

**Our S.T.A.T.E. Policy:
It Means “Same-Time Availability to Everyone”**

Print documents provide access to information for most people, including individuals with hearing impairments and deafness. However, print cannot convey information to everyone and is a significant barrier for people with visual or cognitive disabilities. As a research center, we develop a wide range of products for people with disabilities and those who serve them. To ensure that all people can access our products, RTC: Rural developed the “Same-Time Availability to Everyone” (STATE) policy and procedures. When a print product is made available to the general public, the STATE policy requires us to provide alternative formats useful to individuals with disabilities at the same time. For example, at training events and other important dissemination opportunities we distribute no print product unless at least two alternative formats are concurrently available. This Practice Guideline outlines the procedures we follow to implement STATE policy: 1. Developing standard print documents; 2. Creating alternative formats; and 3. Ensuring access to information presented at training events.

Print Documents – We use WordPerfect software for most documents because its “reveal codes” function facilitates conversion to alternative formats. In general, to prepare a print document for alternative format, its formatting codes (with the exception of hard and soft returns) must be deleted from the electronic file and all graphic elements (tables, figures, pictures, photos) must be described in writing. While the format and style of each document may vary, the process of converting documents to alternative formats is eased by applying these guidelines to most of our standard print documents:

- ◆ We use at least a 12-point font on matte (non-glossy) paper.
- ◆ To reduce the author’s need to write descriptions of the visual elements, documents include only those figures, tables, diagrams, and other graphics that are necessary for meaning and clarity.
- ◆ Documents use narrow columns and “ragged” (unjustified) right margins.

Alternative Formats – Many people who cannot read standard print can read large print or Braille, use a computer software program that reads the text file aloud (a screen reader), or listen to an audiotape. Each format requires that authors describe any graphic elements that contribute to the document’s meaning (tables, figures, photos, illustrations, or graphs) so the user can then read/hear an accurate description that reflects the author’s intent.

Electronic files – We prepare a text file as the first alternative format because it is needed for creating the Braille version, which is often the most time-consuming step. We usually prepare a standard print document with WordPerfect software and then save it as an ASCII DOS text file on disk or CD. This deletes most formatting codes and leaves only hard/soft returns. A Microsoft Word document would be saved in Rich Text format and might retain additional formatting codes. The Rich Text file can be opened in WordPerfect, any extraneous codes deleted until only hard/soft returns remain, and the file saved as ASCII DOS text. A description of each visual element necessary for meaning (a table, figure, photo, map, graphic) is inserted at the element’s former location in the text.

Large Print – All brief reports (2-6 pages) are formatted in large print. Support staff usually format a large print version based on the original document and with direction from its primary author(s). Author direction is particularly important when a document includes visual elements (tables, graphs, photos, graphics, maps) that may require reformatting or elimination to fit large print guidelines. We usually format the large print version during the interim while the standard document is being printed and the Braille copies are being prepared. Our large print format meets the following criteria:

- ◆ Margins are one-inch on all sides.
- ◆ Lines of text are double-spaced.
- ◆ Lines of text are no longer than 6 inches.
- ◆ Pages use letter orientation, unless a visual element requires landscape orientation to achieve maximum visibility. Landscape orientation is used only for that element and returns to letter orientation for ensuing text.
- ◆ If a necessary visual element cannot fit on 8.5" by 11" or 11" by 8.5" paper and still be easily read, we include a clearly-labeled verbal description.
- ◆ Text (including that in tables or graphs) is consistently left-justified, with a “ragged” right edge. Text is **not** arranged in columns. Page numbers are in the right bottom corner.
- ◆ Paragraphs are separated by blank lines and their first words are not indented or tabbed.
- ◆ 18-point bold font is used for body text, footers, page numbers, references, disclaimers, labels on charts and graphs, etc. Larger fonts may be used for headings and titles. Individuals may request fonts larger than 18-point as an accommodation.
- ◆ We use a **bold** serif font (such as **Times New Roman**) for body text and a **bold** non-serif font (such as **Arial**) for headings and other information that is set apart from body text. We do not use compressed fonts or italics. **Note:** Some authorities specify a non-serif font for all text, while others say that a serif font “leads the eye” along lines of text and prefer that headings and other non-body text be clearly delineated by a non-serif font.
- ◆ We do not use SMALL CAPS or ALL CAPS . Standard capitalization/lower case letters for titles and text are preferred. Underlining replaces italics for emphasis.
- ◆ Bullets and decorative graphics not contributing to meaning are deleted. Bullets may be replaced by numerals. Boxed text is cut and pasted into its appropriate location and the box is deleted.
- ◆ Pale yellow or buff matte paper is used to reduce glare.
- ◆ Tables of contents reflect the change in page numbers.
- ◆ Pages are printed on single-sided 8.5" by 11" or 11" x 8.5" paper and stapled at the top left corner. Documents too thick for stapling are hole-punched and inserted into one or more three-ring binders. If multiple volumes are necessary, each has a cover page, title page, volume number, and table of contents.

Audiotapes – Print materials are audio-taped on request. All graphic elements are described.

Braille – Braille allows people with low vision/blindness to read print information by touch. We maintain a stock of Braille copies for all Fact Sheets, Rehabilitation Research Progress Reports, and other brief, general documents. We contract for Braille production with a small business owner. Staff prepare an ASCII DOS text file according to the guidelines above, e-mail the file to the Braille provider and she returns the Braille copies by U.S. Postal Service’s “free matter for the blind”. Pages are double-sided to reduce bulk, each document is comb-bound to lie flat when open and titles are Braille-embossed on plastic covers. With adequate notice, the company can prepare copies and express mail them directly to meeting and conference sites.

If a conference or training event sponsor (National Council on Independent Living, National Association of Rehabilitation Research and Training Centers) requires Braille as an alternative format, we only distribute those print materials that are available in Braille. If an organization (such as Society for Disability Studies) does not require Braille, staff may use their discretion but are encouraged to take Braille copies. When Braille copies of large documents are requested prior to an event, we attempt to honor the request within the time constraints of production and delivery.

Lengthy Documents – With the exception of ASCII DOS text files, alternative formats of lengthy documents may be bulky, time-consuming and expensive to prepare. However, lengthy documents (training manuals, etc.) are produced in large print, Braille and/or audiotape if the product developers have targeted an audience (such as vocational rehabilitation agencies or centers for independent living) likely to request these formats and whose needs are not met by electronic files on disk or CD.

Training Materials and Methods:

RTC: Rural staff often present at conferences, meetings, teleconferences and other training events. We encourage them to follow these guidelines:

Print Materials – Alternative formats are time-consuming to format and duplicate, so RTC: Rural staff presenting at/attending events compile lists of the materials they anticipate distributing. This gives the RTC Office Manager and/or Information Coordinator adequate time to prepare, assemble, and (if necessary) ship the needed quantities of both print documents and alternative formats. With adequate notice, conference coordinators may arrange to produce presenters’ materials in alternative formats and training staff are encouraged to routinely determine if this service is available. If participants are expected to complete evaluations, the presenter should provide evaluation forms in alternative formats and allow non-written responses.

Oral Presentations – Working with Sign Language Interpreters and Real-time Captioners:

Interpreting and real-time captioning are easier if interpreters and captioners receive a print copy of a presentation beforehand. If possible, the written script of any slide show, film or video soundtrack should also accompany the presentation’s text and vocabulary. It is thoughtful to routinely send such materials to the conference coordinator with a note explaining that these are for the interpreters’ and captioners’ use. If the complete text of a presentation isn’t available, interpreters and/or captioners should receive an outline and a list/definitions of any technical or esoteric terms and names. Interpreters frequently must devise signs for unusual terms or fingerspell proper names — advance notice makes this easier and enhances the audience’s understanding of the presentation. If it’s impossible to provide terms to interpreters beforehand, presenters must be prepared to spell and/or define unusual terms, names and foreign words. If the audience will break into groups for activities, the conference coordinator will need advance notice — additional interpreters may be required and the room set-up may need reconfiguration so groups aren’t segregated by disability (i.e. everyone who uses an interpreter or a wheelchair).

A presenter should use any amplification system provided, face the audience when speaking, and keep hands, papers, etc. away from the face so lips aren't obscured. Any writing on a board or flipchart should be completed before the presenter turns and speaks to the audience — if possible, an assistant should do the writing, distribute materials, etc. The presenter shouldn't walk or stand in front of an interpreter. Audience members can hold all comments and questions until the end of the presentation and wait until they are specifically acknowledged before speaking (to ensure that only one person speaks at a time). If the audience doesn't have access to microphones, before responding the speaker should repeat each question or comment into his or her microphone.

Visual Aids – Visual aids should use large, bold fonts and bright high-contrast colors. Room lights may remain lit to keep the interpreter visible, so visual aids must work with normal room lighting. Only those visual elements that contribute to meaning should be included. If necessary, it is preferable to use additional screens, transparencies or flipchart pages so text can be kept large, bold and uncluttered – no more than 8 lines of text per segment. Audience members with low vision may need large print paper copies of visual aids. When referring to a hand-out, it's helpful to provide corresponding page numbers for the alternative formats (i.e. "Turn to page 14 of the manual or page 52 of the large print version").

Visual aids should be orally described. Audience members with hearing impairments will need additional time to watch the interpreter, then look at a visual aid and read it before the speaker moves on to the next screen, transparency or page. If the speaker stands close to the screen or flipchart, viewers can quickly and easily glance from speaker to visual aid. Soundtracks accompanying slide shows, films and videos should be open-captioned or accompanied by a written script. Any equipment that's not currently in use should be turned off so its sound doesn't interfere with the speaker's voice.

References and Resources:

Kailes, J. & Jones, D. (1993.) *A Guide to Planning Accessible Meetings*. Houston: ILRU.

Research and Training Center on Blindness and Low Vision, PO Drawer 6189, Mississippi State University, Mississippi State, MS 39762; 662-325-2001 Fax: 662-325-8989 TDD: 662-325-8693 Email: jemoore@ra.msstate.edu

American Printing House for the Blind, P.O. Box 6085, Frankfort, KY 40206; 502-895-2405 or 800-223-1839; Fax: 502-899-2274; E-mail: info@aph.org; Web site: <http://www.aph.org>

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Rural Practice Guidelines summarize research findings and the consensus of leaders in the field about the best approaches to various issues. Please contact our staff or other listed resources for more information. Our research is supported by Grant #H133B70017-01 from the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research, U.S. Department of Education. Opinions are the authors' and are not necessarily those of the funding agency.

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