

Accessibility Guidelines for Shambhala Centers

January 2006, updated May 2008

This document is designed as a resource for Shambhala Centers to help them assess their accessibility and make plans to improve it. The document poses questions that centers should consider as they look into this issue.

The basis for this document is the *Checklist for Barrier Removal*, a document made available by the ADA, which can be downloaded from the ADA Document Portal at www.adaportal.org.

The Checklist for Barrier Removal is fairly comprehensive but not all of it is relevant to all Shambhala centers and it does not cover all ADA requirements. It is concerned primarily with wheelchair and mobility impaired access and does not deal to any significant extent with the needs of other disabled populations.

Phases

There are many forms of disability and to be genuinely open to all, we need to look into how we can accommodate these and any families, friends and caregivers involved. This is a considerable project and will clearly take time. To make better accessibility achievable and not overwhelming, we have suggested starting by asking your sangha what needs there are now, then trying to meet those. You could follow that by going through the whole Guidelines to identify gaps in accessibility of the various types and also any easily achievable solutions that could be implemented quickly. Keep in mind that the steps in Phase I are generally steps that should be a very high priority to insure that, whenever that is viable, at least everyone can get into the buildings and practice. Then you could use the Phases for a more systematic follow-up. To make this more workable we have suggested dividing the process into four phases.

- ✓ Phase I – Mobility impairments
- ✓ Phase II – Deafness and hearing impairments
- ✓ Phase III – Blindness and visual impairments
- ✓ Phase IV – Other disabilities

Keep in mind that many people have learnt that when they find their accessibility needs are not accommodated, it is easier to go somewhere else than try to change things. So having centers genuinely accessible to start with, would avoid unknowingly turning people away.

Regional/Country Issues

This document has been prepared in the United States but we would like all Shambhala Centers throughout the world to strive for full accessibility whether or not local laws require it. This survey is generally appropriate for accessibility anywhere. However, we would appreciate hearing what accessibility information is available in other countries.

Phase I

General

1. For those who need to sit in a chair for practice, are there chairs available that are appropriate for several hours of practice? Are some foot rests available?
This is a high priority and is an increasingly important issue as our sangha ages.
 - ✓ In selecting chairs, consider the dynamics of a proper sitting position over aesthetics.
 - ✓ The front of the chair seat should not be higher than the back. The pelvis should tilt forwards or have no tilt, rather than tilting backward. This is the single most important factor for selecting chairs.
 - ✓ Select chairs in the middle range in terms of depth and height.
 - ✓ Foot rests should ensure that shorter people do not have to have to practice with their feet dangling in the air and also insulate stocking feet from cold floors. Note that adjustable foot rests are widely available to provide for good office workstation ergonomics.
2. Is there a workable alternative to low puja tables for those who use chairs?
 - ✓ It may be possible to add longer legs to some existing puja tables.
3. Usability of Rest Rooms: Is the lavatory seat rim approximately 17-19 inches high (the higher end is better) with grab bars within easy reach?
4. Do program application forms include a question asking whether the person has any disability and requesting information about what would help that individual to fully participate?
5. Is there a sound amplification system available for all talks, classes and programs, no matter where they occur? See Phase II for more details.
6. Has the *Checklist for Barrier Removal*, been used to survey the centers accessibility? This is a document made available by the ADA, which can be downloaded from the ADA Document Portal at www.adaportal.org. Lifts
7. Don't let equipment salespeople make your decisions for you, for example chairlift companies who offer a cheap solution to stair climbing that can't be used by members who may need a ramp, platform lift, or elevator so that they don't need to be lifted out of and into their wheelchairs.

Resources (General)

1. **Shambhala International web site:** Diversity and Accessibility Best Practices page at <http://www.shambhala.org/members/share/bpmain.php?catid=4> This includes additional accessibility resources for the Phases of the Guidelines
2. **Accessible Faith. A Technical Guide for Accessibility in Houses of Worship.** <http://www.rrf.org/noteworthy/AccessibleFaith-final.pdf>

Retirement Research Foundation congregation's guide to accessibility, edited by sangha member Tom Golz while he was at Inspired Partnerships. Has a great deal of helpful information including "Accessibly Solutions for Houses of Worship", which includes specific designs, etc. for removing physical barriers and information on removing auditory and visual barriers. Also information on organizing, funding and many other related issues.

3. **ADA document portal:** Go to www.adaportal.org. In the left-hand column under *Facility Access*, select *Checklist for Barrier Removal*.
4. **Additional ADA web site:** www.adainformation.org. Select *Publications*, then *New Construction Checklist and Survey Forms*.
5. **National Organization on Disability web site:** www.nod.org. Select Religious Participation (left column, near the top). This page contains many resources for accommodating seniors and the disabled. Also, scroll down on the page to Learn More. Select N.O.D. Interfaith Guides. This page describes the book *That All May Worship*. This book assists congregations, national faith groups, and seminaries in welcoming people with disabilities.
6. **Unitarian Universalist web site Disabilities 101** at <http://uua.org/leaders/leaderslibrary/accessibility/disability101/index.shtml>
This has a great deal of very helpful information, suggestions, and resources covering many types of disabilities.
7. **Access Board New Guidelines for Accessible Design:** www.access-board.gov/ada-aba/final.pdf. This document provides guidelines for builders.
8. **International Codes Council.** Guidelines for Accessible Useable Buildings and Facilities. ICC ANSI A117.1 (2003 or 1998). www.iccsafe.org/e/category.html. Under *Technical Publications by Topic*, select *Accessibility*. Or call to order 1-800-768-4452.

Mobility Impaired

1. Are there any steps required to gain access to the center or in the route to any of the shrine rooms and other facilities of the center? If so where?
 - ✓ Any steps at all are a barrier for any wheelchair and particularly a powered wheelchair weighing over two hundred pounds.
2. Has the director and/or other non-disabled member of the sangha spent at least half a day in a wheelchair at the center, including going to shrine rooms, bathrooms and all other public areas, as well as entering and leaving the center?
3. Does your building have ramps, curb cuts, handicapped vehicle unloading areas, designated and level parking near the entrance, an elevator?

4. Are all people sitting in chairs required to sit at the back of the room?
✓ Where possible, consider chairs at the side rather than in back.
5. Are places for wheelchairs considered in the initial planning for programs and facilities at your center?

Resources (Mobility Impaired) in addition to those listed above.

1. **Meditation cushions, chairs, benches, etc. that some with physical disabilities might find helpful:** Go to www.samadhicushions.com or www.ziji.com or www.zenbydesign.com/newchair/chairs.html. *Betterback* stores in the US also carry some useful items.
2. **Building modification guidance:** Dale Buckstaff, manager of the accessibility ramp project at the Boulder Shambhala Center can share experiences and guidance: dale@dalebuckstaff.com.

PHASE II

Deaf and hard of hearing

Loss of hearing is generally agreed to be the most isolating of all physical disabilities. With our average age rising, this is a rapidly increasing issue in our sangha.

Hard of hearing people use speech to communicate. They may or may not use personal hearing aids. Even if they have personal hearing aids, additional assistive listening devices may be required to access speech at a distance, on the phone, in noisy surroundings, and in other situations. Hard of hearing people supplement the auditory gaps by using speech reading and contextual clues.

Deaf people do not depend on hearing for communication. Communication is completely dependent on visual information and sign languages, which are specific to certain regions. In North America the language is American Sign Language.

1. Who in your sangha already needs or would be helped by Assistive Listening Devices (ALDs)?
 - ✓ Do a survey and make a list.
2. Do program application forms include a question concerning if the person is deaf or hard of hearing and request information about what would help that individual?
3. Is the main shrine room of your center equipped with an amplification system? Have you looked into Induction Loop Amplification?
4. Is there a way to provide amplification in smaller rooms where classes take place?
5. Is there any additional equipment for the deaf or hard of hearing at talks?
 - ✓ The type of equipment that is appropriate depends on many factors.
 - ✓ Check with hard of hearing members as to what is most suitable for them.
6. Do you have any fast typists, who could transcribe a talk, as it happens, on a laptop computer?
 - ✓ A deaf or hard of hearing person could sit next to the typist and read the talk on the laptop.
7. Is the lighting focused on a teacher's face sufficient for speech-reading purposes?
8. Does one of your telephones have the option of raising the volume (and large size keypad)?
9. Is there a computer with e-mail/chat/msn messenger capability in the center that a deaf person can use instead of a telephone?

- ✓ Cell phones with text messaging could be used as well.
 - ✓ TDD devices are less practical.
10. Is there a sign language translator or translator service available if needed?
- ✓ A translator who is a Buddhist would be ideal. It is impractical to have a sign language interpreter available at all times.
 - ✓ If you have a deaf person in your community, please speak with him or her through an interpreter or by writing your message, and inquire about specific needs for simultaneous interpretation.
11. Do you offer a regularly scheduled open house with a sign language interpreter on hand, that could be advertised in the deaf community? Is there a significant deaf community in your area that makes this a worthwhile approach?

Resources (Deaf and Hard of Hearing) in addition to those listed in Phase I

1. Audiologist: Sangha member Carolyn Mandelker is an audiologist. cmandelker@shambhala.org.
2. **Assistive Listening Devices (ALDs):** The following are some possibilities:
 - ✓ **Permanent sound systems** in every room used as a shrine room or classroom. However this will not be enough for many with hearing loss.
 - ✓ **Portable PA systems** (e.g., the Fender Passport Deluxe PD 250, which costs about \$300, although it is somewhat bulky).
 - ✓ **Wireless Sound systems**
 - a. **Induction Loop Amplification.** Installed to operate with existing sound system. These work with any hearing aid and cochlear implants that has a “T” coil, which is now in many hearing aids (50%) in the US and most in Europe. Induction Loop also works with personal receivers. Because it works with hearing aids it could be much easier for users, than FM systems, and cheaper as should require fewer personal receivers with ear buds or headphones (about \$100 each). But it is less mobile than FM systems as it needs to connect to a 12 gage wire going around the whole room. Area needs to be checked before installation for sources of strong electromagnetic fields that can interfere.
 - b. **FM** sound systems that are connected to the main sound system or have their own microphone. These can have a receiver connected to a loudspeaker for several hard of hearing or personal receivers that interface with the sound system and can be adjusted for individual needs.
 - c. **Infrared (IR) light system.** In an IR system, audio signals from any source are conveyed to listeners via infrared light waves (using light emitting diodes) invisible to the human eye. Ordinarily, strict line-of-sight is necessary between an IR emitter and the transparent lens on the receiver, but this can be modified in rooms with light-colored surfaces. Has the advantages of more privacy and it is not affected by ambient electromagnetic interference. Tend to be more costly than other options.

3. **ALD advice:** Sangha member Stefan Carmien has been active in audio work for 35 years and has set up assistive listening systems at seminars. He can give advice to centers on equipment. <http://l3d.cs.colorado.edu/~carmien/> Currently a researcher in the BIKa group at the Fraunhofer Institute for Applied Information Technology (FIT) in Sankt Augustin, Germany working on the EU4ALL project. carmien@l3d.cs.colorado.edu
4. **Hearing Accessibility Handbook – A Guide for Congregations:** <http://uua.org/documents/shhh/hearingaccessibilityhndbk.pdf>
5. **Sign Language Interpreter:** A local disabilities support organization may be able to direct you to an available interpreter. The Yellow Pages may also list interpreters.
6. **Ten Tips for Using a Sign Language Interpreter:** <http://uua.org/leaders/leaderslibrary/accessibility/disability101/hearingimpairments/26846.shtml>

More details on resources available are in “**Accessibility Resources....**” on the Diversity and Accessibility Best Practices page of the Shambhala Web site at <http://www.shambhala.org/members/share/bpmain.php?catid=4>.

PHASE III

Blind or Visually Impaired

1. Do you know of a place/organization in your area that can convert text to Braille?
 - ✓ Some libraries provide a text to Braille conversion service and there may be other resources in your area.
 - ✓ Note that only a small percentage of people who are blind read Braille.
 - ✓ Audio tapes are easier and less bulky.
2. You may provide Braille signage for doors, elevators, bathroom doors, offices, etc.
 - ✓ Again Braille is of limited value as few blind people read Braille.
 - ✓ If your building has multiple floors and an elevator, the elevator should somehow provide clear distinction between floors (possibly audio cues at floors).
 - ✓ Ideally a blind person should have a guide for those situations, to say which floor they are on, etc.
3. Are steps marked with bright high contrast & different textured tape?
 - ✓ This is particularly important if the steps might be unexpected.
4. Are there any chants and practice texts in large font?
 - ✓ Sometimes it might be practical to use a copy machine enlarger to make copies with larger text.
 - ✓ Ask individual members what works best for them.
5. Do you have volunteer readers to read books, transcripts, chants, *The Dot*, *The Shambhala Sun*, etc. for visually impaired people?
 - ✓ Materials can be read directly to individuals or taped for later use.
6. Do you plan ahead to tape chants and practices during regular practice sessions?
 - ✓ Visually-impaired participants can find these very helpful.
7. Do you provide a buddy system of 2 or 3 people, who can assist a visually-impaired participant as needed?
 - ✓ Having a team ensures that the participant is not left alone, which can be isolating.
8. In new surroundings, do you ask a visually impaired person if he or she would like to be led around until he or she has "mapped" the area?
9. When talking to a visually impaired person, since there may not be eye contact, do you touch the person on the arm or shoulder to indicate you are talking to him or her?
 - ✓ Ask first to make sure this is okay.

Resources (Blind and Visually Impaired) in addition to those listed in Phase I

1. **Basic information about dealing with visual impairments:**
<http://uua.org/leaders/leaderslibrary/accessibility/disability101/>.
2. **Other aids:** A color (often yellow) transparency to cover text can sometimes make it more readable. Ask the person what is most helpful.

Accessibility Email -June 10, 2008

I am blind, with only 1% vision in the corner of one eye. I have been registered as blind since 1983. Like many blind/ visually impaired people my sight deteriorated over time. Fortunately only a small proportion of visually impaired people are totally blind, and the incidence of blindness is small in the total population. I am aware of 4 people in our community; however I am sure there are others, and as we grow older both sight and hearing diminish.

Mobility, getting around in facilities;

Here some considerations:

- marking a step or the top and bottom steps in a flight of steps with white or yellow tape
- marking handrails with white or yellow tape to mark their beginnings and ends.
- making sure handrails are matched to steps, that the rail begins and ends where the steps do.
- cane detectable edges to paths through out door areas. [I have occasionally found myself wandering around in a field at night at SMC] Blind people get lost in open spaces and use the edges to "shoreline" their way around, unless there is a cane detectable path through the space. In general blind persons can best work a right angle grid pattern, curves, angled, and forked paths are a challenge.
- clutter or objects in a path or along an edge can throw one off course.
- low overhanging objects, signs or brush, is not apparent to a blind person until he/she runs into it
- persons using seeing eye dogs need accommodation for the dog. I do not have a dog so can not comment.
- from time to time a visually impaired / blind person is going to require help from the sighted, e.g. in a cafeteria setting finding the food, finding a seat. I generally appreciate more information rather than less.

Access to teachings; there is much teaching material available in an audio format e.g. the ARP. What would be helpful would be commonly used books on audio format, such as those of our own teachers.

I use a personal computer with a voice software package that reads what I type in and reads the screen and files and email. Test material can be accessed if one has such a set up.

Ted Spearin
Toronto

PHASE IV

Learning Disabilities

Learning disabilities don't affect a person's intelligence, but affect the way he or she learns and behaves. These limitations can show up in different ways – as specific difficulties with spoken or written language, coordination, self-control, or attention.

1. How many people in your sangha are affected by learning disabilities?
 - ✓ Talk to each learning disabled person to find out what would be most helpful for him or her.
2. Do you have access to resources for helping people with learning disabilities?

Resources (Learning Disabilities) *in addition to those listed in Phase I*

1. Basic information about dealing with learning disabilities:
<http://www.ldonline.org>.
2. Most schools, colleges and universities will have information on resources for people with this disability. Landmark College in Vermont is the leading learning disabilities college. To be prepared when the need arises, you can make some initial inquiries as to who you can contact and what is available.

Multiple Chemical Sensitivities

1. How many people in your sangha are affected by chemical sensitivities?
 - ✓ Talk to each person and find out what would be helpful to him or her.
2. To create a more comfortable environment, you may wish to ask participants at the center to:
 - ✓ Use non-scented body products (e.g. lotion, hair-spray).
 - ✓ Refrain from using perfume, cologne, and other fragrances.
 - ✓ Allow recently dry-cleaned clothing to air before wearing.
 - ✓ Use non-scented laundry products on clothing worn at programs or events.
3. To create a more comfortable environment, you may wish to institute these policies at your center:
 - ✓ Use non-scented soap in the restrooms.
 - ✓ Use the least toxic cleaning products or disinfectants available.
 - ✓ Remove or disconnect fragrance-emitting devices from restrooms.
 - ✓ Do not schedule pesticide application or carpet shampooing prior to programs or events.
 - ✓ Use non-scented or beeswax candles.

Resources (Chemical Sensitivities) *in addition to those listed in Phase I*

1. Basic information about dealing with chemical sensitivities: Unitarian Universalist Association statement at
<http://uua.org/leaders/leaderslibrary/accessibility/disability101/>.

Developmental disabilities/Cognitive Impairments

Developmental disability is a condition in which the normal development of the brain does not correspond to age.

1. How many people or families in your sangha are affected by developmental disabilities and what would be helpful to them?
2. Do you have access to resources for helping people with developmental disabilities?
✓ Note that step-free wheelchair access is important for this population also.
3. Have you made inquiries about who you can contact and what resources are available to deal with developmental disabilities?

Resources (Developmental Disabilities) in addition to those listed in Phase I

1. **Basic information about dealing with developmental disabilities:** Most schools will have information and resources for helping this population and there is often a local government organization specializing in this area.
2. **Additional publications and resources:** The American Association on Mental Retardation (AAMR) has a publication of resources: *On the Road to Congregational Inclusion*. This publication has 170 pages of resources, mostly books, “for clergy, layperson, families, and service providers.” It can be downloaded in PDF format at <http://aamr.org/Groups/div/RG/resources>.

Mental Illness

1. Have you determined how many people in your sangha are affected by mental illness?
2. Do you have access to resources for helping people with mental illness?
3. Have you made inquiries to determine whom you can contact and what help is available?
✓ Be mindful of when you are out of your depth and seek professional assistance.

Resources (Mental Illness)

1. **Other practitioners:** A practitioner who is trained in this area may be able to offer assistance.
2. **Local resources:** Local mental health resources may also be helpful.

Chronic Illness & Invisible Disabilities

This category tends to be under-reported and very pervasive. It includes many forms of disability and illness.

1. How many people in your sangha suffer from chronic illness or invisible disabilities? Have you asked them what would help them participate more fully in activities?

Resources (Chronic Illness & Invisible Disabilities) *in addition to those listed in Phase I*

1. **Shambhala Karuna talk:** lists resources, primarily for people living with chronic illnesses. Available at www.shambhala.org/karuna.
2. **National Organization on Disability web site:** www.nod.org. Select *Religious Participation* (left column, near the top). Scroll down on the page to *Learn More*. Select *N.O.D. Interfaith Guides*. This page describes the book *That All May Worship*, which provides helpful suggestions.
3. **Disability Etiquette web page:**
<http://uua.org/leaders/leaderslibrary/accessibility/disability101/>.

Support for Caregivers

Support for caregivers is extremely important and will only get more important as our sangha ages. Centers should look into how to support caregivers, including providing help so they can attend practices and programs.

1. How many caregivers are there in your sangha and what kinds of help do they need?

Resources (Support for Caregivers) *in addition to those listed in Phase I*

1. **Local resources:** Local senior centers, independent living centers, and disability organizations may have some resources for caregivers.
2. **AgeNet Eldercare Network:** www.agenet.com provides consumer information for seniors & caregivers.
3. **Caregiver.com:** Go to their web site at www.caregiver.com or call them at (954) 893-0550.
4. **Caregiver Media Group:** A leading provider of information, support and guidance for family and professional caregivers. View their web site at www.caregiver.com.
5. **National Family Caregivers Association:** View their web site at www.nfcacares.org. Other contact information: Fax at (301) 942-2302). Phone at (800) 896-3650. Address: 10400 Connecticut Ave., #500, Kensington, MD 20895-3944. E-mail at info@nfcacares.org.
6. **National Federation of Interfaith Volunteer Caregivers:** View their web site at www.nfivc.org. Other contact information: Phone at (914) 331-1358. Address: 368 Broadway, Suite 103, Kingston, NY 12401.