



SMITHSONIAN DIRECTIVE 215

May 9, 1994

ACCESSIBILITY FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

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Purpose

The Smithsonian Institution is committed to providing full and dignified access for people with disabilities to all programs, structures, and sites in its care. The purpose of this directive is to establish Smithsonian policy and procedures for carrying out this commitment.

Background

History Of United States Accessibility Laws. The civil rights movement of Americans with disabilities was born after World War I, but did not gain its full momentum until the mid-1960s. Three major pieces of legislation were passed to guarantee the rights of people with disabilities:

- the Architectural Barriers Act of 1968,
- the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and
- the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.

These laws mandate that people with disabilities have comprehensive access to federal, state, local, and private facilities and programs.

The Architectural Barriers Act of 1968 (ABA), P.L. 90-480, requires that certain buildings and facilities built or altered with federal funds after 1968 be

accessible to people with disabilities. The ABA also requires buildings leased by the federal government after 1977 be accessible. (Lease renewals and lease options are treated as new leases.) Architectural standards issued for compliance with the law are the Uniform Federal Accessibility Standards (UFAS).

To enforce the ABA, as well as to provide access to federally funded or federally conducted programs, the Rehabilitation Act, P.L. 93-112, was passed in 1973. The Rehabilitation Act, a civil rights law, includes Sections 501 through 507 on accessibility; however, it is Section 504 that most impacts public programs. This section requires "no otherwise qualified individual with a disability in the United States, shall, solely by reason of his handicap, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subject to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance or under any program or activity conducted by any Executive Agency or by the United States Postal Service. "Architectural standards issued for compliance with the law are the Uniform Federal Accessibility Standards (UFAS).

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), P.L. 101-336, brings civil rights legislation similar to the Rehabilitation Act to private employers and state and local governments in the areas of employment, transportation, public accommodations, and communications. Title III of this Act requires that individuals with disabilities have full access to public services and programs. Architectural standards issued for compliance with Title III of this law are the Americans with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG).

SI Policy And Practice

Providing accessibility to the Smithsonian for all people is germane to the Institution's mission. However, a mandate for "the increase and diffusion of knowledge" means little without accessibility to the Smithsonian's resources. From long-range objectives in charting research to the smallest details of designing exhibits, accommodating staff and visitors with disabilities is a primary goal and responsibility.

While this may first appear to require designing for a small segment of the Smithsonian's audience and staff, accessibility for people with disabilities also results in increased access for older adults, for people for whom English is not a first language, and for people who have limited experience in museum and zoo facilities and programs. Accessibility is more than an issue of moving barriers to meet minimum standards. It is a philosophy and a design mind-set that results in programs and facilities that serve a diverse public, today and in the future.

The Smithsonian Institution offers fully integrated, physical and intellectual access to its collections, research, programs, exhibits, publications, buildings, and facilities. As a matter of policy, the Institution has established this directive consistent with the philosophy and standards set forth in the statutes referenced under Section 2. Accordingly, this Smithsonian directive follows the guidance provided by the legislative provisions detailed above, using the architectural standards stated in UFAS and ADAAG, the Smithsonian Guidelines for Accessible Design, and SSH 1300, Chapter 4, Affirmative Action Program for Disabled Employees of the Office of Equal Employment and Minority Affairs (OEEMA).

Smithsonian accessibility policy, as specified in this directive, applies to all new construction, exhibits, barrier removal, alterations, and repair and restoration of facilities and grounds, **(as defined in the UFAS and the ADAAG, whichever more stringent)**, whether the Smithsonian owns or leases the property. The policy also applies to all programs held at or by the Smithsonian (e.g., exhibitions, public programs, travel programs, special events, training, audio visuals, and publications), whether they are developed, cosponsored, or hosted by the Institution.

All Smithsonian public programs, both within and outside the United States, shall be accessible to people with disabilities to the fullest extent possible and practical. As a major determinant of accessibility is the program site, Smithsonian organizations and organizations using the Smithsonian name shall establish as a primary site-selection criteria that the location of every public program is accessible. This applies to locations regardless of whether they are used, rented, leased, or owned by the Institution. Selection of any public program site that is not accessible must be explained in writing by the selecting organization to the Accessibility Coordinator. Programmatic alternatives to compensate for site inaccessibility must be provided. All programs, regardless of site accessibility, will be presented in an accessible and dignified manner through their design, supplemental materials, and auxiliary services.

Staff, volunteers, visiting professionals, interns, and fellows must be provided reasonable accommodation in order to enable their participation in work-related areas. A reasonable

accommodation is a change or adjustment to a job or the work environment that enables a person with a disability to perform essential job functions. Reasonable accommodations (defined later in this directive in *Staff Accommodations*), are decided on a case-by-case basis, defined by the manager/supervisor, the individual with a disability, and, if necessary, the Disabled Employees Program Manager (OEEMA) and the Accessibility Coordinator (OASAH).

Responsibilities

The above requirements apply to accommodations for both staff and visitors with disabilities, as those individuals are defined in both the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.

The Secretary of the Smithsonian shall hold each building director and each bureau and office director responsible for ensuring programmatic and facility access to its staff and visitors, to the fullest extent possible and practicable.

Survey, Plan and Reporting: Each unit's director will appoint an Accessibility Liaison. Every five years, all bureau and office liaisons will survey their units' current level of accessibility. The Accessibility Coordinator, in the Office of the Assistant Secretary for the Arts and Humanities, will report the survey results to the Secretary.

From the results of this survey, each organizational unit shall develop a five-year accessibility plan based on a model plan developed by the Accessibility Coordinator. The unit's Accessibility Liaison will update the plan, document progress toward its goals, obtain approval of the unit's director; and submit a report to the Accessibility Coordinator annually. The Accessibility Coordinator will monitor progress in

achieving accessibility in Smithsonian public programs and facilities for the Secretary. The Accessibility Coordinator shall report annually on such achievements to the Secretary. The Secretary, in consultation with the appropriate Assistant Secretary, will decide to what degree failure to meet annual goals established in the five-year plan will jeopardize an organizational unit's funding.

Programs and Facilities: The Accessibility Coordinator:

- provides technical assistance to the bureaus and offices through consultation and training programs.
- publishes reference documents on public accessibility, including the *Smithsonian Guidelines for Accessible Design* on exhibition, program, audiovisual, and publication design.
- provides organizational units with limited support in offering accessibility services (for example, providing interpreter services for deaf visitors and providing reader services for visitors who cannot read print).

Primary responsibility for providing and funding these services lies with the individual bureaus and offices.

- works closely with the Director of Facilities Services Group and the Director of the National Zoological Park on all accessibility changes as they relate to existing structure, as well as on new construction

Staff Accommodations: The Office of Equal Employment and Minority Affairs (OEEMA) will monitor accommodation

issues for employees and applicants with disabilities. A reasonable accommodation is a change or adjustment to a job or the work environment that enables a person with a disability to perform essential job functions. Some such accommodations are:

- provision of sign language interpreters for meetings involving deaf participants,<
- reader services for people who cannot read print,
- computer-assisted note-taking for people who have difficulty hearing, and
- adaptation of individual workspace and common work areas to accommodate people using wheelchairs.

Bureaus and offices are responsible for providing reasonable accommodations for their employees who disclose their disabilities. Upon request from an employee or applicant, managers should discuss accommodations to identify options and determine the effectiveness of each. Managers shall provide reasonable accommodations unless: 1) the financial cost of the accommodations is prohibitive to the bureau or office, or 2) the impact of the accommodations will negatively impact upon the operation of the facility. In such cases, the manager should contact OEEMA to discuss alternatives. OEEMA will provide technical assistance to bureaus and offices upon request.

General Requirements

Facilities: Facilities will meet the minimum standards for accessibility, as established in both the UFAS and the ADAAG. These standards address such issues as:

1. accessible routes up to, into, through, and out of the building or

- outdoor area for both public and staff spaces;
2. access to and through spaces offering exhibitions, public programs, and supplemental services, such as cafeterias and museum shops;
 3. access to rest rooms, water fountains, telephones, areas of assembly, and staff areas;
 4. access to communication through assistive listening systems, signage, and text telephones (TTYs); and,
 5. accessible emergency egress.

Public Programs: Public programs and special events will meet the standards for accessibility indicated in the *Smithsonian Guidelines for Accessible Design*, published by the Accessibility Program. These program issues include program site, content, format of presentation, and availability of auxiliary services. Information about the programs, such as advertisements, press releases, program brochures, calendars, and posters, shall also be accessible.

Exhibitions: Exhibitions will meet requirements for accessibility as established in the *Smithsonian Guidelines for Accessible Design* for access issues that include location, design, content, presentation, supplementary programs and materials

Publications: Design and content, as well as alternate formats of materials, will provide access to publications, as defined in the *Smithsonian Guidelines for Accessible Design*.

Audiovisual Productions and Computer Programming: Audiovisual productions and computer programming will become fully accessible through location, program and equipment design, captioning, auxiliary materials,

technology, and services, as defined in the *Smithsonian Guidelines for Accessible Design*.

Staff Accommodations: Managers and supervisors will consider reasonable accommodations on a case-by-case basis, as determined by the specific functions of the job and the employee's disabling condition. Managers and supervisors should coordinate accommodations with the employee/applicant with a disability. They may also consult the Disabled Employees Program Manager in OEEMA.

Volunteers, Interns, Fellows, Visiting Professionals: Bureaus and offices are responsible for providing reasonable accommodations for their volunteers, interns, fellows, and visiting professionals who disclose their disabilities. Supervisors will consider reasonable accommodations on a and offices are responsible for providing reasonable accommodations for their volunteers, interns, fellows, and visiting professionals who disclose their disabilities. Supervisors will consider reasonable accommodations on a case-by-case basis, as determined by the specific functions of the position or the program and the individual's disabling conditions. Supervisors shall coordinate accommodations with the employee or applicant with a disability. Supervisors may consult the Disabled Employees Program Manager in OEEMA and the Accessibility Coordinator, when needed.

CANCELLATION:

None.

INQUIRIES:

Accessibility.

RETENTION:

Indefinite. Subject to review for currency 24 months from date of issuance.

FILING:

File sequentially with other current directives.

COPIES:

Print file or contact the Office of
Planning, Management and Budget
(OPMB).
