

Improving the Visitor Experience for Visitors with Physical Disabilities

Chesapeake Crossroads
Heritage Area Workshop 2024

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Smithsonian Institution



Foundations of Access

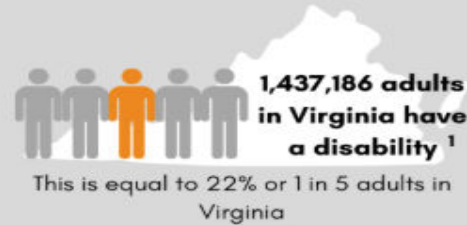
- Understanding and maintaining physical access in cultural spaces is everyone's responsibility.



There is great diversity in people with mobility disabilities



Who is in this diverse audience?



Disability Types

Mobility: Serious difficulty walking or climbing stairs

Cognition: Serious difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions

Independent living: Serious difficulty doing errands alone, such as visiting a doctor's office

Hearing: Deafness or serious difficulty hearing

Vision: Blind or serious difficulty seeing, even when wearing glasses

Self-care: Difficulty dressing or bathing



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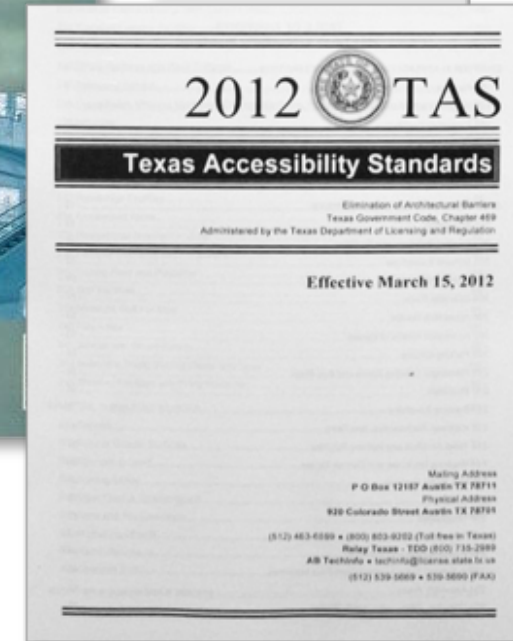
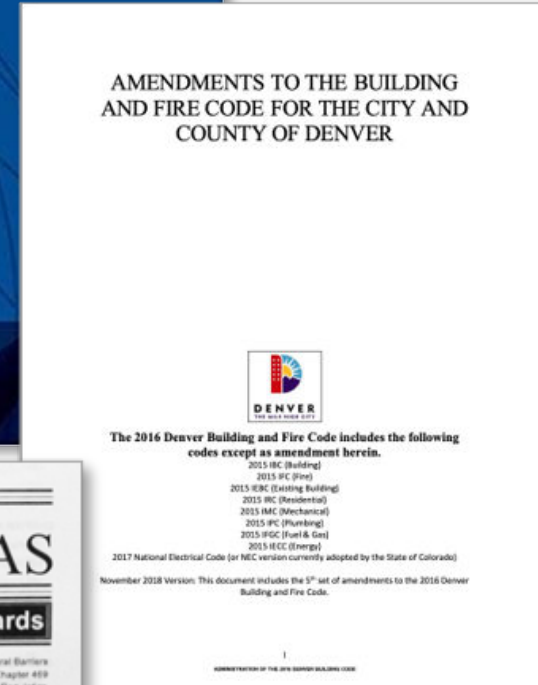
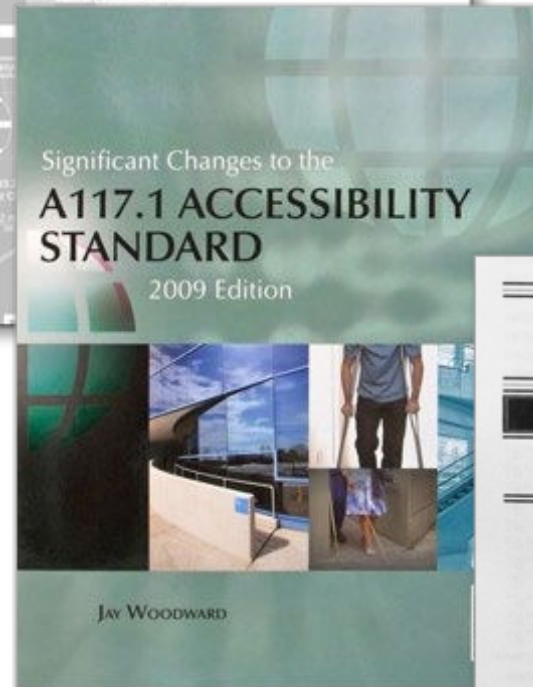
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Minimum Requirements

Know which Standards and Building Codes your facility is obligated to follow



Access to Facilities

- Keep in mind the ADA is a **civil rights law**, not building code
- All areas of newly designed and newly constructed buildings and facilities and altered portions of existing buildings and facilities need to comply with requirements
- Accessibility requirements apply to temporary and permanent buildings and facilities
- Historic buildings are not always exempt from the requirements. Where the State Historic Preservation Officer or Advisory Council on Historic Preservation determines that compliance with the requirements for accessible routes, entrances, or toilet facilities would threaten or destroy the historic significance of the building or facility, the exceptions for alterations to qualified historic buildings or facilities for that element shall be permitted to apply.
- Maintain accessible features in operable working condition



Readily Achievable Barrier Removal: An Ongoing Obligation under Title III

- Businesses and non-profit organizations that serve the public are to remove architectural barriers when it is “readily achievable” to do so; in other words, when barrier removal is “easily accomplishable and able to be carried out without much difficulty or expense.”
- The decision of what is readily achievable is made considering the size, type, and overall finances of the public accommodation and the nature and cost of the access improvements needed. Barrier removal that is difficult now may be readily achievable in the future as finances change.
- <https://adachecklist.org/index.html>

(Source: New England ADA Center)

Title III ADA Priorities for Barrier Removal

- Priority 1 - Accessible approach and entrance
- Priority 2 - Access to goods and services
- Priority 3 - Access to public toilet rooms
- Priority 4 – Any other measures to provide access to the goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages or accommodations

Inclusive Design

- In order to **build to include**, we then have to:
- Understand and meet the baseline minimum requirements for access;
- Design to exceed those minimums; and
- Enrich and expand areas not covered by the requirements.



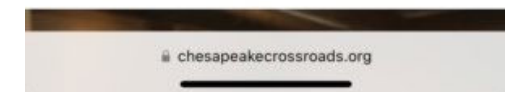
Access to Programs

- Programs include:
 - Goods and services
 - Events and festivals
 - Demonstrations and tours
 - Websites
- Design for the lifespan: kids, teens, adults, parents, grandparents, caregivers, family and friends of all ages
- Physical access is key to programmatic access



Initial Steps Forward

- Conduct assessments of what you have and prioritize remediation projects
- Train staff in developing and implementing goals for facility and programmatic accessibility and Inclusive Design
- Potentially revise contracting and procurement processes (example: website design with specific standards for WCAG compliance with Inclusive Design guidance)



Additional Steps

- Budget (a line item) for integrated facility and program design and consistent accessibility services
- Consider candidates with disabilities when hiring diverse staff



Key Takeaways

- Meet required standards/codes for facilities and design to exceed minimums
- Program design is equally important in achieving accessibility and inclusive design
- Promote good examples of inclusive design to a wide audience
- Seek facility and program design advice from disabled people



Questions?

