

PROVIDING EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION TO PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

SUMMARY

The Americans with Disabilities Act is a federal civil rights law. This law obligates State and local governments to provide effective communications for individuals with disabilities. It is each County department's responsibility to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements regarding effective communications. Examples of effective communication might include providing a sign language interpreter for someone who is deaf, an assistive listening device for someone who is hard of hearing, materials in alternate format for someone who is blind, has low vision, or has a learning disability. County departments must ensure that people with effective communication needs know how to make a request for auxiliary aids and or services.

PROCEDURE

Communicate with the person who is making the request to better understand what service is required for effective communication. If there is more than one way to provide communication, state and local governments may choose the most convenient method. If it is not the method requested, the County must be able to show that the method chosen is effective. Sometimes effective communication might involve reading a form to a person with a visual impairment or for simple communication might involve writing notes to a person who is deaf.

A. Obtaining a Sign Language Interpreter

1. The County has awarded a sign language services contract to several vendors. Check the vendor list for vendor names and contact information. Communicate the need for service to the vendor, including the date, time, and location for the requested services, as well as a department contact name and phone number. Assignments of less than two hours will be covered by a single interpreter except in unusual circumstances when other arrangements are approved by the requesting County department. State the number of people requesting services but do not give names of requestors until you have a service agreement with the company that is providing the service.
2. The vendor will provide confirmation that an interpreter(s) has been scheduled within 48 hours of request. The vendor will work with the requesting department to secure a sign language interpreter with a level of training and experience appropriate to the assignment and County contract. The department will be charged for services according to the interpreter's level of qualification. In the event that the contracted vendor is unable to provide an interpreter appropriate to the assignment, then the department may use other vendors which are registered in the commodity section in the ADPICS system. Should this prove unsuccessful, the department should contact the person who needs the interpreter to give him or her the opportunity to either reschedule the appointment or event necessitating an interpreter, or call the Office of ADA Coordination for other options.

3. Emergency Services - Emergency requests are those for which services are needed within 24 hours of the request for service.
4. Minimum Billable Time - Sign language interpreter vendors cannot bill for travel time within the County. If travel to an assignment is required outside of the County, the County reserves the right to determine fairness of mileage rate. Under normal circumstances, an interpreter will be assumed to be available for the two-hour minimum time even on assignments expected to run less than two hours. However, if an interpreter states that he or she can only accept an assignment if it is for an amount of time less than two hours, and if the requesting department agrees, the vendor will provide the interpreter with a form specifying the maximum agreed upon time availability for the interpreter to take to the assignment. A copy of this form must be included as part of the invoice – also known as the confirmation sheet – when it is submitted for payment.
5. Cancellations - Occasionally, the County may need to cancel a pre-scheduled interpreter. The fee guidelines are as follows:
 - a. Cancellations made with more than 48 hours' notice: no penalty.
 - b. Cancellations within 24 – 48 hours of the appointment: the County will pay 50 percent of the fee for the scheduled hours.
 - c. Cancellations within 24 hours: the County will pay 100 percent of the fee for the scheduled hours.

B. Obtaining Materials in Alternate Format

1. Always discuss the request for materials in alternate format with the requester to ensure the materials to be provided meet the requester's needs. Do not assume you know what the person wants. Not all people who are blind read Braille. Many people who are blind or visually impaired prefer to receive materials on audio tape or via email instead of in Braille. However, if you need written materials converted into Braille format, contact the Office of ADA Coordination and allow sufficient lead time to have documents produced in Braille.
2. Some people with visual impairments can be accommodated by documents printed in large print. Often large print materials can be created on a photocopier using the enlargement function and larger paper to maintaining formatting and page numbers. Standard font size for large print documents is 18 point and a simple font style like Arial or Verdana is best. Black ink on white paper or other strongly contrasting color combination should be used. The large print document should retain the original page numbering so that both visually impaired and sighted users can easily review and discuss a document together.

C. Communicating with People Who Are Deaf, Hard of Hearing or Speech-Impaired

1. People who are deaf, hard of hearing or speech-impaired have traditionally used TTY machines (telecommunications devices for the deaf) to communicate via telephone. A TTY is a special device that allows users to type text messages. A TTY is required at both ends of the conversation in order to communicate. A TTY user can have a conversation with someone who does not have a TTY by using the Florida Relay Service as an intermediary.

2. Personal data devices, email and text messaging have largely replaced the use of TTYs. So that the County may appropriately accommodate people with communications impairments, each department must have at least one email address that is widely available via website and publications so that people with disabilities may contact departments to request accommodations or information. The email address can be a generic address for general communications to the department or can be an email address belonging to a particular individual. If a department currently has a functioning TTY device and staff trained and available to answer it, the department may continue to use it, but this should not be considered a substitute for email communications.

D. Access Statement for Notices of Public Meetings and Departmental Publications

1. People with disabilities need a mechanism by which they can request accessible communications or other types of accommodations as well as materials in alternate format in advance of a public meeting or event. In order to provide this mechanism, all notices of public meetings and events shall contain the following statement:

To request materials in accessible format, sign language interpreters, and/or any accommodation to participate in any County-sponsored program or meeting, please contact _____ five days in advance to initiate your request. TTY users may also call 711 (Florida Relay Service.)

[THE ABOVE BLANK IS TO BE FILLED IN WITH THE NAME, TELEPHONE NUMBER, AND E-MAIL ADDRESS, OF THE RESPONSIBLE DEPARTMENTAL PERSON. IF THE DEPARTMENT HAS A TTY AND WISHES TO CONTINUE USING IT, IT MAY INCLUDE THE TTY NUMBER AS WELL, BUT THE TTY NUMBER MUST BE IN ADDITION TO THE EMAIL ADDRESS, AND NOT A SUBSTITUTE FOR IT.]

2. When meeting or event notices do not contain the above statement or are not sent out sufficiently in advance of the meeting or event for addressing accommodations requests, sign language interpreters and materials in accessible format must be provided by the department unless the department knows that no persons needing such accommodations will be attending.
3. When the County disseminates materials to the general public (such as brochures, pamphlets, etc.), people with disabilities need a mechanism by which they can request such materials in alternate format. In order to provide this mechanism, all publications to be disseminated to the general public shall contain the following statement:

To obtain this information in accessible format, please call _____.

[THE ABOVE BLANK IS TO BE FILLED IN WITH A DEPARTMENTAL PHONE NUMBER THAT IS MANNED BY A STAFF MEMBER WHO CAN APPROPRIATELY RESPOND TO SUCH REQUESTS. AN EMAIL ADDRESS MAY ALSO BE INCLUDED ALONG WITH THE PHONE NUMBER]

E. Ensuring That All Departmental Broadcasts and Video Productions Are Accessible to People With Disabilities.

1. Each department shall be responsible for responding to individual requests for captioning of programs that it disseminates to the public. In conjunction with the Government Information Center (GIC), each department that produces videos shall ensure that the videos contain real-time or postproduction captioning, as appropriate.
2. In the case of emergency-related broadcasts and videos, the GIC, the Office of Emergency Management, or other responsible department shall caption emergency announcements and programs including, but not limited to, those regarding hurricane preparedness, special needs registry, sheltering, evacuation, and the use of transportation during emergencies. With all emergency-related public service announcements, requests shall be made of the television stations to broadcast the announcements with captioning. If it is not possible to provide real-time captioning, scrolled messages with essential emergency information and sign language interpreters shall be provided.

CONTACT(S):
Department/Division
Office of ADA Coordination