

**Town of Colma  
AMERICANS DISABILITY ACT – STAFF TOOLKIT**

**Guide for The Town Of Colma Employees to Title II of the  
Americans with Disability Act (ADA)  
*Serving Our Customer with Disabilities***

**The Americans with Disabilities Act**

On July 26, 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act (“ADA”) was signed into law under the principal that this legislation would “let the shameful wall of exclusion finally come tumbling down.” ADA is one of the most important civil rights laws enacted since the Civil Rights of 1964, prohibiting discrimination against persons with disabilities. Under the ADA Town facilities, programs, services and activities must be accessible to persons with disabilities.

The Town of Colma is dedicated to ensure that no qualified person with a disability be excluded from participating in, or denied the benefits of, the programs, services and activities provided by the Town based on a disability. There are more than 50 million Americans with disabilities – nearly 18% of our population estimates suggest. Town employees are expected to be aware of and respectful of the various types of disabilities individuals may have. Disabilities may include the following: mobility, blindness and vision, deafness and hearing, speech and language and mental and learning disabilities. Some disabling conditions are not readily apparent and some are visible.

**Accommodations for Individuals with Disabilities**

The Town is fully committed to providing access for individuals with disabilities and improvements to access have been and continue to be made. While it is not required that every area of Town facilities be accessible, it is required that Town programs and services be accessible. Periodically, department staff may receive requests for accommodations to allow individuals to participate in and benefit from Town services. Staff should reference the Town’s ADA website for available resources or contact the ADA Coordinator. When responding to a request for accommodation, Town personnel are expected to respond graciously to requests and to make a good faith effort to meet the need, in a timely manner. This should include exploration of various alternatives, which may include:

- Relocation of a program or activity
- Provision of services at alternative accessible sites
- Delivery of services
- Provision of auxiliary aides (e.g. readers, interpreters, mobility assistants, hearing devices)
- Provision of information of an alternative format (e.g. audio tape, large print, Braille conversion)
- Structural alterations

Alternatives that integrate a participant with disabilities with other program participants are preferred. Although some additional costs may be incurred in accommodating the individual, these costs may not be passed on to the individual in the form of surcharges. Ideally, the chosen accommodation is acceptable to the individual and feasible for the Town. However, in some cases it may not be possible to reasonably accommodate the individual. The Town’s obligation under Title II of the ADA must not cause undue financial and administrative burdens to the Town or fundamental alternations in the nature of the program, services or activity. These determinations are best made based on the judgment and knowledge of the department staff and the Town ADA Title II Coordinator.

Any request and the departmental response should be documented using the Request for Accommodation form. Inabilities to provide accommodation due to a determination of fundamental

alteration or undue burden should be made I consultation with the Town's ADA Title II and include a written statement of the reasons for reaching the conclusion.

## **Disability Etiquette**

To ensure full participation by all community members, it is imperative that individuals with disability feel welcomed and respected. One way to make people with disabilities feel welcomed is by practicing disability etiquette:

- Introduce yourself. Shake hands or touch the person on the arm or shoulder to welcome and acknowledge their presence. Treat people as you would like to be treated.
- Be yourself – everyone will feel more comfortable if you relax. Speak directly to that person – face to face. If the person is in a wheelchair, use a chair, in order to communicate at the person's eye level.
- Be courteous, but not condescending. Offer assistance in a dignified manner with sensitivity and respect and realize that asking first is better than assuming help is needed.
- Words Set the Tone – So use Words with Dignity. Place the individual first – “a person with a disability.” Avoid words such as, “handicapped” or “cripple” which are not only inappropriate and outdated, but demeaning.

The word “handicapped” allegedly originates from the “cap in hand/hand in cap” legislation of King Henry VII after a brutal war had left his country with a great number of disabled veterans. Henry could not envision disabled persons being financially self sufficient hence, he proclaimed that begging in the streets be legal for persons with disabilities. When we describe by “labels” we devalue and disrespect them as individuals.

- Allow a person with visual impairments to take your shoulder or arm at or about the elbow. This will enable you to guide rather than lead the person.
- Service animals assist persons with various disabilities some of which are apparent and invisible. Never touch a service animal or the person it assists without permission. Service animals are working; hence do not distract them as loss of their concentration could put their owners in danger. A service animal is not required to have any special certification.
- Remember that not all disabilities are apparent. Respect an individual's needs and requests whenever possible.

## **It's About Customer Service**

Providing access to Town programs and services to individuals with disabilities is not just about complying with the law. It is about providing good customer service and being responsive. It is realizing that a disability does not define the individual, but that each person is unique and deserves respect and consideration, regardless of whether or not that person has a disability.

If you have questions or need information about available resources, contact the Town ADA Coordinator.

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