2025

IMPROVING ACCESSIBILITY

A GUIDEBOOK FOR OREGON TOURISM PROVIDERS AND PROFESSIONALS

Ensuring Inclusivity and Positive Customer Experiences

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INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE OF THE GUIDEBOOK

This guidebook is designed to serve as a resource for Oregon tourism professionals, providers, and destinations, helping them enhance accessibility for all visitors and residents, regardless of age or ability. It is the first step to understanding and implementing accessibility throughout organizations, ensuring an inclusive and barrier-free customer experience. It will equip teams with practical tools based on the social model of disability and the universal design framework to help adapt tourism services, products, and experiences for greater accessibility.

[Visual Description: An athlete with a prosthetic running blade in mid-stride, leaping against a striking backdrop of rugged mountains under a clear blue sky. A hydration backpack is strapped to his back, suggesting he is engaged in a long-distance trail run. His expression is focused and determined, emphasizing the intensity and exhilaration of the activity.]

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Who It Is For

You do not need to be an expert to make a difference. This guide gives you the tools to start small, think big, and create more welcoming experiences for all visitors and residents.

- Tourism professionals, event planners, business owners, marketers, and hospitality staff
- Entrepreneurs and business operations leaders seeking to improve access for anyone with disabilities, chronic conditions, or age-related needs

How It Is Organized

The guide is broken into clear, easy-to-navigate sections:

- Understanding Accessibility: Background and frameworks to ground your work
- Barriers and Solutions: Common access issues and how to address them
- Communication and Etiquette: Tips for inclusive, respectful interaction
- Digital and Physical Access: Tools, technology, and design guidance
- Provider Resources: Training areas, tools, and vendor info to take action
- Legal and Grants: Policies, compliance, and funding opportunities

How to Navigate

- Use the Table of Contents to find specific topics or needs
- Visit linked resources (if digital) or scan QR codes for up-to-date training and support

Start Where You Are

Use this guide to:

- Understand the basics of inclusive tourism
- Identify simple steps to start improving access
- Build toward long-term, system-wide improvements

Remember: The goal is not perfection—it is progress.
Every step you take toward inclusion helps make Oregon
a more welcoming destination for everyone.

WHAT IS ACCESSIBLE TOURISM

Accessible tourism is a comprehensive approach that empowers people of all abilities, including those with mobility, vision, hearing, and cognitive disabilities, to independently and comfortably participate in tourism and leisure activities with dignity and equality. Accessible tourism is about removing barriers in all aspects of your business, from operations and procedures to products and experiences, to provide an inclusive customer experience. Most commonly, seven areas will need to be assessed for potential barriers.

COMMON ASSESSMENT AREAS

FOR ACHIEVING

POSITIVE AND INCLUSIVE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCES

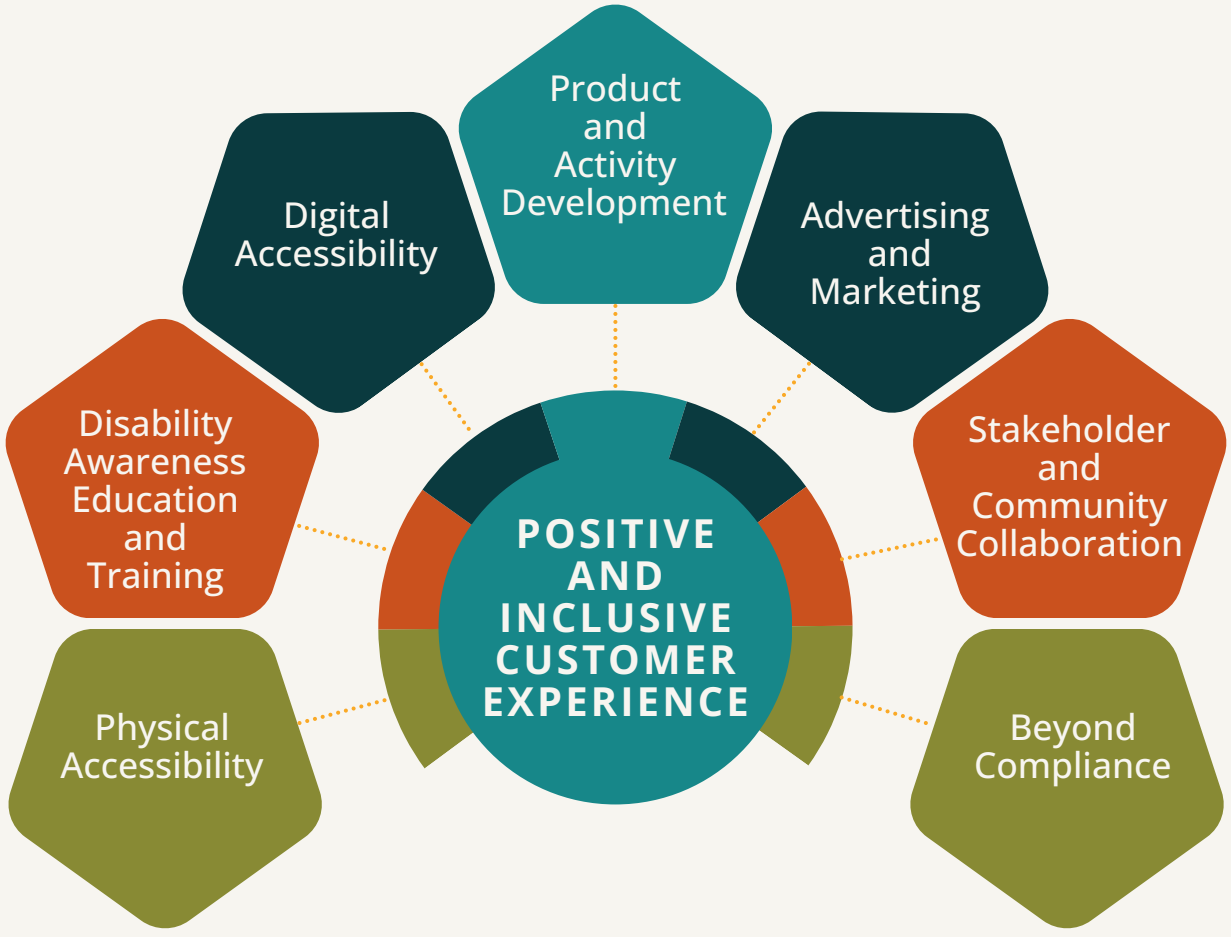


Figure: Areas for Assessment. Kishpaugh, J (2024) [Visual Description: A diagram titled “Positive and Inclusive Customer Experience” is displayed in the center of the image. Surrounding this center are seven pentagon-shaped segments, each labeled with a different theme that contributes to accessibility and inclusion. These segments are connected to the center with dotted lines, forming a circular layout.] Top segment (teal): “Product and Activity Development” Top-left segment (dark teal): “Digital Accessibility "Top-right segment (dark teal): “Advertising and Marketing” Middle-left segment (orange): “Disability Awareness Education and Training” Middle-right segment (orange): “Stakeholder and Community Collaboration” Bottom-left segment (olive green): “Physical Accessibility” Bottom-right segment (olive green): “Beyond Compliance”]

WHO BENEFITS FROM ACCESSIBLE TOURISM

When implemented correctly, everyone should benefit from accessible tourism. Implementing accessibility not only breaks down barriers for people with disabilities to participate but also creates shared benefits among many different types of travelers, such as aging adults, people traveling with temporary disabilities, and people traveling with children. When universal design features are applied, they benefit society as a whole by improving usability for everyone.

[Visual Description: A young person in a wheelchair and his large black service dog. The man, who has a visible disability, smiles broadly and wears a casual grey sweatshirt, green pants, and sneakers. The dog, wearing a service vest, stands close to him. They are indoors, in a room with a vibrant orange couch and a plant decoration, suggesting a comfortable and cheerful living environment.]

WHY ACCESSIBILITY MATTERS

Accessible Tourism is the Future of Travel and is vital to truly being an inclusive tourism provider. Accessible tourism removes barriers to accommodate a growing, diverse market. Overcoming these obstacles restores the fundamental human right of participation and equality, allowing all individuals to participate. Empowering hospitality and tourism providers to invest in accessibility and inclusivity measures, creates substantial economic opportunities, enables individuals with disabilities to travel, and goes beyond legal compliance to improve the customer experience.

Figure: Kishpaugh, J (2024) Why Prioritize Accessibility. [Visual Description: A graphic titled "Why Prioritize Accessibility" in bold, teal-colored text. Below the title, six sections are displayed in a grid format, each highlighting a key reason for prioritizing accessibility with an icon and accompanying text. The sections are as follows: Fundamental Human Right: Icon of balanced scales. Empowers People with Disabilities: Icon of raised hands with a circle above. Increases Revenue: Icon of a dollar sign with upward arrows. Competitive Advantage: Icon of a gear with people inside. Positive Customer Experience: Icon of a person with a checkmark. Legal and Ethical Compliance: Icon of legal documents and a checkmark.]

TIP: It is important to note here, regarding compliance, that while a business must meet the standard legal compliance, a "standard" approach will most likely not achieve a genuinely welcoming and positive customer experience. Minimal effort equals minimal impact, which is not the goal of tourism providers, further expressing the importance of building upon the social model and UD framework to go above and beyond to reach the customer.[1]

Source: [1]Return on Disability, 2024

MARKET POTENTIAL

An estimated 1.3 billion people—or 1 in 6 globally—experience significant visible disabilities, representing 16 percent of the world's population. Additionally, when family members and caregivers are considered, the number of people who are directly or indirectly affected by disability rises to 2 billion or 30 percent of the global population. When invisible disabilities are included, the number climbs to nearly 60% of people worldwide. [2]

This growing demographic represents a powerful but underserved tourism market. Travelers with disabilities take 40 million trips a year, spending $120 billion globally. In the U.S. alone, disabled travelers and their companions spend over $50 billion annually, with a total economic impact exceeding $100 billion. [3]

The global disposable income of people with disabilities is $2.6 trillion, and that rises to $15 trillion when travel companions are included.[4]

[Visual Description: A split graphic titled "Business Opportunity" compares the economic impact of people with disabilities and their friends and families. The graphic is divided into two sections: Left Section titled People with Disabilities: Icon: A person in an orange wheelchair. Text: 1.3 Billion Global Population, 16% World Population, $2.6 Trillion Disposable Income (USA, UK, EU and CA). Right Section titled Including Friends and Families of PwDs: Icon: Four teal figures, one in a wheelchair and three standing next to them. Text: 2 Billion Global Population, 30% World Population, $15 Trillion Disposable Income (USA, UK, EU and CA).]

Source: [2] WHO, 2020, [3] Valuable 500, [4] Return on Disability. (2024).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS OF DISABILITY

The Social Model of Disability is a framework that highlights societal barriers in "disabling" individuals, such as physical, attitudinal, systemic, and communication barriers, rather than the impairment itself. Through this lens, disability is a result of how society has evolved to exclude disabled individuals from everyday activities. Its goal is to identify these obstacles that prevent people with disability from participating in society fully.

The Medical Model of Disability views disability as a personal health issue caused by physical or mental impairments. It focuses on medical treatment to "fix" or "normalize" the individual. This model can reinforce harmful stereotypes by portraying people with disabilities as victims of their conditions.

When applied to tourism, this perspective overlooks the role that inaccessible environments, services, and attitudes play in limiting participation. Focusing only on the individual misses the broader need for inclusive, systemic change.[5]

The Capability Approach focuses on what people are actually free to do or be in their lives, not just what resources they have. It highlights the difference between having an opportunity (a capability) and actually using it (a functioning). Whether someone can turn a capability into a real-life experience depends on personal and environmental factors, called conversion factors. For people with disabilities, supportive resources and inclusive environments can be the key to unlocking those opportunities, making full participation possible.[6]

Universal Design Theory is about designing spaces, products, and systems that work for as many people as possible—regardless of age, ability, or physical condition. It doesn't just help people with disabilities; it also benefits others, like older adults, parents with strollers, or expecting mothers. The goal is to create environments that are usable by everyone, without needing special adaptations.[7]

Sources: [6] Capability Approach as defined by the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (2020). [5] Human Development Institute, University of Kentucky, comparing the Medical and Social Models of Disability (LoBianco and Sheppard-Jones, 2007).[7] Adapted from De Matteis, Notaristefano, and Bianchi (2021).

WHAT IS UNIVERSAL DESIGN

Universal Design puts the social model of disability into action. Using its seven principles, it designs products and environments that are usable by all people to the greatest extent possible, without requiring adaptation or specialized design. From a tourism provider's perspective, it is about creating experiences, activities, and physical environments that cater to all users, regardless of their physical abilities, age, cultural background, cognitive, or sensory requirements.

Seven Principles of Universal Design

Equitable Use
- The design is useful and marketable to people with diverse abilities.

Flexibility in Use
- The design accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities.

Simple and Intuitive Use
- Use of the design is easy to understand, regardless of the user's experience, knowledge, language skills, or current concentration level.

Perceptible Information
- The design communicates necessary information effectively to the user, regardless of ambient conditions or the user's sensory abilities.

Tolerance for Error
- Design minimizes hazards and the adverse consequences of accidental or unintended actions.

Low Physical Effort
- Design can be used efficiently, comfortably, and with minimal fatigue.

Size and Space for Approach and Use
- Appropriate size and space are provided for approach, reach, manipulation, and use regardless of the user's body size, posture, or mobility abilities.[8]

Source: [8] Center for Universal Design, 2022

FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

When applied together, the social model and universal design complement each other to assess the problem areas, address the barriers that prevent participation, and achieve an accessible tourism product, resulting in a positive and inclusive customer experience.

Building an Inclusive Experience

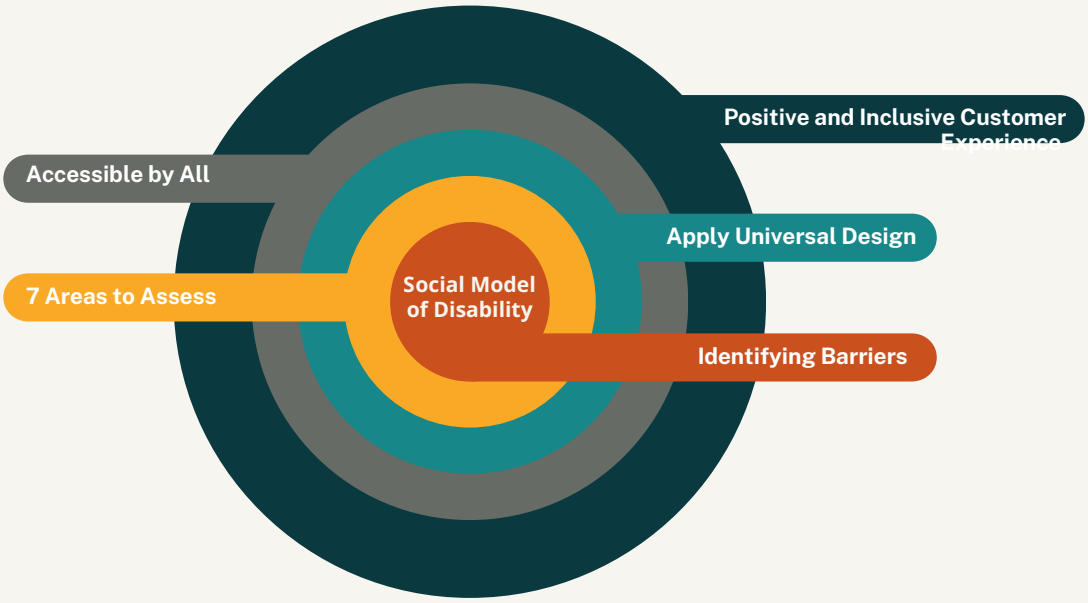
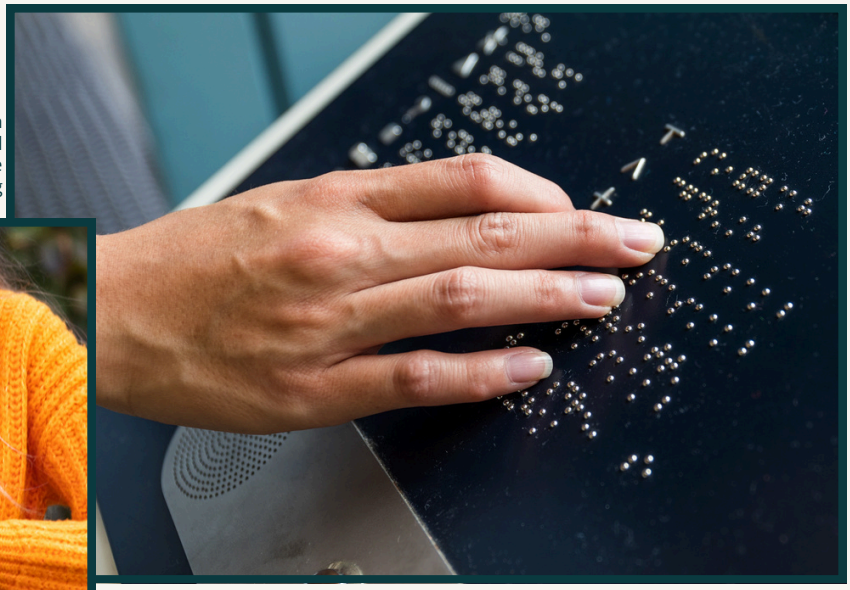


Figure: Components of a Positive Customer Experience. Kishpaugh, J. (2024) [Visual Description: A circular diagram is displayed on a green background, consisting of five concentric rings. At the center, the smallest circle is labeled "Social Model of Disability" in white text with an orange background. The outer rings contain arrows pointing outward, each labeled with a different concept: 7 Areas to Assess (yellow), Accessible by All (gray), Identifying Barriers (red), Apply Universal Design (blue), Positive and Inclusive Customer Experience (dark teal)]

Below [Visual Description: A person in an orange sweater signing the word "Interpreter", highlighting the importance of accessibility for people with hearing impairments.]



Above [Visual Description: A person's hand reading Braille. The setting appears to be outdoors or in a public place, suggested by the hint of a speaker located under the Braille, possibly at a museum or an educational institution. The focus on the hand and the Braille text indicates the importance of accessibility in public settings.]

DISABILITY TAKES MANY FORMS

Disability includes a wide range of conditions and experiences, from physical and sensory to cognitive, invisible, temporary, or age-related. Because no two people experience disability the same way, tourism providers need flexible, inclusive approaches. By understanding different needs and removing barriers, providers can design spaces and experiences that work for everyone.[9]

Understanding Diversity of Disability

Physical/Mobility
- May use a wheelchair, or other mobility device.
- No use or partial limb use

Temporary
- Maybe have broken bones, require a mobility device, limitations due to pregnancy, or others

Hearing
- Total or partial hearing loss
- May require hearing device or use sign language

Age-Related
- May have physical, cognitive or mental limitations
- May not see themselves as having a disability

Invisible
- May have chronic pain or a mental health condition
- May require a service animal

Multiple
- May have >1 disability or a complexity of conditions
- May require additional steps to participate

Cognitive
- May have trouble with instructions or making decisions
- May have a travel companion

Visual
- Total or partial loss of vision
- May require audio guides, white mobility cane or service animal

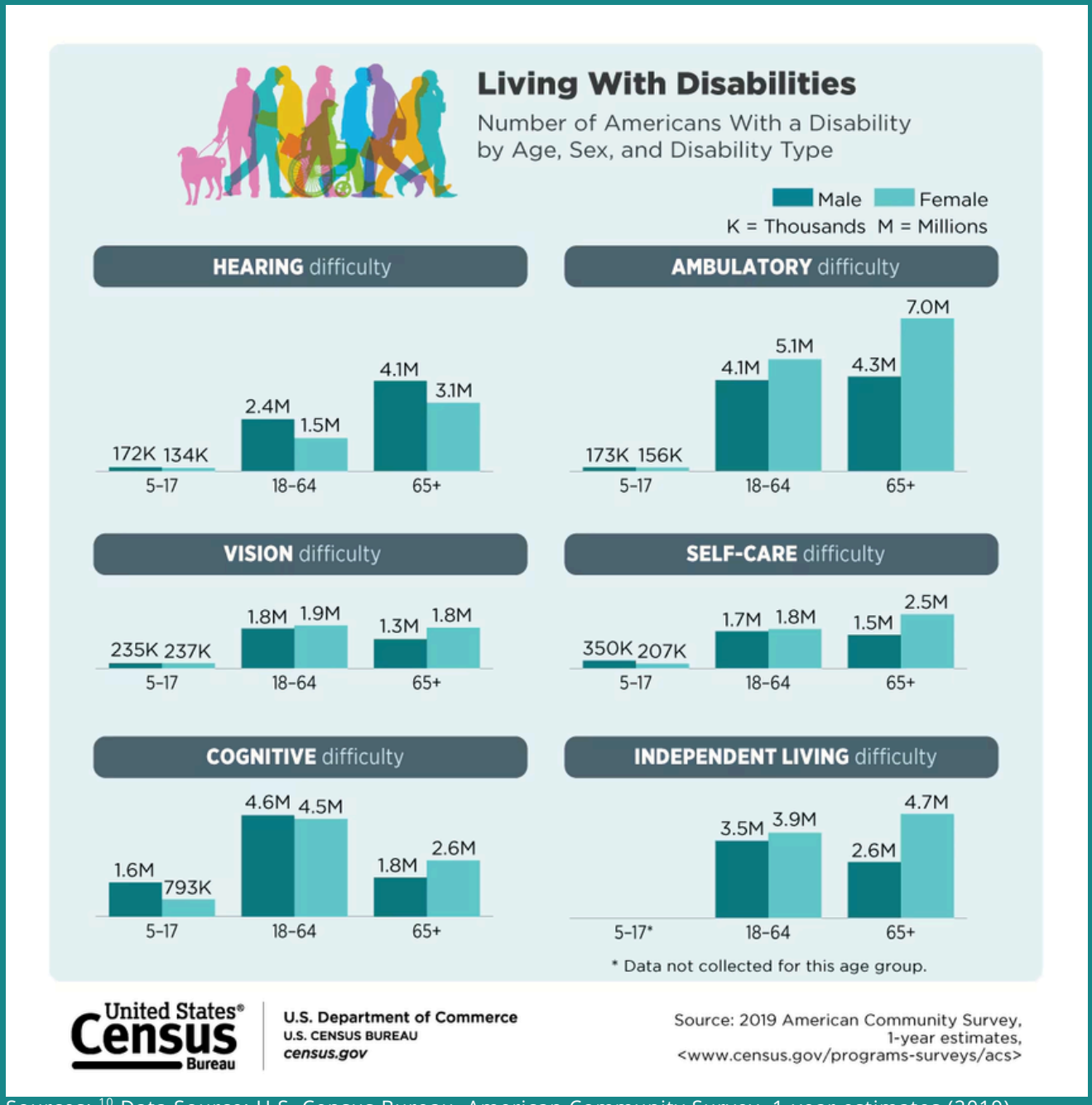
Figure: Understanding Diversity of Disability. Kishpaugh, J., (2024). [Visual Description: An infographic titled "Understanding Diversity of Disability" explains various types of disabilities. The layout consists of icons and descriptions organized in two columns. A circular graphic at the top-right shows four figures, one in a wheelchair, symbolizing inclusion.] Left Column (Orange Background with White Icons): Text: May use a wheelchair or other mobility device; may have no use or partial limb use. Text: Total or partial loss of vision; may require audio guides, white canes, or service animals. Text: Total or partial hearing loss; may require hearing devices or sign language. Text: May have trouble with instructions or decision-making; may travel with a companion or aid. Right Column (Text: May have chronic pain, mental health conditions, or require a service animal. Text: May include broken limbs, mobility device use, or pregnancy-related limitations. Age-Related: Text: May involve physical or mental limitations; individuals may not identify as having a disability. Multiple: Text: May involve multiple or complex disabilities; may require additional participation steps.]

Sources: [9] Based on concepts of disability diversity and inclusive tourism design.

DISABILITY AFFECTS ALL AGES

Disability is not limited to any one age group—it impacts millions of Americans across all stages of life. This graphic shows how different types of disabilities, from cognitive to mobility and hearing challenges, are experienced by children, adults, and older adults alike.

Cognitive disabilities are most common among working-age adults, while mobility and independent living difficulties rise with age. It's a reminder that tourism spaces should work for everyone—regardless of age, ability, or condition.[10]



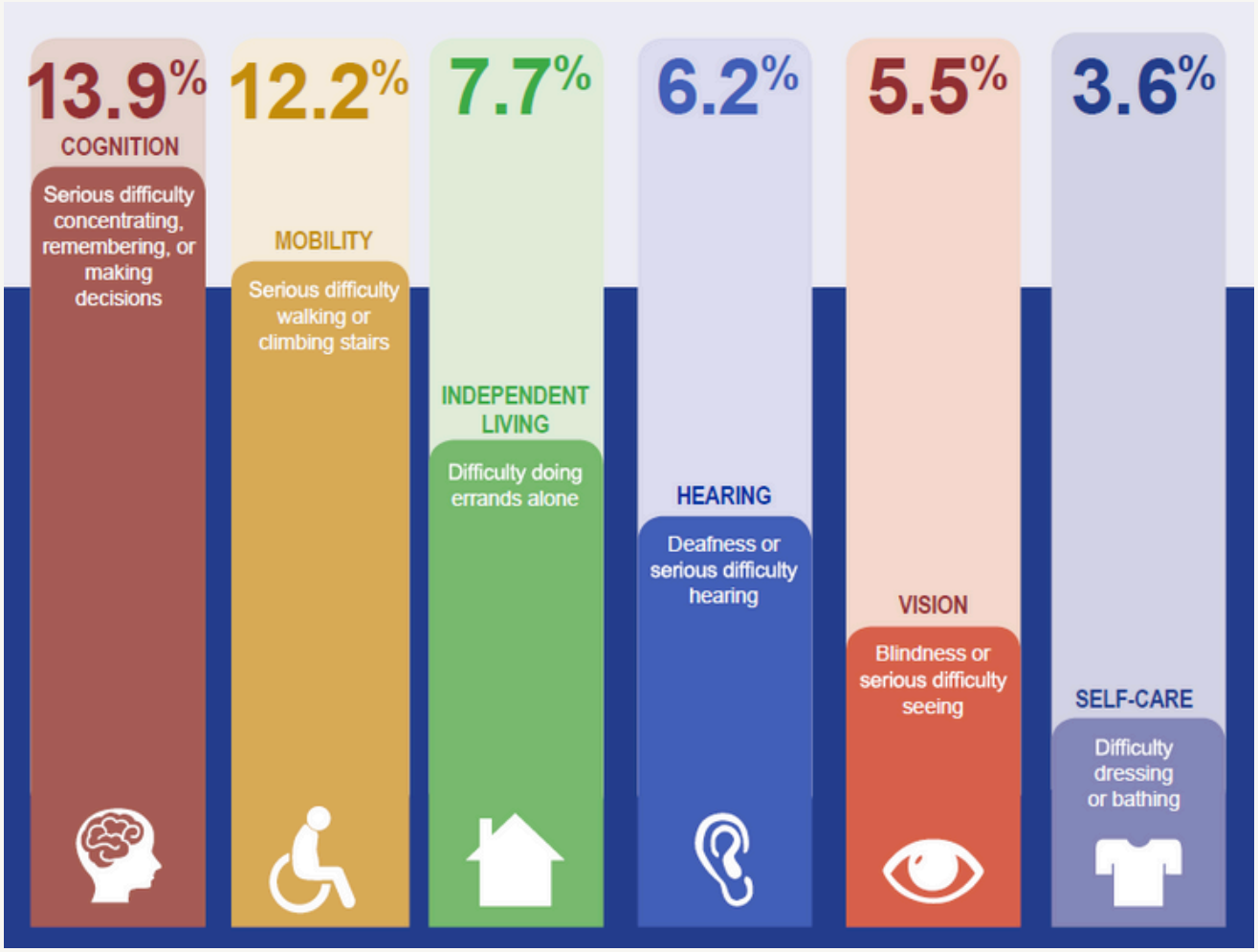
Sources: [10] Data Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 1-year estimates (2019). https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs

DISABIILITY IN THE U.S.

Disability touches the lives of millions of people across the country—often in ways that are not immediately visible. It can affect how someone moves, communicates, processes information, or navigates daily tasks. More than 1 in 4 adults in the U.S. lives with a disability.

This CDC[11] infographic below highlights the most common types of disabilities, including cognitive (13.9%) and mobility (12.2%) challenges, as well as Independent living (7.7%), Hearing (6.2%), Vision (5.5%), and Self-care (3.6%).

These numbers remind us that accessibility isn't a special feature—it is something that makes every visitor feel welcome, included, and able to enjoy their experience. Accessible tourism must account for this wide range of needs to ensure that all visitors can participate fully.



Source: [11]Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Disability Impacts All of Us – U.S. Data, 2022. https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/infographic-disability-impacts-all.html

INSTERSECTIONALITY IN DISABILITY

Intersectionality is the idea that people have multiple overlapping identities—like disability, race, gender, age, language, or income—that shape their experiences in the world, including how they access tourism.[12]

Example: A Deaf traveler who doesn't speak English may face more barriers than a Deaf traveler who does.

Why It Matters in Accessibility

- Accessibility barriers can compound, such as language and disability
- Experiences vary greatly even within disability groups
- Providers need to avoid one-size-fits-all solutions

Common Overlapping Identities

- Disability + Race/Ethnicity
- Disability + Age (elderly traveler with mobility issues)
- Disability + Gender
- Disability + Immigration/Language status
- Disability + LGBTQ+ identity
- Disability + Socioeconomic status

Image: A brown skinned person with long, red curly hair smiles confidently while using black and silver forearm crutches, posing against a light blue background. She wears a floral-patterned black and white cardigan, paired with a yellow shirt and neck scarf, khaki green shorts, fishnet tights, and a daisy-decorated black hat, a visible prosthetic left leg, and white leather laced-up boots.

Image: A Black or person of African American dscent is in a white t-shirt, holding up his right hand with two fingers near his cheek and eye. The gesture resembles the ASL sign for "I see you", or another visual expression, depending on context.

What Tourism Providers Can Do

- Don't make assumptions-ask about individual needs
- Offer multiple formats for communication (text, visual, ASL, plain language, multiple languages)
- Train staff in cultural sensitivity as well as disability awareness

Source:[12] Inspired by concepts from Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex. University of Chicago Legal Forum.

BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION

WHAT ARE BARRIERS

Barriers are anything that prevents people with disabilities from fully participating in public life—physically, socially, or digitally.[13]

These obstacles can be:

- Physical, such as stairs without ramps
- Sensory, such as unreadable signage
- Attitudinal, such as assumptions or a lack of awareness of specific disabilities

Many barriers overlap. For example, poor signage may affect both people who are blind and those with cognitive disabilities.

In the next pages of this section, you will learn several types of barriers people commonly face, how to identify them and address them in your business using

COMMON BARRIERS FOR ALL DISABILITIES

- Lack of Awareness and Training
- Poor Signage
- Inaccessible Communication
- One Size Fits All Policies
- Digital/Technology Access
- Curb cuts and sidewalks
- Lack of Elevators
- Narrow Hallways
- Thick Carpet/Trip Hazards
- Emergency exit
- Parking lot/spaces
- Overly Cluttered Areas
- Uneven Surfaces
- Bathroom Sink/Stalls
- High Service counters

Above: [Visual Description: A Black/African person is sitting in a wheelchair at the bottom of a staircase outside a modern building. The person appears frustrated. The setting includes large steps and a glass-walled building, suggesting an inaccessible environment for someone using a wheelchair. The picture is labeled "Excludes"]

Below: [Visual Description: A Black/African person is seen pushing a person in a wheelchair up a modern, accessible ramp with metal railings and glass panels. The setting is a building with large glass windows. The ramp offers a clear and inclusive alternative to stairs. The picture is labeled "Inclusive."]

Source: [13] ADA National Network

ATTITUDINAL BARRIERS

Attitudinal barriers can result from negative beliefs, perceptions, and assumptions about people with disability. A lack of knowledge, awareness, and understanding often causes them. They can lead to discrimination and poor treatment and can limit opportunities. Attitudinal barriers can compound other barriers, such as physical or communication barriers.

Examples of Negative Attitudes about Disability

- **Stereotyping and Assumptions**: Assumes individuals with disabilities cannot participate in certain activities.
- **Pity:** Feeling sorry for people with disability, leading to patronizing behavior
- **Fear and Avoidance**: Being afraid of saying or doing the "wrong" thing, so avoiding people with disability
- **Ableism:** Believing people with disability are inferior because of their impairment.
- **Denial:** Not recognizing the impact of disabling conditions that may not be visible, such as intellectual disability and autism, and denying reasonable accommodations where needed

Solutions for Attitudinal Barriers

- Disability awareness training for employees
- Share real-life stories
- Encourage inclusive and respectful language through the company [14]

Source: [14] Cities4All, 2020

COMMUNICATION AND TECHNOLOGY BARRIERS

Communication, language, and technology barriers are often overlooked, but they affect people across nearly every disability group. Whether it is inaccessible digital tools, unclear signage, or language-heavy instructions, these challenges can prevent guests from fully engaging with your space, service, or experience. Inclusive communication is not just about speaking louder or adding captions; it is about offering multiple ways to connect, understand, and participate.[15]

Communication and Language Barriers

Barriers in communication can range from unclear verbal instructions to a lack of materials in alternative formats. These issues often exclude Deaf or hard-of-hearing individuals, people with cognitive or intellectual disabilities, non-native English speakers, and anyone who processes information differently.

Examples:

- No captions or transcripts for audio or video content
- Menus, signs, or instructions only in English
- No visual aids or easy-read materials
- Staff untrained in alternative communication methods such as gestures, writing, and basic American Sign Language (ASL).

Technology Barriers

Technology can empower accessibility, but it can also be a barrier when poorly designed. Websites, booking systems, kiosks, and apps that aren't compatible with assistive technology exclude a wide range of users, including people with vision, motor, cognitive, and hearing disabilities.[16]

Examples:

- Websites that are not screen reader compatible
- Touchscreens without tactile or audio feedback
- Booking platforms that time out too quickly or require precise motor control
- No keyboard navigation options or visual contrast issues

The key is flexibility: provide multiple ways to access information, communicate, and interact with your services.

Sources: [15] ADA National Network. (n.d.). Effective Communication under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). https://adata.org/factsheet/communication , [16] Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI). (n.d.). Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1. https://www.w3.org/WAI/standards-guidelines/wcag

BARRIERS OF PARTICIPATION AND THEIR SOLUTIONS

Disability	Barrier	Solution
Physical	• Stairs, steps, narrow doorways and hallways • High counters and shelves • Inaccessible Restrooms: lack of space, grab bars, access to soap and towels, or other accessible features. • Lack of Signage	• Step-free entryways, wide doors, and hallways. • Accessible restrooms with roll-in showers and grab bars. • Adjustable height fixtures like counters, sinks, and shelves • Install threshold transitions, ramps, elevators, and door opening buttons
Visual	• Poor lighting, obstacles in pathways, and complex layouts. • The absence of indicators for important areas • Inaccessible signage: Signs not in braille or large print are difficult to read.	• High-contrast signage, good lighting, simple layout, and tactile surfaces • Alarms with both auditory and visual signals. • Audio descriptions for visual materials and closed captions for videos.
Language	• Unable to use or produce language (speak), understand spoken or written • Loss of breathwork to speak • Speaks a different language • Lack of Spoken Communication • Videos, presentations, and public announcements without a language they understand often ASL, [CC] captions can exclude individuals.	• Identify and reduce language barriers • Provide larger print • Remove cultural references, idioms, and slang • Use clear, concise, and straightforward language, avoiding jargon and complex sentence structures. • Enunciate words carefully and maintain a moderate pace. • Utilize pictures, diagrams, and other visual cues to support understanding.

Table 1: Barriers and Solutions to Participate. Created by Kishpaugh, J., (2024) based on ADA National Network. (n.d.). ADA Checklist for Existing Facilities., ADA National Network. (n.d.). Effective Communication.

BARRIERS OF PARTICIPATION AND THEIR SOLUTIONS

Disability	Barrier	Solution
Hearing	• Lack of Visual Alerts and Communication • Poor Acoustics: Even with hearing aids, poor acoustics can hinder speech comprehension. • Videos, presentations, and public announcements without captions can exclude hearing-impaired individuals.	• Provide assistive listening devices for improved sound clarity. • Use communication methods like sign language interpreters, written instructions, and speech-to-text services. • Ensure all videos, presentations, and public announcements have captions or subtitles
Cognitive	• Unclear signage: difficult to read or understand • Overwhelming environments • Lack of routine: difficulty managing inconsistencies or unpredictable changes. • Complex building or destination layout	• Reduce sensory overload with predictable layouts • Provide clear, concise instructions, simplified with visual and verbal components. • Design controlled sensory environments with adjustable lighting and sound levels • Establish and maintain consistent routines with visual schedules.
Invisible	• Lack of Awareness: invisible disabilities like a person with allergies, autoimmunity, chronic pain, mental health conditions, and people on the spectrum are often unrecognized. • Social stigma and misconceptions can lead to discrimination and lack of support. • Rigid procedures that don't accommodate these needs.	• Awareness and Education: Implement training programs on invisible disabilities the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower (HDS) provides education and support https://hdsunflower.com/ • Be flexible and adaptable • Create calming spaces • Provide clear communication and signage

Table 1: Barriers and Solutions to Participate. Created by Kishpaugh, J., (2024) based on ADA National Network. (n.d.). ADA Checklist for Existing Facilities., ADA National Network. (n.d.). Effective Communication.

MOBILITY-RELATED BARRIERS

Environmental and structural barriers are physical features in public spaces that can limit mobility, independence, and safety for people with disabilities. While some barriers are apparent, like stairs without ramps, many are subtle and easily overlooked. Features such as thick carpet or area rugs, poor lighting, heavy doors, narrow hallways or door frames, and uneven or sloping walkways significantly impact a person's ability to participate fully in the travel experience.

These challenges do not just affect people who use wheelchairs. Individuals with vision impairments, chronic pain, balance issues, or temporary injuries may also face serious limitations navigating these spaces.

Inaccessible transportation systems, poorly positioned amenities, and cramped public areas can reduce the usability of environments and lead to an overreliance on personal vehicles.[17] When essential equipment like ramps or elevators is missing or broken, mobility becomes even more restricted.[18]

Compounding the problem, attitudinal barriers, such as negative assumptions, lack of training, or social exclusion, can make visitors and residents feel unwelcome, left out, or overlooked.[19] Addressing these issues requires more than just physical upgrades; it calls for policy enforcement, staff education, and a cultural commitment to improve awareness around inclusion models.

ADDITIONAL OVERLOOKED BARRIERS

- **Inaccessible Air Travel:** Passengers often face difficulties obtaining necessary assistance and accessing onboard facilities like lavatories. Issues such as improper handling of mobility aids, leading to damage or loss, are also prevalent.[20]
- **Rideshare Service Challenges**: Users report ride cancellations, additional charges for guide dogs, and outright refusals of service. Despite upcoming app updates aiming to address these issues, there is a need for better driver education on ADA compliance and stricter anti-discrimination measures.[21]
- **Inconsistent Accessibility in Lodging:** Travelers frequently encounter accommodations that do not meet accessibility needs, such as inaccessible bathrooms and beds that are too high to access.[22]

Sources: [17] Kett et al., 2020, [18] Naami, 2019, [19] Leal et al., 2020, [20] Office, n.d., [21] Hunter, 2024, [22] Editor, n.d.

SOLUTIONS FOR MOBILITY-RELATED BARRIERS

Solution	Solution Features
Wheelmap	**Wheelmap is a free, crowdsourced online map that allows users to rate and discover the wheelchair accessibility of public places around the world, including restaurants, museums, hotels, parks, and transportation hubs.** • Uses a color-coded design system to indicate full, partial, or no wheelchair access • Helps travelers plan visits based on access ratings • Great for promoting transparency and inclusion of your destination • https://wheelmap.org/ • Similar apps are Wheelmate or Roll
Scootaround Mobility Rentals	**Scootaround Mobility Rentals is a North American rental service for mobility aids like scooters, wheelchairs, rollators, and powerchairs.** • Short-Term Rentals for Visitors • Delivery and Pickup at Hotels or Venues • Wide Selection of Equipment • https://scootaround.com/
BraunAbility Vehicle Lifts and Ramps	**Mobility vehicle solutions including wheelchair-accessible lifts for vans and SUVs.** • Ideal for transportation services, tour companies, or shuttle systems • Compatible with full-size vehicles for group or private travel • Includes service and repair support • https://www.braunability.com/
AccessNow Accessibility Information	**AccessNow is a global platform that crowdsources and verifies accessibility information for businesses, attractions, and public spaces·** • Claim and manage your listing to showcase ramps, accessible restrooms, seating, entrances, and more • Reach disability-conscious travelers who use AccessNow to plan their trips • Receive feedback from users to improve guest experience and transparency • https://accessnow.com/

VISION-RELATED BARRIERS

Sight-related disabilities include individuals who have low vision, are legally blind, or are totally blind. A common barrier for many is related to confidence in unfamiliar environments. While about 90% of visually impaired individuals can independently navigate familiar places, they may feel uncertain or anxious in new settings, which can discourage them from traveling.

Visual impairment affects individuals in different ways. While some people may use a guide dog or mobility aid, others may not. This variation can sometimes cause individuals who do use visible assistance to feel self-conscious or judged, which may lead them to decline help or avoid using assistive technology altogether.

Many tourism experiences rely primarily on visual elements—like signs, displays, or scenic views—without offering engagement alternatives. A lack of multi-sensory options (such as tactile, auditory, or descriptive supports) can make it difficult for people with sight-related disabilities to enjoy or participate in those experiences.[23]

Additional Vision-Related Barriers

- Nondescriptive maps
- Inaccessible Signage
- Barriers to mobility, such as unsafe pathways
- Inaccessible formats for communicated information
- Poor acoustics
- Staff-related issues, including a lack of training or knowledge
- A lack of assistive technology, such as working QR codes[24]

Uneven bricks on a walkway create a serious tripping or fall hazard. Without tactile warnings or level surfaces, this type of pavement can be dangerous even with a cane leading to trips, falls, or injury.

Source: [23]Šintáková and Lasisi (2021) , [24]Fortuna et al. (2023)

SOLUTIONS FOR VISION-RELATED BARRIERS

Solution	Solution Features
Navilens	**Navilens uses colorful codes to assist users by scanning codes and providing audio or text messages.** • Scannable from a distance (12x farther than QR codes) • Wide-angle detection (up to 160 degrees) • Provides audio or text guidance for direction and location • https://www.navilens.com/
Be My Eyes	**Be My Eyes allows users to receive calls on smartphones to assist them with daily tasks.** • 24/7 visual assistance via smartphone with volunteers or agents • AI-powered image description (with GPT-4o) • Supports over 185 languages and connects within ~15 seconds • https://www.bemyeyes.com/
Touch Mapper	**Provides 3D printable map files that can be downloaded and printed at no additional charge. Maps use a variety of textures to indicate different spaces including:** • Creates free 3D printable tactile maps • Maps include textured indicators for roads, buildings, water, etc. • Compass direction and area markers for spatial awareness • https://touch-mapper.org/
Ruby XL HD	**A handheld digital magnifier that includes a 5-inch LCD screen that provides 2x - 14x magnification.** • 5-inch screen with 2x–14x digital magnification • Portable, fold-out handle for ergonomic use • 20 high-contrast color modes for easier viewing • https://www.freedomscientific.com/products/video-magnifiers/ruby-xl-hd/
Aira	**On-demand visual interpretation for blind users. Provides visual information for blind or low-sighted individuals. This assists with:** • Live visual interpretation for blind and low-vision users • Assists with navigation, reading, shopping, work tasks • Available on-demand via smartphone or smart glasses • https://aira.io/

HEARING-RELATED BARRIERS

People who are Deaf or hard of hearing often face barriers that extend beyond sound. They involve social perceptions, communication breakdowns, and a lack of inclusive design. These barriers not only affect how someone navigates a space but also how they're perceived and engaged by others.

Stigmatization and Misconceptions

More than half (58%) of individuals with hearing-related disabilities report experiencing stigma. They are often wrongly perceived as less intelligent or capable, especially when they struggle to follow conversations. In some cases, their communication needs are misunderstood, and they may be seen as uncooperative or inattentive when in reality, they are simply trying to understand.

Example of misunderstanding a disability and acting in a patronizing manner.

Lack of Awareness and Accommodations

About 50% say they do not receive enough information or support. Many environments are not designed with effective communication strategies in mind, such as maintaining eye contact between the recipient and speaker while talking, reducing background noise, or providing captions or transcripts. A general lack of public awareness continues to make everyday interactions more difficult than they need to be.

Social and Emotional Impact

Hearing barriers often affect more than communication—they impact well-being. Around 43% report significant effects on their personal relationships and emotional health. Noisy social settings can increase stress, misunderstandings, and frustrations, and lead to feelings of exclusion or isolation.[25]

Sources: [25]Varghese et al., 2024

SOLUTIONS FOR HEARING-RELATED BARRIERS

Solution	Solution Features
Otter.ai	**Otter.ai is a real-time voice transcription tool that converts spoken language into accurate, searchable text.** • Real-time transcription for guided tours, live events, or presentations • Speaker identification helps during multi-speaker tours or panels • Downloadable transcripts support guests who prefer or need written content • https://otter.ai/
Rev Captioning	**Rev Captioning is a service that provides accurate, professionally generated captions and transcripts for video and audio content.** • Professional captions and transcripts for videos, promotional material, or visitor education • Supports multiple languages and subtitle formats for international travelers • Boosts guest engagement by making all digital content accessible, searchable, and inclusive • https://www.rev.com/
Hand Talk	**Hand Talk is an award-winning mobile application that leverages artificial intelligence to translate spoken and written language into sign language, enhancing communication for deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals.** • Real-time translation of spoken or written text into sign language (ASL or Libras) • Interactive 3D avatars support digital and mobile communication • Website plugin makes tourism websites accessible in sign language format • https://www.handtalk.me/en/
Ava – Live Captioning App	**Ava is a real-time captioning app designed to improve communication access for Deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals. It transcribes speech into live, color-coded captions that identify who is speaking** • Live multi-speaker captioning for group conversations, tours, and events • Custom vocabulary helps recognize names, landmarks, or common phrases in local tourism settings • Mobile accessibility for spontaneous use in hotels, restaurants, or transportation • https://www.ava.me/

COGNITIVE-RELATED BARRIERS

Many individuals with cognitive disabilities express a strong interest in travel and recreation, yet avoidable barriers often limit their experiences. One of the most commonly reported challenges is the attitude of frontline staff. Guests frequently describe interactions marked by impatience, avoidance, or even dismissal, which can create an unwelcoming or disempowering environment.[26]

While family members or caregivers accompany many travelers with cognitive disabilities, this can unintentionally limit the guest's independence. It is essential to offer clear, user-friendly resources that enable all guests to navigate experiences with confidence and autonomy.[26]

Additional barriers include environmental design flaws, such as confusing layouts or overstimulating spaces, as well as a lack of accessible online information about available accommodations.[27] These issues make it harder for visitors to your area to plan or feel prepared, leading to feeling unsafe, added stress on vacation, or a sense of exclusion from experiences that should be enjoyable for everyone in your area.

Some examples include:

- Difficult to read maps
- Troubles navigating large areas
- Difficulties interpreting signage
- A lack of understanding of how to perform different activities, such as riding the bus. (Sánchez-Padilla et al., 2024)

Unintuitive signage may be confusing to some.

Friendly, diverse, and accommodating staff can shape the visitor's experience.

Sources:[26]Sánchez-Padilla et al., 2024, [27]Saarela and Partanen, 2024

SOLUTIONS FOR COGNITIVE-RELATED BARRIERS

Solution	Solution Features
MagnusCards (Magnus Mode)	**MagnusCards is a free mobile app that uses step-by-step visual guides called "Card Decks" to help users navigate everyday tasks. Tourism providers can create custom branded decks for hotel check-ins, using attractions, or dining out.** • Step-by-step visual guides for tasks like hotel check-in, ticketing, or using amenities • Customizable "Card Decks" for your business, available in 13 languages • Text-to-speech and intuitive UI helps support travelers with autism, ADHD, and other cognitive disabilities • https://www.magnuscards.com/
KultureCity	**KultureCity works with public venues, including sports arenas, museums, airports, and event spaces, to help them become certified "Sensory Inclusive" environments.** • Sensory Inclusive™ certification for your venue • Training for frontline staff on how to support guests with sensory sensitivities • Sensory bags with tools like noise-canceling headphones, fidget tools, and visual cue cards • https://www.kulturecity.org/
GoodMaps	**GoodMaps provides indoor navigation through a mobile app with visual and verbal prompts, ideal for people with cognitive or sensory processing needs.** • Indoor navigation with verbal and visual prompts, helpful for people with memory, attention, or spatial challenges • No special hardware required—a GoodMaps rep scans your space • Multilingual support (6 languages) and adaptable for both cognitive and visual disabilities • https://www.goodmaps.com/
Brain in Hand	**Brain in Hand is a self-management tool for people with cognitive challenges, including autism, anxiety, and executive functioning difficulties.** • Personalized routines and reminders for people with anxiety, autism, or executive functioning challenges • Real-time support prompts to handle stress or unfamiliar situations • Ideal for independent travel support and reducing cognitive overload • https://www.braininhand.co.uk/

DISABILITY AND COMMUNICATION ETIQUETTE

Interacting with visitors and guests with disabilities, for some, can sometimes feel uncomfortable. People who mean well and strive for inclusivity may sometimes overcompensate, leading to awkward or insulting situations. Other times, the opposite happens, and visitors are avoided and ignored. Guests with disabilities are people, and they want to be treated with respect and dignity, like everyone else. Welcoming and effective communication requires respectful consideration and understanding.

Using people-first language is the most preferred approach when talking to someone with a disability, but it's also essential to ask the individual directly. People-first language is used to communicate appropriately and respectfully with and about individuals with disabilities. People-first language emphasizes the person first, not the disability.

For example, when referring to a person with a disability, refer to the person first by using phrases such as:

- "a person who …", "a person with …" or "person who has …"[28]

Basic Disability Etiquette Guidelines

1. Make eye contact and acknowledge people with disabilities
2. Speak to the person directly
3. Let people with speech or language disorders finish their sentences
4. Ask to offer assistance and respect the answer
5. Respect bodily autonomy
6. Do not pet service animals before asking the owner
7. Adjust your posture and eye level
8. Use people-first language
9. It's okay to ask someone how they want to be addressed
10. Avoid negative language
11. Don't ask intrusive questions before you establish a friendship
12. Don't make someone an ambassador for their community
13. Do not place people with disabilities on a pedestal
14. Don't tell someone how they should think about their disability
15. If you make a mistake, apologize and move on
16. Help your employees practice disability etiquette[29]

A further explanation for each guideline can be found here.

Source: [28]Northwest ADA Center, 2022, [29]Accessibility.com, 2021

PEOPLE-FIRST LANGUAGE

Tips	Use	Do not use
Emphasize abilities, not limitations	• Person who uses a wheelchair • Person who uses a device to speak	• Confined or restricted to a wheelchair, wheelchair bound • Can't talk, mute
Do not use language that suggests the lack of something	• Person with a disability • Person of short stature • Person with cerebral palsy • Person with epilepsy or seizure disorder • Person with multiple sclerosis	• Disabled, handicapped • Midget • Cerebral palsy victim • Epileptic • Afflicted by multiple sclerosis
Emphasize the need for accessibility, not the disability	• Accessible parking or bathroom • Blue zone parking or access	• Handicapped parking or bathroom
Do not use offensive language	• Person with a physical disability • Person with an intellectual, cognitive, developmental disability • Person with an emotional or behavioral disability, a mental health impairment, or a psychiatric disability	• Crippled, lame, deformed, invalid, spastic • Slow, simple, moronic, defective, afflicted, special person • Insane, crazy, psycho, maniac, nuts
Avoid language that implies negative stereotypes	• Person without a disability	• Normal person, healthy person
Do not portray people with disabilities as inspirational only because of their disability	• Person who is successful, productive	• Has overcome his/her disability, is courageous

Table 2: People-First Language Source: CDC. Modified by Kishpaugh, J., (2024)

Website accessibility means designing and developing websites to be usable by everyone, including people with disabilities who may use assistive technologies like screen readers, magnifiers, or keyboard-only navigation.

Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG)

WCAG is a set of international standards developed by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) through the Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI), designed to make web content more accessible for people with disabilities. The WCAG 2.2 guidelines detail how to do this.

Web accessibility relies on several components that work together. Some of these include:

- Web content
- User agents
- Authoring tools

CORE PRINCIPLES OF WEB ACCESSIBILITY

1.Perceivable information and user interface

- Text alternatives for non-text content
- Captions and other alternatives for multimedia
- Content can be presented in different ways
- Content is easier to see and hear

2.Operable user interface and navigation

- Functionality is available from a keyboard
- Users have enough time to read and use the content
- Content does not cause seizures or physical reactions
- Users can easily navigate, find content, and determine where they are
- Users can use different input modalities beyond the keyboard

3. Understandable information and user interface

- Text is readable and understandable
- Content appears and operates in predictable ways
- Users are helped to avoid and correct mistakes

4. Robust content and reliable interpretation

- Content is compatible with current and future user tools

Section 508

Part of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 requires U.S. federal agencies eliminate barriers and ensure access to information and communication technology (ICT).

Design and Develop Accessible Products Learn to design and develop digital products and services for your organization and meet responsibilities under Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act.

WAVE

Tools to identify the many possible website accessibility errors and get feedback on how to fix them. WAVE feedback identifies features and design that can be improved to help advanced users participation and interaction. https://wave.webaim.org

GOVERNMENT REGULATIONS AND POLICIES

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA): Lays the groundwork and sets standards to ensure that facilities, services, and experiences are accessible to all individuals to reduce discrimination in education, employment, transportation, program access, public and private spaces, and accessible federal websites and electronic content. The ADA is divided into five titles, each covering requirements for different organizations.

- Title I: Employment
- Title II: State and Local Government Activities (A)
- Title II: Public Transit Systems (B)
- Title III: Public Businesses and Nonprofits
- Title IV: Telecommunications
- Title V: Implementation of the Law

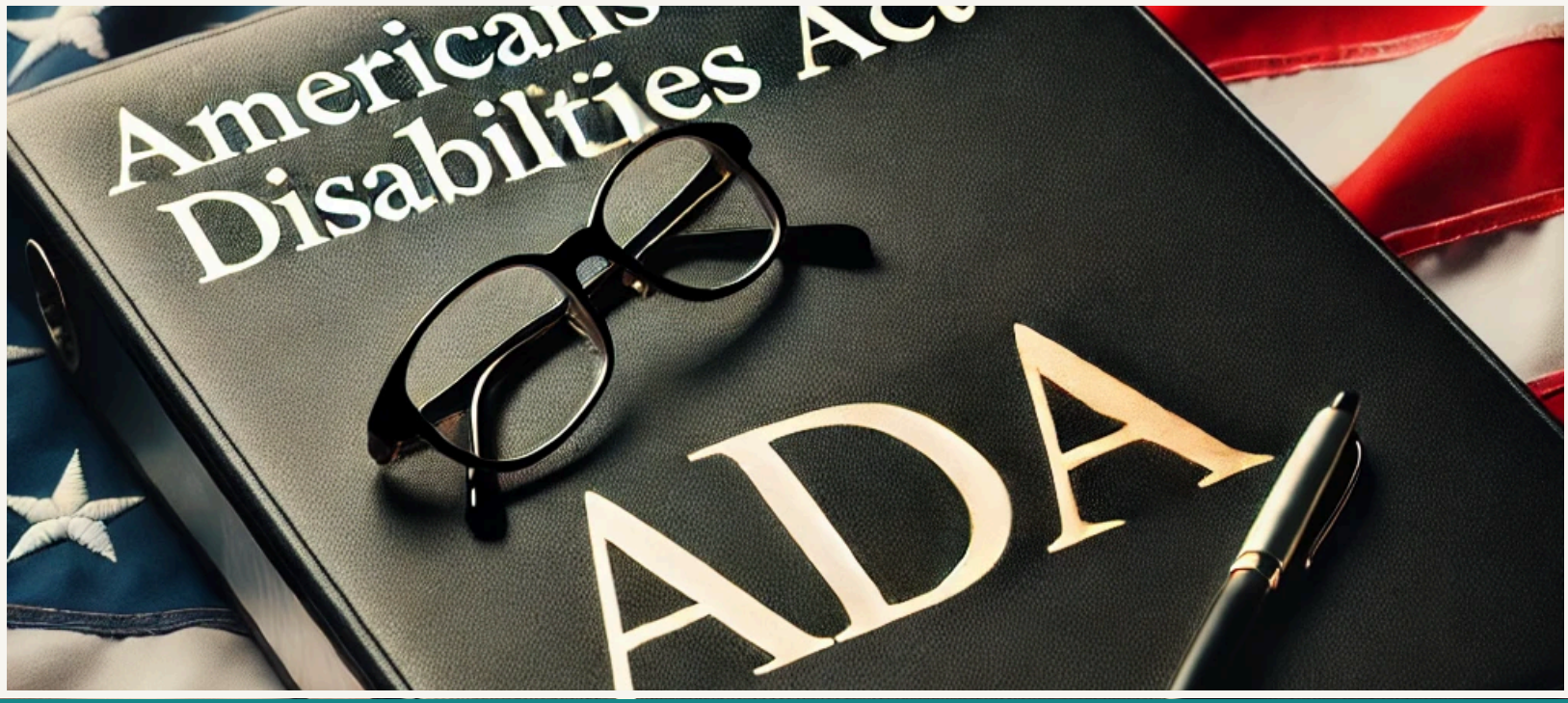
Section 504 of the The Rehabilitation Act of 1973: covers how a person with disabilities can participate in any federally funded organizations' services and programs and is overseen by the Office of Civil Rights and enforced by the US and State Departments of Justice.

Architectural Barriers Act (ABA): Ensures accessibility in buildings and facilities built, modified, or leased with federal funds including tourism sites that receive federal funds.

- Enforced by the Access Board, a federal agency

Air Carrier Access Act (ACAA): Regulates airline policies to prevent discrimination against disabled passengers. It covers the accessibility of onboard services, including seating, assistance, and communication.

- DOT Disability Policy Priorities to improve air travel and uphold the rights of PwDs



BUSINESS RESOURCES

Travel Oregon: The state's destination management organization, dedicated to promoting Oregon as a travel destination and supporting the state's tourism industry. Travel Oregon is committed to fostering sustainable tourism, enhancing community vitality, and ensuring inclusive access to Oregon's diverse attractions.

Travel Southern Oregon (TSO): Southern Oregon's regional destination management organization (DMO). It provides support for the region's tourism providers and their guests.

Tourism Inclusion Council of Oregon (TICSO): This council, developed by TSO, promotes inclusion through training, advocacy, and education.

Access Recreation: A Portland committee that developed accessible information guidelines to be used by providers of hiking trails and outdoor facilities to benefit PwDs. The information is intended for websites and printed materials.

Northwest ADA Center: This center, part of the ADA National Network, serves Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington. It is one of ten regional centers throughout the US that provides businesses with information, guidance, and training on ADA topics such as accessibility in hospitality, infrastructure, and technology.

Access Technologies, Inc.: Developed Oregon's statewide assistive technology program. It is part of a national network of technology-related assistance programs to increase access to assistive technology (AT) devices and services. It works with business providers and offers training, assistive technology devices, and assistance.

JAN (Job Accommodations Network): offers invaluable insights, practical ideas, and best practices for accommodating employees with all types of conditions and disabilities.

David's Chair: gives the gift of independence to people with mobility challenges.

Oregon Adaptive Sports: Creates access to high-quality outdoor recreation experiences for individuals with disabilities.

Disability Rights Oregon (DRO): Helps with disability-related legal issues in Oregon.

Rogue Valley Transportation District (RVTD): Public service provider of accessible transportation, serving people with disabilities and low-income individuals and families.

TravelAbility: An organization within the travel industry that provides resources, summits, information, and support for businesses and travelers. Its goal is to improve travel experiences and make planning easier for people with disabilities.

Destinations International: Global organization that educates and offers various industry resources for tourism and travel providers. Membership is required to access full benefits.

National Center on Accessibility: Located in Indiana, it works with various agencies throughout the U.S. to train, plan, assess, and provide technical assistance to improve accessibility in parks, public lands, and communities.

National Travel and Tourism Advisory Board: This federal advisory committee counsels on current and emerging US travel and tourism industry issues.

National Travel and Tourism Strategy was developed to promote US destinations, foster sustainable tourism, ensure diverse experiences, and reduce travel barriers.

AccessNow: Phone app and website to search, rate, experience, share, and crowdmap accessibility businesses and information.

Structural Accessible Business Standards and Checklist

ADA Design Standards
ADA Checklist for Existing Facilities
ADA Ramp Calculator
Oregon Parks Design Standards
ADA Signage Standards

[Visual Description: An elderly man using a walking aid on a pathway in a park. He is dressed warmly in a teal blue puffer jacket and dark jeans, accessorized with a patterned gray scarf. He is smiling at the camera, exuding a cheerful demeanor. The background shows a serene park setting with a waterway, trees and a few people in the distance, suggesting a quiet, outdoor environment. His walker includes a storage basket, indicating it is designed for both support and convenience.]

Travel Oregon: Administers an annual competitive grants program directed by statute to "develop and improve the economies of communities throughout Oregon by means of improvement, expansion, and promotion of the visitor industry..

- Competitive Grants Program: Aimed at enhancing local economies and communities by improving and promoting accessible and inclusive tourism projects across the state.

- Capacity and Small Project Grants Program: Awarded funding to support tourism infrastructure that is accessible/inclusive and projects centered on accessible/inclusive tourism promotion.

Oregon Community Foundation (OCF): A nonprofit organization that supports community initiatives, including projects that improve accessibility and inclusivity.

The Ford Family Foundation: Invests in programs and projects across Oregon that benefit communities.

- Technical Assistance Grants
- Good Neighbor Grants
- Larger Grants to fund programs, operations, and capital projects

Meyer Memorial Trust: Focuses on racial, social, and economic justice based on its three priority areas: Our Resilient Places, Our Empowered Youth, and Our Collective Prosperity.

- Operating Support Grants
- Project Support Grants

The Collins Foundation: Invests in Oregon nonprofit organizations dedicated to improving the quality of life and well-being of the people in their communities.

- Responsive Grants (mid-2025)
- Black Equity Movement
- Oregon Immigrant and Refugee Funders Collaborative

The Oregon Cultural Trust: Support Oregon's cultural nonprofits in the arts, heritage, and humanities through three annual grant programs.

- Cultural Development Grants

IRS Tax Incentives: Benefits for making businesses accessible to workers and customers with disabilities.

- Disabled Access Credit
- Barrier Removal Tax Deduction

Business Oregon: The state's economic development agency administers more than 80 grants, loans, tax incentives, and other programs to further the development of businesses, communities, and economies in Oregon.

THE SOUTHERN OREGON ACCESSIBILITY HUB

The Accessibility Hub is a collaborative project between Travel Southern Oregon and Southern Oregon University. It is designed to help local businesses, destinations, and tourism professionals work together to make our region more sustainable and accessible for everyone.

Hosted on Basecamp, the Hub is a centralized online tool where participants can share ideas, access training, explore funding opportunities, and connect with others working to improve accessibility in Southern Oregon.

WHAT CAN YOU DO WITH THE ACCESSIBILITY HUB

- Learn what accessibility really means and how to improve it, one step at a time
- Identify local needs or gaps in access (physical, digital, service-related)
- Find resources, grant opportunities, and training to support your efforts
- Connect with others working on similar goals to collaborate and grow together
- Access guidance on marketing to travelers with disabilities and being transparent about what you offer

A visitor in a wide-brimmed hat sits on a rocky ledge overlooking the deep blue waters and tree-lined rim of Crater Lake in Southern Oregon. White bold text across the image reads, "DO SOMETHING GREAT," with the subheading, "There's something about Southern Oregon that inspires visitors to..."

GOALS OF THE ACCESSIBILITY HUB

- Match identified needs with available resources and collaborative partners (grants, fundraising, training, mentorship, volunteers)
- Promote education and training in accessibility
- To be a region known for thoughtful, continuous improvement

Source: Travel Southern Oregon Business Resources, https://www.southernoregon.org/industry/business-resources/

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