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In the United States, zoos and aquariums are places of recreation and education for millions of people. Attendance figures show that over 115 million people attend an American zoo or aquarium annually. This is more than the attendance of professional basketball, baseball, and football games combined for a year (Carpenter, 1992). It is interesting to note that of the known attendance at zoos and aquariums worldwide, 600 million people, or one-tenth of the world's population, make that visit in one year (Ross, 1997). Millions of people visit zoos and aquariums in a year, but are there people who are unable to attend? Does a disability prevent or hinder their ability to enjoy, learn, and impact the environment? Since 1990, all zoos and aquariums have been required to deal with the issue of accessibility. In that year, President Bush signed into law the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which provides people with disabilities the most widespread civil rights protection ever. The law has the basic intention of eliminating discrimination and providing inclusive opportunities for people with disabilities.

Leading up to the development of this law, congressional hearings and reports revealed that:

- there is widespread discrimination against people with disabilities in housing, employment, and public services.
- nearly 43 million people (19% of the U.S. population) have some type of mental or physical limitation that affects their daily living skills.

The ADA is divided into five main sections or titles:

Title 1 concerns discriminatory practices in hiring procedures and employment. The law states that reasonable accommodations must be offered if an individual who is disabled is hired and needs those accommodations. Accommodations readily achievable include telephones with volume adjustment knobs for individuals with hearing impairments, larger print on documents or memos for those with visual impairments, and moving a desk from an inaccessible area to an accessible area for someone using a wheelchair. These accommodations must be made without significant cost or as designated in the law, being an undue burden to the employer.

Title 2, Subtitle A, prohibits discrimination by public entities against people with disabilities. Public entities are defined as state and local governments, some examples of which are park and recreation facilities, voter registration, and police and fire services. This encompasses all aspects of the entities' operations.

Title 2, Subtitle B, looks at the need for making public transportation accessible. These services include rail, buses, and vans.

Title 3, requires public accommodations and services operated by private entities to provide services to people with disabilities. One of the specific public facilities given as an example are zoos. (Private clubs and religious organization are excluded.) Areas that public accommodations need to make physically

facility; and entrances to goods, services, programs, facilities, accommodations, and other areas mentioned,

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new construction must be accessible. Facilities that are considered public accommodations may comply with the law through the use of auxiliary aids, services, removal of barriers, and modifications of policies, practices, or procedures.

Title 4 specifies the need for installation of a telecommunications relay service or a teletype writer (TTY). Individuals with speech and/or hearing impairments can then communicate with another person by a TTY or by a telephone relay system.

Title 5, is a miscellaneous section of the law that includes information on such items as insurance and other accessibility laws as they relate to the ADA. It is important to note that if a state law is more stringent than the federal law, the more stringent law is to be followed.

Since zoos are specifically mentioned under Title 3 and aquariums are implied, in 1990 there was a need to know their level of accessibility. To this end, a survey was designed and created by the author and experts from Illinois State University. It was then modified based on review by Brookfield Zoo staff and on comments from a pilot survey sent to nonprofit organizations similar in setup to zoos and aquariums.

The final version of this survey was sent to qualified members of the American Zoo and Aquarium Association (AZA) selected from the 1993 AZA directory. The criteria for inclusion in the study were that these members were in good standing, open to the public, and located within the United States. A total of 151 facilities met these criteria.

To ensure the highest number of completed questionnaires, the final instrument used the Dillman (1978) method of surveying, in which the survey form and a cover letter, along with a self-addressed stamped envelope, are followed up at 10-day intervals by a reminder postcard, a second survey and cover letter, and finally a phone call. With this method, 98 surveys (65%) were completed and returned.

The survey was divided into three sections. The first section asked basic background questions concerning each facility. The questions concerned the annual attendance, budget, the number of buildings, the number of full- and part-time staff, and the number of full-time and part-time staff that are disabled.

The second section asked questions about accessibility at the facility. These questions focused on the accessibility of programs for people with disabilities and the elderly, the use of auxiliary aids, guide-dog policies, advertising of services, and staff training.

The third and final section asked questions about the Americans with Disabilities Act. The questions asked if staff had attended some type of informational meeting on the ADA, if a key staff person had been selected to head up the efforts to meet ADA standards, if an advisory group or consultant had been used, if a barrier removal plan had been designed, which barriers had been recognized, and what factors limited the organization from removing those barriers.

The highest positive response rates came from facilities that had attended an informational meeting on the ADA (73%) and those that had selected a key staff person to be responsible for ADA compliance (70%). The other high positive response rate related to the adaptation of programs for people with disabilities (65%).

All remaining questions had a positive response rate below 50%. For other programming specifically designed for the elderly or a person with a disability, only 34% of respondents stated that they had specific programs for a person with a disability. The main programs offered included tours (34.5%), educational classes (20%), special days at the facilities (13%), and outreach programs (13%). Other programs were offered but reflected a much smaller positive response.

Only 40% of the respondents had a program designed specifically for an elderly person. The most frequently offered programs included a special day at the facility (23%), outreach programs (23%), educational programs (19%), and tours (15%). Other programs were offered but at a substantially smaller response rate, similar to the response rate for programming offered to people with disabilities. It is



interesting to note that these accessible programs were the same as the programming offered for people with disabilities.

Other questions within section two concerned auxiliary aids. The three auxiliary aids relating to a response rate above 50% were ramps (87%), wheelchairs (80%), and signage (54%). The remaining aids had positive responses of only 23% or lower. See Table 1 for frequencies and percentages of all auxiliary aids.

Table 1: Auxiliary Aids

<u>Types of Auxiliary Aids</u>	<u>Frequencies</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Ramps	84	87%
Wheelchairs	78	80%
Signage	52	54%
Adult Strollers	22	23%
Elevators	19	20%
Large-Print Materials	18	19%
Accessible Trams	17	19%
Braille Materials	17	18%
Sign Language Interpreters	12	12%
TTY	9	9%
Motorized Scooters	8	8%
Assistive Listening Devices	7	7%

The responses to the question concerning staff training for assisting a person with a disability found that only 31% provided some type of training. More detailed questions were asked about full-time and seasonal staff training, how many attended, and if the training was mandatory or voluntary. If the training was required, only 26% of the full-time staff and 14% of the seasonal staff actually attended. If the training was voluntary, responses were slightly lower for full-time staff (22%) and slightly higher for seasonal staff (17%).

Section three concerned questions about the organization's efforts to comply with the ADA. The use of experts outside of the facility to assist with their accessibility also received a low response rate. Only 38% of the facilities had hired some sort of consultant to assist with their accessibility, with another 11% considering the same. Also, the formation of an advisory group had a positive response rate of only 33%. The establishment of a barrier removal plan or transition plan is explicitly written into the ADA. This plan is a written document that recognizes the barriers to people with disabilities, the projected date for removal of the barriers, the cost of removal, or recognition of the removal as an "undue burden." An undue burden is a factor such as cost or space that prevents the elimination of that particular barrier. Of the responses to the development of a barrier removal plan, only 44% had developed some type of plan.

Of the types of barriers recognized, the highest percentage recorded was some type of physical barrier (94%). These barriers included steep paths or ramps, uneven or rough sidewalks or pathways. High counters, steps, curbs, inaccessible walkway material, doorway problems such as narrowness, the poundage required to open doors, and difficult handles to grasp.

Problems with public amenities such as washrooms and parking were recognized by 38% of the facilities. Of the amenity problems, 79% had difficulty with restroom accessibility, 14% had a lack of accessible parking spaces, and 7% had a problem in both areas.

The next highest-rated barrier was signage (18%). Barriers to exhibits were recognized by 9% of the respondents. This problem focused on viewing into the exhibit. The remaining barriers included high public



telephones (6%). High food costs (3%), and long cue lines (3%).

Eighty-five organizations responded concerning factors that limited the removal of barriers. The largest limiting factor to barrier removal was financing (48%), followed by topography (12%) and lack of staff (8%). See Table 2 for the frequencies and listing of all limitations.

Table 2: Limitations to Barrier Removal

<u>Types of Barriers</u>	<u>Frequencies</u>	<u>Percentage</u>	<u>Cumulative Percentage</u>
Finances	41	48%	100.0%
Topography	10	12%	52.0%
Lack of Staff	7	8%	40.0%
Lack of Time	6	7%	32.0%
Retrofitting	6	7%	25.0%
Lack of Knowledge	5	6%	18.0%
Old Facility	4	5%	12.0%
Waiting on Superiors	4	5%	7.0%
Staff Attitudes	1	1%	2.0%
Other Goals	1	1%	1.0%

The survey results seem to indicate that zoos and aquariums are knowledgeable of the ADA because of the attendance of their staff at informational meetings and seminars. They have also made a good effort to select a key staff person to direct their accessibility efforts and adapt their programming for participants who have a disability.

The positive responses are then greatly reduced after those specific questions. Since finances seem to be a major deterrent to removing barriers at many facilities, it would seem logical that low-cost or no-cost methods to increase access would be employed. However, the hiring of consultants was used slightly more frequently (38%) than the formation of an advisory group (33%). Advisory groups usually are made up of people from the community who have a disability or people from an organization representing such a group.

These individuals usually help a facility improve access for free or for a nominal fee.

Another low-cost way of improving access is through staff training. Such training provides staff, especially those with much public contact, with information about different disabilities and teaches them to recognize potential barriers in their area of responsibility. Staff can provide potential suggestions for barrier removal or suggestions of alternative means of access.

It is interesting to note that many facilities with smaller budgets had many more services, staff training, and accessible amenities than facilities with larger budgets. See Table 3 for a ranking and percentages.

Table 3: Services Offered by Facilities with Budgets Below Mean

<u>Types of Services or Amenities</u>	<u>Percentages</u>
Designed Programs for the Disabled	75%
Barrier Removal Plan	70%
Adult Strollers	68%
Ramps	67%
Adapted Programming	67%
Training to Assist a Person with a Visual Impairment	67%
Training to Assist a Person with a Hearing Impairment	65%
Programming Designed for an Elderly Person	64%
Providing Motorized Scooters	63%



Training to Assist a Person with a Mobility Impairment	61%
Providing Accessible Transportation	59%
Provide Staff Training to Assist a Person with a Disability	54%

This survey provided the AZA with base-line information to assist its members with increasing the accessibility of their facilities and complying with the ADA. Some of the ways the AZA has helped its members include:

- sending its members an overview of the survey results, information on what the results mean, and information on ways to increase accessibility.
- discussions with the Department of Justice to modify service-animal laws to restrict them in areas in zoos and aquariums (see Appendix A). These discussions were the result of several incidences of animals aggressively trying to attack guide dogs and injuring themselves in the process. Some animals did die as the results of their injuries. Another topic of discussion was the prevention of physical contact between a previously quarantined zoo animal and an unquarantined service animal. This was meant to prevent the passing of illnesses or pests to the animal collection.
- sending updates on ADA regulations that affect zoos and aquariums. The ADA is continually being reviewed and modified. AZA members need to be aware of changes that affect them.
- providing conference speakers on ADA and access issues.
- referring questions on accessibility to appropriate sources.

Many zoos and aquariums are just beginning to address accessibility. Several others have worked to increase accessibility for many years. Brookfield Zoo has been involved in this process for over 20 years. To enhance the access of the zoo and to reach more people with its conservation messages, three main approaches are used.

First, the zoo's outreach program serves groups unable to visit the zoo because of the severity of their illness and/or disability. Small, mostly domestic animals are taken out for individuals to see and touch. Animal artifacts are also used in these presentations. No person other than zoo staff and volunteers can hold the animals. Each group is charged a modest fee to cover transportation costs. These parameters ensure that only the neediest groups participate in the zoo-sponsored program. If groups do not meet these restrictions they are then encouraged to visit the zoo.

If a group comes to the zoo, it is provided with "direct services." This approach includes prearranged, formal involvement by staff during the visit. This usually involves programs such as a hands-on tour in Children's Zoo. Specially trained staff, volunteers, and docents assist in these presentations. This prearranged tour is similar to the outreach program. Animals are brought out so the group can see and touch them. Again, no one except zoo staffer trained volunteers can handle the animals. Information on both the animals and animal artifacts is adapted to the level of understanding of the group. More variety in the types of animals can be shown to visiting groups.

The facilitation approach involves modification of zoo features and materials to provide inclusive opportunities without the direct involvement of personnel. These include:

- ramps
- wheelchair-accessible trams
- large-print and Braille Children's Zoo handouts
- large-print maps detailing accessibility information
- cutouts and statues of animals
- assistive listening devices for people who are hard of hearing
- easy-to-use interactives for all guests



- animal artifacts
- sign language interpreters who are available with prior notice viewing windows into exhibits

Additionally, the zoo keeps accessibility in mind while reviewing long-range projects and staff training. Information on accessibility is provided to assist planning teams to make new exhibits as accessible as possible. Also, information on different disabilities and how to assist someone with a disability is provided to new seasonal staff and new docents. Tentative plans call for this training to be included in training of new, full-time staff.

Overall, it appears that zoos and aquariums in America are aware of the ADA and accessibility for visitors with a disability. To answer additional questions and to ascertain if there have been any changes in accessibility levels, a second survey is being discussed for 1998. While some facilities still have a long way to go, overall they are making efforts to improve accessibility and appear to be heading in the right direction.

References

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Appendix A

The Application of the ADA to Zoos' Policies Concerning Service Animals

From the Department of Justice

Zoos and other facilities where animals are exhibited are subject to the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). One of the underlying goals of the ADA is to foster the independence and self-sufficiency of individuals with disabilities. Service animals allow many individuals with disabilities to be self-reliant. Refusing to allow service animals in a place of public accommodation is not permissible under the ADA absent evidence that such animals pose a real threat to safe operation of the facility.

The ADA requires zoos and other facilities to make reasonable modifications to their policies, practices, and procedures when necessary to afford an individual with a disability the same goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages, or other accommodations offered to others. Generally zoos and other facilities must permit the use of a service animal by an individual with a disability. Any limitations on the use of service animals in zoos and other facilities where animals are exhibited must be shown by the zoo to be necessary for safe operation.

Each facility needs to make its own analysis of its circumstances and the determination is very likely to differ from facility to facility depending on the types of animals and the configurations of the facility. Facilities that wish to restrict service animals in any way should make careful assessment of each area to determine where safety concerns justify restricting the access of persons with their service animals. Unsubstantiated fears about potential risks will not suffice to justify the exclusion of service animals from areas open to the general public.

It is not likely that a total ban of service animals from the entire facility can ever be justified. There are many zoo facilities that permit service animals in all or parts of their facilities apparently without problems.

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