

Ways to Make Loudoun County Businesses More Accessible

By: Rosemarie Rossetti, Ph.D.

Doing business with everyone, including those with disabilities, can improve your revenue.

As you think about the accessibility of your business, what architectural barriers keep customers from entering?

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (May 2023), 61 million Americans, 27 percent of the population, live with a disability. Twelve percent have a serious difficulty walking or climbing stairs.

As a person with a spinal cord injury, I use a manual wheelchair for mobility. When I travel, I am often confronted with businesses I can't enter due to inaccessibility. If I can't enter a business, I can't spend money there.

Even one step at the entrance will restrict people from entering a business. There are low-cost solutions including creating a concrete or wooden ramp or a separate accessible entrance.

By adding a second accessible entrance, business owners invite people using mobility equipment. This entrance can be on the side or back of the building. Add signs at the main entry showing customers how to reach this entrance. This door needs to stay unlocked or have a doorbell that notifies the staff that a person is at the door.

The door threshold should be no higher than one-half inch. If the threshold is a barrier, consider a threshold ramp.

The door opening must be at least 32 inches wide to ensure passage. If the door is a barrier, consider replacing the hinges with swing away or offset hinges. They can add 2-5 inches of width. These hinges swing the door clear of the door frame, making it easier to get a wheelchair through the doorway.

Modifications to your business can make it easy for people who use wheelchairs, scooters and walkers to enter.

Funding Sources

Various funding sources are available for business owners to make their businesses accessible. Here are some options to explore.

Business owners can elect to deduct the costs of making a facility more accessible to and usable by people with disabilities on their federal tax returns. A facility is all or any parts of buildings, structures, equipment, roads, walks or parking lots.

In 2022, businesses could deduct up to \$15,000 per tax year for costs associated with removing barriers to disabled people.

The following is a list of some architectural barrier removal costs that can be deducted.

- Ground and floor surfaces
- Walks

- Parking lots
- Ramps
- Entrances
- Doors and doorways
- Stairs
- Floors
- Toilet rooms
- Water fountains
- Public telephones
- Elevators
- Controls
- Signage
- Alarms
- Protruding objects
- Symbols of accessibility

For more information, see the IRS Publication 535, Barrier Removal Costs, page 28
<https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p535.pdf>

The IRS Form 8826, Disabled Access Credit, can be used by eligible small businesses to document eligible access expenditures. These can include removing barriers that prevent a business from being accessible to or usable by individuals with disabilities. The instructions and form are here <https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/f8826.pdf>

The U.S. Small Business Administration has the 504 loan program that provides long-term, fixed rate financing for major fixed assets that promote business growth and job creation. To learn about this loan, go to <https://www.sba.gov/funding-programs/loans/504-loans>

Thoroughly research and understand the requirements and conditions associated with each funding option. Consult with financial advisors, accountants and experts who can guide you through the application process and help you determine the best funding approach for your specific needs.

Bio: Rosemarie Rossetti, Ph.D., is an internationally recognized accessibility consultant, speaker, author, and president of Rossetti Enterprises LLC. www.RosemarieSpeaks.com

She speaks to and consults with meeting professionals and destination marketing organizations to help them create welcoming, inclusive environments. This ensures they exceed the requirements mandated by the venue and the meeting organizer for inclusion and diversity.

Having been paralyzed from the waist down with a spinal cord injury, she speaks from her wheelchair, sharing her dramatic personal story. She presents to audiences throughout the U.S. and beyond as a recognized expert on inclusive design.

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Accessible ramps.



Door openings must be 32 inches wide to ensure a wheelchair can pass through.



Adjust door hinges to create width.