



Disability Inclusive Development

This guide offers practical steps for developers to collaborate with the disability community and integrate inclusive design practices. Working directly with disabled residents and disability-led organizations from the start builds long-term partnerships that raise awareness about your project, help recruit disabled applicants for your accessible units, and ensure your project is designed to meet market needs.



Attend & Support Disability-led Events & Efforts

Understand that building mutual, trusting relationships with the disability community takes time. Don't always expect them to come to you. You will learn a lot about the community's diverse needs by subscribing to organizations' newsletters and showing up to their events in the communities in which your housing developments are based.



Plan & Budget for Accessible Meetings

Hold meetings in accessible locations and make accessible design a line item in your meeting agenda. Provide different ways to participate like gathering online, in person, meeting 1:1, or in groups. Budget to offer support like participation stipends, food, transportation, interpreters, closed captions, and large-print materials.



Request Feedback with Time for Changes

Give the community time to provide feedback during all stages of your design and build process. Give yourselves time to implement changes from this feedback ahead of when final decisions are required. Making decisions with enough time will help you mitigate and navigate any cost barriers.



Practice Inclusive Design to Design Beyond Code

Building beyond minimum code requirements makes housing more accessible and usable for people with diverse needs. Inclusive design ensures homes work for everyone, including people with disabilities, at any stage of life. This leads to happier residents, and a better return on investment, often at no extra cost.

Supported by



Learn More and Connect

To learn more, visit The [Inclusive Design Standards](#), co-created by The Kelsey and Mikiten Architecture. The Standards provides 300+ Elements that offer a structured framework for inclusive development, spanning development strategies, building features and physical design, operational policies, leasing practices, and resident services.

List of Local Disability-Led Organizations

The Arc – Detroit

Phone: (313) 831-0202

Detroit Area Agency on Aging

Phone: (313) 446-4444

Detroit Disability Power

Email: info@DetroitDisabilityPower.org

Disability Network of Wayne County - Detroit

Phone: (313) 923-1655

Michigan Bureau of Services for Blind Persons

Phone: (517) 241-1100

Michigan Developmental Disabilities Institute

Phone (Toll Free): (888) 978-4334

Email: middi@wayne.edu

Michigan Division of Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing

Phone: (313) 437-7035

Email: DODDBHH@michigan.gov

MI-UCP (Michigan United Cerebral Palsy)

Phone: (800) 827-4843

Email: info@mi-ucp.org

United Community Housing Coalition

Phone: (313) 963-3310

Warriors on Wheels of Metropolitan Detroit

Phone: (313) 251-5777

Learn More:

- Article: [Beyond Code: Taking a Progressive Approach to Disability Accessibility & Inclusion](#)
- Article: [How Cross-Disability Design Makes Housing Better for Everyone](#)
- Article: [Moving from Integration to Inclusion](#)
- Print Resource: [The Business Case for Disability-Forward Design](#)
- Resource: [Inclusion Concierge: Top Considerations for Resident Services for Disability Inclusive Communities](#)
- Resource: [Development and Finance Basics](#)
- Case Study: [Ayer Station's capital stack](#)



Best Practices for Leasing Accessible Units

FOR HOUSING PROVIDERS



Accessible housing is in limited supply in Detroit, Michigan, and the United States. Because of this, it is important that accessible units are occupied by residents currently living with disabilities. Housing providers can use a wide range of effective marketing and outreach methods to better connect accessible units with the tenants who need them.

This guide offers an overview of current requirements for marketing accessible units and includes additional strategies to help housing providers match these units with the right tenants.

Supported by



What Are Affirmative Marketing Requirements?

The federal Fair Housing Act (FHA) and Michigan laws protect people from being discriminated against in housing based on disability, race, color, religion, sex, national origin, familial status, marital status, and age. These regulations also encourage housing providers to conduct outreach to people who might not know about available housing opportunities.

Many housing programs in Michigan that get federal or state support must create and follow an Affirmatively Fair Housing Marketing (AFHM) Plan. This plan includes:



Targeting

Identify groups of people who are less likely to apply for housing without extra outreach (for example, people with disabilities).



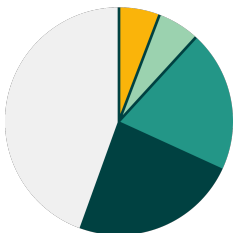
Staff Training

Make sure that sales or rental staff are trained on fair housing laws and affirmative marketing practices.



Outreach

Develop a plan to reach these groups. This means contacting community organizations that serve these groups and getting their help with marketing. It also involves using media advertising, social media, and other platforms to reach these groups.



Collect & Use Data

Determine ways to measure the effectiveness and success of your marketing plan. Track how people learned about your housing and why they chose to apply. Compare the number of units occupied by people considered least likely to apply before and after marketing campaigns are conducted.

Where can I find more information on affirmative marketing requirements?

If you have additional questions about fair housing law, please contact the Fair Housing Center of Metro Detroit 313-579-FAIR (3247), or visit www.hud.gov.

Strategies for Matching Accessible Housing with the Right Residents

Deep Affirmative Marketing

Build strong relationships with organizations that serve people with disabilities and older adults to advertise housing opportunities and recruit more applicants. Begin by reaching out to organizations listed at the end of this resource. Advertise units through methods like email communications, social media outreach, posting fliers at local community centers and businesses, hosting tours, TV and radio ads, and more. Available units can also be listed on the City of Detroit's affordable housing search-and-filter website, Detroit Home Connect, by emailing DetroitHomeConnect@detroitmi.gov.

Track and Advertise Accessible Units

Keep an updated detailed list of all accessible units. When advertising accessible units, include photos and descriptions of the units' accessible housing features so residents know if these homes are right for them. Include information on accessible common areas of the property. Providers should make sure their advertising materials are accessible (including screen-reader compatibility, mobile-friendly formatting, high contrast, subtitles/captions) and offer alternative formats (large print, Braille, ASL).

Give Extended Time for Vacant Accessible Units

When an accessible unit becomes available, conduct longer-term outreach and marketing campaigns before renting it to a non-disabled tenant.

Lease Addendum for Nondisabled Tenants in Accessible Units

Include a requirement in the lease for non-disabled tenants moving into accessible units that says they agree to move to a comparable non-accessible unit if one becomes available. This helps make sure accessible units are available when disabled tenants are looking for them.

Separate Transfer and Waiting Lists

Maintain separate waiting lists for those needing accessible units, or use one list that clearly marks who needs specific accessibility features.

Use Plain Language

Write leases and other documents in plain language. Plain language is writing designed to ensure the reader understands documents as quickly, easily, and completely as possible. It makes communications more accessible, especially for people with cognitive disabilities, lower literacy levels, and English language barriers. Keep documents clear and simple by using plain language tools. [Utilize The Kelsey's Plain Language Reasonable Accommodation & Modifications Policy template online](#) to help you adapt your existing materials.

Disability Etiquette Tips



Interacting with disabled tenants calls for understanding and respect. Disability etiquette goes beyond legal compliance—it’s about creating an inclusive, supportive environment where everyone feels valued. Whether a tenant is moving in, requesting modifications, or moving out, treating them with care helps build a welcoming and empowered community. Follow these guidelines to foster inclusivity and make all tenants feel at home.

DO	DO NOT
• Ask if someone needs help • Respect someone’s autonomy if they decline your help • Be patient. Recognize people communicate and process information differently • Look & speak directly at the person—not an aid, interpreter, or family member • When appropriate, pull up a chair to be eye level with a wheelchair user if you will be together for more than a few minutes • Treat disabled people like people • Be flexible and provide multiple options to engage	• Assume someone needs help • Touch someone or their equipment without their consent • Rush someone or question their request • Treat disabled people like children • Ask invasive, personal questions • Consider disabled people as inspirational heroes • Expect one option or solution to work for all disabled people

Organizations to Connect With in Detroit and Wayne County

The following list of local organizations have close ties to the disability community. Housing providers can work with these organizations to promote available accessible units. You can reach out to these organizations to share fliers, co-host events and open houses, and engage with community members.

The Arc – Detroit

Phone: (313) 831-0202

Detroit Area Agency on Aging

Phone: (313) 446-4444

Detroit Disability Power

Email: info@DetroitDisabilityPower.org

Disability Network of Wayne County - Detroit

Phone: (313) 923-1655

Michigan Bureau of Services for Blind Persons

Phone: (517) 241-1100

Michigan Developmental Disabilities Institute

Phone (Voice/TTY): (313) 577-2654

Phone (Toll Free): (888) 978-4334

Email: middi@wayne.edu

Michigan Division of Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing

Phone: (313) 437-7035

Email: DODDBHH@michigan.gov

MI-UCP (Michigan United Cerebral Palsy)

Phone: (800) 827-4843

Email: info@mi-ucp.org

United Community Housing Coalition

Phone: (313) 963-3310

United Way for Southeast Michigan

Phone: 313-226-9200

Email: LiveUnited@UnitedWaySEM.org

Warriors on Wheels of Metropolitan Detroit

Phone: (313) 251-5777





Plain Language Leasing Benefits

FOR HOUSING PROVIDERS

What is plain language?

Plain language makes important paperwork easy to understand. Plain language is writing to ensure the reader understands documents as quickly, easily, and completely as possible. It makes communications more accessible, especially for people with cognitive access needs, lower literacy levels, and English language barriers. This includes residents with intellectual and developmental disabilities, whose accessibility needs may interfere with typical ways of reading and understanding content.



Why plain language leasing?

Most leases are written at a graduate school level. To make housing opportunities more accessible to people with disabilities, you can make sure that essential information is effectively communicated to all residents. Plain language is typically written at a 6th to 8th-grade reading level and geared toward audiences with cognitive disabilities.

With thoughtfully created plain language documents, you can both meet regulatory needs and provide an accessible housing experience for your residents. You can provide applications, explanations of leases, and other agreements or contracts in plain language.

Supported by



PLAIN LANGUAGE BENEFITS EVERYONE BY:

Simplifying Communication

Using straightforward language in your forms and processes can help renters understand their rights and responsibilities. For providers, simplifying communication materials can limit confusion and even speed up processes like lease-up.

Building a Stronger Community and Mutual Trust

When everyone understands each other better, it creates a safer and friendlier community for both tenants and housing providers.

Tools for Plain Language Leasing

The Kelsey's Open Source Plain Language Documents

The Kelsey, a disability-forward housing organization in California, has an [online plain language guide](#) where stakeholders can learn more about plain language in housing. The Kelsey also offers open source template plain language leasing documents that providers can adapt and use, linked below. It should be noted that these documents include all of the State of California requirements for lease language. You should work with your team to make sure adapted documents meet your needs for leasing in Michigan.

- [Lease Agreement](#)
- [Reasonable Accommodation & Modification Policy](#)
- [Complaint Process \(Grievance Procedure\)](#)
- [Community Guidelines \(House Rules\)](#)

To learn more about plain language leasing, watch [this presentation](#) from The Kelsey.

Readability Tools

The best way to learn if your documents are in plain language is to get feedback from residents with diverse backgrounds who will be using the documents. There are many tools that can help you check the readability level of your writing. You should aim for no more than a grade 8 level of readability. If you use Microsoft Word, you can use Microsoft Word Readability Statistics to check the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level for your writing. We recommend that you use readability tools as a guideline, and use your own judgment when you are writing. Here are a few readability tools that you can use to check the level of your writing:

- [Microsoft Word Readability Statistics](#) (included with any version of Word)
- [Hemingway Editor](#) (free)
- [Readable](#)



Tips for Accommodation & Modification Requests

FOR HOUSING PROVIDERS



Residents with disabilities have specific housing rights under Michigan and federal laws. These rights protect against discrimination and allow tenants to request changes or adjustments to their homes to meet their needs. However, the process for making these requests is often unclear, and many tenants don't know their rights for requesting and receiving changes.

Housing providers, landlords, and property managers can help by understanding their legal responsibilities and offering clear guidance to residents. This resource explains these laws and shares tips to make the request process easier for everyone.

Supported by



A disability is any condition that makes it harder to do major everyday activities, like taking care of yourself, working, communicating, or learning. Some examples of disabilities protected by law include:

- Visual, speech, or hearing disability
- Mobility disability
- Neurodivergence (like ADHD or autism)
- Chronic disabilities (like cerebral palsy, epilepsy, multiple sclerosis, or muscular dystrophy)
- Chronic illnesses (like cancer, heart disease, diabetes, or HIV/AIDS)
- Intellectual disabilities
- Mental health conditions (like depression, anxiety or PTSD)
- In recovery for drug addiction or alcoholism

Reasonable accommodations are changes made to rules or practices to help a tenant with a disability fully use and enjoy their home. Housing providers are typically responsible for these costs.

EXAMPLES INCLUDE

- Providing a reserved accessible parking spot
- Allowing a service or emotional support animal
- Permitting a live-in caregiver
- Offering help to understand communications
- Allowing an exception to the rent payment policy so a resident who receives SSI can wait until after they receive their monthly check to pay rent

Reasonable modifications are physical changes made to a building, shared spaces, private unit, or home to help a tenant with a disability fully use and enjoy their home.

EXAMPLES INCLUDE

- Widening doorways
- Adding a wheelchair ramp
- Installing grab bars in the bathroom
- Lowering kitchen counters
- Lowering coat racks or closet shelves
- Installing a visual fire alarm or doorbell
- Removing carpet

Housing providers must allow reasonable modifications to the property, typically paid for and maintained by the tenant unless the building is publicly funded. If tenants can't afford modifications, check community resources or call the Fair Housing Center of Metropolitan Detroit at (313) 579-3247 for financial help. Providers cannot charge extra security deposits. Providers may also ask for professional plans and permits and are responsible for maintaining modifications in shared areas, like ramps.

Tips to Simplify Your Request Process

Here are a few steps to make the reasonable accommodation and modification request process easier for both housing providers and disabled tenants:

Inform Tenants About Their Rights

Regularly provide new and current tenants with information on their housing rights and how they can request changes. Provide your tenants with informational materials like the City of Detroit's "Know Your Rights Guide" upon move-in and on an ongoing basis. You can also request informational materials from the Fair Housing Center of Metropolitan Detroit. In addition, communicate your process for requesting reasonable accommodations/modifications.

Set Up a Clear Request Process

Create policies that guide staff on how to handle accommodation and modification requests. Though residents are not required to submit requests in writing, you will want to have a clear option for that in place. Whether verbal or written, housing providers should document all requests for reasonable accommodation or modification in a standard way:

- **Provide an address, email, and phone contact** for tenants to submit their reasonable accommodation/modification request.
- **Use Plain Language Forms:** Provide easy-to-understand forms for requesting changes. Using plain language makes communications more accessible, especially for people with cognitive disabilities, lower literacy levels, and English language barriers. The Kelsey offers a free, [open-source template](#) that you can customize.
- **Give a response within 14 days** for non-emergency requests, including an estimated timeline for completing any approved requests.
- **Recognize people are the experts of their own lives.** You can grant requests based on a tenant's explanation of need without requiring extensive documentation. In addition, remember that disabilities vary widely. Even individuals with the same disability may have different needs, and their reasonable accommodation/modification requests may also vary.

Be Flexible

Flexibility makes the process more accessible, and it can decrease tenant turnover! Tenants want to stay longer when providers are flexible and responsive to their needs. Consider:

- **Share Cost:** For modifications that improve the unit's value, work with tenants to share costs or find third-party funding.
- **Negotiate Lease Terms:** Offer longer leases to provide stability for tenants while ensuring steady income without vacancy for housing providers.

Track Requests and Fulfillment

To clearly communicate and comply with fair housing laws, establish a record-keeping procedure to document and track requests. This helps providers identify trends, standardize procedures, improve staff training, and enhance communication, leading to more effective policies and practices that increase accessibility and inclusivity for all tenants.

- **Written Requests:** Ask tenants to submit their requests in writing, or work with them to document their verbal request. This helps create a clear record of what they need.
- **Acknowledge Receipt:** Send a confirmation to the tenant when you receive their request, noting the date and details.
- **Keep a Log:** Maintain a simple log that includes the following.

EXAMPLE LOG

Tenant's Name: Ruby Smith

Date of request: 8/6/2024

Description of the modification requested:
Install a doorbell with a visual signal

Reason for the modification:
To alert the tenant when someone is at the door

Date the request was acknowledged:
8/12/2024

Status: Approved / Denied / In Progress

Justification for the decision:
Improves safety and ability for the tenant to use their home

Any follow up actions or communications:
Notify the tenant, schedule the installation, clarify who handles costs and maintenance, and ensure the work will be done safely

- **Notify Tenant of Decision within 14 Days:** Contact the tenant to let them know the decision made and the reasons for that decision. For non-emergency requests, tenants should be notified within 14 days, including an estimated timeline for completing any approved requests.
- **Track Completion:** Once a modification is approved, track the progress and completion of the work, and communicate progress updates to the tenant.
- **Follow-Up:** After completion, follow up with the tenant to ensure the modification meets their needs.

Train Staff

Train your staff regularly to recognize when a tenant is asking for a reasonable accommodation or modification, even if they don't use those exact words. Staff should know that requests are still valid even if the tenant describes them differently. Make sure there's a clear process for documenting, responding, fulfilling, and maintaining these requests.