

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT VOLUNTEERS WITH DISABILITIES

RESOURCE MATERIALS FOR LINC_s
(Local Inclusion Collaborative Networks)
Materials also available at www.aia.hawaii.edu

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Frequently Asked Questions

From Tarjan Center (UCLA) Service Inclusion Project

<http://tcsip.tarjancenter.ucla.edu/faqs.cfm>:

For Programs Looking to Include Volunteers with Disabilities

1. What are my legal obligations surrounding including and accommodating volunteers with disabilities?

Civil rights laws affect almost every area of American life and require equal opportunity be provided. In terms of persons with disabilities, several federal laws ensure equal opportunity and non-discrimination. In most cases, if a program is truly open to the full inclusion of persons with disabilities and to the creation of a respectful and inclusive service environment, that program is likely to be in legal compliance.

There are two federal disability laws that are specifically relevant to national and community service programs: Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended, and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA).

More detailed information, including descriptions of Section 504 and the ADA, mentioned above are available at the site listed below.

The above is adapted from *Inclusion: Creating an Inclusive Environment: A Handbook for the Inclusion of People with Disabilities in National and Community Service Programs--Legal Requirements:*

<http://www.serviceandinclusion.org/handbook/index.php?page=sectionxii>

2. Do volunteers with disabilities need special types of supervision?

“No. Volunteers with disabilities are no different from other volunteers in their motivations or expectations around volunteering. In general, volunteers stay when they feel valued, when they know they are making a difference, and when they receive the right balance of challenge and support.”

From Tarjan Center at UCLA Service Inclusion Project at:

http://tcsip.tarjancenter.ucla.edu/faq_view.cfm?ID=7

3. I'm worried about saying the wrong thing to people with disabilities. What are the basics I should know?

See the document "Basic Etiquette: People with Disabilities Based on Guidelines from a Handout by United Cerebral Palsy (UCPA)/Access AmeriCorps" on the AIA-HI website.

4. Will all volunteers with disabilities need special assistance to volunteer?

No. Some studies state that fewer than half of all individuals with disabilities require any formal accommodations. Depending on the nature of the volunteer position, some individuals with disabilities will require reasonable accommodations. A reasonable accommodation is an adjustment to a volunteer position or volunteer site or the way that things are usually done that allows a qualified individual with a disability to complete the application process, perform essential job functions, or enjoy equal access to the benefits and privileges of service. While nearly half of reasonable accommodations cost nothing at all, some accommodations do result in expense to the organization. Think of this expense as an investment in your organizations ability to serve its mandate. For example, you probably already provide accommodations that could be considered reasonable, such as chairs to sit in, or desks to write on, or computers to accomplish work tasks. The only difference is that these accommodations are so accepted they don't require a label.

*Adapted from Tarjan Center at UCLA Service Inclusion Project at:
http://tcsip.tarjancenter.ucla.edu/faq_view.cfm?ID=5*

5. How do I recruit people with disabilities to my program?

Reach out to disability organizations. Contact your local LINC (Local Inclusion Collaborative Network) for contacts. See end of this document for Hawai'i contacts.

Begin to establish relationships and collaboration. Present at each other's staff meetings. Exchange materials. Get feedback, from disability specialists, on the accessibility of your materials and practices.

Let it be known that you want to engage the abilities of people with disabilities.

*Adapted from Tarjan Center at UCLA Service Inclusion Project at:
http://tcsip.tarjancenter.ucla.edu/faq_view.cfm?ID=2*

6. How can I make sure that people with disabilities can access my volunteer site?

When most people hear the word "accessibility" they think of ramps, automatic doors, and elevators. While these provide some access, accessibility refers to all the features that make an environment accessible. Accessible design benefits everyone! Ramps make it easier for senior citizens, persons with children, and delivery persons to enter buildings. Wider doors and levered handles make it easier for everyone to negotiate doorways. Signage requirements make it easier for everyone to see and understand signs.

What are the five areas of accessibility?

The term "access" or "accessibility" encompasses five different areas

- i **Architectural.** Architectural accessibility refers to the built environment and the means of getting to and from that built environment, whether it is from a parking lot, a bus stop, or the street.
- ii **Programmatic.** Programmatic accessibility refers to the eligibility requirements, policies, or operating procedures that may be causing additional barriers to full and meaningful access.
- iii **Technology.** Technology access refers the myriad of ways individuals with disabilities use universal or specifically designed technology to overcome barriers to participation.

It is important to consider accessibility in your website. For good information on web accessibility visit these three websites:

- www.cast.org
- www.W3c.org/WAI
- www.wave.webaim.org/index.jsp

iv **Communication.** Communication Access means providing the technology or services necessary to facilitate equivalent communication with volunteers with hearing, speech, cognitive or learning disabilities, for example, a sign language interpreter.

v **Alternate Formats.** For people with visual impairments, written material needs to be provided in alternate formats, such as Braille, text file or audiotape.

*Adapted from Tarjan Center at UCLA Service Inclusion Project at:
http://tcsip.tarjancenter.ucla.edu/faq_view.cfm?ID=3*

7. Should I create special volunteer opportunities just for people with disabilities?

It may be tempting to want to create or identify volunteer positions specifically designated for people with disabilities. But don't!

People with disabilities are a diverse group. Don't make assumptions about what a person with a disability can or cannot do.

What can I do to ensure that a volunteer with disability finds the right position?

Have a clearly defined volunteer job description. Don't confuse what needs to be done with how it needs to be done. A person with a disability might have an alternative but equally effective way to complete a task. By having a well-thought out job description and by sharing that description with potential volunteers you will enable volunteers to

effectively ask for any reasonable accommodations/adjustments needed to participate.

Many volunteer descriptions now make a distinction, just as job descriptions do, between “essential” and “marginal” functions. An “essential” function is necessary to meet the minimum qualifications for fulfilling the position. For example, someone who does not drive may not be a good candidate to use as a volunteer delivery person for items that need to be transported in a vehicle. But at the same time, that same person might be an excellent coordinator of when and where those same items would be picked up and delivered. The question will be is it “essential” that the delivery person be able to drive? Or, is it “essential” that the coordinator is a person able to drive? In the first instance, it might be. In the second question, it is doubtful that driving is “essential” to fulfilling the criteria of the position.

Adapted from Tarjan Center at UCLA Service Inclusion Project at:
http://tcsip.tarjancenter.ucla.edu/faq_view.cfm?ID=4

Further Resources:

A Model for Accessibility (Center on Disability Studies):
<http://www.cds.hawaii.edu/modelforaccess/default.aspx>

Alliance for Inclusion Advancement-HI- www.aia.hawaii.edu:

"The Ten Commandments of Communicating with People with Disabilities:"

“Ten tips to keep in mind when interacting with adults with Hidden Disabilities in the Workplace”

Both are available at:
<http://www.aia.hawaii.edu/downloads/>

CNCS (Corporation for National and Community Service) Resource Center:
<http://nationalserviceresources.org/index.php>
 This site contains many searchable resources.

Inclusion: Creating an Inclusive Environment: A Handbook for the Inclusion of People with Disabilities in National and Community Service Programs--Legal Requirements:
<http://www.serviceandinclusion.org/handbook/index.php?page=sectionxii>

Job Accommodation Network:
<http://www.jan.wvu.edu/>

Managing Volunteers Within the Law:
<http://www.ed.gov/inits/americanreads/resourcekit/ManageVolunteers/index.html>

US Dept. of Labor: Communicating With and About People with Disabilities:

<http://www.dol.gov/odep/pubs/fact/comucate.htm>

Volunteer Match: "How Pro-Disability Are Your Opportunities?"
<http://www.volunteermatch.org/nonprofits/resources/newsletter.jsp>

END

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