

ADA COMPLIANCE CHECKLIST FOR LIBRARIES

INTRODUCTION:

Kansas libraries need to have the Americans with Disabilities Act as a high priority. Kansas already has a high population of older residents and that number will be increasing rapidly. That means Kansas is bound to have a very high number of people with covered disabilities.

Covered disabilities include, but are not necessarily limited to: heart conditions, diabetes, cancer, AIDS, bad backs, impaired vision, impaired hearing, impaired mobility, impaired dexterity, impaired speech, impaired cognition. Temporarily disabled citizens are also covered by the ADA.

ADA compliance is an area of the law that is rarely in black and white but contains many shades of grey. Compliance reviews speak of fair compliance, good compliance, fullest compliance and other terms that are somewhat relative.

The disability community has usually been reasonable in understanding that neither libraries nor their parent governments have unlimited funds. Undue hardship can be documented in many cases as a reason for non-compliance. But a library that has no plan for developing their ADA compliance and shows no evidence of good faith effort is inviting criticism that might escalate into legal problems. A library building program that does not result in full barrier-free access makes the library very vulnerable to legal problems.

PARKING:

A library that has less than 25 parking spaces, needs one handicapped parking space, but it must be van-accessible. That means a parking space 8 feet wide plus an aisle 8 feet wide. The parking space must be on a level, hard surface with a vertical sign and a curb cut. It must be as close to the library entrance as possible.

If you have more than 25 parking spaces, but less than 50, you must have two handicapped parking spaces. However, two parking spaces may share a common access aisle.

EXTERIOR SIGNAGE:

The library should have clear, large exterior signs that can be read from the street even by people with impaired eyesight. One of these signs should be a yard sign, since pediment signs are usually above eye level. Another common problem with exterior signs is lack of sufficient contrast.

The library hours should also be posted on an exterior sign with print as large and clear as possible.

MAIN ENTRANCE:

The path to the main entrance should be hard-surfaced, smooth surfaced, barrier-free and at least 36 inches wide, with no slope greater than a one inch rise in a 20 inch run.

The door should have a clear opening of 36 inches. Automatic doors are not required in small libraries but excessively heavy doors should be regarded as a barrier. The door should have some sort of push-type handle rather than a twist-type handle. Doorway thresholds should be no more than 1/4 inch high but these can usually be ramped.

A library that serves more than 5000 people should have an automatic door opener.

Exterior steps are a serious problem that cause a library to be regarded as barrier-rich

Book returns should always be placed in a barrier-free location.

RAMPS:

If a ramp is necessary to access the building, it should have a maximum rise of 1 in 12 (a one inch rise to a twelve inch run).

There can be no run greater than 30 feet without a level platform. A level platform at the doorway is required and it must be a minimum of five feet by five feet. Ramps should be equipped with railings and guard curbs.

MULTI-LEVELS:

A patron should be able to access all areas of the library. If necessary, non-public services can be transferred to non-accessible areas but this will not be considered full compliance.

Any new construction that involves multiple levels requires an elevator. A lift is acceptable only in a very small library. Chair lifts are not acceptable compliance.

Stairs should be 36 inches wide with risers no more than 11 inches high. There should be handrails on both sides. Stairs are a legal back-up to elevators and lifts in all public libraries.

FLOORS:

Ripples, edges or worn places in the carpet are a hazard to uncertain footing and should be repaired or eliminated.

A carpet for a library should not have a busy pattern that could cause dizziness or difficulty for those who have mobility impairments.

Open drains in restroom floors can be a hazard if they are deep or loosely covered.

Cords across the floor can pose an unintended hazard and should be eliminated as much as possible.

Too many toys on the floor in a children's department can pose an unintended hazard to those with impaired vision or impaired mobility. It is best if the children's play area is contained in some way, so clutter does not spread to path areas.

LIGHTING:

Library lighting should be as strong as possible in all areas. Lighting should be glare-free and uniform. Lighting should run across the stacks rather than parallel to them, although this cannot always be corrected.

A review of lighting for ADA compliance is NOT a review of lighting codes. Rather, it is an assessment of whether the lighting needs to be strengthened or supplemented before the collection can be easily used by someone with visual impairment. Dark shades in the paint, carpet or shelving can sometimes weaken the available lighting.

Paint shades in white, cream, ivory, yellow or pale peach can assist library lighting. Blue and green shades and dark paneling will steal the available lighting. Light colored carpet will also aid the library's lighting.

Lighting in library restrooms is frequently not strong enough to serve the visually impaired.

CIRCULATION DESK:

A new circulation desk must include a lower section for the use of children and disabled patrons. This section should be no more than 36 inches high. If a tall circulation desk cannot be restructured, a small table nearby should be used for supplementary service when needed.

PUBLIC ACCESS CATALOGS AND COMPUTER STATIONS:

An accessible catalog should be considered a top priority since it is essential to library service. The top of a card catalog should be no more than 48 inches off the floor and there should be a 36 inch clear space around it. Card catalog drawers should have the largest and clearest print possible.

Public catalog access stations and Internet access stations should be used in the seated position unless there are more than three of them. Larger libraries should have mix of higher and lower stations.

Public catalog and computer stations should offer the option of increasing the print size. Chairs for computer work stations should be comfortable and easy to use.

FURNITURE:

There should be a clear passage of at least 40 inches between sets of study tables and/or carrels. Tables should have a 27 inch high clearance, a 19 inch deep knee clearance and a surface height of 18-24 inches.

Many libraries have such a severe lack of space that the clear passage space cannot always be observed. But every library should make sure that at least one table could be reached and used by a wheelchair user.

READING AREA:

The library should have comfortable chairs, in addition to study tables. These should be armchairs to facilitate mobility. An end table should serve each armchair. The area should have good lighting for easy reading. Usually the reading areas are placed near magazines and newspapers or new books.

PERIODICALS:

The top row of periodicals should be no more than 50 inches above the floor. Most library periodical shelving is higher than this. It is strongly recommended that the top shelf not be used, if possible. If the periodical shelving must be high, there should be a sign advising library users to ask for any needed assistance.

Besides periodical shelving that is too high, many libraries have periodicals that are not well arranged or do not have large, clear signage. These are also barriers to effective use. Periodical names should be three inches high.

STACKS:

Stack areas should have aisles of at least 36 inches. The perimeter aisle around the stacks should be 40 inches. If there is no stack perimeter and one cannot be created, the aisles should be 42 inches. There is no legal limit on stack height but if the library must use extra tall shelving, there should be plenty of stools and signs advising patrons to ask for any needed assistance.

A common problem with stacks in public libraries is that the legal clear space gets blocked with furniture or other intruding objects. A conscious effort should be made to leave the legal clear space unimpeded.

Stack signs should be at least three inches high and with excellent contrast. White on black, navy or chocolate is considered much more visible than black on white.

INTERIOR SIGNAGE:

The library should have clear, large signs with maximum contrast directing people to departments, restrooms, elevators, stairs, meeting rooms, public service desks, exits, emergency exits and specific collections. White on black, navy or chocolate is considered the best contrast. Department and Collection signs should be at least five inches high.

Stack signs should be large enough for people to read with impaired vision. Three inches is considered a reasonable compliance. Stack signs should contain an accurate and up-to-date combination of Dewey and print information that will pilot people easily through the stacks.

Inadequate signage is the most common citation in ADA compliance reviews. Good signage is not only an ADA issue, but is a key element in making a library welcoming and easy to use.

COLLECTIONS:

The more residents a community has that are elderly and/or disabled, the more emphasis the library should place on large print materials, videos and audiobooks. Many small libraries are supplied with rotating collections of large print books. The Kansas Talking Books Service should be visibly marketed in public service areas and supplied to eligible library users.

It is preferable, though not legally mandated, that reference collections should be in half-height shelving. Signage for reference stacks should be as clear and informative as possible and the department should be clearly identified with a large sign.

There should be good signage for all special collections.

Large print copies of articles or other brief materials should be supplied upon request.

Few small libraries can afford Braille materials but they still have an obligation to supply such materials through interlibrary loan when they are requested.

WATER FOUNTAIN:

Water fountains in libraries should be low. If the library has a full height water fountain, the addition of a water cooler and a cup dispenser will bring the library into good compliance. Cup dispensers are often recommended, in any case, because difficulty in swallowing can be a covered disability.

TELEPHONE:

The top of a public service telephone should be no more than 48 inches above the floor. The rapid growth of cell phone use has gradually made telephone compliance a less urgent issue. Many small libraries also allow library users to make very brief use of an accessible staff phone.

COPIER:

The copy plate of a copier should be no more than 36 inches off the floor. Most library copiers are in compliance.

RESTROOMS:

The path to a public restroom should be barrier-free and 36 inches wide. The doorway should have a 36 inch clear space. The doors should be push-type or have push-type handles.

A single service restroom should have a clear space of at least five feet by five feet. Five feet by eight feet is considered fullest compliance.

A multiple service restroom should have one handicapped stall. The entrance to the stall should be at least 36 inches wide and should have a clear space of at least five feet by five feet.

All toilet commodes should be equipped with grab bars at the side and back. These should be no more than 36 inches above the floor. The back grab bar should be 36 inches long and the side grab bar should be 42 inches long. The paper dispenser should have continuous paper delivery.

All restroom fixtures should be less than 48 inches off the floor, including mirror, soap dispenser and towel rack. Sink faucets should have push-type handles rather than twist-type.

Pipes should be covered or wrapped to prevent burns. This is considered a child safety issue as well as an ADA issue.

The restroom should be strongly lighted. A visually impaired person should be able to refresh make-up or replace a contact lens. White or yellow paint can help correct weak lighting. Blue and dark tan have a tendency to drain light.

The mirror should be as large as possible and strongly lighted. A mirror shelf is recommended for fullest compliance.

The restroom door should carry both verbal and pictorial signs. However, it should not carry the symbol for barrier-free access unless the restroom is truly in very good compliance with the law.

For small libraries, it is better to have a unisex restroom than to have one that is in poor compliance with the ADA. If the library serves more than 5000 people, however, this would not be considered good service.

Restroom compliance is a common problem for small libraries and older libraries. Some of these problems cannot be solved without a remodeling program. But minor compliances, such as grab bars, correct fixtures and strong lighting, should be put in place. Problems that cannot be solved without undue hardship should be carefully documented.

MEETING ROOMS:

The library meeting room should have directional signage, a large door sign and a door clearance of at least 36 inches wide.

Most library meeting rooms do not have serious problems when they are empty. The most common problem is inadequate lighting. Side and center aisles should be 40 inches wide when audience seating is in place. There should be one wheelchair space for every twenty-five seats and this should be placed with an excellent view of the front of the room.

Microphones should be used for every program that has an audience of more than twenty-five people. Signers should be supplied when requested, unless this is clearly an undue hardship.

Water should be available at all meetings and programs, whether refreshments are served or not. There are no formal regulations in regard to refreshments, but it is best to avoid very spicy or very hard food.

OUTREACH:

Outreach service to those in residential institutions and to the homebound should be offered. If outreach service cannot be offered, undue hardship should be documented.

Larger libraries often have a staff member who works with outreach. Small libraries often need to find an effective volunteer to handle such a program.

Generally, the rule is that the less accessible the library is to the public, the more important outreach becomes.

Outreach is often very poorly marketed to the public, even when it is available. The library should try to have enough resources devoted to outreach to make it possible to market the program.

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS:

Emergency preparedness is considered an ADA issue because the library staff is responsible for library users during an emergency, whether they are able-bodied or disabled. A library that does not have written procedures for emergencies and a staff effectively trained in using these procedures cannot be considered in good compliance with the ADA.

There is information in the Kansas Public Library Policy Manual to help libraries create an emergency preparedness plan. System consultants can also help with this project.

New staff members and new board members should be given a copy of the library's emergency preparedness plan. All staff members and volunteers should read and sign off on it once a year.

All public libraries should have portable fire extinguishers. Even small libraries usually need three of them. The staff members should be trained in their use.

Public libraries should also have smoke alarms, though small libraries may use the same kind that are used in private homes.

All public libraries should have a second exit that can serve as an emergency exit. The emergency exit should have a large sign and the path to it should be kept clear. The exterior of the emergency exit should have a handrail to help people get away from the building quickly and safely.

All public libraries should have a battery operated radio, powerful flashlights and extra batteries. These should be checked every six months. Blankets and bottled water are also good supplies to have, especially in larger libraries.

All public libraries should have a procedure for severe weather. If the library doesn't have a lower level, library users should be directed to a nearby building, to a restroom without windows or to a central, protected part of the building.

STAFF PROTOCOLS:

Library staff should be trained in impeccable courtesy to those who are disabled, in fragile health or elderly. This training can be handled through a written staff manual, but staff should have to sign an agreement that they have read and understood it. Training for staff is also available from the systems, the state library and sometimes from the municipality.

Staff and volunteers should be advised of the following:

When a library user is accompanied by a caregiver, communication should still be addressed to the library user, if possible. He or she should not be ignored.

When speaking to a hearing-impaired person, the staff member should not only speak clearly but make sure they are facing the person.

A person with speech impairment may be asked, politely, to write their request, but only after an honest attempt has been made to understand what the library user is saying.

Visually impaired persons should be escorted to the service they need. Even in a small library, pointing is rarely helpful.

A wheelchair is considered part of the user's body and should never be touched without permission. A wheelchair user should be asked if they need assistance only when the situation clearly warrants.

If it is feasible, the staff member should sit down when talking with a person in a wheelchair.

Persons with mobility impairments should not be hurried. A staff member may ask if he or she can retrieve something or write something down, if the library user seems to be having difficulty.

Under Kansas law, all service dogs can go wherever their masters go. A service dog can be complimented or admired, but it should never be petted or spoken to directly while it is on duty.

It is good practice to allow service dogs in training to examine the library, although it is not legally mandated.

Disfigured persons and amputees should be neither stared at nor avoided. A conscious effort should be made to treat them with standard courtesy.

Any person complaining about the library's ADA compliance, or any barrier to using the library, should be treated with impeccable courtesy. There should be an understood procedure that they will be referred to someone who is trained to help them. This is usually either the library director or the library's designated ADA coordinator.