

BEYOND THE RAMP | Creating Truly Inclusive Library Experiences

Quick Reference Card • MLA-DLA Conference 2026 • AM Dillon • adillon@stmalib.org • 240-587-7206

THE INCLUSION SPECTRUM

- 1 Legal Compliance**
ADA requirements, physical access
- 2 Accessible Services**
Assistive tech, alt formats, trained staff
- 3 Inclusive Practice**
Etiquette, welcoming culture, proactive design
- 4 Disability Justice**
Community co-design, centering voices

DISABILITY TYPES

Physical/Mobility: Wheelchair, chronic pain, limb differences

Sensory: Blind/low-vision, Deaf/hard of hearing

Cognitive/Learning: Dyslexia, ADHD, intellectual disabilities, TBI

Psychiatric: Anxiety, depression, PTSD, OCD

Chronic/Invisible: Fibromyalgia, lupus, diabetes, ME/CFS

Neurodivergent: Autism, Tourette, sensory processing

Most disabilities are invisible. Assume competence.

DISABILITY ETIQUETTE



DO

- Speak directly to the patron, not companion
- Ask before helping — never assume
- Get to eye level with wheelchair users
- Allow extra time without drawing attention
- Follow the patron's language preference
- Rephrase if not understood; be patient



DO NOT

- Speak loudly or slowly unless asked
- Finish someone's sentences
- Ask personal medical/diagnostic questions
- Use "special needs" or "differently-abled"
- Make disability the focus of the interaction
- Speak to a companion instead of the patron

LANGUAGE GUIDE

Person-First

"Person with a disability" — places person before condition. Common in medical/social service settings.

Identity-First

"Disabled person" — preferred by many Deaf and autistic communities as part of identity.

When in doubt: Ask the patron which they prefer.

INCLUSIVE COMMUNICATION

Spoken

- Face person when speaking; natural pace
- Plain language; avoid library jargon
- Offer paper, text, or AAC device support

Written/Visual

- Min 14pt font (16pt preferred); sans-serif
- High contrast — 4.5:1 minimum ratio
- Left-align text; proactively offer large print

Digital

- WCAG 2.1 AA compliance on website
- Alt text on ALL images; caption all videos
- Tagged PDFs; full keyboard navigation

KEY STATISTICS

1 in 4

U.S. adults has a disability

61M

Americans with a disability

71%

leave inaccessible websites

36%

feel unwelcome in public spaces

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QUICK WINS BY INVESTMENT

Free / This Week

- Add image alt text to all social media posts
- Train front desk on person-first language
- Designate a quiet hour weekly
- Post fragrance-free reminder in program spaces
- Stock fidgets/earplugs at the service desk
- Review signage: font size and contrast

Moderate Investment

- Purchase 2–3 assistive technology lending items
- Add large-print labels to shelf sections
- Develop an accessibility statement for website
- Schedule annual all-staff etiquette training

Strategic / Long-Term

- Form a Disability Advisory Council
- Conduct a full accessibility audit (physical, digital, programmatic)
- Revise collection development policy
- Apply for accessibility grants
- Partner with local disability service organizations

Start somewhere. Progress matters more than perfection.

INCLUSIVE PROGRAMMING (UDL)

- Multiple means of REPRESENTATION: visual, audio, hands-on
- Multiple means of ENGAGEMENT: varied entry points
- Multiple means of EXPRESSION: varied ways to show learning
- Flexible participation: in-person, virtual, recorded

Program Ideas

- Sensory-friendly story times
- Assistive technology demos
- Disability History Month events
- Caregiver support groups
- Seated exercise/yoga programs
- Job access and accommodations workshops

Design programs WITH — not just FOR — people with disabilities.

COLLECTION ESSENTIALS

Accessible Formats

- Large print, audiobooks, e-audiobooks
- BARD enrollment (NLS — free, via loc.gov/nls)
- Tagged e-books for screen readers
- Easy-read / plain language adult materials

Representation Audit

- Are disabled characters protagonists, not sidekicks?
- Are own-voices authors represented?
- Is disability shown as part of ordinary life?

KEY RESOURCES

Organizations

ADA National Network — adata.org
American Foundation for the Blind — afb.org
ASAN — autisticadvocacy.org
NAMI — nami.org
Disability Rights Advocates — dralegal.org

Library-Specific

ALA Accessibility — ala.org/accessibility
WebAIM Evaluator — webaim.org
NLS BARD — loc.gov/nls

Reading & Media

Disability Visibility — Alice Wong (ed.)
Haben — Haben Girma (memoir)
Crip Camp (2020, Netflix)
The Accessible Stall (podcast)

MY ACTION PLAN

This week I will:

I will propose:

Partner to contact:

The library belongs to everyone. Let's make sure that's true.

