MOSAICA
The Center for Nonprofit Development and Pluralism

CORPORATION

FOR NATIONAL

★ SERVICE

TrainingBriefs

Ensuring Access to Your Training Session

National Service program staff, site supervisors, and trainers share responsibility for member training and development. *TrainingBriefs* provide these individuals with useful information and innovative ideas for training and development.

United Cerebral Palsy Association/Access AmeriCorps
Access AmeriCorps is the Training and Technical Assistance Provider for disability issues. Here's how to contact them:

(800) 872-5827 or (202) 973-7143 [voice]
(202) 776-0414 [fax]
accessamericorps@ucpa.org
http://www.ucpa.org/html/innovative/americorp/

As the national service community becomes more diverse it becomes essential that we take responsibility to do our part to make our programs accessible to people with disabilities. When you implement training sessions, proper planning and a good understanding of participant special needs will increase the likelihood of ensuring access for all participants. Remember that your role in assessing member needs not only means gathering information about member knowledge and skills, but also includes communicating well with participants about any special accommodations they may need.

Assess participants' needs in advance. Be proactive, not reactiveС demonstrate that accommodating special needs is a priority, and not an afterthought. For example, in publicity information or in pre-training assessment materials, state that accommodations (e.g., American Sign Language interpreter, large print, assistive learning devices, wheelchair ramp access) are "available upon request." Make sure to provide a contact person in case there are special requirements for the training session. Tracie Spingarn, a certified[1] American Sign Language/English Interpreter, suggests that you also provide a deadline by which to respond so there is enough time (at least a week) to schedule specialized staff or reserve necessary equipment. Well before the training session, clarify expectations with your training site contact person so that the facility, materials, and activities are readily available to meet any requests.

Below are some proactive suggestions for making your training sessions accessible to people with disabilities. Kevin Elliott, at the United Cerebral Palsy Association/Access AmeriCorps (Training and Technical Assistance Provider for disability issues), comments that the examples listed below should not be considered "universal accommodations" for every training situation. He suggests handling each situation individually, since each person will have individual needs requiring individual attention. In this spirit, we encourage you to learn more about these important issues by contacting Access AmeriCorps (See box of contact information in this article).

Ensure access at the training location. Take note of accessible entrance areas, parking spaces, elevators, and ramps. Pay attention to adequate lighting in the training room; for people with visual disabilities, lighting can greatly affect the ability to see visual aids and the facilitator's lips. Make sure that break-time necessities (e.g., restrooms, pay phones, water fountains) are appropriately accessible. Reserve an area of the room for a sign interpreter, should one be needed. Will Morales, Project Director at Tech Connections in Atlanta and former Director of the Access AmeriCorps Project, suggests that one way to include participants who may be using wheelchairs is to leave one place at each table without a chair.

Use training materials and visual aids appropriately. For example, on posters and flipcharts, use large, visible, dark-colored typeС periodically ask if participants are following the information to which you direct them, and prepare individual copies of presented text or material outlines, should they be requested. When using a flipchart or overhead projector, maintain full face-to-face connection with the participants to make it easier for persons with hearing disabilities to receive all the information you communicate. If possible, have one trainer writing text or changing the overheads and another standing close to the visual aid, facing the group, to facilitate discussion.

[1] Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf С contact information: 301-608-0050

Design training approaches that are appropriate for people with different needs and abilities. Use diverse methodsⒸ lecturettes, text-based documents, visual aidsⒸ that are inclusive of people of all abilities. Anticipate the limitations of using physical activities (e.g., icebreakers, teambuilders, games, etc.) that may exclude participants with limited mobility; always have a seated activity as a back-up plan to achieve similar training outcomes. Include disabilities issues in case studies and scenarios to reinforce that people with disabilities are everywhere and should be respected like any other person. When implementing small-group activities, allow participants to choose cooperative learning rolesⒸ i.e., facilitator, reporter, recorder, timekeeper, and observer (see *Starting Strong*, pp. 197-202)Ⓒ with which they are most comfortable.

Model inclusive language and behavior. Be attentive to the way language can hinder or promote a comfortable learning environment. Avoid descriptive terms that are outdated and inappropriate, such as "the handicapped," "the disabled," "deaf and dumb," or "midget." Instead, Access AmeriCorps encourages the use of phrases that respectfully identify individuals as "people first," as in "persons with disabilities," "people with disabilities," "person who is deaf," or "person of short stature." In training sessions with individuals using wheelchairs, sit down whenever possible so that you are at the eye level of all participants. During training sessions involving people with hearing disabilities, speak clearly and evenly, always look directly at the individuals, and avoid obscuring your face and mouth with hands or other distractions.

Respect individuals by not making assumptions and by being attentive. When interacting with a participant with a speech disability, do not assume that s/he also has a hearing disability. If someone needs you to speak in a louder voice, s/he will ask you to do so. Speak at a regular volume and pace once it has been established that the speaker does not have a hearing disability; pay attention to nonverbal cues and pause occasionally to make sure that participants understand what you are communicating. Be careful not to change the topic of conversation without warning; use transitional phrases such as "Okay, we now need to discuss…". Above all, avoid spending too much time on one person's disability, instead focusing on the individual and the topic.

MOSAICA encourages you to take an active role in making sure that all phases of your program are accessible to **all** participants. In designing and delivering your training sessions, ensuring access is an essential step in meeting your member training and development goals.

MOSAICA thanks Tracie Spingarn, Will Morales, Kevin Elliott, and the United Cerebral Palsy Association/Access AmeriCorps Project for their valuable information and helpful insights to this article.

ACTIVITY: Cross the Line

This activity has been used by Access AmeriCorps in its training sessions on disability awareness. Feel free to use this activity for other topics such as diversity awareness, or as an icebreaker or teambuilder.

Purposes:
To assess member knowledge, attitudes, or opinions about particular topics. To encourage teambuilding among members in a training session.

Training site specifications needed:
Physical space large enough for adequate physical movement. Identify an imaginary line on the floor that splits the room in two.

Instructions:
Share with members that they will participate in an activity where they will position themselves in locations in the room based on their responses to a series of statements. One side of the imaginary line represents the "True" response while the other side represents the "False" response. The middle of the room (i.e., at the imaginary line) represents the "Not Sure" response. Some sample statements include: "It is OK to push a person using a wheelchair who is struggling, without asking first" or "It is OK to touch someone with a hearing disability to get her/his attention."

Read one statement and instruct participants to place themselves in an area represented by either a "True," "False," or "Not Sure" response. Direct participants to follow their own instincts in how they personallyⒸ not as a groupⒸ would respond to each statement.

After each statement, spend about five minutes facilitating a discussion among all participants to gain a better understanding as to why they responded the way they did. Ask the "True" or "False" group with fewer individuals to share their perspectives first. After one side has given their full range of points of view, allow the other side to share their opinions, and finish with the "Not Sure" group.

To demonstrate that individuals may not be fixed on one opinion or can gain new perspectives, give participants the option of changing their opinion during the discussion by physically moving to the area that reflects their new responses. Still in the large group, encourage dialogue among the various viewpoints and summarize all comments before moving on to the next statement.

Variation:
Use the Cross the Line activity to discuss controversial topics, to encourage team development, or to provide an assessment of member needs or interests. Consider relevant questions for your particular program sites, program issues, and program goals. Make sure you build comfort levels, beginning with less risky statements that promote confidence and safe sharing within the group. Then, once you sense appropriate comfort, use more challenging statements. As a wrap-up, ask members to share viewpoints through group discussion.