



Town of Barnstable, Massachusetts

PART B – Evaluation of Non-discriminatory Policies & Practices in Programs, Services & Activities

June 2021

Prepared by the



200 Portland Street, First Floor
Boston, MA 02114
617.695.1225 voice/tty
www.IHCDesign.org

Introduction

In an effort to provide and maintain compliance with the American with Disabilities Act (ADA), the Town of Barnstable contracted with the Institute for Human Centered Design (IHCD) to undertake a comprehensive assessment of its policies, practices and procedures as well as its facilities to determine compliance with the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The review and recommendations provided in this assessment also go beyond strict compliance assessment to recommend enhancements to current conditions that would result in a more usable, inclusive and welcoming environment for members of the Barnstable community.

Information about corrective action will include recommendations based on Title II of the ADA as well as recommended “*best practices*” for each aspect that requires action.

The assessment included non-discrimination in policies, practices and procedures for all of the Town’s programs, services and activities including those related to effective communication and policies, practices and procedures relative to employment.

Corrective action is needed in policies and procedures to create written policies that would ensure the Town of Barnstable’s compliance with applicable laws. In addition, the Town may wish to consider making a commitment to a more accessible website. Choosing to make the website completely accessible would make it available to site visitors who use assistive technology such as screen readers as well as to website visitors with a mix of other functional limitations. The website is also a valuable asset in communicating the Town’s commitment to equal opportunity for people with disabilities through a clear statement and contact information for the ADA Coordinator. It can also provide a helpful opportunity to share information about accessible routes to reaching the Town’s programs and activities including meetings as well as requesting effective communication or modification of policies.

This report summarizes IHCD’s findings of ADA Title II compliance. The information pertinent to this assessment was obtained by an on-line ADA Questionnaire developed by the Institute for Human Centered Design (IHCD) and submitted by sixteen (16) departments from the Town of Barnstable, and from information from the Town’s website.

This mix of sources constitutes the basis for this compliance assessment report. It is clear that the Town understands its obligations under Title II of the ADA, but additional steps are necessary to ensure that people with disabilities enjoy the same opportunities to participate in its programs, services and activities as Barnstable residents without disabilities.

Analysis

Title II of the ADA prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability. Specifically, Title II requires that:

No qualified individual with a disability shall, on the basis of disability, be excluded from participation in or be denied the benefits of the services, programs, or activities of a public entity, or be subjected to discrimination by any public entity (28 CFR Part 35.130 (a)).

This report is divided into sections where these requirements apply. Each section includes the applicable citation from Title II of the ADA; IHCD's summary of findings after reviewing answers from the ADA questionnaire and information from the website and other previously mentioned sources. It also includes IHCD's recommendations for the Town of Barnstable to implement.

I - Designation of Responsible Employee

Title II of the ADA makes clear that a public entity must designate a responsible employee and adopt grievance processes.

A public entity that employs 50 or more persons shall designate at least one employee to coordinate its efforts to comply with and carry out its responsibilities under this part, including any investigation of any complaint communicated to it alleging its noncompliance with this part or alleging any actions that would be prohibited by this part. The public entity shall make available to all interested individuals the name, office address, and telephone number of the employee or employees designated pursuant to this paragraph. (28 CFR Part 35.107 (a)).

Title II provides little specific guidance for implementing this requirement, but the primary role of the designated employee, also called the ADA Coordinator, is making sure that the Town is in compliance with the ADA.

Finding

The Town of Barnstable has met its obligation to designate a responsible employee by appointing William Cole, Human Resources Director as the Town's ADA Coordinator.

IHCD would suggest consideration by the Town of the expertise and time needed to meet the breadth of ADA compliance responsibilities particularly following the ADA Transition Plan project. That would include the responsibilities for Effective Communication and serving as the Town point of contact and expert for ensuring equal access to participation in Town activities and services for people with disabilities such as individuals with sight and hearing limitations, so prevalent in a Town with the very

high proportion of older residents. Addressing the possible increased level of work might be solved by allocating a clear proportion of time in an existing position or perhaps adding a specialized ADA Coordinator for Effective Communication, and all the administrative requirements of the ADA necessary to meet that responsibility. Communicating contact information for the ADA Coordinator to residents and visitors may well increase demands on time as residents and visitors will be better informed about how to submit disability-related questions or requests.

Recommendations

The Town should consider clarifying for its entire community and Town employees the name, contact information and scope of responsibilities of the ADA Coordinator. Highlighting this information will improve compliance and make for more efficient operations with respect to meeting the needs of members of the public with disabilities.

Furthermore, clarification regarding the ADA Coordinator will:

- Make it easier for the Town to be proactive in meeting the needs of members of the public with disabilities;
- Help the Town to develop and articulate a clear vision and mission with regard to members of the public with disabilities;
- Reduce confusion and improve the Town’s day-to-day operations with respect to members of the public with disabilities;
- Permit employees to respond more quickly to needs as they arise because they have a primary contact for addressing their needs;
- Build in-house expertise and capacity;
- Prevent confusion and help ensure that candidates for employment, employees and the public have a clear understanding of their responsibilities and rights under the ADA.

II – Grievance Procedures

Title II of the ADA requires a public entity to adopt an adequate grievance process.

A public entity that employs 50 or more persons shall adopt and publish grievance procedures providing for prompt and equitable resolution of complaints alleging any action that would be prohibited by this part. (28 CFR Part 35.107 (b))

Findings

The Town of Barnstable has a Grievance Procedure, which can be found on the Town’s website within the Human Resources webpage. Many survey respondents are aware that the Town had adopted a

Grievance Procedure or know to contact William Cole in Human Resources. When asked if they had a Grievance Procedure, respondents indicated, “we would refer those issues to the Human Resources Department” or “we would follow town or state guidance” or “we follow Town ADA policy”. It is not clear if staff in all departments are aware of the process for meeting the requirement for grievance procedures. Some respondents indicated that their department didn’t have a Grievance Procedure or that it didn’t apply to their department.

Recommendations

- Provide an “Accessibility” tab on the Town’s website home page where there is access to the Grievance Procedure form and state the commitment to provide copies in accessible formats upon request.
- Ensure Town employees and the public are aware of the Grievance Procedure process and that Town employees can provide information to members of the public about the process when appropriate.
- Ensure good record keeping for all complaints submitted and documentation for steps taken towards resolution. Maintain records for a reasonable length of time.
- Distribute the Grievance Procedure to all department heads, and post copies of it in noticeable locations in each of the Town’s public buildings.
- Add “ADA Coordinator” to Mr. Cole’s title within the Grievance Procedure form.

III – Notice

Title II of the ADA requires that public entities notify participants of its non-discrimination policies:

A public entity shall make available to applicants, participants, beneficiaries, and other interested persons information regarding the provisions of this part and its applicability to the services, programs, or activities of the public entity, and make such information available to them in such manner as the head of the entity finds necessary to apprise such persons of the protections against discrimination assured them by the Act and this part. (28 CFR Part 35.106)

Findings

The Town of Barnstable does have an ADA Notice, which can be found on the Town’s website within the Human Resources webpage. However, while the Human Resources Department and the Council on Aging have posted the Town’s ADA Notice, ten (10) survey respondents indicated “no” or “I don’t know” when asked if an ADA Notice was posted in the building. while the Human Resources Department and the Council on Aging have posted the Town’s ADA Notice.

Recommendations

- Publish the ADA Notice in all the materials distributed by the Town; post the ADA Notice on the Town’s homepage under a recommended “Accessibility” tab so that members of the public are aware that this information is for them and their use; post on social media and in public locations in all of the Town’s buildings.
- Distribute the ADA Notice to all department heads. Copies should also be provided to any person upon request.
- Add “ADA Coordinator” to Mr. Cole’s title within the materials and publications that contain general information disseminated to staff and members of the public.

IV - Reasonable Modification of Policies, Practices and Procedures

Title II of the ADA requires state and local governments to modify its policies when necessary to avoid discrimination:

A public entity shall make reasonable modifications in policies, practices, or procedures when the modifications are necessary to avoid discrimination on the basis of disability, unless the public entity can demonstrate that making the modifications would fundamentally alter the nature of the service, program, or activity. (28 CFR Part 32.130 (b)(7))

Findings

A public entity must make reasonable modifications in policies, practices, or procedures unless the modification would fundamentally alter the nature of the service, program, or activity. Within the ADA Notice, the Town of Barnstable does state a process for requesting reasonable modifications. However, only two (2) survey respondents indicated that their departments have policies for the provision of reasonable modifications, and the rest of the respondents indicated “N/A”. A couple of the respondents who indicated N/A, referred us to the Town’s policies, to the ADA Coordinator Bill Cole, or to the Town’s website. There is no evidence that the Town was unable to provide a reasonable modification upon request.

Recommendations

- Ensure Town employees are aware of the Town’s process for requesting reasonable modification of policies.
- Ensure that Town employees can provide information to members of the public about the process of requesting reasonable modification of policies when appropriate.

- Add “ADA Coordinator” to Mr. Cole’s title within the in materials and publications that contain general information disseminated to staff and members of the public.
- Provide an “Accessibility” tab on the Town’s website home page providing access to the Modification to Policies and Procedures statement and state the commitment to provide copies in accessible formats upon request.

IHCD, through its New England ADA Center, can provide training for the Town of Barnstable on the Town’s ADA obligations, including the administrative requirements and providing reasonable modifications. This training would be appropriate for department heads and public-facing Town staff in order to build confidence about rights and responsibilities under the ADA and to build capacity within the Town to comply with this important element of the ADA.

V – Eligibility Criteria

A Title II entity may not impose eligibility criteria that may prevent a person with a disability from participating in its programs, services or activities:

A public entity shall not impose or apply eligibility criteria that screen out or tend to screen out an individual with a disability or any class of individuals with disabilities from fully and equally enjoying any service, program, or activity, unless such criteria can be shown to be necessary for the provision of the service, program, or activity being offered. (28 CFR Part 35.130 (8)).

This requires that ADA Title II entities may not impose eligibility criteria that either screen out or tend to screen out persons with disabilities, unless it can show that such requirements are necessary for the provision of the service, program or activity.

Findings

Some departments responded to the online questionnaire indicating that they have eligibility criteria. To qualify for certain programs through the Council on Aging, a person must be 60 years old and over, and the Marine and Environmental Affairs Department requires permits for programs such as fishing and mooring. These requirements might be necessary for the provision of the service, program or activity, and are permitted under the ADA.

VI – Employment and Reasonable Accommodation

Title II of the ADA prohibits discrimination on employment on the basis of disability:

No qualified individual with a disability shall, on the basis of disability, be subjected to discrimination in employment under any service, program, or activity conducted by a public entity. (28 CFR Part 35.140 (a)).

This requires that ADA Title II entities make reasonable accommodation to qualified employees with disabilities. Reasonable accommodation may include modifying work schedules, job restructuring, and making facilities used by employees readily accessible to employees with a disability.

Note that the requirements of Title I of the ADA, as established by the regulations of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in 29 CFR Part 1630, apply to employment in any service, program, or activity conducted by a public entity if that public entity is also subject to the jurisdiction of ADA Title I. (28 CFR Part 35.140 (b)(1)).

Findings

From the responses to the ADA Questionnaire, there is no evidence that the Town has failed to provide reasonable accommodations to its employees. Most of the staff departments that completed the questionnaire indicated that their department has adopted non-discriminatory employment practices and policies for recruitment, hiring, promotion or layoff. Respondents also indicated that the nondiscrimination policies include providing reasonable accommodations and testing accommodations to applicants and employees with disabilities upon request. Town employees do know and seem comfortable with reaching out to Human Resource. *“Many of these I would reach out to our HR department or the Legal Department before moving forward and have done so in the past. We do everything we can to accommodate in everything we do.”*

Recommendations

- Ensure that materials and publications that contain general information disseminated to the Town’s employees include information on the requirements of reasonable accommodation, the ADA Notice and Grievance Procedure under the ADA.
- IHCD recommends that Town of Barnstable employees familiarize themselves with the excellent free national resource from the Job Accommodation Network (<https://askjan.org>).

VII – Effective Communication through Auxiliary Aids and Services

Title II entities are required to provide appropriate auxiliary aids and services to ensure “effective communication” with people with disabilities. This obligation applies to all members of the public with

disabilities including job applicants, program participants and people who are seeking information about the Town's programs, services or activities. Specifically, Title II requires that:

A public entity shall take appropriate steps to ensure that communications with applicants, participants, members of the public, and companions with disabilities are as effective as communications with others. (28 CFR Part 35.160 (a)).

Auxiliary aids and services are devices or services that enable effective communication for people who have vision, hearing, or speech disabilities (communication disabilities), use different ways to communicate. The type of auxiliary aid or service necessary to ensure effective communication will vary in accordance with the length and complexity of the communication involved (e.g., a query at a service counter in the Town Offices, a meeting, a job description).

The obligation to communicate effectively with people who have disabilities applies to the presentation and exchange of information in all forms including sound, print, graphics and voice. Furthermore, this requirement may include but is not limited to providing sign language interpreters, telephone handset amplifiers, Telecommunication Devices for Deaf persons (TDD's), note takers, written materials for persons who are deaf or hard of hearing or transcripts, braille, digital or audio information for persons who are blind or have difficulty seeing.

The decision about what auxiliary aid is appropriate should evolve from a consultation between the ADA Title II entity (Town of Barnstable) and individuals with disabilities wherever possible to ensure effective communication. In many cases, more than one type of auxiliary aid or service may make effective communication possible. While consultation is always strongly encouraged to achieve effective communication, the Town of Barnstable and all public entities are required to give primary consideration to the requests of individuals with disabilities. The effective communication obligation does not require the Town to take any action that would result in a fundamental alteration in the nature of its services, programs or activities or that would impose an undue financial and administrative burden.

Findings

Within the ADA Notice, the Town of Barnstable states a process for requesting auxiliary aids and services. And there is no evidence that the Town has failed to provide Effective Communication to people with disabilities upon request. One of the survey responses included, "When someone comes into our office, we do whatever is necessary to help the resident or visitor. We have changed our signage at polling locations to yellow paper with black lettering. The AutoMark has headphones, enlarged print and braille for individuals to mark the ballots without help. For all the other services we provide, today most of that is done over the phone, through the mail or by computer." Another

response stated, “Our department may use web-based tools such as email, text, or we may explain things orally to our customers in person or over the phone. The majority of our public service is carried out by phone or email. We may also consult the Barnstable Disability Commission to advise on ways to help us communicate based on the situation at hand. When in doubt, staff would consult their supervisor or Human Resources.”

Recommendations

The Town should consider developing and publicizing clear processes for members of the public and employees to request auxiliary aids and services:

- Distribute the Effective Communication Notice to all department heads; publish it in a local newspaper of general circulation serving the Town; in all materials regarding the Town’s programs, services or activities and on the Town’s website home page through an “Accessibility” tab. Copies should also be posted in prominent locations in the Town’s public buildings.
- Staff should clearly understand the responsibility to provide auxiliary aids and services where necessary to afford qualified individuals with disabilities, including applicants, participants, companions, and members of the public, an equal opportunity to participate in, and enjoy the benefits of, a service, program, or activity of a public entity. (28 CFR Part 35.153 (b)). Staff should also clearly understand the process for requesting auxiliary aids and services when needed.
- Staff needs to understand the scheduling time necessary in requesting a sign language interpreter or Computer-Aided Real-Time Transcription (CART) through the Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing or other provider.
- Members of the public also need to have a clear understanding of the process for requesting auxiliary aids and services and the time period in which a request must be made if it involves ASL interpreters, CART, or special equipment such as assistive listening devices that may need to be rented. This information should be included in the general information for the public as well as on the Town’s website.
- Ideally, the Town should develop a system for training staff to meet these responsibilities especially knowing the processes for securing braille, making large print, other types of accessible formats, understanding how to request interpreters or CART and the length of time needed prior to an event. It is also important that staff know how to use and maintain the assistive listening systems and other special devices to assist people with disabilities to enjoy effective communication.

IHCD, through its New England ADA Center, can provide a training for the Town of Barnstable on effective communication that would be appropriate for department heads and public-facing Town staff

in order to build confidence about rights and responsibilities and to build capacity within the Town to comply with this important element of the ADA.

Sample of Effective Communication request:

“The Town of Barnstable is committed to the full participation of people with disabilities. Any person with a disability who requires an auxiliary aid or service for effective communication, or a modification of policies or procedures to participate in the Town’s programs, services, activities and committee meetings, should contact the office of the ADA Coordinator (Name, Address, Phone number and Email) as soon as possible but no later than 48 hours before the scheduled event.”* (*if the Town needs 2 or 3 weeks or longer to ensure an interpreter, then it must be clearly stated).

- Ensure that information and resources at each department interacting with the public are available in accessible format. That could be done by having a large print sign at each department and on each department’s portion of the website stating:

“All of our materials are available, upon request, in accessible format such as audio, large print or braille.”

- Ensure that staff interacting with the public is fully trained on how to respond to TTY and relay calls for telephone communications with people who are deaf, have difficulty hearing or have speech disabilities.

Even though there is a fundamentally changed pattern among people who are deaf or hard-of-hearing in relation to communication technology, TTY remains a compliance requirement. Because of these advances in communication technology, some people who are deaf and people with speech disabilities no longer have TTYs in their homes and rely instead on instant messaging, text messaging, email, or the video communication features of computers.

- Ensure that the Town’s website and other web-based services are accessible to people with disabilities. It is the Department of Justice position that when services are provided on a website, those services too must be made accessible. (see www.ada.gov/mclennan_pca/mclennan_sa.html Section K on Web Based Services and Programs)

Note: IHCD will be submitting a web accessibility report with recommendation for the Town to implement.

- To address these Information and Communication Technology (ICT) issues, Barnstable should commit to fixes and maintenance of the website accessibility. All staff should undergo training on

accessibility best practices for posting web content and creating accessible documents. All third-party software should be properly vetted for compliance with WCAG 2.0 AA and section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act.

- Ensure the newsletter from the Council on Aging can be provided in accessible formats upon request.
- Ensure all the forms available on the Town’s website are accessible and can be provided in an accessible format such as an accessible fillable PDF.
- Include alternative text descriptions for all photographs and images available on the Town’s website and social media.
- Additionally, under Title II of the ADA, emergency programs, services and activities must be accessible to people with disabilities. Ensure that the Town takes the necessary steps to effectively communicate with people with disabilities and make the emergency plan available on the Town’s website and update the emergency procedure as often as is necessary.

Also, it is the Department of Justice position that police stations provide sign language interpreters in a timely manner when requested.

- Non-scheduled Interpreter Requests: A “non-scheduled interpreter request” means a request for an interpreter made by an inmate, visitor, companion, or other member of the public, who is deaf or hard of hearing with less than two (2) hours advanced notice. For non-scheduled interpreter requests, the interpreter shall be provided no more than two (2) hours from the time of the request for an interpreter if the service is provided through a contract interpreting service or a staff interpreter who is located off-site or 30 minutes from the request for an interpreter if the service is provided through a Video Remote Interpreting service.

- Scheduled Interpreter Requests: A “scheduled interpreter request” is a request for an interpreter made two (2) or more hours before the services of the interpreter are required. For scheduled interpreter requests, the Police Department will make a qualified interpreter available at the time of the scheduled appointment. If an interpreter fails to arrive for the scheduled appointment, upon notice that the interpreter failed to arrive, the Police Department will immediately use reasonable efforts to call an interpreter service for another qualified interpreter or provide a Video Remote Interpreting service.

VIII – Emergency Preparedness, Evacuation Plans, and Emergency Shelters

While a review of the Town of Barnstable’s emergency preparedness, evacuation plans and emergency shelters was not part of this RFP, as evidenced by recent U.S. Department of Justice’s (DOJ) Project

Civic Access settlement agreements, DOJ’s views on emergency preparedness, shelters and evacuation plans are critical components of a Town’s responsibilities related to accessibility.

Recommendations

- Visibly post up-to-date floor plans for all buildings;
- Post information about evacuating people unable to use stairs;
- Make the evacuation procedure available on the Town’s website in an accessible format and update the evacuation procedure as often as necessary;
- Develop evacuation plans for each facility;
- Ensure that the input and needs of staff and visitors with disabilities are included in all phases of emergency management planning. When developed, involve the participation of members of the Disability Commission.
- As plans are developed or revised, adopt policies to ensure that community evacuation plans enable people with disabilities, including those who have mobility, vision, hearing, or cognitive disabilities, mental illness, or other functional limitations, to safely self-evacuate or to be evacuated by others. Until all emergency shelters are accessible with parking, exterior routes, entrances, interior routes to the shelter area, and accessible toilet rooms serving the shelter area, the Town should identify and widely publicize to the public, including persons with disabilities and the organizations that serve them, the locations of the most accessible emergency shelters.

For more information:

Making Community Emergency Preparedness and Response Programs Accessible to People with Disabilities - <http://www.ada.gov/emergencyprepguide.htm>

ADA Tool kit: Emergency Management - <http://www.ada.gov/pcatoolkit/chap7emergencymgmt.pdf>

FEMA Guidance on Planning for Integration of Functional Needs Support Services in General Population Shelters - http://www.fema.gov/pdf/about/odc/fnss_guidance.pdf

Additionally, we recommend considering engaging the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) for evacuation training and guidance, providing and load verifying backup power source for elevator to address Functional Needs Support Services (FNSS) emergency shelter needs, installing one or more accessible showers to meet emergency shelter needs and providing backup power for charging batteries for wheelchairs or breathing equipment and refrigeration for medication to meet emergency shelter needs.

Reference List

ADA Action Guide for State and Local Governments:

- www.adaactionguide.org

Department of Justice:

- Americans with Disabilities Act Title II Regulations:
http://www.ada.gov/regs2010/titleII_2010/titleII_2010_regulations.htm
- Making Community Emergency Preparedness and Response Programs Accessible to People with Disabilities - <http://www.ada.gov/emergencyprepguide.htm>

Federal Emergency Management Agency:

- FEMA Guidance on Planning for Integration of Functional Needs Support Services in General Population Shelters - http://www.fema.gov/pdf/about/odc/fnss_guidance.pdf

Job Accommodation Network:

- <http://www.askjan.org>

New England ADA Center:

- <https://www.newenglandada.org>