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Accessibility: Just Do It!

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Accessibility: Just Do It!

Abstract

In the spring of 2019, The South Carolina State Library and Charleston County Public Library each formed an Accessibility Team to identify and begin addressing accessibility issues in their libraries. Volunteers from diverse roles and departments participate in the teams so that together they can have a deeper impact. The teams have started making improvements and have established a process to bring positive change to their organizations.

Keywords

Accessibility, Disabilities, Libraries, Organizational change

Introduction

In the spring of 2019, The South Carolina State Library and Charleston County Public Library each formed an Accessibility Team. As luck would have it, both organizations began this journey during the same month. Through collaboration and the formation of their own accessibility teams, both organizations were able to work together to begin addressing accessibility on an institutional level.

Feedback and Partnerships

Both library systems relied on feedback from individuals with disabilities and the organizations who are their advocates. Charleston's team initially developed out of a conversation with their local chapter of the Federation of the Blind.

Organizations that both teams connected with include:

- South Carolina Commission for the Blind
- Able South Carolina
- Access South Carolina Information Technology (ASCIT)
- Beyond BASIC Life Skills
- Beautiful Gate Center
- Charleston Association of the Deaf
- Family Resource Center for Disabilities and Special Needs
- National Federation of the Blind – Charleston Chapter
- Protection & Advocacy Network
- SC Assistive Technology Program (SCATP)
- South Carolina Talking Books Services
- Successful Transitions
- University of South Carolina, School of Library and Information Science

The results of our self-evaluations and feedback from community members and organizations were used to determine immediate goals and priorities for each team.

Current Projects and Goals

Goals and projects that the SCSL Accessibility Team identified through their meetings were:

- Establish accommodations process for event accessibility
- Revise internal procedure documents to address accessibility
- Produce consistent and accurate captions, transcripts, and image descriptions
- Expand assistive technology use, including braille printing and assistive listening systems

Goals and projects that the CCPL Accessibility Team identified through their meetings were:

- Educate staff and the community about digital accessibility opportunities
- Provide staff and the community resources to ensure equitable access
- Stay abreast of emerging accessible technologies
- Evaluate accessibility opportunities within CCPL
- Work with community partners to identify and address accessibility issues within CCPL

Getting Started

The team leaders started by seeking support and buy-in from leadership, and then invited staff from a variety of roles to join the first meeting. The teams set clear goals, which were tied to the larger vision of each library:

The State Library established a new Accessibility Team to discuss and reevaluate accessibility issues (including usability of our building, services and collections) for customers with disabilities of all kinds. Actions to take included:

- Reduce legal liability through voluntary compliance with the ADA
- Make our services more inclusive of people of all abilities
- Serve as a model for South Carolina public libraries

CCPL authorized the formation of an Accessibility Team in order to ensure all patrons could access information without barriers. Some objectives for this new team were the following:

- Assess current CCPL resources and services
- Evaluate the needs of our local communities with disabilities
- Produce a 2019 report summarizing our findings and make recommendations

Self-Evaluation: Where Are We Now?

Each team worked through checklists from Project Enable (<https://projectenable.syr.edu>) and The New England ADA Center's Title II Action Guide (www.adaactionguide.org).

Areas they evaluated include:

- Departments and Programs
- General Nondiscrimination
- Effective Communication
- Web Accessibility
- Program Accessibility

The teams did not evaluate physical facilities because each organization already has a plan to assess facilities according to the ADA 2010 Standards for Accessible Design.

Start Your Own Accessibility Team!

Don't wait for conditions to be perfect. Start now and learn as you go! First, look for guidance from organizations in your community, library patrons, the State Library, and the ADA National Network. For small libraries, your team can be one or two people.

Make a long-term commitment to accessibility. As new technology emerges, there will always be work to do to ensure that everyone has access to it.

For more resources that can help you get started with accessibility, visit:

<http://guides.statelibrary.sc.gov/inclusion/accessibility>