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The diversity of people — including those with and without disabilities — who are served by the workforce development system necessitates a universal access approach.

When considering accessibility for people with disabilities, it is important to review the entire program, service, or activity as well as the specific policies, procedures, facility, materials, equipment, and technology. The diversity of people – including those with and without disabilities – who are served by the workforce development system necessitates a universal access approach. Developing a program, service, or activity to be accessible to youth and adults with disabilities will make it more usable by everyone.

Access for people with disabilities is driven by some very specific standards embedded in multiple laws and implementing regulations. Yet, much about providing access to programs for people with disabilities is rooted in common sense and a basic understanding of various disabilities.

The workforce development system is comprised of a broad array of entities at the national, state, and local levels with diverse responsibilities for planning, funding, administering, and operating programs to assist young people and adults with and without disabilities in obtaining education, training, job placement, and support services. The term "universal access" has been introduced into the workforce development system as a means of assuring that everyone has access to the One-Stop system and to core employment services. The universal access provisions of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) require recipients of federal funding to demonstrate that a reasonable effort has been made to include, in their WIA programs and activities, members of varying demographic groups, including people with disabilities. This requirement can be satisfied in the following ways: 1) advertising in targeted media; 2) sending notices about openings in the recipient's programs and activities to schools and community service groups that serve various populations; and 3) consulting with appropriate community organizations about ways to improve outreach.

Core services are those available to everyone at no cost; they are usually self-directed, although staff assistance is available. Core services can include such things as basic outreach; intake; interest assessment; job search and placement assistance; access to a wide variety of labor market, training, and support service information; and assistance in establishing eligibility for public assistance programs.

Other provisions of WIA, intended to ensure that people with disabilities can benefit from America's workforce development system, include those relating to physical and programmatic accessibility. Publicly funded entities are prohibited from denying people with disabilities equal access to participate in programs and activities because facilities are not accessible. The requirement of program accessibility means that when viewed in its entirety, the program or activity provided by the recipient of public funds must be readily accessible to qualified individuals with disabilities. The recipient must ensure that participants with various physical and mental disabilities will have access to the program or activity. Program access requires innovation and creativity and may involve any of the following: redesign of equipment; reassignment to accessible locations; use of aides; delivery of services at alternative accessible sites; use of accessible vehicles and technologies; alternatives to existing facilities; and construction of new facilities.

Workforce development programs have an obligation to comply with architectural accessibility standards independently of program accessibility requirements. The architectural accessibility requirements relate specifically to construction and design of facilities and apply to the program whether or not they serve or employ someone with a disability. Specific architectural standards are spelled out in state and local building codes as well as in guidance published by the Access Board.

The workforce development system is but one area where the concept of universal access has been embraced systematically. Other areas where universal design and universal access principles have taken hold include education, architecture, and technology.

RESOURCES

ACCESSIBILITY RESOURCES

Access Board (http://www.access-board.gov) is an independent federal agency that develops accessibility standards and guidelines for facilities and technology.

ADA Basic Building Blocks (http://www.adabasics.org) contains a web course which explores the legal requirements and spirit of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

One Stop Accessibility Guidance (http://www.onestops.info/article.php?article_id=137&subcat_id=64) is a manual to assist the workforce development system in meeting the needs of customers with disabilities.

Center for Universal Design (http://www.ncsu.edu/www/ncsu/design/sod5/cud) is a national research, information, and technical assistance center that evaluates, develops, and promotes universal design in housing, public and commercial facilities, and related products.

Adaptive Environments Center, Inc. (http://www.adaptenv.org) promotes accessibility as well as universal design through education programs, technical assistance, training, consulting, publications, and design advocacy.

Assistive Technology Resource (http://www.assistivetech.net) is an online searchable database of assistive technology designed to help target solutions, determine costs, and link to vendors that sell products.

National Center for Accessible Media (NCAM) (http://ncam.wgbh.org) is a resource for making media and information technology, including a captioning, accessible for people with disabilities.

WIA Section 188 Disability Checklist (http://www.dol.gov/oasam/programs/crc/section188.htm) identifies the basic disability-related requirements of the nondiscrimination provisions of the Workforce Investment Act.

The Job Accommodation Network (http://www.jan.wvu.edu) is a free consulting service that provides information about job accommodations, the ADA, and the employability of people with disabilities.

ADA Disability and Business Technical Assistance Centers (DBTAC) (http://www.adata.org/index.html) provides information, training, and technical assistance on the ADA and accessible electronic and information technology in education.

ELECTRONIC & INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY ACCESSIBILITY

Section 508 Guidance (http://www.Section508.gov) offers electronic and information technology accessibility standards, guidance, and resources.

Trace Center (http://trace.wisc.edu) develops universally designed products and systems to make standard information technologies and telecommunications accessible to and usable by people with disabilities.

Information Technology Technical Assistance and Training Center (ITTATC) (http://www.ittatc.org) provides information, training, and technical assistance about accessible electronic and information technology.

Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST) (http://www.cast.org) develops and disseminates products that expand opportunity for learning through universal design, including through the development and innovative uses of technology.

National Center on Accessible Information Technology in Education (AccessIT) (http://www.washington.edu/accessit/index.php) centers on the use of electronic and information technology for students and employees with disabilities in educational institutions at all academic levels.

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Notes

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RESOURCES

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Alliance for Technology Access (ATA) (http://www.ataccess.org) connects children and adults with disabilities to technology tools through public awareness and special initiatives.

INTERNET ACCESSIBILITY

World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) (http://www.w3.org/WAI) develops common protocols that promote the internet's evolution and ensure its inter-operability, including web accessibility to and usability for people with disabilities.

Bobby Worldwide (http://bobby.watchfire.com/bobby/html/en/index.jsp) is a low cost web software tool to help expose and repair barriers to accessibility and encourage compliance with existing public and private standards.

Cynthia Says Portal (http://www.cynthiasays.com) free web content accessibility validation tool for checking websites against various accessibility standards.

WebABLE (http://www.webable.com) provides extensive resources for ensuring access to information technologies for people with disabilities.

Web Accessibility in Mind (WebAIM) (http://www.webaim.org) addresses web accessibility through online learning opportunities and its ***WAVE*** tool (http://www.wave.webaim.org) to help web authors verify that their websites are accessible to people with disabilities.

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The National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth (NCWD/Youth) is composed of partners with expertise in disability, education, employment, and workforce development issues. NCWD/Youth is housed at the Institute for Educational Leadership in Washington, DC. The Collaborative is charged with assisting state and local workforce development systems to integrate youth with disabilities into their service strategies.

At the time of printing, every possible effort was made to compile accurate and up-to-date website information. Internet information changes frequently.

NCWD/Youth

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