control panels can be modified with a "wand" on a cord to make the control panel accessible, and timing devices can usually be adjusted.

Retrofitting Door Knobs

Historic door knobs and other hardware may be difficult to grip and turn. In recent years, lever-handles have been developed to replace door knobs. Other lever-handle devices can be added to existing hardware. If it is not possible or appropriate to retrofit existing door knobs, doors can be left open during operating hours (unless doing so would violate life safety codes), and power-assisted door openers can be installed. It may only be necessary to retrofit specific doorknobs to create an accessible path of travel and accessible restrooms.

Modifying Interior Stairs

Stairs are the primary barriers for many people with disabilities. However, there are some ways to modify stairs to assist people who are able to navigate them. It may be appropriate to add hand railings if none exist. Railings should be 1 0" (3.8 cm) in diameter and return to the wall so straps and bags do not catch. Color-contrasting, slip-resistant strips will help people with visual impairments. Finally, beveled or closed risers are recommended unless the stairs are highly significant, because open risers catch feet.

Building Amenities

Some amenities in historic buildings, such as restrooms, seating, telephones, drinking fountains, counters, may contribute to a building's historic character. They will often require modification to improve their use by persons with disabilities. In many cases, supplementing existing amenities, rather than changing or removing them, will increase access and minimize changes to historic features and materials.

Upgrading Restrooms

Restrooms may have historic fixtures such as sinks, urinals, or marble partitions that can be retained in the process of making modifications. For example, larger restrooms can sometimes be reconfigured by relocating or combining partitions to create an accessible toilet stall. Other changes to consider are adding grab bars around toilets, covering hot water pipes

under sinks with insulation to prevent burns, and providing a sink, mirror, and paper dispenser at a height suitable for wheelchair users. A unisex restroom may be created if it is technically infeasible to create two fully accessible restrooms, or if doing so would threaten or destroy the significance of the building. It is important to remember that restroom fixtures, such as sinks, urinals, and partitions, may be historic, and therefore, should be preserved whenever possible.

Modifying Other Amenities

Other amenities inside historic buildings may require modification. Seating in a theater, for example, can be made accessible by removing some seats in several areas. New seating that is accessible can also be added at the end of existing rows, either with or without a level floor surface. Readily removable seats may be installed in wheelchair spaces when the spaces are not required to accommodate wheelchair users. Historic water fountains can be retained and new, two-tiered fountains installed if space permits. If public telephones are provided, it may be necessary to install at least a Text Telephone (TT), also known as a Telecommunication Device for the Deaf (TDD). Historic service counters commonly found in banks, theaters, and hotels generally should not be altered. It is preferable to add an accessible counter on the end of a historic counter if feasible. Modified or new counters should not exceed 36" (91.5 cm) in height.

Considering a New Addition as an Accessibility Solution

Many new additions are constructed specifically to incorporate modern amenities such as elevators, restrooms, fire stairs, and new mechanical equipment. These new additions often create opportunities to incorporate access for people with disabilities. It may be possible, for example, to create an accessible entrance, path to public levels via a ramp, lift, or elevator. However, a new addition has the potential to change a historic property's appearance and destroy significant building and landscape features. Thus, all new additions should be compatible with the size, scale, and proportions of historic features and materials that characterize a property.

New additions should be carefully located to minimize connection points with the historic building, such that if the addition were to be removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the building would remain intact. On the other hand, new additions should also be conveniently located near parking that is connected to an accessible route for people with disabilities. As new additions are incorporated, care should be taken to protect significant landscape features and archeological resources. Finally, the design for any new addition should be differentiated from the historic design so that the property's evolution over time is clear. New additions frequently make it possible to increase accessibility, while simultaneously reducing the level of change to historic features, materials, and spaces.

Making Historic Landscapes Accessible

To successfully incorporate access into historic landscapes, the planning process is similar to that of other historic properties. Careful research and inventory should be undertaken to determine which materials and features convey the landscape's historical significance. As part of this evaluation, those features that are character-defining (topographical variation, vegetation, circulation, structures, furnishings, objects) should be identified. Historic finishes, details, and materials that also contribute to a landscape's significance should also be documented and evaluated prior to determining an approach to landscape accessibility. For example, aspects of the pedestrian circulation system that need to be understood include walk width, aggregate size, pavement pattern, texture, relief, and joint details. The context of the walk should be understood including its edges and surrounding area. Modifications to surface textures or widths of pathways can often be made with minimal effect on significant landscape features.

Additionally, areas of secondary importance such as altered paths should be identified-especially those where the accessibility modifications will not destroy a landscape's significance. By identifying those features that are contributing or non-contributing, a sympathetic circulation experience can then be developed.

After assessing a landscape's integrity, accessibility solutions can be considered. Full access throughout a historic landscape may not always be possible. Generally, it is easier to provide accessibility to larger, more open sites where there is a greater variety of public experiences. However, when a landscape is uniformly steep, it may only be possible to make discrete portions of a historic landscape accessible, and viewers may only be able to experience the landscape from selected vantage points along a prescribed pedestrian or vehicular access route. When defining such a route, the interpretive value of the user experience should be considered; in other words, does the route provide physical or visual access to those areas that are critical to understand the meaning of the landscape?

Federal Accessibility Laws



Today, few building owners are exempt from providing accessibility for people with disabilities. Before making any accessibility modification, it is imperative to determine which laws and codes are applicable. In addition to local and State accessibility codes, the following federal accessibility laws are currently in effect:



The automatic door to this museum building is a practical solution for universal entry. Photo: NPS files.

Architectural Barriers Act (1968)

The Architectural Barriers Act stipulates that all buildings designed, constructed, and altered by the Federal Government, or with federal assistance, must be accessible. Changes made to federal buildings must meet the Uniform Federal Accessibility Standards (UFAS). Special provisions are included in UFAS for historic buildings that would be threatened or destroyed by meeting full accessibility requirements.

Rehabilitation Act (1973)

The Rehabilitation Act requires recipients of federal financial assistance to make their programs and activities accessible to everyone. Recipients are allowed to make their properties accessible by altering their building, by moving programs and activities to accessible spaces, or by making other accommodations.

Americans with Disabilities Act (1990)

Historic properties are not exempt from the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements. To the greatest extent possible, historic buildings must be as accessible as non-historic buildings. However, it may not be possible for some historic properties to meet

the general accessibility requirements.

Under Title II of the ADA, State and local governments must remove accessibility barriers either by shifting services and programs to accessible buildings, or by making alterations to existing buildings. For instance, a licensing office may be moved from a second floor to an accessible first floor space, or if this is not feasible, a mail service might be provided. However, State and local government facilities that have historic preservation as their main purpose-State-owned historic museums, historic State capitols that offer tours-must give priority to physical accessibility.

Under Title III of the ADA, owners of "public accommodations" (theaters, restaurants, retail shops, private museums) must make "readily achievable" changes; that is, changes that can be easily accomplished without much expense. This might mean installing a ramp, creating accessible parking, adding grab bars in bathrooms, or modifying door hardware. The requirement to remove barriers when it is "readily achievable" is an ongoing responsibility. When alterations, including restoration and rehabilitation work, are made, specific accessibility requirements are triggered.

Recognizing the national interest in preserving historic properties, Congress established alternative requirements for properties that cannot be made accessible without "threatening or destroying" their significance. A consultation process is outlined in the ADA's Accessibility Guidelines for owners of historic properties who believe that making specific accessibility modifications would "threaten or destroy" the significance of their property. In these situations, after consulting with persons with disabilities and disability organizations, building owners should contact the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) to determine if the special accessibility provisions for historic properties may be used. Further, if it is determined in consultation with the SHPO that compliance with the minimum requirements would also "threaten or destroy" the significance of the property, alternative methods of access, such as home delivery and audio-visual programs, may be used.

Summary and References

Historic properties are irreplaceable and require special care to ensure their preservation for future generations. With the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act, access to historic properties open to the public is a now civil right, and owners of historic properties must evaluate existing buildings and determine how they can be made more accessible. It is a challenge to evaluate properties thoroughly, to identify the applicable accessibility requirements, to explore alternatives and to implement solutions that provide independent access and are consistent with accepted historic preservation standards. Solutions for accessibility should not destroy a property's significant materials, features and spaces, but should increase accessibility as much as possible. Most historic buildings are not exempt from providing accessibility, and with careful planning, historic properties can be made more accessible, so that all citizens can enjoy our Nation's diverse heritage.

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This publication has been prepared pursuant to the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, which directs the Secretary of the Interior to develop and make available information concerning historic properties. Technical Preservation Services (TPS), National Park Service prepares standards, guidelines, and other educational materials on responsible historic preservation treatments for a broad public.

September 1993

Reading List

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U.S. Department of Justice
Civil Rights Division
Disability Rights Section



Americans with Disabilities Act

GUIDE FOR PLACES OF LODGING: SERVING GUESTS

WHO ARE BLIND OR WHO HAVE LOW VISION

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires places of public accommodation, including hotels, motels, and other places of transient lodging, to ensure that everyone regardless of disability has an equal opportunity to enjoy their services and facilities.

Your establishment is covered by the ADA as a place of public accommodation if it is a private entity and is a place of lodging (including inns, hotels, and motels), regardless of whether it is a for-profit or non-profit establishment. The ADA does not cover owner-occupied establishments renting five or fewer rooms.

Your ADA Obligations

Places of lodging, like other places of public accommodation, must provide their services to the public in a way that gives people who are blind or who have low vision a full and equal opportunity to enjoy the services that are provided to others. You must, for instance:

- Follow accessibility standards when constructing or altering facilities;

- Remove architectural or structural communication barriers in existing facilities where it is readily achievable to do so;
- Make reasonable modifications in policies and procedures (e.g., allow person to be accompanied by service animal or guide dog, even if a hotel has a ‘no pets’ policy);
- Eliminate discriminatory eligibility criteria (e.g., allow a guest to use alternative state ID to substitute for driver’s license at check-in); and
- Provide auxiliary aids and services leading to effective communication if it is not an undue burden and does not fundamentally alter the nature of the goods or services provided (e.g., provide alternate format materials such as Braille, large print, and audio tape when guest cannot read standard print materials due to a disability).

This publication is designed to help you and your staff to understand these obligations.

The ADA gives businesses a certain degree of flexibility in meeting these obligations. If some steps are too costly or burdensome for you to undertake, you must use alternative methods that are not so costly or burdensome in order to afford people with disabilities as much access as possible to your goods and services.

To make sure your hotel and the services you offer do not discriminate against people who are blind or who have low vision, it is helpful to think about how guests use your hotel:

How do guests arrive at your hotel and what do they do once they get there?

How do guests check-in and check-out?

How do they move about your facilities?

How are the rooms set up?

What in-room guest services are provided?

What other amenities are available?

People Who Are Blind or Who Have Low Vision

Approximately 2.5 million people in the United States are “legally blind” – meaning that even with corrective lenses, they have less than 20/200 visual

not simply laid on a counter or table. A piece of cardboard or a plastic or metal signature template can be used to indicate where a signature is required. Train your staff to simply place a cardboard edge horizontally below a signature line or orient the opening of a signature template wherever a signature is required.

Room Keys. Use of a passcard-type room key may be difficult for a guest who is blind or who has low vision. It is often not possible to determine by touch which way to place the card into the locking mechanism. One solution to this problem might be to place a small piece of tape on the card running in the same direction as the visual arrow and inform the guest as to its significance. Alternatively, a small corner of the card – on the side opposite the magnetic strip – can be clipped for easy tactile orientation.

Room Selection. Do not assume that a person who is blind or who has low vision will require or want to be placed in a room designated for people with disabilities. Just as you would with other guests, ask the person about his or her preferences. If someone is traveling with another person but they have requested separate rooms, ask whether they would prefer to be in adjoining rooms. For security reasons, most hotel receptionists inform the guest in writing of his or her room number. While guests who are blind or who have low vision should be told their room numbers orally, care should be taken so third parties do not overhear this information.

Information in Alternate Formats. Guests who are blind or who have low vision should be informed of all front desk information that is available to other guests through visual means – such as posted check-out times and acceptable methods of payment. All information that is available to others should be made available to people who are blind or who have low vision, in Braille, large print, audio recording, or orally. Some hotels have found it helpful to put all relevant information into a single package and inform guests who are blind or who have low vision of its availability at check-in.

Reviewing the Bill. Staff should give the guest a printed copy of his or her bill, even if the person cannot read standard print without assistance. If requested, you should also provide a large print copy. Staff should offer to review the entire bill with the guest in a way that respects the guest's privacy. When the person has checked out, offer to provide assistance in locating the shuttle bus or a taxi.

Guide Dogs and Other Service Animals

acuity or that their visual field is 20 degrees or less, regardless of acuity. Many of them have some residual vision. Only about 5% of blind people use Braille for reading; many people who are legally blind are able to read large print.

Many have “low vision.” Many have eyesight that is better than 20/200 or a visual field that is greater than 20 degrees, but they have some significant impairment that substantially limits their ability to see well under different circumstances. In some people, the center of the field of vision is obscured. In others, the peripheral vision is obscured, as though they are looking through a tunnel. Others have conditions that cause glare to produce rapid eye strain.

Many people who are blind or who have low vision wear very thick glasses or very dark sunglasses. Others carry white canes. Still others use service animals such as guide dogs. Some walk with another person who serves as a sighted guide. Some who are legally blind or who have low vision do not use a cane or a guide dog or wear glasses of any kind.

Arriving At the Hotel

Shuttle Buses. If you provide shuttle bus services, those services are subject to the ADA. Your shuttle bus drivers should be trained to offer assistance to people who are blind or who have low vision. Staff should inform guests who are blind or who have low vision of the presence of the shuttle bus. Drivers should announce all stops to riders who are blind or who have low vision. Service animals such as guide dogs should be permitted to accompany their handlers. For other requirements applicable to shuttle buses, please contact the Department of Transportation at 1-888-446-4511 (voice; TTY users should use relay service) or review their information online (www.fta.dot.gov/civilrights/civil_rights_2360.html).

Wayfinding. Staff who assist guests at the front door should offer assistance to guests who are blind or who have low vision in finding the Registration Desk or other hotel facilities.

Check-In and Check-Out Procedures

Front Desk. Hotel staff working with guests who are blind or who have low vision should introduce themselves by giving their names and functions.

Do not make assumptions about the extent of a person's visual acuity. Instead, you should inform the guest what services – including alternate format materials such as Braille, large print, and audio cassette versions of printed material normally provided to guests – are available, offer assistance, and be guided by his or her response. Many hotels have found it helpful to have a package prepared for guests who are blind or who have low vision. This package might include items such as alternate format materials, a high contrast template to fit over the telephone keypad, and a list of available services, such as increased lighting in a guest room.

If a guest refuses assistance or an offer of a particular accommodation, the law requires you to respect this refusal. If your guest requests assistance, let him or her guide you in the most effective way of responding to the request. You should not ask a guest for documentation that he or she is blind or has low vision.

If more than one person is in a party with a person who is blind or who has low vision, you should treat the group as you would any other and communicate directly with whomever approaches and speaks to the desk clerk; if the person who is blind or who has low vision is the one to approach the desk and ask for a room, the staff should talk directly to him or her rather than any travel companions.

Using Appropriate Language. Use disability-sensitive language and etiquette. Using words such as blind, visually impaired, seeing, looking, watching television are acceptable words in conversation. Similarly, using descriptive language, including references to color, patterns, and the like, is appropriate. When referring to guests with disabilities, refer to the person first, then the disability.

Forms and Documents. Upon request, staff should read fully, and provide assistance in completing, registration folios, hotel bills, service request forms, and other documents. You may find it more helpful to your guests to provide frequently used documents – including registration instructions – in Braille, cassette tape or telephone recording, and large print. Many people who are legally blind or who have low vision are able to read documents printed in 18 or 20 point type in a sans serif font such as Arial.

Payment. When handing currency to a guest, bills should be individually identified and counted. Credit cards should be handed to guests after imprint,

You must allow people with disabilities to go wherever guests are generally allowed, even when they are accompanied by guide dogs or other service animals. For detailed information about services animals, please refer to the Department of Justice's ADA guide, "Commonly Asked Questions About Service Animals in Places of Business."

Moving Throughout Your Facility

Guiding Techniques. It is a routine practice in many hotels to offer assistance to guests in finding their rooms and other facilities. It may be a reasonable modification of this practice to assist guests who are blind or who have low vision in wayfinding throughout their stay. If it appears that a guest would benefit from a sighted guide, you may identify yourself and offer assistance. If assistance is accepted, you may offer your arm to the guest. The guest will lightly hold your arm directly above the elbow. You should not pull or push the guest or hold his or her arm. Instead, relax and walk at a comfortable, normal pace. Allow the guest to walk a step or two behind you, and indicate changes in terrain, such as stairs, narrow spaces, and escalators, by hesitating briefly as you approach them and explaining what you are about to do. When seating the guest, ask if you may show him or her the back of the chair. If the response is yes, simply place the guest's hand on the chair back. When it is time for you to leave, indicate that you are leaving his or her presence. Staff should not touch or remove mobility canes unless requested to do so and should not interfere with service animals such as guide dogs.

Verbalizing Directions. When giving directions, do not point. Instead, explain the directions in words and be specific. Be sure to use right and left as they apply to the person who is blind. What is on your right is on the left of a person facing you. Indicate number of blocks to the department store and whether one proceeds right or left when exiting the hotel. Simply saying, "The department store is about six blocks down in that direction" is ineffective. Provide the address and, whenever possible, indicate such things as the number of doorways from the corner and distance. Similarly, be specific about directions to rooms within the hotel, e.g., "To find the Monroe Room, walk twenty feet forward, turn left, and it's the fifth room on your right."

Architectural Barriers. Assuming your place of lodging is not subject to the new construction and alteration provisions (discussed below), you must remove barriers to access for people with disabilities when it is 'readily

achievable' for you to do so. The term 'readily achievable' means "easily accomplishable and able to be carried out without much difficulty or expense." The Department of Justice's title III regulation lists factors to determine whether an action is readily achievable. 28 C.F.R. § 36.104.

New construction and alteration requirements. The ADA requires that newly constructed facilities, first occupied on or after January 26, 1993, meet or exceed the minimum requirements of the ADA Standards for Accessible Design (Standards). Alterations to facilities, spaces or elements (including renovations) on or after January 26, 1992, also must comply with the Standards. If you build a new facility or modify your existing one, (for example, work such as restriping the parking area, replacing the entry door or renovating the sales counter), make sure to consult the Standards and the title III regulations for the specific requirements. Renovations or modifications are considered to be alterations when they affect the usability of the element or space. For example, installing a new display counter, moving walls in a sales area, replacing fixtures, carpet or flooring, and replacing an entry door. However, simple maintenance, such as repainting a wall is not considered an alteration by the ADA.

The Standards can be found at Appendix A to the Department of Justice's title III regulation, 28 C.F.R. pt. 36. The entire regulation, including the Standards, is available online and from the Department of Justice's ADA Information Line. Contact information is listed below.

Signs. In newly constructed and altered facilities, signs that identify permanent rooms and spaces – including, but not necessarily limited to those identifying rest rooms, exits, or room numbers – must meet the following requirements, 28 C.F.R. pt. 36, App. A, "ADA Standards for Accessible Design," (Standards) § 4.1.3(16)(a):\

- Raised and Braille letters or numbers (Standards § 4.30.4);
- Mounting location (§ 4.30.6);
- Color contrast (§ 4.30.5); and
- Non-glare surface (§ 4.30.5).

Signs that provide direction to, or information about, functional spaces (§ 4.1.3(16)(b)) must comply with requirements for:

- Character proportion (§ 4.30.2);
- Character height (§ 4.30.3); and
- Finish and contrast between the characters and background (§ 4.30.5).

Elevators. In newly constructed or altered facilities, elevators must comply with specific design standards regarding the following:

- Hall call button orientation, mounting location, and visual signals (§ 4.10.3);
- Hall lantern audible and visual signals, size, and mounting location (§ 4.10.4);
- Raised and Braille characters on elevator hoistway entrances (door jambs), including mounting location and size (§ 4.10.5);
- Door protective and reopening devices (§ 4.10.6);
- Door and signal timing for hall calls (§ 4.10.7);
- Door delay for car calls (§ 4.10.8);
- Illumination levels (§ 4.10.11);
- Car control size, mounting height and location, and tactile, Braille, and visual indicators (§ 4.10.12);
- Car position indicators (§ 4.10.13); and
- Emergency communications (§ 4.10.14).

Existing facilities must remove barriers to the extent that doing so is readily achievable.

Guest Rooms and In-Room Guest Services

Orientation to the Room. Guests who are blind or who have low vision should be offered a thorough orientation to their guest rooms. If the guest accepts the offer, staff should explain the location of the bed, desk (and associated electrical outlet and data port, if provided), dresser, table and chairs, thermostat, television and remote control, light switches and lighting, closet, suitcase stand, and telephone. Staff should also offer to tell the guest how to operate the drapery controls and explain whether the curtains are open or closed and opaque or see-through. Staff should offer to turn the lights on for guests with low vision. If a microwave oven, coffee maker, or safe is provided, its location and operating instructions should also be given. When orienting the guest to the bathroom, staff should explain how to work the shower, where the linens, ice bucket, and glasses are located, and what complementary toiletries (shampoo, lotion, soap, etc.) are provided and how

to distinguish them from each other. Staff may also offer to set up the iron and ironing board.

Staff should always inform guests as to the location of the nearest fire exit, using specific language such as, “In case of a fire, exit your room to the left. The emergency exit stairway will be the fifth door on your right.”

It is also helpful to inform the guest as to the location of ice and soda dispensers, using similarly specific language.

Lighting. Many who are legally blind or who have low vision will appreciate an increase in the amount of available lighting in their rooms. Simply changing light bulbs to a higher wattage or providing extra floor and table lamps may make a significant difference to them. Some hotels inform guests who are blind or who have low vision of the availability of additional room lighting when they check in.

Instructions for Use. During check-in, hotels should inform guests who are blind or who have low vision that the hotel will provide, free of charge, large print, Braille, and recorded instructions for all services for which print instructions are provided for guests. Some of the more common instructions include:

- Telephone – including dialing instructions, local and long distance charges, and a list of the in-house numbers for room service, wake-up calls, etc.;
- Room service menus, hours of operation, and telephone number;
- Television – including a list of available channels, instructions and charges for ordering in-house movies, etc.;
- Thermostat – including any automatic features, location of ‘on’ and ‘off’ switches, etc.;
- Laundry, valet, and water-conservation policies;
- Security instructions;
- Check-out policy.

Guests may require assistance when ordering movies or using other television features, as choices are only visual and change frequently.

Recorded instructions can be provided on a telephone answering machine or by loaning the guest a cassette recording and cassette player upon check-in. A reasonable, fully refundable deposit may be required for cassette players.

Guest Room Telephones. Many people who are legally blind or who have low vision find it very difficult to see individual numbers on dial pads and important graphics (e.g., for room service, front desk, etc.) on guest room telephones. Most guest room phones are in beige or another neutral color and do not have much contrast between the background color and the color in which graphic information and numbers are displayed. High contrast large print templates can be fashioned to fit over the telephone keypad. Such templates can greatly reduce the number of repeat calls to hotel operators by people who simply cannot see all of the information displayed on the telephone. Some hotels provide such templates in the package of information they provide upon check-in to guests who are blind or who have low vision.

Emergencies. Emergency evacuation instructions should be provided in a way that can be used effectively in the event of an emergency. One way to do this would be to hang Braille and large print evacuation instructions on the back of the door, adjacent to where they are posted for others to see. Audiotapes may not provide effective communication in the event of an emergency.

Restaurants and Lounges

When a guest who is blind or who has low vision is entering, leaving, or maneuvering through a restaurant, you should offer to provide assistance using the techniques described above in the section titled, "Sighted Guide Techniques."

Seating arrangements. Ask the guest about his or her lighting preferences. Would he or she prefer to be near a window? Would he or she prefer a table with strong lighting? If the guest will be eating from a buffet, would he or she prefer to sit near it? In any case, do not try to "hide" your guests with disabilities by placing them in secluded areas.

Buffets. For buffet service, offer assistance in identifying and serving food on the buffet table. If one of the guest's hands is occupied by holding a cane or using a service animal, staff may offer assistance in carrying the food to the table.

Menus. Hotels should provide menus in alternate formats including Braille, large print, and audio recording. Additionally, staff should offer to read the menu, including listings and prices. When reading a menu, staff should first read broad categories of items and allow the guest to choose which

categories are of interest. Do not rely on sighted companions to provide menu reading assistance, unless your guests indicate that is their preference.

Assistance During the Meal. Staff should ask guests who are blind or who have low vision whether they would like any assistance during the meal. Some guests may ask the wait staff to explain the arrangement of the tableware and describe the placement of food and beverage items as they are being served. One way to assist your guest would be to describe the location of the food or beverage using the face of a clock. For example, “Your meat is at 6 o’clock and your vegetables are at 3 o’clock.” Staff should speak directly to people with disabilities, not to their nondisabled companions, when it their turn to order.

Because some guests who are blind or who have low vision may have difficulty locating their servers, staff should remember to return to the table from time to time, announce their presence, and ask whether the guests need anything else. Staff should also offer to assist guests who are blind or who hve low vision in locating restrooms.

Paying the Bill. With regard to reviewing the bill, handling currency and credit cards, and signing sales slips, restaurant staff should follow the same procedures discussed above in the section entitled “Check-In and Check-Out Procedures.”

Gift Shops

Follow the techniques described above to help guests who are blind or who have low vision shop in your stores. Offer assistance with locating items and reading price tags. Identify individual bills when handing currency to a guest. Hand credit cards back to your guest, rather than leaving them on a counter. Provide signature templates or use a piece of cardboard to indicate where your guest should provide a signature.

Recreational Facilities

Guests who are blind or who have low vision generally have the same right to use your recreational facilities as others. Unless there is a legitimate safety reason why someone cannot use a facility – a sound reason that is not based on stereotypes and that cannot be ameliorated by providing auxiliary aids

and services or making reasonable policy modifications – you cannot exclude them from recreational activities. An example of when it might be appropriate to exclude a blind person would be if your hotel offers a go-cart track and requires users to be licensed drivers, and the person is not a licensed driver. You cannot ask people who are blind or who have low vision to sign waivers of liability unless everyone who uses the equipment or amenities is also asked to do so. Any instructions for use – including hours of operation and safety rules – should be communicated orally to persons who are blind or who have low vision. If you use passcard-style keys for recreation areas, you should make those keys accessible to people who are blind or who have low vision, using the simple techniques described in “Check-In and Check-Out Procedures.”

Additionally, it can be difficult or impossible for people who are blind or who have low vision to use electronic exercise equipment, if equipment controls are on a touchscreen or touchpad. Simply putting a piece of tape over the “on/off” button and informing your guests of the tape’s significance can make the equipment more usable.

Business and Conference Facilities

You will find that the techniques described above to assist guests who are blind or who have low vision in moving throughout your hotel will also help them use your business and conference facilities.

Staff Training

Providing good training to your staff is perhaps the single most important step you can take towards meeting your ADA obligations. A training program should include each of the subjects discussed in this publication and should be updated on a regular basis. It is always a good practice to involve people who are blind or who have low vision in the development of your training programs.

Tax Credits and Deductions

To assist businesses with complying with the ADA, Section 44 of the IRS Code allows a tax credit for small businesses and Section 190 of the IRS Code allows a tax deduction for all businesses. The tax credit is available to businesses that have total revenues of \$1,000,000 or less in the previous tax year or 30 or fewer full-time employees. This credit can be up to \$5,000 annually – reimbursement for 50% of your eligible access expenditures in a year, for expenditures between \$250 and \$10,250. The tax credit can be used to offset the cost of undertaking barrier removal and alterations to improve accessibility; providing accessible formats such as Braille, large print, and audio tape; making available a sign language interpreter or a reader for guests or employees, and for purchasing adaptive equipment. The tax deduction is available to all businesses with a maximum deduction of \$15,000 per year. The tax deduction can be claimed for expenses incurred in barrier removal and alterations.

Sources of Technical Assistance

Department of Justice's ADA Information Line

The ADA Information Line is available during weekdays to provide technical assistance on the ADA Standards for Accessible Design and other ADA provisions applying to businesses, non-profit service agencies and state and local government programs. It also provides a 24-hour automated service for ordering ADA materials. This free service provides answers to general and technical questions about ADA requirements and is a source for free ADA materials including the ADA Standards for Accessible Design. You may reach the [ADA Information Line](#) at:

800-514-0301 (voice)

800-514-0383 (TTY)

ADA information is also available on the Department's ADA Home Page:

<http://www.ada.gov/index.html>

Other Documents Available from the Department of Justice

- [Self-Evaluation Checklist for Hotels and Motels to Ensure Access to Services and Facilities by Customers Who Are Blind, Deaf-Blind, or Visually-Impaired](#)
- [Common ADA Errors and Omissions in New Construction and Alterations](#)
- [Common ADA Problems at Newly Constructed Lodging Facilities](#)
- [ADA Checklist for New Lodging Facilities](#)
- [Five Steps to Make New Lodging Facilities Comply With the ADA | Acrobat PDF format](#)
- [Title III regulation, including the ADA Standards for Accessible Design](#)
- [Title III Technical Assistance Manual](#)
- [Tax Incentives Packet on the Americans with Disabilities Act](#)
- [Accommodating All Guests: The Americans with Disabilities Act and the Lodging Industry," which was prepared in conjunction with the American Hotel & Motel Association.](#)

Disability and Business Technical Assistance Centers (DBTACs)

Ten regional centers are funded by the Department of Education to provide technical assistance on the ADA. Calling 800-949-4232 (voice & TTY) will connect you to the center in your region, or reach them on the Internet, www.adata.org.

Access Board

The Access Board offers technical assistance on the ADA Accessibility Guidelines. Call 800-872-2253 (voice) or 800-993-2822 (TTY), or reach them on the Internet, www.access-board.gov.

Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)

The EEOC offers technical assistance on the ADA provisions for employment which apply to businesses with 15 or more employees.

Employment questions: 800-669-4000 (voice)
800-669-6820 (TTY)

Employment documents: 800-669-3362 (voice)
800-800-3302 (TTY)

www.eeoc.gov

Local Libraries

Technical assistance materials including the title III regulations that apply to businesses have been distributed to 15,000 libraries nationwide. This collection is known as the ADA Information File. Contact your local or regional library to find if it has the ADA Information File and where it is located. You may also contact your regional DBTAC (800-949-4232) to obtain the name of a local library that has the ADA Information File.

The Americans with Disabilities Act authorizes the Department of Justice (the Department) to provide technical assistance to individuals and entities that have rights or responsibilities under the Act. This document provides informal guidance to assist you in understanding the ADA and the Department's regulations.

This guidance document is not intended to be a final agency action, has no legally binding effect, and may be rescinded or modified in the Department's complete discretion, in accordance with applicable laws. The Department's guidance documents, including this guidance, do not establish legally enforceable responsibilities beyond what is required by the terms of the applicable statutes, regulations, or binding judicial precedent.

Reproduction of this document is encouraged.

January 2001

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: October 09, 2008



Help Center

Coronavirus outbreak ✕

The World Health Organization has declared the coronavirus outbreak a global health emergency. Impacted hosts and guests can find info on our [Extenuating circumstances policy for coronavirus](#) page.

[Learn more](#)

[Help Center](#) > [Airbnb community](#) > [Accessibility](#) > [What does Airbnb do to support accessibility?](#)

Getting started

[Your account](#)

Airbnb community

[Accessibility](#)

[Airbnb magazine](#)

[Neighbors and local communities](#)

Trust and safety

What does Airbnb do to support accessibility?

To make it easier for people with disabilities and other accessibility needs travel on Airbnb, we've taken action to make our website and app more accessible, and created ways for hosts and guests to showcase and search for accessible spaces.

Accessibility in our website and app

In collaboration with [Lighthouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired](#) and [Level Access](#), we've begun researching how people with limited vision use screen access technology to use our website and app. We've learned a lot about what's working and what isn't, and we've created a team dedicated to educating our engineers and designers about how to create online experiences that everyone can use. [Learn more about how we design for accessibility.](#)

Spaces with accessibility features

Hosts can highlight features of their home that make it more accessible for guests who use wheelchairs, canes, or other mobility aids. If a home already has things like a well-lit entrance or wide hallways, hosts can add these as features to their listing. Additionally, Airbnb requires hosts to show photos of any accessibility features mentioned, so that guests will have a clearer idea of what might fit their needs. [Learn how to add accessibility features.](#)

Guests can easily search for places that will be a good fit by using accessibility features. For example, guests can filter search results so they only see homes with an elevator or an entrance without steps. [Learn how to search for accessible listings.](#)

We ask hosts and guests to work together to figure out if a space will work. We expect our hosts to be open to discussing accessibility details with guests, and sometimes make small adjustments to help a guest safely and comfortably move through a home. [Learn how hosts can support guests with disabilities.](#)

Additionally, in the United States, the Americans with Disabilities Act and state disability access laws may apply to some hosts with five or more listings. We encourage hosts to visit ada.gov and contact an expert who can advise you about your listings. The ADA National Network and its [regional ADA centers](#) may also be able to help hosts with questions.

Assistance animals

We recognize that assistance animals are not pets, and that they serve a critical function for their owners. If an assistance animal is housebroken and under control, a host is required to accept it (even if the host doesn't allow pets), except for [limited health and safety reasons](#). [Learn more about assistance animals.](#)

Nondiscrimination Policy

Our community is built on the principles of inclusion and respect, and we don't support discrimination of any kind on Airbnb. [Learn about our Nondiscrimination Policy](#).

We understand that not all homes will meet a guest's needs, but hosts can't turn a guest down just because the guest has a disability. To report discrimination of any kind on Airbnb, [report your issue to us](#).

Contact us

We're continuing to work on making Airbnb more accessible, and are here to help. To get help using Airbnb, or to report a home that was incorrectly described as accessible, [contact us](#) to get in touch with a member of our team.

Did you get the help you needed?

Give us feedback

VICE VICE ON TV I-D IMPACT REFINERY29

HB 771 - Bed
Height

MOTHERBOARD
TECH BY VICE

New Study Quantifies Airbnb's Widespread Exclusion of Disabled Guests

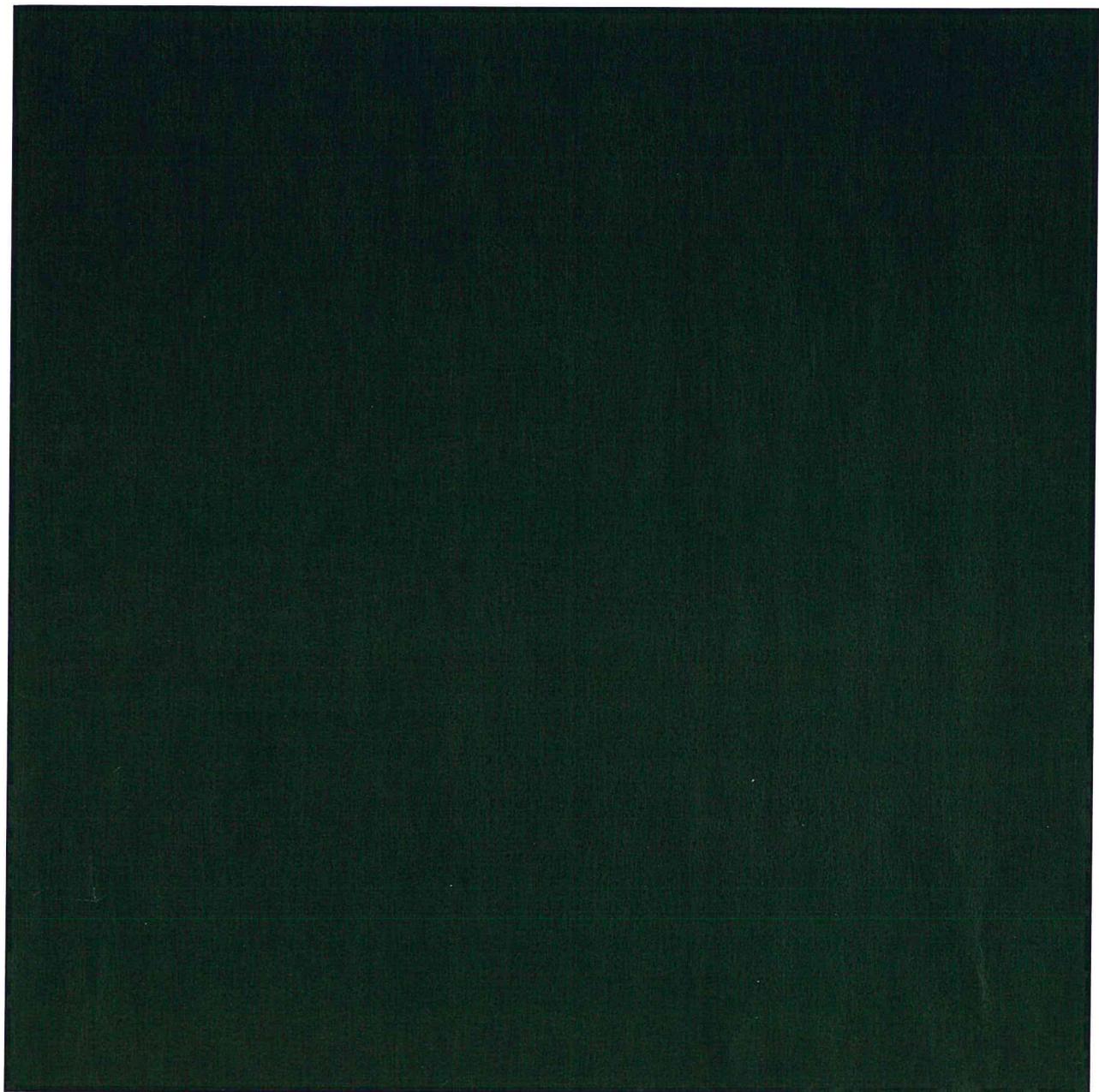
Less than half of would-be guests with cerebral palsy can expect to be pre-approved for an Airbnb stay.

By **Michael Byrne**

Jun 5 2017, 11:00am



In late April, **Sean Gray**, founder of **Is This Venue Accessible** and a key figure in the DC-area punk scene, was making plans to travel from Washington DC to Brooklyn to see noise-rock band the Cherubs play a reunion show at Saint Vitus. It was a one-night trip, and Gray, who has cerebral palsy and uses a walker, sent a message to a potential host asking about accessibility. The exchange went like this:



Gray had used Airbnb a few times in the past, but usually tries to stay in hotels. "I'm not a heavy user of it," he told me. "Mostly due to shit like this." This trip, however, he was strapped for cash, and, besides, hotel accommodations in New York City are a luxury commodity. He managed to book another Airbnb, but it "still had one or two steps and was a shithole."

Gray's experience is far from isolated, according to **a new report** from Rutgers University. Based on a randomized experiment consisting of nearly

4,000 booking requests, "Hosts were less likely to preapprove, and more likely to reject outright, the requests from travelers with disabilities than requests from travelers without disabilities," the study found. "The preapproval rate was 75 percent for travelers without disabilities, compared to 61 percent for travelers with dwarfism, 50 percent for travelers with blindness, 43 percent for travelers with cerebral palsy, and 25 percent for travelers with spinal cord injury."

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 is designed to prohibit discrimination based on disability. It applies to businesses ranging from restaurants to airlines to hotels and theoretically ensures that reasonable accommodation will be afforded to those with disabilities, including those with wheelchairs, walkers, service animals, and the blind. Generally, the ADA did not anticipate the sharing economy. With respect to Airbnb, its protections do not apply to owner-operated lodgings with fewer than six rental units. Which is much of the service. 

Nonetheless, Airbnb instituted its own non-discrimination policy last year. In a statement this week, the company said, "Discrimination of any kind on the Airbnb platform, including on the basis of ability, is abhorrent, a violation of our anti-discrimination policy and will result in permanent removal from our platform." I've reached out to Airbnb for comment on Gray's rejection and will update if and when it responds.

The Rutgers study concludes with some suggestions as to how Airbnb can address the problem. They range from simple education—informing hosts covered by the ADA that they are indeed covered by the ADA, for example—to the usage of "mystery shoppers" for checking disability policy compliance to developing principles in concert with disability advocacy organizations.

The real problem, however, is unlikely to be solved by Airbnb itself. The problem is instead the law that lets hosts off the hook in the first place. "If we're entering an era where these new types of hotels, which are essentially private homes, can't offer accommodations, it defeats and undoes all of the progress we've made with the ADA as far as equal access is concerned," Mason Ameri, co-author of the new study, **told the *New York Times***. "The law needs to catch up with services like Airbnb."

Gray is skeptical that a fix exists at all. This is just the nature of the sharing economy, and, well, it's bullshit. Just a week before the Airbnb incident, he was rejected by an Uber driver unwilling to accommodate Gray's walker. "At this point Uber, Airbnb, etc are like Walmart of the sharing economy," he said. "Hashtag protest all you want but if getting a room through Airbnb is sometimes 75 percent cheaper than a hotel, there will never be a shortage of consumers."

"And people with disabilities are a very, very small amount of consumers," Gray added. "Until their backs are against the wall, [companies like Airbnb] won't do anything."

TAGGED: TECH, MOTHERBOARD, UBER, ADA, AIRBNB, AMERICANS WITH DISABILITY ACT

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