Office of One

Shannon M. Mulhall, NIC, ADAC, CASp
Certified Americans with Disabilities Act Coordinator
City of Fresno, CA
Shannon.Mulhall@fresno.gov
559-621-8716
June 25, 2020
ADA Online Conference

Shannon M. Mulhall, NIC, ADAC, CASp

• ADA Coordinator, City of Fresno, CA
• Disability Rights Advocate
• ADA Nerd (self proclaimed)
• Certified Sign Language Interpreter
• Certified Access Specialist
Session Learning Objectives:

• Processes, challenges, and successes possible for ADA Coordinators who are an "Office of One"
• Developing & fostering meaningful relationships with internal allies and community partners
• Tools for addressing outdated plans, updating policies, and developing internal training programs

It Starts with People
Moving beyond “I can’t” and “they won’t let me”

TOOLSET: ADDRESSING ADA COORDINATOR CHALLENGES

Common ADA Coordinator Challenges

- Clout/authority
- Access to information
- ADA is a low priority
  - lack of administrative support
- Strained relationships
  - With staff
  - With community
- Lack of funds
- Fear based decision-making
  - Hands tied/short leash
  - “Don’t tell the community…”
  - “If we know the issues, then we will be more liable”
ADA Coordinator as Storyteller

- What is your story about:
  - The jurisdiction as a whole
  - The community needs
  - Staff, Administration, Elected Officials

Get to Inquiry

**Moving from...**
“*I can’t...*”

“*They won’t let me...*”

**To...**
- “*What can I do?*”
- “*What will they let me...?*”
Interpret “No” as “Not Yet”

No is not permanent in government
• Administration, elected officials, and directors come and go
  – Meet with new hires and leaders
  – Transitions are the best time to inspire a new way of thinking

Set Up Future Success

• Research
• Prepare
• Line things up to be ready for YES
• Make it THEIR priorities (ownership)
Know What is Going On

• Attend/watch meetings of the elected
• Follow budget planning & approval
• Be aware of the administration priorities

Planting the Seed

• Be at the table
• Discuss concepts at all levels
• Sprinkle in a mini pitch
  – “This is something I can help you plan for over the next few years...”
Define your Message

Story Time - Before
“In organizations, real power and energy is generated through relationships. The patterns of relationships and the capacities to form them are more important than tasks, functions, roles, and positions.”
Margaret Wheatly

TOOLSET: RELATIONSHIP BUILDING
Relationship Building

With whom you need to connect to start removing barriers?

Shared Responsibility

When to do the heavy lifting, when to delegate?
Reminder: You can’t do it all. Rely on:
• Liaisons
• Champions
Liaisons

I asked for a person who:
• Has access to department services and programs
• Understands services
• Has time to work on access issues
• Could meeting periodically

I got:
• Assistant City Manager
• Directors
• Executive Assistants
• Staff Assistants
• Mid-level Supervisors
• Fire Captain
• Department Worker’s Compensation Rep

Champions

• Have disability
• Have a friend/loved one with disability
• Just get it - “It’s the right thing to do”
• Rule followers - “It’s the law”
• Supporting access supports their objectives
Warning – Office of One

**ADA Coordinator Agrees to:**
- Not do all their work
- Support & guide steps
- Provide resources, tools, and best practices
- Keep accountability
- Be firm when necessary
- Be flexible when reasonable

**Department Agrees to:**
- Take ownership of actions
- Remain in contact with you
- Report progress for tracking
- Ask for help
- Communicate when timelines are not met or become unreasonable

---

**Praise and Empathy**

- Praise the good
- Empathize when they are overwhelmed
- Lean in where there is support
- Be firm
Collaborative Approach

“People do not willing return to a conversation that diminishes them.”

Parker J. Palmer, *The Courage to Teach*

Celebrate

- Sing the praises!
  - Talk up the successes, no matter how small
  - Celebrating the wins and victory moments
  - Let staff know that you’re there to protect them
  - Let community know you hear their concerns and are advocating for them
Story time: Celebrate Champions

Community Outreach

*Nothing About Us Without Us*

- Requirement of the job
- Build relationships
- Be transparent
- Leverage voices
  - Ask for letters of support/dissent
  - Bring into meetings with you
Community Support

- Disability Advisory Commission
- CBO partnerships
- Vocal Advocates
Story Time – Relationships Matter

Be effective without the hammer of authority

TOOLSET: AUTHORITY & CLOUT
“Let me look into that for you”

- Listen & clarify the question
- What is the end goal
- Research:
  - Regulations
  - Legal precedents
  - Other jurisdictions’ approach

Situational Authority

- You are the expert, BE the expert

I’m not going to tell you how to do your job.
Here is the recommendation of the most protected position.
The risks are: (cite PCA for similar jurisdiction, litigation, community impact)
The benefits are: (cite the legal, civic, and community impact)
Is there any additional information you need for this decision?
What Does DOJ Expect?

Project Civic Access = ADA Coordinator Playbook

“...A recent DOJ audit of our neighboring jurisdiction, Anytown, required that they do XYZ. Which of these actions are feasible for your department/division?”

Collaborative Process*

“You need to do X for compliance.”

VS

“The community is asking for X. How can we make that possible?”

*even when it is painful!
Story Time – Collaborative Approach

“Do the next right thing”

TOOLSET: POLICIES, PLANS, & TRACKING
Be Strategic

Turning a cruise liner, not a speedboat

Inquiry: Outdated Plans

• What aspects are completed?
• What remains?
• What is no longer relevant?
• What new policies support accessibility?
• What are the current needs?
• Replace, divide, or create addendum?
• Consultants or in-house?
Inquiry: Updating Policies

- What is the mechanism?
  - Department policies? Administrative orders?
    Municipal code? Ordinances?
- Who needs to provide input?
  - Internal (staff, decision makers, attorney, labor representatives)
  - External (community members)
- Administrative adoption or council/board adoption?

Inquiry: Department Needs

- Ask Them:
  - What are your areas of concern?
  - What do you think your department needs?
  - How long do you need to do that? Is it realistic?
  - What supports would you need?
  - What programs/services are you proud of?
Inquiry: Community Needs

- What are advocates vocal about?
- What are their biggest concerns?

Funding Relationships

- Who controls:
  - Community Development & Block Grants (CDBG)
  - Grant Writing
  - Grant Planning & Prioritizing for:
    - Traffic Signal improvements
    - Roadway Reconstruction
    - Facility Projects
    - Maintenance Projects
  - Long Range Planning
Funding Timing

• Budget planning cycle
• Budget request forms and flow
• Grant planning cycle

“Who pays for the accessibility part?”

Accessibility is a integral part of the program, not an added expense

OR

If you can’t afford to meet Federal and State codes & laws you can’t afford to do the program
Regular Tracking

*Keep it from becoming a “shelf document”*

- Use a tracking mechanism
  - Specific actions
  - General compliance/outreach activities
- Liaison/Responsible Employee in Department
- Periodic update meetings

Annual Addendum

- Smaller document
- Gives flexibility to change/add goals
- Keeps it breathing
Annual Report

• A reason for staff to respond
• Pre-organize audit information
• Record of:
  – Compliance
  – Good faith efforts
  – Community engagement
  – Points of Contact

Story Time – Community Outcomes
They don’t know what they don’t know

TOOLSET: TRAINING

Training

• ADA Training Program
  – New employees
  – ADA Basics/Overview (Mandatory All staff)
  – Public Accommodations/Modifications for Supervisors
  – Accessible Documents
  – Incidental Trainings
Get Personal

• In-house training benefits:
  – Familiarity with YOU
  – You can guide the emphasis
• Train-The-Trainer – pros/cons

Training: Defining Program Access

• “We can get a wheelchair in here”
• “We don’t have public contact, we just post things online and answer phones”
Inquiry: Training Development

- What kind of training is needed?
- What is the easiest way to provide it?
- What is the most effective way to provide it?
- Who needs to sign off on this?
- What platform will be used for training?
  - In person
  - Web based
  - Memo/T-T-T

Story Time- I.T. Training
Reality: You Can’t Do It All

But you can:
• Promote the positive
• Work with allies
• Ask others to do their work
• Work with what you got
• Cheer for Champions (LOUDLY!)
• Be transparent

It’s about People
Write It Down:

What one thing can you do this week?

Questions?

Shannon M. Mulhall, NIC, ADAC, CASp
Certified Americans with Disabilities Act Coordinator
City of Fresno, CA
Shannon.Mulhall@fresno.gov
559-621-8716
June 25, 2020
ADA Online Conference
Additional Sessions are scheduled for the ADAOnline2020 Program through July 2020.

View/register on-line at: www.adaonline2020.org