

Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, Inc.  
Affiliate Chapter Relations Committee

Affiliate Chapter Handbook  
Third Edition  
Section 30

Open to All:  
How to Ensure Accessibility

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Written/Compiled by the Affiliate Chapter Relations Committee, 2001-2007.

## Editor's Note

This section is one in a series of sections of the Affiliate Chapter Handbook intended to assist affiliate chapters in developing and maintaining a functional chapter of the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, Inc. Each section has been prepared with the needs of the affiliate chapters in mind based on feedback provided to the Affiliate Chapter Relations Committee (ACRC) by the membership during the 2001 RID Convention, Orlando, Florida, and from the Affiliate Chapter Relations Committee survey of affiliate chapters.

### The ACRC Mission Statement:

It is the mission of the Affiliate Chapter Relations Committee to clarify and strengthen the organizational structure of the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, Inc. by acting in an advisory capacity, representing the interest of the affiliate chapters and promoting best practices so that affiliation is valued by chapters and by individual members.

The design, organization and composition of the membership of affiliate chapters across the country vary. To accommodate the diversity of affiliate chapter needs, each section (or parts thereof) may not apply to every affiliate chapter. The challenge was to develop all-inclusive sections with the understanding that each individual affiliate chapter may or may not need the information in its entirety.

The Affiliate Chapter Handbook is intended to be a “living document” with updates, additions and/or deletions made accordingly and in a timely manner by the ACRC. Suggestions and inquiries to the Affiliate Chapter Handbook or the ACRC may be directed through the RID National Office, Membership Services Coordinator, or via e-mail at [membership@rid.org](mailto:membership@rid.org).

The Affiliate Chapter Relations Committee would like to express its' sincere appreciation to the following individuals for their assistance with various sections of the Affiliate Chapter Handbook.

### Cultural Diversity in Leadership Committee, 2003-2005

Janet L. Bailey, RID President, 1991-1995

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Cindy Farnham

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## Open to All: How to Ensure Accessibility

How often do you think about accessibility? Chances are, unless you have recently broken a leg or taken your Great Aunt Hilda out to the store, you have not thought about it too much. In our role as Sign Language Interpreters, we are knowledgeable about the need to ensure language and communication accessibility. In actuality, there is much more involved than making sure there is a professional interpreter at your meetings and events.

Accessibility is really about equality. Equal access is making sure that everyone has a voice and an opportunity to understand and fully participate in any event or activity. The vast majority of those in our profession are able-bodied, hearing people. By virtue of that simple demographic, awareness of the steps to ensure accessibility for all can be overlooked. For many, when the concept of accessibility is mentioned, the ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) comes to mind. Wide doorways, lever handles on doors, accessible bathrooms, flashing strobes on fire alarms and providing interpreters are some of the nuts and bolts of the ADA; those are the details that make engineers happy and business owners cringe at the expense. It is often referred to as following the letter of the ADA; however, we should also strive to capture the spirit of the ADA and its' intended purpose, heart and soul. Going that extra step to do the right thing to accommodate all is the goal.

Going that extra step is also in the language that we use. If you notice, in this section, the word “handicapped” is never used. Neither is “differently-abled”, “physically challenged”, or “handi-capable”. Those are terms developed by able-bodied people in an effort to be more politically correct. The terms accessible/accessibility, person with a disability, and someone using a wheelchair are all words or phrases that carry a more positive connotation than “handicapped” or the other terms. Of course, much like there are individual preferences within the d/Deaf community for the words chosen to self-identify (Deaf, deaf, hard of hearing, hearing impaired, etc.), there is no single answer or word in the disability community. Identity, of course, is a personal choice.

OK, so you know that you need a working interpreter at meetings and events when there are d/Deaf present, but how often are there d/Deaf affiliate chapter members on a planning or coordinating team? When planning a conference or event, having both d/Deaf and hearing members on the planning committees is optimal. Having d/Deaf members on executive boards and affiliate chapter committees enriches the dynamics and content of the various groups. The groups can then provide a balanced and fair representation of the people with whom we work and will honor the diversity of the profession. For any event, workshop or conference, the official languages, at the very least, should be ASL (American Sign Language) and English (in some locations, Spanish or French/Quebecois should also be included). At any event where there are d/Deaf people present, everyone should be encouraged to use ASL or the native visual language. It is the common

language we share and by using it, all event participants are included and all are on equal ground.

Now I'll ask you to think about the physical and logistical aspects of your events.

- Are your meetings or events held in buildings with steps but no ramps?
- Are they upstairs in a building with no elevator?
- Are the rooms large enough to accommodate scooters and wheelchairs along with the regular seating?
- Are the tables in meeting rooms high enough so that someone using a wheelchair can comfortably sit at them?
- If you are having an event large enough to require aisles and a microphone, are aisles wide enough to accommodate mobility impairments?
- Are there spaces at the ends of the rows to accommodate scooters or wheelchairs?
- Are the bathrooms accessible?
- Are the fire alarms visually accessible?
- Can the meeting or event occur in more accessible location?

#### HIDDEN DISABILITIES:

Many people live with disabilities that go unnoticed and therefore unaccommodated. Examples of such disabilities include:

- Scent and/or environmental chemical allergies and sensitivity
- Cognitive delays
- Epilepsy
- Mental Illness
- HIV/Cancer/Depression
- Etc.

The results of those not being considered can range from something minor with short-term effects to extremely serious.

If you are planning an event and are not sure of what might be needed to be fully accessible and inclusive, you can contact your local Center for Independent Living, Protection and Advocacy Office, or Office for Persons with Disabilities for advice. Having a person with a disability “walk through” your event site, taking note of what might be needed or changed, would also be advisable. After all, who best to know what is needed than someone who lives with a disability every day?

All of these are seemingly minor considerations, but for someone with a disability, the little things, especially the language chosen and the attitudes of the organizers, staff and volunteers, really make a difference. That's what I meant by following the spirit of the ADA. It's the difference between feeling like an inconvenience and feeling welcome.

## A Checklist for General Accessibility

	Yes	No
1) Is there accessible parking? If so, how many spaces?		
2) Is there at least one “extra wide” parking space to accommodate a van with a lift?		
3) Are there curb cuts near the accessible parking?		
4) Are there curb cuts near the main entrance to the building?		
5) If there are stairs, is there also a ramp, lift, or alternative entrance?		
6) Can doors be opened without too much force? (less than 5 lbs of force – try opening it with one or two fingers)		
7) Are there power doors?		
8) Do fire and emergency alarms have both visible and audible signals?		
9) Are the entrance(s) and meeting room doors wide enough to accommodate a wheelchair or scooter (32”)?		
10) Are there accessible restrooms; stalls large enough for a wheelchair to turn around?		
11) Is the event being planned by a d/Deaf and hearing team?		
12) Are there interpreters provided?		
13) Are the tables in meeting rooms high enough to accommodate someone in a wheelchair? (Wheelchairs are roughly 2”-4” higher than a regular chair.)		
14) If there is an opportunity or need for general audience comments using a microphone, can a person in a wheelchair, scooter or using crutches/cane get to the microphone?		
15) If you are serving beverages or food, especially a buffet, is it placed at a height that can be reached independently by someone using a wheelchair or scooter?		
16) If a Blind or Deaf-Blind person is expected, are there materials in Braille and/or large print format, and/or are the documents on a disk so that they can be made into large print on the spot?		
17) If a Deaf-Blind person is expected, have the appropriate interpreters been scheduled?		
18) If someone arrives with excessive perfume or cologne, is someone prepared to ask him or her to leave or sit farther away?		

This is by no means an exhaustive list. It is merely a beginning and a framework with which to start.

For events being planned that require an overnight or weekend stay in a hotel, the following checklist is used by RID for National Conferences.

**Hotel Accessibility Review (American Public Health Association)**

Hotel: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Hotel Contact/Title: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Parking, Drop-Off Areas, Hotel Entrance</b>	Yes	No
1) Is there overnight accessible parking in the garage adjacent to the hotel?		
2) Is there valet parking?		
3) Can the hotel garage accommodate raised roof accessible vans (8'6" high)?		
4) Are there curb cuts leading from the valet parking area to the main entrance?		
5) Are there curb cuts at the passenger drop off area?		
6) Are there accessible on-street parking spaces in front of the hotel? Where are these located?		
7) How many main entrances are there to the hotel?		
8) If there are stairs at the main entrance, is there also a ramp or lift?		
9) Can doors be opened without too much force? (i.e. less than 5lbs of force)		
10) Is the main entrance equipped with power doors?		
11) If there is a vestibule, is there adequate space (48") for a wheelchair to rest free of the door swing?		

**Public Areas**

1) Does the accessible entrance provide direct access to the main floor, lobby or elevators?		
2) Is the registration desk accessible to a wheelchair user?		
3) Is there at least one wheelchair accessible pay or public phone (clear floor space of at least 30"-48" in front)? Location?		
4) Is there a phone equipped with text telephone TTY or TDD? Where is it located?		
5) Is there at least one drinking fountain with clear floor space of at least 30" by 48"? Where is this located?		
6) If there are raised or sunken public areas, are the same services available on the accessible levels?		
7) Is there an accessible route to all self-service areas?		
8) How many wheelchair accessible public restrooms are there? # Men's: Location(s): # Women's: Location(s):		
9) Do fire and emergency alarms have both audible and visual signals?		

### Meeting Rooms

1) Do doors into public spaces and meeting rooms have at least a 32" clear opening?		
2) Do permanent room signs comply with requirements for accessible signage?		
3) Is there at least 18" of clear wall space on the pull side of the door, next to the handle?		
4) Are door handles 48" high or less (are they operable with a closed fist)?		
5) Is there a portable assistive listening system available?		
6) How many floors are meetings rooms located on?		
7) Please list any meeting rooms or public areas that are not accessible:		

### Restaurants

1) How many food outlets/restaurants are on property?		
2) Are all food outlets/restaurants accessible to people in wheelchairs?		

### Hotel Amenities

1) Are all recreation areas/exercise facilities on an accessible route of travel?		
2) Is the hotel business center accessible?		
3) Is the pool area accessible?		
4) Is the pool equipped with a lift?		
5) Are both the men's and women's changing room on an accessible route of travel?		
6) Are accessible lockers available in both the men's & women's changing rooms?		
7) Do both the men's and women's changing rooms have one accessible roll-in shower with a hand held shower on a hose with an adjustable height bar?		
8) Is there a folding seat for the roll in showers?		

### Elevators

1) Do elevators have visible and audible door opening/closing (one tone = up, two tones = down) and floor indicators?		
2) Do the elevator controls inside the cab, and the call button outside, have raised and/or Braille lettering?		
3) Are elevator controls (inside and call button outside) located at or below 54"?		

**Accessible Guest Rooms**

1) How many total guestrooms are there in your property?		
2) How many wheelchair accessible rooms are on property?		
3) How many of these accessible rooms have roll-in showers?		
4) Is there adequate space for a rollaway bed?		
5) Are king, queen and double bed options available in accessible rooms?		
6) Does the door have "lever" hardware?		
7) Does the door have a lock with a key that is easily operable with one hand?		
8) Is the security lock easily operable and located within 48" of floor?		
9) Are air-conditioning controls, light switches, etc. within the range of reach?		
10) Are closet rods located within the range of reach?		
11) Are drapery controls easily operable?		

**Bathrooms in Wheelchair Accessible Guest Rooms**

1) Is the door at least 32" wide?		
2) Is there at least 18" clearance on the pull side?		
3) Does door have lever hardware?		
4) Is the threshold of the door less than 1/2" high?		
5) Are there grab bars behind and on the sidewall nearest to the toilet?		
6) Is the toilet seat 17" - 19" high?		
7) Is a built in transfer seat provided at the tub?		
8) Is a portable tub seat available?		
9) Are grab bars provided on the sidewall of the tub?		
10) Does the sink provide 29" of clearance below the front apron? Is the sink rim no higher than 34"?		
11) Is the sink faucet operable with a closed fist?		
12) Are soap and other dispensers 48" high or less and usable with one closed fist?		
13) Is there a roll-in shower (min. 36" x 60")?		
14) Does it have a folding seat?		
15) Is there a hand held shower on a hose with adjustable height bar?		
16) Is the shower control operable with a closed fist?		
17) Are towels and other amenities located within the accessible range of reach?		

**Rooms for Guests with Hearing Loss**

1) Do you have in-house kits that can be installed in guestrooms for people who are deaf/hard of hearing? And if so, how many kits do you have?		
2) Do your kits include: Notification device for door knocking?		
Notification device for telephone ringing?		
Notification device for alarm clock?		
Text telephones (TTY or TDD)?		
3) What else do your kits include?		
4) Do all TVs have closed captioning? If not, how many do?		
5) Are there visual emergency warning devices in all accessible rooms?		

**Usability of Standard Guest Rooms**

1) Do standard rooms have a minimum of 28" clear opening width?		
2) What is the clear opening width of the bathroom door?		
3) Do standard rooms have grab bars on the tub walls?		
4) Is there adequate space between beds and furniture for a person using a wheelchair or scooter?		
5) Are lights and temperature controls within an accessible reach?		