

**PERSPECTIVES OF LIBRARIANS AND STAFF ON PUBLIC LIBRARY ACCESSIBILITY  
FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES**

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**Team Project Abstract  
2015-2016**

**Background:** Federal, state and local laws such as the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act require equitable access to facilities and services for people with disabilities. Individuals with disabilities, however, continue to face challenges with accessibility within their community, including within their local libraries. Previous research in this area has shown that although there has been an elimination of physical barriers, little attention had been paid to the use of adaptive technology and few libraries had assigned a responsibility for disability services to a specific staff member.

**Objective:** The specific aim of this project is to ascertain the perspectives of librarians and library staff on the accessibility of their library both the physical environment and their resources for individuals with physical, intellectual and/or sensory disabilities.

**Methods:** An anonymous, self-administered online survey was created and recruitment was done via a WIHD community partner. The survey will be available for a 2-month period and we are expecting an estimated sample size of 40% out of 120 librarians and staff members on distribution list (n = 50).

**Community Partner:** A community partnership was formed with a head librarian at a local Westchester library.

**Progress-to-Date:** A literature review was conducted and identified resources for library accessibility such as the ALA policy and ALA toolkit. Barriers to library accessibility were also identified in the literature review. These areas included physical access to indoor/outdoor spaces for use, technology, assistive, adaptive and rehabilitative devices. Limited programming of community activities as well as staff training and attitudes were identified as major barriers. It was identified that professional training and education for library staff to gain knowledge and skills was needed. IRB approval was granted by New York Medical College and data collection began in March 2016.

To date, 23 respondents have completed the online survey (19.2% of our estimated sample size). Of the respondents, 26.1% were librarians and 73.9% were library staff. Self-reported levels of competency revealed 82.6% have little to no knowledge in offering assistance to individuals with hearing and speech impairments. Just over 75% of staff report having little to no knowledge in offering assistance to individuals with cognitive, intellectual or learning disabilities. Levels of self-reported comfort in providing library assistance to individuals with disabilities offered a variety of results. Only 34.8% of respondents indicated that they had participated in any type of relevant formal training. While 60.9% were familiar with the ALA's policy on "Library Services for People with Disabilities," only 13.6% were familiar with the relevant toolkit.

**Next Steps:** Preliminary results indicate that while librarians and library staff report some comfort offering assistance to individuals with disabilities, they do not report adequate levels of competency. Moreover, most librarians do not have adequate training. Additional awareness of the ALA resources and additional training—perhaps in the form of online webinars—is necessary in order for these staff members to adequately serve all members of their community.

Figure 1. Level of self-reported comfort in providing services to library patrons with disabilities (n=23).

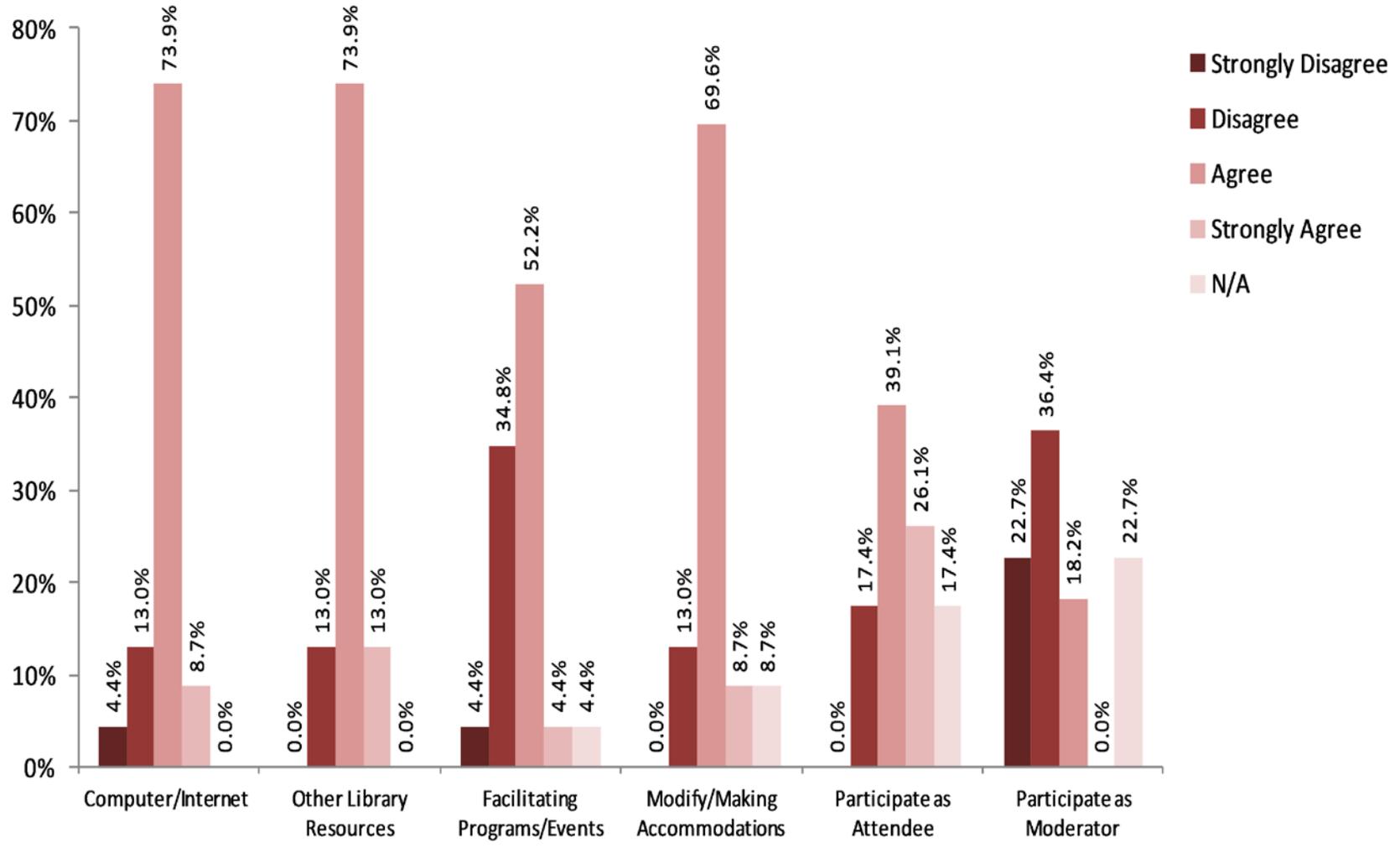


Figure 2. Level of self-reported competency in offering assistance to library patrons by disability type (n=23).

