Accessibility Advisory Committee Meeting
December 1, 2021
Teleconference via Zoom
3:00-5:00 pm

Notes

Francie Gilman reviewed Zoom etiquette.

INTRODUCTIONS

Present were:

Jill Lewis, retired director of the Maryland Library for the Blind and Print Disabled and former MCPL Library Board chair.

Richard Bell-Irving, Treasurer of the Learning Disabilities Association of Montgomery County.

Tim Lighter, AAC liaison from the Library Board.

Larry Cohen, leader of the Leisure World Low Vision Group.

Francie Gilman, board member of Independence Now and retired MCPL librarian.

Jonina Duker, customer of the former Special Needs Library and a member of the Special Needs LAC.

Elizabeth Lang, Assistant Manager for Facilities and Accessibility for MCPL.

Cindy Buddington, board member of Independence Now.

Debbie Brown, president of the Sligo Creek Chapter of the National Federation of the Blind.

Jane Carona, treasurer of the American Council of the Blind of Maryland, the National Capital Area Chapter of ACB MD, and the Braille Revival League.

Betty Thompson, consultant to the AAC

Yasmin Reyazzudin, guest.

Jill congratulated the AAC, saying we have accomplished a great deal. The staff training, programming and outreach committees will make an impact. She said that we should consider a team approach to make sure we follow through with our priorities. For example, Richard has agreed to deal with accessibility and tech issues. Jill, Betty, Francie, and Cindy cover the agenda. Debbie and Betty create the meeting notes. Members agreed that a team approach would be an effective way to coordinate our priorities.

ACCESSIBILITY

Accessibility is a persistent source of concern. Jill began the discussion by noting the trouble people have had in accessing documents from Friends of the Libraries, registering for MCPL events, and finding information about accessibility and the AAC on the website, etc.

Richard noted that accessibility is a huge topic. He asked if we see any low-hanging fruit that would make a difference and that would be easy to do, or things that would make a big impact across all the disabilities.

Discussion highlighted multiple dimensions.

Debbie noted that, like the libraries, many County agencies have problems with accessible technology. Unlike many agencies, the library has people who will answer questions if they can.

Elizabeth described the complexity of technology roles related to library services. The County tech group chooses, provides, and troubleshoots the library's hardware and software. The library has a small Tech Management group that troubleshoots all tech devices in the 21 branches, working with Elizabeth; they are currently installing screen-reading software on all computers. The library's

Digital Strategies group is responsible for the MCPL website content.

AAC members and Elizabeth agreed that libraries would benefit from a person solely dedicated to assistive technologies. Elizabeth said that top library administration has made priority decisions about what positions to hire for and in what order, and it is not likely to include someone solely to handle library assistive technology.

The question arose of having AAC meetings hosted by the libraries instead of our using the Zoom account provided through Jane Carona and the American Council of the Blind of Maryland, which does not provide closed captioning and transcriptions, although it is a feature available in Zoom. Each branch has its own Zoom account and can host LAC meetings with it. The Library Board and Elizabeth use TEAMS, not Zoom, and TEAMS will not work for Cindy because it requires a lot of memory.

Action: Work on assuring that we can meet on Zoom in a way that provides captioning and transcripts. (Elizabeth – explore library options.)

Richard and Tim again raised the question of AAC priorities in the broad area of accessible technology. They suggested that we start not with the huge county bureaucracy that determines library technology, but with accessible documents from the Friends. That could become a case study on how to make it work. There was general agreement with this idea and with an informal approach to provide education; many volunteer organizations don't have expertise in making documents accessible.

Action: Work with the Friends and the Library Board to get accessible meeting notes and other information. (Richard, Tim, Jane)

Later in the meeting, during the Library Report, Yasmin (who had been delayed in arriving for this earlier part of the meeting) raised continuing problems accessing events calendars with screen readers. Elizabeth said that the company that makes the calendar is called Communico and they have been cooperative in solving past

problems if she can give them enough information. She asked AAC members and others to let her know the problem (e.g., "If I hit escape, the whole thing crashes") and the device, operating system, browser, and screen reader involved. Elizabeth noted that software fixes often require new coding that can take several months.

Action: Tell Elizabeth about tech problems and context, e.g., "If I hit escape, the whole thing crashes" and the device, operating system, browser, and screen reader involved. (AAC members)

During the discussion above, Jonina raised an additional topic of how the AAC functions. The sense of the group was to defer this topic to the next meeting.

Action: At the next meeting, re-open the topic of how the AAC functions.

STAFF TRAINING

Elizabeth and those who were on the Staff Training panel on serving people with disabilities in September provided an overview of how it went followed by a general discussion of next steps.

Cindy, Jane, Jonina, and a representative from Learning Disabilities Association of MC were on the training panel, with Elizabeth. Cindy and Jane reported that it was well run. All said it went very well, covering different areas in context of the same questions. Elizabeth said there was very positive feedback including concrete changes that trainees planned to make immediately in their branches. Those who were trained are now to review the overall Tip Sheet about service to customers with disabilities as well as specific blogs, videos, and a podcast, and to complete a quiz and give feedback on the training.

There was a concern about whether the AAC was introduced and given credit for creating the tip sheets. Jonina said she mentioned it and others did, too. Jonina thought Elizabeth did mention that panelists were connected with the AAC.

The plan for next steps has been to ask all librarians and ultimately all library staff to view the recording. Elizabeth has a recording but

had not had time to review it. Also planned was a series of smaller training sessions, e.g., on service animals, perhaps using various scenarios on the tip sheets. A follow up quiz with 10 questions on important concepts in the training is due out to staff in three weeks, and Elizabeth will report on that at our next meeting.

Kate Tavakolian retired in October and her replacement will be in charge of the video of the September panel and will make decisions about its use and about future training sessions.

Action: Seek approval to distribute the training video and tip sheets to all staff even before Kate Tavakolian's replacement is on board. (Elizabeth)

Action: Richard volunteered to reach out to the participant who was not on the AAC, based on Jonina's and Elizabeth's recommendations.

OUTREACH REPORT

Francie and Larry said there was a lot of interest in the first outreach meeting. Each organization had an interest in promoting library activities on social media. They hope to also involve Richard and Monica. Larry and Francie will work on a mini-communication plan with easy steps that AAC members can use to spread the word on libraries through social media.

Action: Develop a mini-communication plan for AAC outreach use on social media. (Larry and Francie)

PROGRAMMING REPORT

Cindy plans to coordinate with Elizabeth to understand more about programming on the library side. She is working with Independence Now to produce a program in the Spring.

Action: Create programming, possibly on disability resources. (Cindy and committee)

BRAILLE REPORT

The Braille subcommittee talked about holding a virtual Louis Braille birthday party in January, looking at Braille around the world. Francie asked if meeting in person was possible. Debbie and Elizabeth both said holding the meeting virtually was better at this point. Elizabeth will start asking library branches about using their virtual meeting room.

Action: Contact Elizabeth about a virtual Louis Braille celebration. (Debbie)

LIBRARY REPORT

Elizabeth outlined the status of facility improvements and described current library actions to improve accessibility software on all public computers. There was renewed discussion of accessible technology and alternatives when it doesn't work.

In terms of renovations: Germantown reopened on October 16. Maggie Nightingale has started its construction project and it is expected to be done in late spring. The design for Potomac is almost finished. That is expected to continue into next calendar year; construction will start then. The Damascus assessment is wrapping up. If you have visited Damascus, send your feedback to Elizabeth and committee members.

To provide accessibility software on all computers, the county decided to install NVDA (NonVisual Desktop Access) instead of JAWS because NVDA is commonly used and is free.
They have to physically install it on every computer; they cannot push it remotely. As soon as they started the work, they found that customers were inadvertently starting it; as a result, the staff had to learn quickly how to start and stop the NVDA software. The tech people are making sure it no longer starts automatically when the computers start up.

Braille had not been listed as a format in the new catalog. Elizabeth thanked us for bringing that to her attention. The library alerted the company (Aspen is the public name) and the problem is

corrected. Also, if there is no braille copy in the system, braille will not show as an option when users search.

A discussion of accessibility problems accessing the event calendar with screen readers has been moved in these Notes to the "Accessibility" section above. Yasmin and others urged that there be another clear way for people to register for events if the registration software is not working. The county and library must make sure that accessibility is not lost in updating the software. Various options were discussed for event registration, including calling Ask A Librarian or any branch for help registering until the accessibility issues are resolved.

Action: Make sure that registration is accessible for all events, even those provided by outside presenters in cooperation with the library, are accessible, and until that is possible, make sure that an alternative registration process is available and advertised. (Elizabeth)

LIBRARY BOARD REPORT – Tim had sent his report to the group in advance.

MATT BARKLEY REPORT – The Montgomery County ADA Compliance Manager was not present, and hopefully will send his report by email.

NEXT MEETING

Some people cannot make Zoom calls at 3 PM on first Wednesdays. There was discussion of other possible times. We considered first Tuesdays at 3:30. It was noted that some AAC members were not present to state their availability.

We expressed appreciation for Jane hosting today.

ACTION ITEMS

Action: Work with the Friends and the Library Board to get accessible meeting notes and other information. (Richard, Tim, Jane)

Action: Work on assuring that we can meet on Zoom in a way that provides captioning and transcripts. (Elizabeth – explore library options.)

Action: Tell Elizabeth about tech problems and context, e.g., "If I hit escape, the whole thing crashes" and the device, operating system, browser, and screen reader involved. (AAC members)

Action: At the next meeting, re-open the topic of how the AAC functions.

Action: Seek approval to distribute the training video and tip sheets to all staff even before Kate Tavakolian's replacement is on board. (Elizabeth)

Action: Richard also volunteered to reach out to the participant who was not on the AAC, based on Jonina's and Elizabeth's recommendations.

Action: Develop a mini-communication plan for AAC outreach use on social media. (Larry and Francie)

Action: Create programming, possibly on disability resources. (Cindy and committee)

Action: Contact Elizabeth about a virtual Louis Braille celebration. (Debbie)

Action: Make sure that registration is accessible for all events, even for those provided by outside presenters in cooperation with the library, and until that is possible, make sure that an alternative registration process is available and advertised. (Elizabeth)