

12 STEP PLAN TO ACCESS FOR ARTS ORGANIZATIONS

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Introduction

Since the passing of the Americans with Disabilities Act, there have been many questions about how to create better access for people with disabilities. This 12 Step Plan is a guide to help arts organizations identify their weaknesses in accordance with the ADA and to create a plan that will complete their access needs.

Step 1: Assign a 504/ADA Coordinator for Your Organization.

Make sure that there is a point person in your organization who is in charge of convening the people involved with access in your organization and move the process forward.

Step 2: Insure Internal Support to Create and Implement ADA Compliance

It is important to connect with upper management staff, board, and other support staff within your organization to discuss the need for ADA compliance in your facility and programs. Once you know that everyone in your organization is on board with creating and implementing a plan, it will be easier to go through the rest of the steps.

Step 3: Know the Law and How it Relates to Your Organization

Whether it is the ADA, Section 504, or other laws that are pertinent to your state, it is important to read them and understand them. Go to websites such as: <http://www.adata.org/> and <http://www.usdoj.gov/> to get up to date information about the law and how it relates to your organization. Consult experts in your area (independent living centers, ADA lawyers) to ask questions and get more information.

Step 4: Gather your Access Team Together

Put together a committee made up of staff, volunteers, patrons, board members, and community members to fulfill your access plan. Look for people who have an interest in access, who have a disability themselves, who have family members with disabilities, who have expertise in access issues, who have the need to be involved (such as front of house or box office staff), and who are good team members. Give them some education about what your expectations are and what the outcome will be as well as sharing your knowledge about the law.

Step 5: Assess the Current Organizational Access

There are a lot of survey instruments that are available in many forms, such as checklists to a more detailed examination. The Design for Accessibility: A Cultural Administrators Handbook from the NEA has some suggestions. It will lead you through architectural, programmatic, marketing, communication, and other policies in your organization that are barriers to accessibility. Members of your staff and committee should be included in the group that fills out this survey. You will want to have a level, a fishhook and a measuring tape with you when you do the architectural portion of the survey.

Step 6: Create an ADA Plan

Once you know what the access strengths and weaknesses, you will be able to create your ADA plan. Take each section and determine if the barriers that exist are short term or long-term concerns. For instance, if the bathroom in your facility is down a set of stairs without an elevator and you don't have any plans to renovate the building, an alternative restroom option should be explored. But if the restroom is accessible except for the fact that the toilet seat is too low, that can be changed more easily. Your plan should include a timeline, the people who are in charge of each item, and the budget if the item requires funding.

Step 7: Publicize and Adopt the Plan Internally

Take the plan beyond your committee to the staff and board that may not have been involved in this process. Talk about it to them and get their buy in for it. Once they have had a chance to give their feedback, make sure it is adopted as part of the organizational plan so it will move forward.

Step 8: Implement the Plan

Take the short-term steps and start to work on them one by one. Don't let this plan sit on a shelf! Build up to the long term ones as you begin the process.

Step 9: Do Training

Train Staff, volunteers, board members, ushers, docents, etc. on disability etiquette, language and access issues for your organization. Education is an important part of an access plan. Incorporate this training into your ongoing training sessions and materials.

Step 10: Market Your Access

Hold a press conference, print a brochure, go to speak to groups-whether you are adding audio description to your access list or putting in new accessible seats, let the community know that you are working on total access. And be sure to put those symbols on your brochures and mention access in all printed materials.

Step 11: Evaluate the Plan

On a yearly basis, go back to the plan to look at the goals, timeline, marketing, training, and budget and evaluate what has and hasn't worked and what still needs to be done.

Step 12: Celebrate Your Successes

Access is ongoing and long term and it is important to celebrate your progress along the way.