Accessibility within the Society of American Archivists

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Bit.ly: https://bit.ly/3aT0uTe
Very *brief* history of accessibility initiatives @ SAA

- **2008-2009:** [Archives Management/Records Management Joint Working Group on Accessibility in Archives](#)
- **2018-2019:** [Task Force to Revise the Best Practices on Accessibility](#)
Guidelines for Accessible Archives for People with Disabilities

- Revision and expansion of 2008 Best Practices
- Topics Include:
  - Core Values
  - Physical Environment
  - Public Services
  - Exhibitions and Public Programming
  - Workplace
  - Digital Content
Core Values

- Treat every person with dignity and respect.
- Consider people first in all accessibility decisions.
- Disclosing a disability is a choice.
- Respect personal boundaries. Physical assistive devices are considered part of the body of the person using those devices.
- Be flexible
- Factor accessibility into every aspect of institutional spaces, policies, and services.
Physical Environment

- Americans with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines for Buildings and Facilities (ADAAG) guidance
- Not as much awareness or compliance of ADA guidelines within buildings

Photo credit: Hiroko Masuike/The New York Times
Hunter’s Point Library
Physical Environment

- Doors with automatic openers, wide enough to accommodate wheelchairs and scooters
- Eliminate obstacles that could be tripping hazards or obstacles
- Signage should be in large print, Braille
- Height adjustable tables and chairs

Photo credit: Lydia Tang. Patron unable to open reading room door
Former Reading Room

Desk too high!
Digital Scholarship Lab
Former Reading Room

Crowded aisles, not adjustable desks, chairs not height-adjustable, etc.
New Reading Room!
Height-Adjustable Tables
Public Services

● Know what you can and can’t ask re: service animals
  ○ “Is this a service animal required because of a disability?”
  ○ “What task is the animal trained to perform?”
  ○ NOT “What is your disability?” or documentation of the disability
● Know what assistive technology is available and how to get it started
  ○ Many people might bring their own assistive technology
● Flexible communication
  ○ Come around from the desk, if it’s too high
  ○ Written communication, volume/speed of speech
● Flexible spaces
  ○ Light adjustment?
  ○ Alternative reading room for people with sensory issues, etc.
Important!

- Assistive devices (cane, wheelchair, etc) are considered an extension of the person. Do not touch or move person/assistive device without consent.
- Service animals are working - do not pet them without permission.
- Listen to the person and meet their need but avoid gestures that can be infantilizing, cute, dismissive, out of step.
  - If someone is blind, speaking louder and slower.
  - Using terms such as “special needs,” “handicapped” (origin of term: hand-in-cap).
Exhibitions and Public Programming

- Exhibit items and their labels should be visible to a seated person. For example, if labels or materials are stored on a flat surface, angle them for better visibility.
- Cater to multiple senses
- **Always** use a microphone for public events!

Murray & Hong Special Collections Gallery. Photo credit: Lydia Tang
Instruction and Outreach

- Normalize asking for accommodation requests
- Share assignments and handouts via accessible electronic format
- Tactile examples

A blind visitor touches sculpture at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY
https://narratively.com/please-touch-the-art
Left image: 3-D tactile book by Tom Burtonwood, image by Lydia Tang

Right image photo credit: Sound dome in Murray & Hong gallery, Lydia Tang
Workplace Accessibility

- It’s the law. ADA. Overseen by EEOC
- Your colleagues may also be disabled, *not only patrons*
- Consider:
  - Work location
  - Work space (office, desk, materials transport, equipment, technology, etc)
  - Bathrooms, break rooms, etc.
  - Modes of communication
  - Evaluations and promotions
  - Organizational support
Digital Accessibility

- Design accessibility from the beginning!
- Headers
- Alt-text
- Contrast
- Flexibility
- Test it with Tools: [WAVE](https://wave.webaim.org), etc.
- Test it with people

ArtCenter College of Design website using the WAVE accessibility tool