



ACCESSIBILITY FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

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1. PURPOSE

The Smithsonian Institution (SI) is committed to providing people with disabilities access to all its programs and facilities. The purpose of this directive is to establish Smithsonian policy and procedures for carrying out this commitment. Guidance on implementing the policy is available on the Accessibility Program website, <http://www.si.edu/accessibility>.

2. BACKGROUND

Three major pieces of civil rights legislation guarantee the rights of people with disabilities in the United States: The Architectural Barriers Act of 1968; the Rehabilitation Act of 1973; and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.

The Architectural Barriers Act (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 that buildings leased by the federal Government after 1977 be accessible. (Lease renewals and lease options are treated as new leases.)

The Rehabilitation Act, P.L. 93–112, provides access to federally funded or federally conducted programs to people with disabilities. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act mandates that “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.” Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act eliminates barriers in information technology by requiring that federal agencies, when they develop, procure, maintain, or use electronic and information

2. BACKGROUND (continued)

technology, give individuals with disabilities access to information and data that is comparable to access available to others.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), as amended, P.L. 110–325, applies to state and local governments and private entities that operate public accommodations. Title III of the ADA requires that individuals with disabilities have full access to public services and programs.

In general, public and private entities ensure effective communication through program design and the use of auxiliary aids or services, and by making reasonable modification in policies, practices or procedures, when necessary to avoid discrimination on the basis of disability.

Facility access is ensured through compliance with architectural standards issued by the General Services Administration (GSA), (the ABA Accessibility Standards), and the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) (the ADA Standards for Accessible Design).

3. POLICY

All Smithsonian public programs, both within and outside the United States, shall be accessible to people with disabilities to the fullest extent possible and practicable.

Facilities used by the Smithsonian for its operations and programs will meet the minimum standards for accessibility, as established in both the ABA and ADA Accessibility Standards, whichever is more stringent. This applies to facilities regardless of whether they are occupied, rented, leased, or owned by the Institution. If facility accessibility is not reasonably achievable, for example, because a historic structure cannot be altered, programmatic alternatives must be provided to compensate for the inaccessibility of the facility. Priority must be given to methods that provide physical access to people with disabilities.

All programs, regardless of facility accessibility, will provide effective communication to people with disabilities through their design, supplemental materials, or auxiliary services, such as sign language interpreters, captioning, verbal descriptions or assistive listening devices.

4. SCOPE

This directive applies to all new construction, exhibits, barrier removal, alterations, and repair and restoration of facilities and grounds, as defined in the ABA and ADA Standards (whichever is more stringent), whether the Smithsonian owns or leases the property. The policy also applies

4. SCOPE (continued)

to all programs held at or by the Smithsonian, whether they are developed, co-sponsored, or hosted by the Institution, and services provided by or on behalf of the Smithsonian, including those provided through contractors.

Examples of Smithsonian programs and services include exhibitions, lectures, travel programs, special events, training, audiovisual/interactive presentations, mobile projects, websites, publications, cafeterias, stores, and social media. This policy applies equally to temporary or permanent facilities and programs.

This policy does not establish procedures for reasonable accommodations for employees, applicants for employment, or individuals affiliated with the Smithsonian (e.g., interns, research associates, Fellows, and volunteers). Those procedures are defined in [SD 214, *Equal Opportunity Handbook*](#).

5. RESPONSIBILITIES

All staff and affiliated persons have a role in providing people with disabilities access to all Smithsonian programs and facilities.

Unit directors are responsible for:

- ensuring programmatic and facility access to their staff and visitors to the fullest extent possible and practicable, by providing and maintaining accessible facilities, exhibits, services and programs; and
- appointing an Accessibility Liaison to participate in an Accessibility Liaison Council managed by the Accessibility Program.

Smithsonian staff is responsible for planning, budgeting for, and designing exhibits, programs, and facilities following the guidance in the [Smithsonian Guidelines for Accessible Design](#), published by the Accessibility Program.

The Accessibility Program director is responsible for:

- providing technical assistance to SI units through consultation and training programs;
- publishing guidance documents on accessibility, including the Smithsonian Guidelines for Accessible Design on exhibitions, programs, audiovisual and interactive presentations, and print publication design; and

5. RESPONSIBILITIES (continued)

- providing organizational units with limited support in offering accessibility services (for example, providing interpreter services for visitors who are deaf).

The Office of Facilities, Engineering and Operations (OFEO) provides leadership for all Institution facility programs as outlined in [SD 410, *Facility Construction and Improvement Projects*](#). Their leadership includes planning, budgeting for, designing, constructing, and maintaining facilities that are accessible to people with disabilities.

The Office of Protection Services (OPS) implements procedures for service animals and mobility devices that are consistent with federal accessibility laws and this policy.

6. CONTACT INFORMATION

Contact information for the Accessibility Program can be found on its website:
<http://www.si.edu/accessibility>.

CANCELLATION: SD 215, May 9, 1994

INQUIRIES: Accessibility Program

RETENTION: Indefinite. Subject to review for currency 24 months from date of issue.
