

AFG Grants: Maximizing Your Accessibility Improvements

Thank you for your awareness of the importance of making houses of worship accessible to all. The following information may assist you in achieving the best outcomes for your accessibility improvements.

Increasing Awareness of Accessibility

Members of your congregation may not be familiar with the new accessible feature or equipment or may be reluctant to use it. To ensure that your congregation achieves the full benefits of the project, it is helpful to include an orientation. Schedule orientations at a time outside of normal services or activities so that the sole focus is on becoming comfortable with using the new feature or equipment. Encourage members of the congregation to try it. Emphasize that the purpose of the renovations and equipment is to increase participation and inclusiveness in all services and activities in your facility.

It is important to inform outside organizations that want, or are required, to use accessible locations for their programs or activities about the increased accessibility of your facility. Polling places, health agencies, social service agencies, or other organizations that receive government funding are examples of entities that have legal obligations to provide services in accessible locations.

Accessible Parking Spaces

- Ensure that the people who clear snow from your parking lot keep each accessible parking space and the adjacent striped access aisle free of snow.

Exterior Ramps

- Shovel and salt ramps during the winter.
- Ensure that access to the ramp is not obstructed by piles of snow after clearing parking lots, sidewalks, or streets.
- Keep the ramp free of debris.
- Do not allow vehicles, decorative items, or dumpsters to block the area at the bottom of the ramp, even temporarily.
- Keep the landing at the top of the ramp clear to allow for emergency exit.

Implementing these measures will make it easier for congregants or visitors to use the ramp and will reduce your potential for liability due to accidents.

Accessible Entrances

- If the main entrance to your facility is not accessible, make sure there is a sign on it explaining where the accessible entrance is located.
- Put a sign on the accessible door that clearly designates that it is an accessible entrance.

Elevators or Lifts

- A warranty and maintenance plan for a specific duration should be included as part of the installation package.
- When the original warranty/maintenance contract expires, it is essential to continue with regular inspection and maintenance even if not required by your municipality.
- Do not place planters, wastebaskets, or other items under the elevator call buttons. This could prevent someone using a wheelchair or walker from being able to reach the buttons.
- A lift or elevator should not be locked when the building is in use; people who need it should be able to use it without having to look for someone with a key.
- Encourage use of the lift or elevator by those who need it. Long periods of idleness may result in damage to mechanical or hydraulic equipment.

Accessible Restrooms/Toilet Stalls

- Keep accessible restroom fixtures in operable condition.
- Ask congregation members and staff to report broken items as soon as they are observed so they may be repaired or replaced quickly.
- Do not use accessible restrooms or stalls for storage because every inch of floor space is needed for persons using wheelchairs, walkers, or other mobility aids.
- Put a sign on the wall right next to the door of the accessible restroom which clearly designates that it is accessible. Post signs in the building to show the location of the accessible restroom. Signs describing the location of the accessible restroom should also be posted next to the doors of any inaccessible public restrooms.
- When making restroom renovations or repairs, be aware that accessibility codes do not usually require special fixtures often marketed as “accessible” or “ADA approved” such as extra-long sinks or lavatories, gooseneck faucets, blade faucet hardware, or tilt mirrors. When installed or mounted according to guidelines in DOJ 2010 and IAC (which your architect or engineer should be familiar with), standard lavatories, faucets, push button or automatic faucet hardware, and flat mirrors meet accessibility requirements.

Assistive Listening Systems

- Post notices in easily visible locations to inform congregants and visitors that an assistive listening system with headsets is available.
- Describe how someone may obtain a headset to use during the service or program and where to return it after use.
- Because the term “assistive listening system” may not be familiar to many people who have a hearing loss, feel free to use terms such as “Audio Booster” or “Enhanced Listening” to describe the system.