
Mayor's Office on Disability



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TIPS & resources for providing Alternative Formats

Requirement to provide alternative formats

Under Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, **all public entities are required to ensure “equally effective communication”** and to provide "auxiliary aids and services" to individuals with cognitive or sensory disabilities. Auxiliary aids and services include such things as assistive listening devices, sign language interpreters, real time captioners, and alternative (or “accessible”) formats – large print, Braille, computer disk, or audio cassette tape. It also includes making "PDF" files and other electronic documents, including emails and websites, accessible to blind persons and others who rely on audible computer screenreaders.

Alternative formats of print materials are to be provided just as the San Francisco City and County would provide any other modification of policies, practices or procedures, upon request by a qualified person with a disability. It is therefore advisable to have a variety of such materials on hand and readily available in situations where persons with a disability might have a particular interest or would be likely to attend.

Requirement to provide the format requested

The City of San Francisco, like all public entities, must give “primary consideration” to the specific aid or service requested.

For example, if information in Braille is requested, the City and County should try to provide the information in Braille. The only circumstances under which City and County may choose not to provide the aid or service requested is if the agency can demonstrate that another “equally effective means of providing access” is available, or that use of the means requested would result in undue financial or administrative burden.

Providing alternative formats is not just an issue of disability law compliance, but also of good customer service.

If someone requests a particular alternative format, you may offer other alternatives.

For example, if someone requests information in Braille, you may mention that you can also provide it on computer disk. The individual may opt for the computer disk, not knowing that was an option, or may confirm the request for Braille. The person may not have a computer, or may simply prefer to have a “hard copy” of the information.

Notification of availability of alternative formats

Print materials (such as meeting notices, agendas, reports, departmental brochures, etc. should contain a statement that lets people know that alternative formats are available upon request for people with disabilities. There is no specific language prescribed for the notification, but the notification should contain information about who to contact to receive accommodations. For Example:

This material is available in alternative formats for individuals with disabilities upon request. Please contact [name, email address and telephone number, including a TTY number, if there is one].

The notification sentence should be in a sans serif font, such as arial 14-18 point font so individuals who may need an alternative format (large print) will be able to read that it is available.

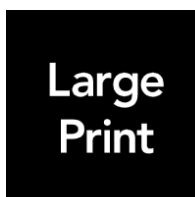
Public Hearings with Print Information

If you will be providing print materials at a public hearing, be sure to note on the public hearing notices that print materials "are available in alternative formats by contacting [name] at [telephone numbers, including TTY, email address] by [date--deadline]. Providing 72 hours notice will help to ensure availability." If it is an event that is likely to be of particular interest to the disability community, planners should plan to have large print and computer disk versions available at the meeting.

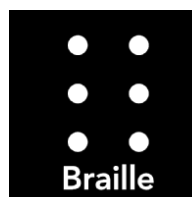
Symbols you can use to indicate availability of alternative formats

There are symbols that can help you advertise your available alternative formats. You are encouraged to place these symbols next to the relevant information in your publications such as program brochures, application forms, event flyers, public meeting or hearing notices, etc. Symbols should be 18 point+.

Here are symbols that denote alternative format access:



Large print version available



Brailled version available

[Positive and negative tiff files of this and other disability access symbols are available for copying or downloading via a link on MOD's website: http://www.sfgov.org/site/sfmod_index.asp, or directly at <http://www.gag.org/resources/das.php>]

How to provide alternative formats

The requested alternative format should be provided in a timely fashion. Depending on the format requested, it may take a few minutes, a day, a week, or more to provide the alternative format. Making a large print version or putting the document on a computer

diskette may be easily and quickly accomplished. Providing a Braille version of information may take up to a week or longer, depending upon the length and complexity of the document.

When providing alternative formats, descriptive information about graphics should be included in a “text only” version of the document.

LARGE PRINT

This is one of the easier alternative formats to provide if the document was produced by one of the common word processing programs (e.g., Word or WordPerfect). When someone requests a document in large print, remember to ask if there is a preferred font style and/or font size because individual needs vary. One person may request the document in Univers 14-point font, while another may request **Arial 18-point bold font**. As a default, use Arial font. After changing the font, you may need to do some reformatting; sometimes making a large print version “throws off” a document, just as changing margins can.

If the document is produced in PDF format or by publishing software such as PageMaker, it may take more time, as conversion to a more easily manipulated document may be required.

ELECTRONIC FORMAT OR EMAIL

This is a relatively easily accomplished alternative format, particularly if the document was produced by one of the common word processing programs (e.g., Word or WordPerfect). If the individual does not request the document to be a certain type of file, remember to ask. You want to be sure the type of document you have is compatible with the individual’s software. Keep in mind that headers and footers as well as materials in PDF format are not readable by audible screen readers. Sometimes, simply saving a copy of the original document onto a disk will fulfill the individual’s request. For additional information about converting word processing or PDF documents to screen-readable text documents, please contact the Mayor’s Office on Disability.

BRAILLE

Since San Francisco City and County does not have Braille services internally, you must use an outside vendor. Because of this, it will take more time to provide Braille versions of documents.

If the document is fairly short and straightforward, you can get a document Brailled within a few days. If the document is longer and/or complex, you will need to confirm delivery date with the vendor. If the information is already a Word, WordPerfect, or text file document, you can simply e-mail the document to the Braille vendor. If it is in PageMaker or other “publisher” software, you will need to convert it to an acceptable type of file prior to sending it to the vendor. If it is some other type of document, contact the vendor to see what you will need to provide for them to do the Brailleing.

Sources for Brailleing & audio cassettes

Note: Inclusion in this resource list does not constitute endorsement by San Francisco City and County Government, nor does omission imply non-endorsement. Our goal is to provide you with information on some key resources available. Please let us know if you're aware of a useful resource missing from this list.

Lighthouse for the Blind/Rose Resnick Center

214 Van Ness Avenue

San Francisco, CA 94013

415.431.1481

415.255.5906 VP

415.863.7568 Fax

ais@lighthouse-sf.org Braille, Transcription and Audiotape Services

Lions Center for the Blind

2115 Broadway

Oakland, CA 94612

510.450.1580

510.654.3603 Fax

scott_blanks@lbcenter.org Training in Use of Assistive Equipment

With Braille vendors:

- You may send the document to be Brailled by e-mail or on disk
- The file should be in Word, WordPerfect, or a text file
- If the file is in PageMaker or other "publisher" software, you will need to convert it to
- a different type of file
- If you only have a print copy, it can be scanned or re-typed for an additional fee
- Costs vary, so confirm estimated cost with the vendor you select
- Brailled materials will be sent to you with an invoice
- You may request that the Brailled materials be sent directly to the individual free of charge via the U.S. Postal Service "Free Matter for the Blind"

SPREADSHEETS AND GRAPHS

Spreadsheets and graphs can be Brailled, but in a different format according to the Braille Code. Usually they will list the column headings separated by semicolons, and then Braille the columnar material in paragraphs, without repeating the heading every time. For the reader, they insert an explanation as to how to read it. If brailleing complicated tables, charts and graphs, it is helpful to summarize in narrative form, the information being presented.

It is helpful to provide a print copy of the chart as well as the document on disk. (Codes for tables and boxes have to be removed, as the Braille program does not recognize them.) It also helps if the chart on disk is set up for 8 ½" x 11" paper, portrait orientation. But they will work with whatever is sent.

Free Postage When Mailing Braille, Large Print, and Audio Tapes

Most alternative format materials can be mailed free through the U.S. Postal Service to people who are blind, low vision, or who cannot use or read conventionally printed materials due to a physical, cognitive or other sensory disability. This includes brochures, information sheets, booklets, and other reading matter, in Braille, large print (14-point or larger), or on tape. To use this service, omit stamps and print the words Free Matter for the Blind & Handicapped in the upper right hand corner of the envelope or package. These materials are subject to inspection by the Postal Service and may not contain any advertising. Handwritten or typewritten letters are subject to regular postage.