

# Accessibility within the Society of American Archivists

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Bit.ly: <https://bit.ly/3aT0uTe>



## *Very brief* history of accessibility initiatives @ SAA

- 2008-2009: [Archives Management/Records Management Joint Working Group on Accessibility in Archives](#)
- 2018-2019: [Task Force to Revise the Best Practices on Accessibility](#)

# Guidelines for Accessible Archives for People with Disabilities

- Revision and expansion of 2008 Best Practices
- Topics Include:
  - Core Values
  - Physical Environment
  - Public Services
  - Exhibitions and Public Programming
  - Workplace
  - Digital Content

# Core Values

- Treat every person with dignity and respect.
- Consider people first in all accessibility decisions.
- Disclosing a disability is a choice.
- Respect personal boundaries. Physical assistive devices are considered part of the body of the person using those devices.
- Be flexible
- Factor accessibility into every aspect of institutional spaces, policies, and services.

# Physical Environment

- Americans with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines for Buildings and Facilities (ADAAG) guidance
- Not as much awareness or compliance of ADA guidelines *within buildings*



Photo credit: Hiroko Masuike/The New York Times  
Hunter's Point Library

# Physical Environment

- Doors with automatic openers, wide enough to accommodate wheelchairs and scooters
- Eliminate obstacles that could be tripping hazards or obstacles
- Signage should be in large print, Braille
- Height adjustable tables and chairs

Photo credit: Lydia Tang. Patron unable to open reading room door



# Former Reading Room



Desk too high!



# Digital Scholarship Lab





# Former Reading Room



Crowded aisles, not adjustable desks, chairs not height-adjustable, etc.

# New Reading Room!





# Height-Adjustable Tables



# Public Services

- Know what you can and can't ask re: service animals
  - “Is this a service animal required because of a disability?”
  - “What task is the animal trained to perform?”
  - NOT “What is your disability?” or documentation of the disability
- Know what assistive technology is available and how to get it started
  - Many people might bring their own assistive technology
- Flexible communication
  - Come around from the desk, if it's too high
  - Written communication, volume/speed of speech
- Flexible spaces
  - Light adjustment?
  - Alternative reading room for people with sensory issues, etc.

# *Important!*

- Assistive devices (cane, wheelchair, etc) are considered an extension of the person. Do not touch or move person/assistive device without consent
- Service animals are working - do not pet them without permission
- Listen to the person and meet their need but avoid gestures that can be infantilizing, cute, dismissive, out of step
  - If someone is blind, speaking louder and slower
  - Using terms such as “special needs,” “handicapped” (origin of term: hand-in-cap)

# Exhibitions and Public Programming

- Exhibit items and their labels should be visible to a seated person. For example, if labels or materials are stored on a flat surface, angle them for better visibility.
- Cater to multiple senses
- **Always** use a microphone for public events!



Murray & Hong Special  
Collections Gallery. Photo  
credit: Lydia Tang



# Instruction and Outreach

- Normalize asking for accommodation requests
- Share assignments and handouts via accessible electronic format
- Tactile examples



A blind visitor touches sculpture at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY  
<https://narratively.com/please-touch-the-art>

Left image: 3-D tactile book by Tom Burtonwood, image by Lydia Tang



Right image photo credit: Sound dome in Murray & Hong gallery, Lydia Tang

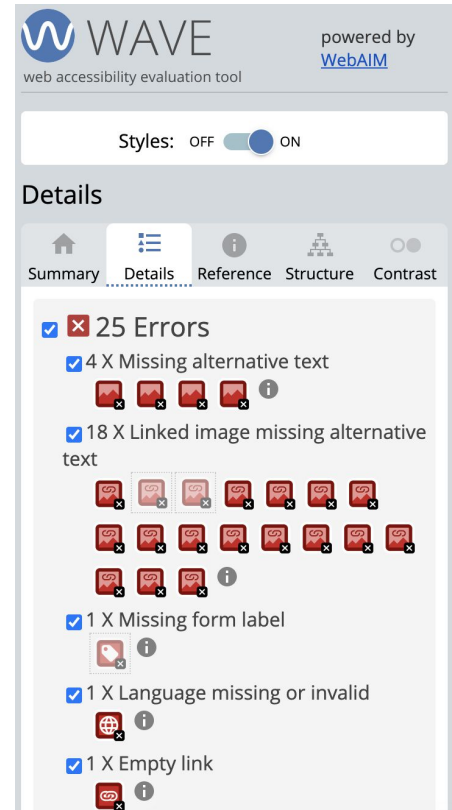


# Workplace Accessibility

- It's the law. ADA. Overseen by [EEOC](#)
- Your colleagues may also be disabled, *not only patrons*
- Consider:
  - Work location
  - Work space (office, desk, materials transport, equipment, technology, etc)
  - Bathrooms, break rooms, etc.
  - Modes of communication
  - Evaluations and promotions
  - Organizational support

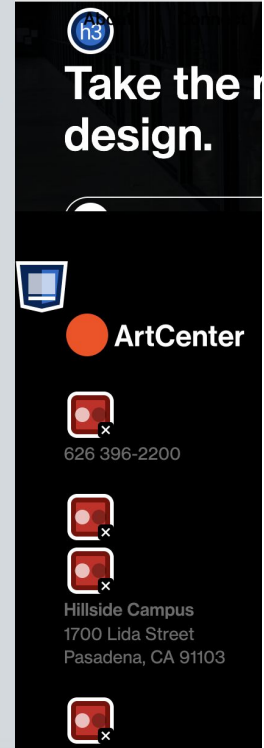
# Digital Accessibility

- **Design accessibility from the beginning!**
- Headers
- Alt-text
- Contrast
- Flexibility
- Test it with Tools: [WAVE](#), etc.
- Test it with people



The screenshot displays the WAVE web accessibility evaluation tool interface. At the top, it says "powered by WebAIM" and "web accessibility evaluation tool". Below this, there is a toggle for "Styles: OFF ON". The main section is titled "Details" and has a navigation bar with "Summary", "Details", "Reference", "Structure", and "Contrast". The "Details" tab is active, showing a list of 25 errors. The errors are:

- 4 X Missing alternative text (4 red icons with 'x')
- 18 X Linked image missing alternative text (18 red icons with 'x')
- 1 X Missing form label (1 red icon with 'x')
- 1 X Language missing or invalid (1 red icon with 'x')
- 1 X Empty link (1 red icon with 'x')



The image shows the ArtCenter logo and contact information. The logo is a blue circle with "h3" inside. Below it, the text "Take the design." is written in white. The ArtCenter logo is a red circle with "ArtCenter" text. Below it, the phone number "626 396-2200" is displayed. The address "Hillside Campus 1700 Lida Street Pasadena, CA 91103" is also shown. At the bottom, there is a red icon with a white 'x'.