



DISABILITY 101 FOR KING COUNTY BOARD & COMMISSION STAFF LIAISONS

As a Staff Liaison, you are responsible for ensuring accessibility for any members of the public who serve on your King County Board or Commission who are people with disabilities. This fact sheet outlines the requirements of disability access laws that apply to King County government.

What laws govern disability access?

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal law which mandates equal access and reasonable accommodations for people with disabilities in employment, government services, transportation, and public accommodations (such as businesses)). Title II of the ADA outlines the responsibilities of local governments to make their facilities, programs, activities and services accessible to members of the public who have disabilities.

Other disability access laws that apply include the Washington State Law Against Discrimination (RCW 49.60), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and King County nondiscrimination ordinances.

How is “disability” defined?

A person with a disability is an individual who:

- 1) has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities; or
- 2) has a record or history of such an impairment; or
- 3) is perceived or regarded as having such an impairment.

“Major life activities” includes functions such as caring for oneself, performing manual tasks, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, learning, and working.

We are concerned primarily with those individuals who fit the first prong of this definition – those who have a current disability and thus, may have an accommodation need that we should meet.

What are the requirements of Title II of the ADA?

Title II identifies steps that local governments must undertake to comply with the ADA. King County is responsible for public access compliance, has conducted a self-evaluation and transition plan to enhance access, and has developed a grievance procedure. Beyond these basic steps, the ADA requires:

- **Equal opportunity** – People with disabilities must be assured an equal opportunity to participate in the programs and activities offered by King County.
- **Program accessibility** – The standard for ADA compliance is one of overall program accessibility: Is the program, service or activity, when viewed in its entirety, readily accessible to and usable by individuals with disabilities?
- **Reasonable modification (also called reasonable accommodation)** – Policies, practices and procedures must be modified when necessary to avoid discrimination against people with disabilities, unless to do so would fundamentally alter the nature of the service, program or activity, or would create an undue administrative or financial burden.
- **Equally effective communication** – County government is required to ensure that applicants, participants, and members of the public with disabilities have communication access that is as effective as that provided to people without disabilities.

How can Board or Commission Staff Liaisons ensure accessibility?

Many people with disabilities want to participate in their government, and they should be encouraged to participate as members of county Boards and Commissions. We can best assure equal opportunity by including people with disabilities in planning and decision-making. Some of them may need program access assistance.

Here's what you can do as Board or Commission Staff Liaison:

- **Facility access** – Make certain that board meeting locations are accessible. This means that accessible parking or bus routes are nearby, the path from parking or bus stops to the facility is ramped, the doors are sufficiently wide, and accessible restroom facilities are available. It's a good idea to scout out a facility for access ahead of time. See our fact sheet titled "Quick Facilities Checklist".
- **Auxiliary aids and services** – This includes a variety of services, equipment or devices that provide effective access to people with disabilities, including alternate formats, sign language interpreters, and in some cases, personal assistance. One common type is an assistive listening device, which enhances the group discussion forum for those with hearing disabilities. See our fact sheet titled "Assistive Listening Devices". KCCR has an assistive listening device available for loan.
- **Alternate formats** – For people who are blind or have learning disabilities, we must make written materials available upon request in accessible formats, such as large print, Braille, computer disk, or providing a reader. See our fact sheet titled "Alternate Formats and Resources".
- **Telephone communications** – Use of the statewide Telecommunications Relay Service is an appropriate means of ensuring access for people who have speech or hearing disabilities. Familiarize yourself with the relay service. See our fact sheets titled "Telecommunications Relay Services" and "TTY Use & Helpful Hints".
- **Sign language interpreters** – County Boards and Commissions are responsible for providing interpreter services upon request.

- **Service or assistance animals** – Growing numbers of people with disabilities are using assistance animals such as dog guides, hearing dogs, alert dogs, psychiatric assistance animals, etc.
- **Meeting notices, minutes, and other printed materials** – You are responsible for providing effective notice that your county Board or Commission is accessible and that accommodations are available upon request. This includes the following required notices on all written materials:
 - State in 14-point type (or larger) that the written material is available in alternate formats upon request (often in the footer).
 - Note that reasonable accommodations for people with disabilities are available upon request.
 - A TTY or Relay Service number (711) next to the telephone number.

While not required, it is appropriate and helpful to mention that your meeting location is accessible. You can state “this facility is accessible” on meeting notices or use the International Symbol of Access:



- **Remember** – Except for providing facility access and notice of access, you do not need to have any accommodations prepared in advance.