

Implementation Tips for USAID Partners

Sharing Resources and Knowledge Among the Global CSO Community

Inclusive Development 6 | 2020

Definitions

Accessibility: A precondition for persons with disabilities to live independently and participate fully and equally in society. Without access to *the physical environment, transportation, information and communication (including information and communication technologies and systems), and other facilities and services open or provided to the public*, persons with disabilities do not have equal opportunities for participation in their respective societies.

Reasonable Accommodation:

Necessary and appropriate modifications and adjustments that do not impose a disproportionate or undue burden on providers—*where needed in a particular case*—to ensure persons with disabilities the enjoyment or exercise of all human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis with others.

Source: *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)*

Improving Inclusion in the Workplace and Human Resource Practices

Q How can I make my organization's workplace and human resource practices more inclusive for persons with disabilities?

A Organizations that include persons with disabilities on their staff enjoy competitive advantages, an increased number of skilled workers, and increased workplace diversity. To ensure inclusion of persons with disabilities, the workplace must provide accessibility through accommodations that make sure employees can work fully and independently. An accessible workplace does not just refer to the physical space where employees work. Accessibility and inclusion have implications for the pre-hire process (recruitment, hiring, and onboarding) and while employed (performance, retention, and advancement). To begin understanding how to improve workplace accessibility, ask yourself: Is your workplace fully accessible? Conduct an accessibility audit to find out! Workplaces should provide both employees and potential employees with *reasonable accommodation*. This includes services, tools, an environment, and procedures that allow a person with a disability to participate equally. It is also important to remember that not all disabilities are visible, and that an individual may choose not to disclose his or her disability.

Below are five suggestions to help your organization start thinking about reasonable accommodation.

Suggestion 1: Set your accessibility objectives

Consider these preliminary questions:

- Does our organization want to address all aspects of accessibility (infrastructure, tools, information/communication, and information technology) at the same time or set some priorities?
- Do we want to aim for the best possible results from the beginning or do we want to proceed step-by-step, planning a progressive improvement of the level of inclusion/accessibility? If the latter, over the course of how many years?
- Do we want to target all the spaces of the premises at once, ensuring that all areas are physically accessible? Or do we want to prioritize certain areas to make them accessible first?

Keep in mind that policies and laws vary by country, region, and community

Ensure your organization/program is in compliance with the laws applicable to you. While the United States has not ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD),¹ the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) provides legal protection for USAID employees in the United States.² In countries that have ratified the CRPD, implementers of USAID projects should refer both to this legally-binding document and to specific national policies.

1 [United Nations, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#)

2 [USG, Americans with Disabilities Act](#)

Guiding Questions that can be used in an internal accessibility assessment

- How do our employees work? What equipment or tools do they use? What are the spaces they use the most?
- What are the essential job functions or work tasks for each role? How might people with different types of disabilities face barriers to completing these tasks?
- In what other activities do our employees engage (eating, socializing, relaxing, or exercising)? How might these activities be difficult for those with different kinds of disabilities?
- What could be done to reduce these barriers?

- Do we want to accommodate only the needs of specific staff members who we are already hiring? Or do we want to think about the future and plan accommodations for different kinds of disabilities so that we will be able to hire more persons with disabilities, moving forward?
- If we have several offices, do we want to address the issue(s) in all of them at the same time, or begin/test in one office and then expand to the others?
- Are we willing to appoint dedicated full-time human resources for this process, or do we want to use existing staff members as part-time resources?
- Are we willing to invest financial resources for this process or not? If yes, how much and for how long?
- Are there partners in our community whose expertise we could tap so we are not reinventing the wheel (e.g., Organizations of Persons with Disabilities [OPDs], nongovernmental organizations [NGOs], and service providers)?
- What policy or legal framework must we follow to ensure that we are in compliance? (United Nations CRPD, ADA, and International Organization of Standardization)

Suggestion 2: Conduct an internal assessment

Focus on these five areas when conducting an internal accessibility assessment:

Office premises: Is the infrastructure accessible and to what extent?

Is the office easy to reach for people with mobility disabilities? Infrastructure includes external areas, entrances, common spaces, toilets, circulation spaces, working spaces, evacuation plan, etc.

Office equipment: Is the equipment in the office accessible and to what extent?

Is the furniture usable by everyone? Would a person with an amputated arm be able to use our work equipment or the computers? Would a person with intellectual impairments manage to find an office within the building without asking for help?

Office information/communication techniques: Are they accessible to all?

Are our meetings accessible to deaf people? Are our internal conferences accessible to blind people? Are receptionists at the entrance of our building able to communicate with individuals who are deaf or hard-of-hearing? Would a deaf person be able to communicate with his or her supervisor?

What does “reasonable” mean, in terms of accommodation?

- Accommodation is considered “reasonable” if it does not create an undue burden.
- A reasonable accommodation good practice is to keep a centralized reasonable accommodation fund (e.g., at the human resources level) to meet any reasonable accommodation requests.

Resources

[Best Practices in Developing Reasonable Accommodations in the Workplace: Findings Based on the Research Literature](#)

[Good for Business: Promoting Partnerships to Employ People with Disabilities](#)

[Job Accommodation Network](#)

[How to Design and Promote an Environment Accessible to All](#)

Office information/communication tools (internal and external): Are they accessible to all?

Would a blind person using a screen reader be able to access the files that we share? Would a deaf person know immediately when there is an emergency requiring that the building be evacuated? Are the printed materials that we use accessible to a person with low vision or to a person who is color blind?

Office culture: Are there practices to encourage the inclusion of persons with disabilities?

Do hiring pipelines engage with groups that support people with disabilities? Does the hiring process encourage applicants with disabilities to apply? Are there required trainings for all employees to better understand challenges and stigmas that co-workers with disabilities may face?

If the answer to any of the above is “no,” what is our capacity to anticipate and rapidly respond to accommodation needs?

Do we know what suppliers to contact if we need a specific keyboard or mouse for a person with a disability? Do we know how long it would take to acquire those and how much they would cost? Do we know a taxi company that can accommodate people using wheelchairs? Do we know what hotels close to our office have rooms that are accessible for visitors with disabilities? Do we have a list of accessible meeting rooms where we could rapidly organize a meeting if we could not provide an accessible meeting place in our office?

Suggestion 3: Create an accessible work environment

Organizations should ensure that they provide an accessible workplace so that all staff can perform their duties (see also *Implementation Tip* on [Providing Accessible Services](#)). OPDs, NGOs, service providers, and others can help assess individual and environmental accessibility and provide corresponding disability-specific services and environmental adaptations. Most importantly, organizations should provide *reasonable accommodations throughout the recruitment and employment process*.

Suggestion 4: Attract qualified job seekers

Persons with disabilities are often unable to apply for jobs they are qualified for because recruitment processes are inaccessible. Information about job opportunities may not be shared in accessible formats. Ideally, organizations should work with OPDs to identify hard-to-reach candidates with disabilities for suitable employment opportunities and provide advice to ensure recruitment processes are accessible. (See also *Implementation Tip* on [Partnering with Organizations of Persons with Disabilities for Inclusive Local Development](#).) If this doesn't fall under an organization's mandate,

What is a disability ambassador?

Disability ambassadors in the workplace are people with disabilities who share their experiences and work with employers to create and promote an accessible and inclusive workplace.

mission, or priority list, the organization can instead identify and provide referrals to other local agencies who understand the resourcing requirements of organizations or businesses.

Especially in low- and middle-income countries, OPDs often register community members with disabilities or otherwise know where persons with disabilities in the surrounding communities live and work. OPDs can also act as centralized bodies that provide referral services to connect persons with disabilities to suitable job opportunities. Where an OPD serves a large network of persons with disabilities, that organization can be a great partner in building inclusive talent pipelines or helping businesses to identify qualified job seekers with disabilities.

Suggestion 5: Cultivate commitment to inclusion and address attitudinal barriers through awareness sessions

One of the most important factors in creating an inclusive workplace is commitment by leaders. Top management should initiate and drive changes in an organization—starting with the internal accessibility assessment (see Suggestion 2) to understand current knowledge, attitudes, and practices. Based on this assessment, an organization should create and implement an inclusion action plan. When working to change the internal inclusion culture, an organization should create a diversity policy and then work towards a broad workplace transformation. Organizations should:

- Invest in disability sensitization and awareness programs for all staff to support the recruitment of persons with disabilities and help to break the myths and unconscious biases towards disability employment. Include persons with disabilities and OPDs to create content and run weekly or monthly disability awareness sessions.
- Provide specific training for key individuals across departments, such as human resources (HR), general services, and management.
- Appoint disability ambassadors to share good practices on disability inclusion.
- Support a disability focal point or employee resource group (ERG)/employee working group (EWG) to ensure that information reaches all areas of the organization and to support workers with disabilities.

Illustrative solutions to accessibility challenges:

Please note that accommodations will vary based on context. The solutions listed below are examples of good practices for consideration in a range of different contexts.

For More Information

For this or other issues of *Implementation Tips*, please visit [NGOConnect.net](https://ngoconnect.net).

The Web site is a dynamic and interactive portal dedicated to connecting and strengthening CSOs, networks, and CSO support organizations worldwide.

Funding for this publication was provided by the U.S. Agency for International Development, under the Strengthening Civil Society Globally (SCS Global) Leader Award. Its contents, managed by SCS Global, do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the U.S. Government.

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SCS Global thanks Consortium Partner Humanity & Inclusion for drafting the content for this *Implementation Tip*.

CHALLENGE FOR APPLICANT	SOLUTION FOR ORGANIZATION
Be recruited	Advertise the position on relevant channels and send the advertisement to OPDs.
	Produce accessible vacancy advertisements (easy to understand, including all information, welcoming job seekers with disabilities to apply, created in formats accessible to screen readers).
	Clearly outline the process for requesting reasonable accommodations in the job description and ensure the process is accessible.
Communicate with colleagues and supervisors	Adapt the recruitment procedures (longer time for interviews and tests, hearing loops available during interviews, tests provided in various formats).
	Ensure that meeting agendas are provided beforehand to allow for preparation, that meeting minutes are provided after meetings, and that communications are translated to different languages when necessary/ possible.
	Train staff members in sign language and other techniques to interact with people with specific disabilities.
Do my job	Adopt different communications styles (writing, drawing, subtitles, and/or audio descriptions).
	Provide assistive devices and alternate formats such as alternative keyboards and mice, magnifying systems, braille printers, and labelers.
	Encourage and promote flexible schedules and quiet spaces to promote mental health.
Use the services in the office	Define procedures at team level to ensure that everyone is coached, supervised, and supported in the most appropriate way.
	Ensure the accessibility of the main areas in the office, ensure that circulation spaces are left unobstructed, and ensure that spaces are organized clearly.
	Ensure that toilets are accessible.
	Provide resting spaces and silent rooms.



