

Empowering Libraries to Serve All Visitors

25 January – 5 February 2027
Madrid

AGILE LEADERS
Training Center

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Overview

Public and institutional knowledge centres must adapt their environments and services to welcome community members with diverse physical, sensory, and cognitive abilities. This two-week programme focuses on empowering libraries to serve all visitors through structured accessibility audits, adaptive customer service workflows, and inclusive communication techniques. Participants examine the practical application of universal design for libraries, multi-format collection development, and barrier-free facility navigation. Professional teams learn to eliminate barriers across front-desk interactions, programming, digital catalogues, and reading rooms. This course is delivered by Agile Leaders Training Center.

Who Should Attend

- Library directors and branch managers supervising public service operations and facility accessibility.
- Reference and circulation librarians interacting daily with patrons of varying physical and cognitive abilities.
- Children, youth, and adult services coordinators designing community learning programmes and events.
- Digital service librarians and systems administrators maintaining web accessibility and online catalogues.
- Facilities managers and operations specialists responsible for building navigation and interior layouts.
- Community outreach liaisons establishing partnerships with disability advocacy groups and local agencies.

Departments and Industries

This programme supports personnel responsible for information access, patron engagement, and public service equity across multiple library sectors.

- Public Library Systems and Municipal Information Centres
- Academic Libraries in Colleges, Universities, and Research Institutes
- School Library Media Centres across Primary and Secondary Education
- Special Libraries in Medical, Legal, Corporate, and Government Institutions
- Museum, Archive, and Cultural Heritage Documentation Centres

Learning Objectives

By the end of this course, participants will be able to:

- Apply inclusive library services principles across direct patron assistance and general reference work.
- Conduct facility walk-through audits using accessible library space design standards and wayfinding frameworks.
- Implement library staff disability awareness protocols to deliver respectful, professional customer service.
- Deploy assistive technologies in library services including screen-reading tools, audio devices, and adaptive hardware.
- Design sensory-friendly programmes and resources suited for neurodivergent visitors and patrons on the autism spectrum.
- Formulate institutional accessibility policies that sustain equitable service delivery and community engagement.

Course Agenda

Day 1: Introduction to Disability Inclusion in Libraries

- Understanding disability diversity and its direct operational impact on library services
- The institutional role of libraries in promoting community access and social equity
- International access frameworks and institutional obligations governing information access
- Categorising barriers across physical infrastructure, digital portals, and programming
- Core principles of universal design for libraries across physical and informational environments
- Benefits of proactive inclusion for visitors, staff members, and wider communities

Day 2: Library Staff Disability Awareness

- Foundational concepts in disability awareness for front-line and administrative staff
- Challenging unconscious assumptions and social stereotypes regarding functional limitations
- Respectful communication and behavioural guidelines during patron interactions
- Creating welcoming arrival experiences and establishing rapport at public service desks
- Recognising hidden and episodic disabilities and addressing their service implications
- Safeguarding patron personal autonomy, privacy, and self-directed information retrieval

Day 3: Accessible Communication Strategies

- Core standards of accessible verbal, non-verbal, and visual communication in libraries
- Practical interaction methods when supporting patrons who are deaf or hard of hearing
- Clear visual communication techniques, assistive listening considerations, and signage clarity
- Support methods and descriptive interaction tools for patrons with visual impairments
- Techniques for assisting visitors with cognitive disabilities and learning differences
- Drafting library guides, handouts, and instructions using plain language standards

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Day 4: Sensory-Inclusive and Autism-Friendly Spaces

- Understanding neurodiversity and autism spectrum considerations within library settings
- Identifying and mitigating sensory overload factors such as lighting, acoustics, and crowding
- Modifying standard library workshops, storytimes, and community sessions for sensory comfort
- Utilising visual schedules, cue cards, and social narratives for orientation and navigation
- Staff de-escalation protocols and preparedness for sensory distress and meltdowns
- Planning, equipping, and designating quiet spaces and calming zones within facilities

Day 5: Physical Facility Audits and Space Design

- Methodology for conducting comprehensive accessibility audits across library buildings
- Spatial planning, turning radiuses, and clearance for wheelchairs and mobility devices
- Accessible signage design covering contrast, tactile indicators, braille, and visual height
- Configuring barrier-free service counters, self-checkout kiosks, and shelving aisles
- Ergonomic workstations and furniture arrangements for computer labs and reading areas
- Exterior site access including ramps, dedicated parking connections, and building entryways

Day 6: Assistive Technologies and Adaptive Collections

- Categorisation of adaptive hardware and software deployed in modern libraries
- Screen magnification, screen-reading software, and speech-to-text applications
- Management of loanable assistive devices including portable magnifiers and hearing devices
- Structuring digital skills training sessions for patrons using adaptive technology
- Accessibility standards for public computing terminals and shared research stations
- Curating and preserving multi-format collections including braille, large print, and audio

Day 7: Inclusive Program and Event Planning

- Designing library events that accommodate participants with diverse functional needs
- Adapting educational workshops, lectures, and children story sessions for accessibility
- Partnering with local disability advocacy groups to co-develop educational programming
- Operational coordination for inclusive cultural exhibitions and community literacy events
- Establishing event accessibility checklists covering seating, sightlines, and presentation media
- Briefing and training event volunteers to support attendees with accessibility requests

Day 8: Web and Digital Information Accessibility

- Digital compliance guidelines and technical standards for library web portals
- Evaluating online public access catalogues and discovery tools for keyboard navigation
- Procuring and formatting digital content, e-books, and audiobooks in accessible structures
- Integrating synchronized captioning and text transcripts for audio-visual media
- Organising accessible virtual webinars, digital meetings, and online learning modules
- Ensuring web chat services, digital reference tools, and forms meet accessibility standards

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Day 9: Accessibility Policy and Community Partnerships

- Formulating and updating institutional accessibility policies and operational guidelines
- Embedding equity and accessibility metrics into strategic master plans and budgets
- Advocating for accessible library resources and services at local administrative levels
- Establishing collaborative partnerships with specialized disability service organizations
- Identifying public grants and institutional resources for accessibility improvements
- Engaging patron advisory panels with lived experience to inform operational decisions

Day 10: Service Evaluation and Sustainability Planning

- Designing ongoing staff onboarding and continuous training programmes on accessibility
- Developing quantitative and qualitative indicators to evaluate accessibility progress
- Gathering and analyzing patron feedback through accessible survey tools and interviews
- Monitoring technological developments and emerging tools in adaptive information access
- Documenting and publishing institutional success stories and procedural improvements
- Drafting a multi-year institutional roadmap for continuous accessibility improvement

Practical Exercises

Participants engage in realistic service simulations, facility assessments, and procedural planning throughout the course.

- Suggested activity: Conduct a walk-through accessibility audit using standard checklists on an existing library area.
- Suggested activity: Create an interaction action plan addressing distinct customer service scenarios with patrons with disabilities.
- Suggested activity: Redesign a promotional programme flyer and its associated web notice using plain language and high-contrast typography.
- Suggested activity: Draft an operational proposal for creating a sensory-friendly space within a municipal or academic library.

FAQs

What specific qualifications or prerequisites are needed for participants before enrolling in the course?

No prerequisites are required; it is designed for all library professionals committed to improving disability inclusion in services.

How long is each day's session, and is there a total number of hours required for the entire course?

Each day is 4 to 5 hours, with interactive activities, totaling 40 to 45 hours over 2 weeks.

What is the difference between accessibility compliance and universal design in libraries?

Accessibility compliance meets legal requirements, while universal design proactively ensures spaces and services are usable for all from the outset.

Conclusion

Equitable public service requires structured policies, staff awareness, and physical and digital environments that proactively welcome every community member. By mastering universal design principles, accessible communication practices, and systematic facility auditing, library professionals can remove barriers and ensure their institutions remain open and usable for everyone.