

Glossary of Disability Access Terms

The City Manager’s Office is engaged in a portfolio of work dedicated to disability inclusion and accessibility. As this work continues to evolve and through partnership with World Institute on Disability, tools and resources have been designed to facilitate accessibility in the design and implementation of City programs, policies, and initiatives. **The following glossary of disability access terms is provided for review. The glossary will continue to evolve; input is welcome to raania.mohsen@sanjoseca.gov.**

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A11y

A term that stands for “accessibility”; a numeronym, with 11 representing the count of letters between the letter a and the letter y.

Ableism

The discrimination of and social prejudice against people who are perceived to be disabled, based on the belief that typical abilities are superior; rooted in the assumption that disabled people require “fixing” and that people by are defined by their disability(ies).

Accessibility

The practice of making information, activities, and/or environments sensible, meaningful, and usable for as many people as possible, and specifically people with disabilities.

Accessible

A person with a disability is afforded the opportunity to acquire the same information, engage in the same interactions, and enjoy the same services as a person without a disability in an equally effective and equally integrated manner, with substantially equivalent ease of use; the person with a disability must be able to obtain the information as fully, equally, and independently as a person without a disability.

Accessible Housing

The construction or modification (such as through renovation or home modification) of housing to enable independent living for people with disabilities.

Accessible Parking

A designated parking space identified by prescribed signage which is reserved for the exclusive use of people with disabilities who have an accessible parking permit.

Accessible Room

A room that meets ADA standards and is easy for disabled people to enter and leave; typically located on the ground floor and has wider doorways that allow for wheelchair access.

Accommodation

Used to describe an alteration of environment, curriculum format, or equipment that allows an individual with a disability to gain access to content and/or complete assigned tasks.

Adaptive Strategies

Techniques that people with disabilities use to improve interaction with the web; for example, increasing the font size in a common browser; include techniques with mainstream browsers or with assistive technologies.

Aira

A professional app-based service that connects blind and low-vision people to trained agents, who provide a visual interpretation of the person’s surroundings and assist them in navigating the world.

Alternative Format

A document in large print, Braille, printed on colored paper, a paper copy of an electronic resource or vice versa, or an electronic resource in an alternative way, that provides equal access to information for people who are blind or low-vision.

Alternative Text

Also referred to as “alt text”, “alt tags”, or “alt descriptions”, this is written copy that describes the content of images, graphs, and charts for screen reader users; can be added to the image’s HTML tag on a website.

Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA)

A federal civil rights law that prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in all areas of public life, including jobs, schools, transportation, and all public and private places that are open to the general public; signed into US law in 1990.

ASL	Acronym for American Sign Language; the most commonly used sign language in the United States.
ASR	Acronym for Automated Speech Recognition; also referred to as “Automatic Voice Recognition (AVR)”, “voice-to-text”, or simply “speech recognition”; a technology that identifies and processes a human voice, converting spoken words into text or performing actions based on spoken instructions.
Assistive Technology (AT)	Any item, piece of equipment, software program, or product system that is used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of persons with disabilities; examples are screen readers, screen magnifiers, voice recognition software, and selection switches.
Audio Description	Also referred to as “description” or “visual description”, verbal depiction of key visual elements in media and live productions; provides information on visual content that is considered essential to the comprehension of the program.
Barrier	A condition or obstacle that prevents individuals with disabilities from using or accessing knowledge and resources as effectively as individuals without disabilities; can be attitudinal, organizational or systemic, architectural or physical, information or communications, or technology

Blind	Unable or nearly unable to see because of injury, disease, or a congenital condition; Legal blindness is considered a central visual acuity of 20/200 or less in the better eye with correction, and functional blindness is having to use so many alternative techniques to perform tasks that are ordinarily performed with sight that the person’s pattern of daily living is substantially altered.
Braille	A system of writing or printing, devised by Louis Braille for use by the blind, in which combinations of raised dots or points are used to represent letters, characters, etc., and are read by touch.
Captioning	Can refer to automatic speech recognition (ASR) captions, CART, or hybrid versions, e.g., Hamilton Web CapTel service were a live person (Communication Assistant) repeats into speech-to-text technology what one party in the conversation says.
Communication Access Realtime Transcription (CART) Captioning	Real-time speech-to-text service provided by live captioners.
CART Captioner	Provider of a commonly used captioning service; CART stands for Communication Access Real-Time Translation.

Cognitive Disability

Also referred to as “intellectual disability” or “cognitive impairment”; a term used when a person has certain limitations in mental functioning and in skills such as communication, self-help, and social skills; can be caused by injury, disease, genetic condition, or a brain abnormality.

Color Contrast

The difference in light between font (or anything in the foreground) and its background.

Curb-Cuts

Sidewalk indentations that were created for wheelchair users, and ended up benefitting many others: those pulling suitcases on wheels, pushing babies and young children in strollers, bikers, workers with large racks making deliveries, etc.

Curb-Cut Effect

Phenomenon of a disability-friendly feature (curb-cuts) being used and appreciated by a larger group than the people they were designed for; asserts that an investment in one group can cascade out and up, and be a substantial investment in the broader well-being of society.

d/Deaf

When used with a lowercase ‘d’, this means having total or partial hearing loss; little to no functional hearing. When used with an uppercase ‘D’, it is meant to describe people who identify as culturally Deaf and are actively engaged with the Deaf community.

Dexterity Disability

A disability that causes pain, discomfort, or complete loss of feeling in a person’s fingers, hands, wrists, and/or arms, making it difficult to use a standard keyboard or mouse; can be caused by a wide range of common illnesses and accidents, such as carpal tunnel, arthritis, stroke, Cerebral Palsy, Parkinson's, Multiple Sclerosis, loss of limbs or digits, spinal cord injuries, and repetitive stress injury, among others.

Developmental Disabilities

A group of conditions that involve impairments in physical, learning, language, or behavior areas.

Disability

Any condition that makes it more difficult for a person to do certain activities or effectively interact with the world around them, socially or materially; these conditions, or impairments, may be cognitive, developmental, intellectual, mental, physical, sensory, or a combination of multiple factors; may be present from birth or acquired during a person’s lifetime.

Fair Housing Act

Part of the Civil Rights Act of 1968; federal law that forbids discrimination in housing based on race or color, religion, sex, national origin, family status, or disability.

Guide Animal

A working animal specifically trained to assist blind or low vision people when navigating in public; may be trained to avoid obstacles, open doors, recognize traffic signals, guide their owners safely across public streets, and navigate through crowds of people.

Hard of Hearing

Someone who has hearing loss but with enough functional/residual hearing that an auditory device, such as a hearing aid, cochlear implant, or FM system, can provide adequate assistance to process speech and sound.

Hearing Aid

A small electronic device that you wear in or behind your ear; makes some sounds louder so that a person with hearing loss can listen, communicate, and participate more fully in daily activities; can help people hear more in both quiet and noisy situations, however, only about one out of five people who would benefit from a hearing aid actually uses one.

Hearing Animal

A working animal that has been specifically selected and trained to aid a person who is deaf or hard of hearing, often by alerting their handler to important sounds, such as doorbells, smoke alarms, ringing telephones, alarm clocks, sirens, forklifts, and a person calling the handler's name.

Hearing Loss

The loss of hearing in one or both ears, ranging from mild to profound.

Independent Living Movement

Founded by Ed Roberts; a worldwide movement of disabled people working for equal opportunities, self-determination, and self-respect; stems from the fundamental principle that people with disabilities are entitled to civil rights, options, and control over choices in their own lives.

**Independent Living
Philosophy**

The emancipatory idea and practice which empowers disabled people and enables them to exert influence, choice, and control in every aspect of their life; emphasizes that people with disabilities are the best experts on their own needs, having crucial and valuable perspective to contribute, and are deserving of equal opportunity to decide how to live, work, and take part in their communities.

Interpreter

A person whose job is to translate what someone is saying into another language.

Invisible Disabilities

Also known as “hidden disabilities” or “non-visible disabilities”; disabilities that are not immediately apparent to others, including cognitive disabilities, brain injuries, chronic illnesses, chronic fatigue, fibromyalgia, PTSD, anxiety, depression, ADHD, autism, and other conditions that significantly impact normal activities of daily living.

Low Vision

Having vision loss that cannot be treated by glasses, contacts, surgery, or medication.

Mental Health Disability

A medical condition that disrupts a person's thinking, feeling, mood, ability to relate to others, and/or daily functioning, often resulting in a diminished capacity for coping with the ordinary demands of life; common examples include anxiety, depression, eating disorders, Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD), PTSD, schizophrenia, and substance abuse.

Mobility Aid

A wheelchair, scooter, electric personal assisted mobility device, crutches, walker, cane, brace, orthopedic device, or similar equipment or device, designed to assist people with mobility disabilities in navigation.

Mobility Disability

Any condition that limits a person’s ability to walk, ambulate, or maneuver around objects, or to ascend or descend steps or slopes.

Neurodiversity

A concept that regards individuals with differences in brain function and behavioral traits as part of normal variation in the human population, often used in the context of autism spectrum disorder (ASD), as well as other neurological or developmental conditions such as attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) or learning disabilities.

Person of Short Stature

A person with a medical or genetic condition that results in a height that is considerably below average compared to the height of their peers (4 ft 10 inches or shorter for an adult); also may be referred to as “little person” or “dwarf”.

Physically Accessible

A facility or place that people with functional limitations, caused by impairments of sight, hearing, coordination, cognition, or perception, or persons with mobility disabilities, may readily enter, leave, and circulate within, and in which they can use public restrooms and elevators.

Plain Language

A style of communication that prioritizes easy-to-read, concise, and clear information; particularly helpful for people with cognitive and learning disabilities.

Reasonable Modification (ADA)

A change in a policy, practice, or procedure that is done to offer equal access and equal opportunity for a person with a disability.

Reasonable Modification (FHA)

A structural change made to existing premises, occupied or to be occupied by a person with a disability, in order to afford such person full enjoyment of the premises.

Screen Reader

Assistive technology that helps people who are blind or low-vision access and interact with digital content, like websites or applications via audio or touch, by converting text, buttons, images, and other screen elements into speech or Braille.

Section 508

Refers to a section in the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 that prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in federal programs or programs receiving federal aid or employment; has since been updated to incorporate the “digital” side of accessibility. Its standards apply to the accessibility of “information and communication technology.”

Service Animal

Also referred to as “assistance animal” or “helper animal”; a working animal that has been trained to perform tasks that assist disabled people; *categorized into three types: guide animals, hearing animals, and other service dogs.*

Service Dog (other than Guide animals or Hearing animals)

Working dog that can perform a number of functions, related to alert and response, that help people with medical conditions such as asthma, Epilepsy, diabetes, migraines, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and more.

Sign Language

An expressive language that uses gestures with the hands, arms, head, face and body to communicate; there are over 300 different sign languages in the world, varying from nation to nation, including American Sign Language.

Speech Impairment

An impaired ability to produce speech sounds; may range from mild to severe; may include an articulation disorder characterized by omissions or distortions of speech sounds, a fluency disorder characterized by atypical flow, rhythm, and/or repetitions of sounds, or a voice disorder characterized by abnormal pitch, volume, resonance, vocal quality, or duration.

Switch

An assistive technology device that replaces the need to use a computer keyboard or mouse; may allow users to control a computer, power wheelchair, video game console, tablet, smartphone, toy, or a variety of other electronic devices.

Telecoils (t-coils)

A part of hearing aids and cochlear implants that expand their usefulness, especially in environments where it is typically challenging to hear clearly; also called t-coils; built into many hearing aids, all cochlear implants, and some streamers; an essential component for anyone wishing to easily and directly access an assistive listening system.

Transcript

A written or printed version of material originally presented in another medium.

Universal Design

The design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design.

Usability

A measure of how well a specific user in a specific context can use a product/design to achieve a defined goal effectively, efficiently, and satisfactorily.

Visual Relay Service (VRS)

A form of Telecommunications Relay Service that enables people with hearing disabilities who use American Sign Language to communicate with voice telephone users through video equipment, rather than through typed text; a video link allows a communication assistant (CA) and the ASL user to view and sign with each other, and the CA is also connected to a user on the voice side of the call through telephone, and the CA interprets and relays the conversation back and forth between the two parties.

Voice Recognition

Also referred to as “automated speech recognition (ASR)”, “automatic voice recognition (AVR)”, “voice-to-text”, or simply “speech recognition”; a technology that identifies and processes a human voice, converting spoken words into text or performing actions based on spoken instructions.

Wayfinding

The act of navigation: knowing your point of origin and your destination, following a good route from your origin to your destination, recognizing you’ve arrived at your destination, and then finding your way back to your point of origin; pedestrian wayfinding systems deliver sensory cues – they can solicit sight thanks to visual signage, audition by the transmission of sound information, olfaction with the orientation by the smells, etc.

Web Content

Refers to the information in a web page or web application, including text, images, forms, sounds, etc.

**Web Content
Accessibility Guidelines
(WCAG)**

Part of a series of web accessibility guidelines published by the Web Accessibility Initiative of the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C), the main international standards organization for the Internet; covers a wide range of recommendations for making web content more accessible to a wide range of people with disabilities, including blind and low vision, deaf and hearing loss, learning disabilities, cognitive disabilities, mobility disabilities, speech disabilities, photosensitivity, and combinations of these.

Wheelchair User

A person who uses a wheelchair to get around because their ability to walk is limited, inefficient, or absent.

DRAFT