

# Regional Mobility Council: Priority actions for Strengthening accessibility

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## Summary

The following document presents priority actions identified by the Regional Mobility Council (RMC) to strengthen the relationship between municipalities and the disability community. These recommendations reflect discussions among RMC members and the Regional ADA Coordinators in three different areas: (i) community engagement, (ii) physical accessibility, and (iii) resource opportunities.

Each recommendation was evaluated based on the time, resources, and capacity required for municipalities to implement it, as well as its potential positive impact on the disability community.

# 2

## Suggestions for Implementation

# 2.1

## Community Engagement

## High Impact and Low Effort Suggestions

- **Use a multi-pronged communication approach and ensure digital communication is accessible:** Utilizing a diverse array of channels like newsletter blasts, social media posts, in-person town halls, and print materials that are visually accessible is a good way to engage the disability community.
- **Have open communication with municipalities and share what projects you are engaged in:** Transparent conversations can create opportunities for collaboration between the disability community, providers, and municipalities. Direct communication can support identifying challenges faced by municipalities and ways to get support, funding, and resources.

## High Impact and Low Effort Suggestions

- **Simplify the process for assistants to attend meetings with the disability community:** People who need accessible accommodations, including having an assistant present at meetings, often run into barriers to attend meetings— simplify the process for registering and accommodating assistants.
- **Provide detailed information about accessible entrances and pathways for meetings:** For many in the disability community, it is vital to plan ahead to understand if conditions are met to enable their participation in an event. If information isn't provided on the website, it may discourage participation.

## High Impact and Low Effort Suggestions

- **Provide clear information about project needs and estimated costs to help community members understand the scope and resources required:** Ensure that documents shared with communities have relevant information for people to understand the level of capital investment required to bring an idea to fruition.
- **Use plain language:** Language in reports and other official documents are often inaccessible to the larger community. Providing information in a digestible way can limit confusion and make community members more comfortable participating in planning processes. Keeping sentences concise and aiming for a middle school reading level (6th-8th grade) can help everyone access important information.

## High Impact and Low Effort Suggestions

- **Offer small group meetings with municipal stakeholders or liaisons:** Although large meetings are important, they can be daunting for people with disabilities who are new to civic engagement. Offering small group or 1:1 meetings with municipal staff can allow people to communicate more comfortably, participate more meaningfully, and ensure that their accommodations can be met.

## High Impact and High Effort Suggestions

- **Leverage school systems as a resource to expand reach to parents and residents:**  
Resources and capacity vary across school districts— an understanding of each community context is required to successfully action this approach as many residents may not be able to stay up to date on what happens in schools.
- **Work with community partners that can help facilitate engagement with the disability community:** Community based organizations often have built-in trust with and nuanced understandings of the communities they serve— anchoring engagement through and with such partners can greatly increase access for the disability community. But finding the right partners and managing the relationship can take a great amount of effort.

## High Impact and High Effort Suggestions

- **Ensure meetings are easily accessible via public transit:** Finding a location that best meets everyone's needs and is accessible may take additional effort. However, it opens up possibilities not only for a more accessible engagement but also to other activities, such as inclusive walk audits with community members and planners to examine routes and bus stops.
- **Strengthen engagement between the disability community and municipal staff:** Meetings that offer meaningful ways to engage require participation from community members and municipal staff alike. However, getting and maintaining participants requires consistent outreach, relationship building, and expectation management— all of which take time and effort..

## High Impact and High Effort Suggestions

- **Utilize maps to showcase upcoming ADA improvements:** Maps with up-to-date information on planned ADA improvements could enable accessible information way-finding while building transparency with the community. However, the level of effort depends on the in-house skills and resources available to a given team.
- **Communicate across municipalities to expand outreach:** Centralizing communication on community engagement and accessibility improvements across the Chicagoland Area would support community members to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the planned activities and opportunities to engage in different municipalities. However, coordinating this would require knowledge management, alignment, and willingness to cooperate across different localities.

## Low Impact and Low Effort Suggestions

- **Offer meetings at different times to provide more opportunities to engage:** While requiring initial coordination, offering meetings at times that accommodate different work schedules, appointments, and other personal matters can ensure that people with disabilities can engage.
- **Offer hybrid and virtual meeting opportunities:** Attending in-person meetings is not always feasible for many in the disability community. Creating options for participation that are more inclusive – such as hosting a Zoom meeting in tandem with in-person presentations – is a relatively low-lift effort. It is important to make sure the virtual settings are accessible and have features such as captioning, screen reader compatibility, ASL interpretation, high-contrast settings, and chat functionality adjustments, like access checks in meeting agendas.

## Low Impact and Low Effort Suggestions

- **Use disability awareness and celebratory months to excite community engagement:** Aligning engagement events with pre-existing disability awareness dates is a low lift to raise awareness and bolster outreach for community engagement opportunities amongst the disability community.
- **Use postal mail and physical copies of information in large print:** Offering physical copies of information printed with accessible type sizes in key locations, such as public offices, can expand information for the disability community. However, the impact of snail mail and printouts may depend on the community's preferences on information sharing.

## Low Impact and High Effort Suggestions

- **Offer parking vouchers or free parking at meetings:** The ability to offer free parking or parking vouchers could be challenging for many organizations, as it is highly dependent on available funds for each locality. Impact may also vary, depending on whether people use cars as their primary mode of transportation.

# 2.2

## Resource Opportunities

## High Impact and Low Effort Suggestions

- **Partner with local universities to access data and mapping services that municipalities can use to advocate for funding:** Outreach to universities, particularly centers devoted to disabilities, is a great way to find necessary resources to support initiatives. Although these relationships require maintenance, leveraging partnerships with local universities could be a way to access updated data that can support projects and funding avenues.
- **Verify if there are colleges in the area that could contribute to match funds:** Institutions of higher education can be good resources for projects. Developing an understanding of the colleges in a given area is a low lift task but challenges may arise surrounding fund matching.

## High Impact and Low Effort Suggestions

- **Have open communication with municipalities and share what projects disability coordinators are engaged in:** Transparent conversations can create opportunities for collaboration between the disability community, disability coordinators, and municipalities. Open and direct communication can support identifying challenges faced by municipalities and ways to secure support, funding, and resources.

## High Impact and High Effort Suggestions

- **Encourage large corporations to invest in public transportation through donations, fair tax, and similar avenues:** While additional revenue through can be highly impactful, how much funding municipalities have in their budget plays an important factor. Some cities may have more difficulty matching funds than others, so the impact varies by community.
- **Work with municipalities to identify strategies to match funds:** Opportunities to finance accessibility projects in partnership with community-based organizations (through matching funds for bills or grant) are critical to expanding support for the disability community. While advocating for increased financial investment is important, municipalities often face structural budget constraints that limit their ability to provide matching funds. Given that many existing grant opportunities require matches in the six- to seven-figure range, be upwards of 6-7 figures, many local governments (particularly in low-income areas) may not have the sufficient discretionary resources to participate.

## High Impact and High Effort Suggestions

- **Establish advisory boards or steering committees that focus on the ADA:** Setting up participatory councils ensures continuous dialogue and trust building between municipalities and the disability community. But ensuring agenda alignment and accessible, consistent participation requires continuous management and effort— e.g. having alternative formats, physical copies, and engagement materials in simpler language (see also Section 2.1).

## High Impact and High Effort Suggestions

- **Advocate for a free fare transit system, utilizing both traditional paratransit models and connections with TNCs and taxis:** Although incredibly beneficial to the disability community, recommendations that touch on transit financing and mobility as a service (MAAS) are challenging to implement.

## High Impact and High Effort Suggestions

- **Continue building connections between ADA coordinators and municipal staff to collaborate on funding opportunities and strengthen trust with the disability community:**  
A constant collaboration between coordinators, municipal staff and community organizations yields projects that are more impactful, feasible, and aligned with community priorities. However, building meaningful, strong connections takes consistency, time and effort—especially to find representatives, conduct outreach, and bridge connections between organizations and people with disabilities.

## Low Impact and High Effort Suggestions

- **Provide stipends to organizations to provide feedback on plans, implementations, and policies:** Coordinating stipend distribution can be burdensome for government entities to administer, as third party partners are often required to actually manage disbursement. Additionally, the stipend amount depends on the type of organization and available funding. Grassroots organizations and advocacy groups, for instance, may not have as many resources to enable participation as a for-profit company. In order to have genuine participation and feedback from organizations, it is crucial to align expectations on scope, time commitment, and feedback implementation at the beginning.

# Appendix

# Idea Bank

High

**(High Impact, Low Effort)**

- Simplify the process for assistants to attend meetings with the disability community
- Have ASL interpreter and closed captioning at meetings
- Use simpler language in discussions with community members
- Partner with local universities to access data and mapping services that municipalities can use to advocate for funding
- Provide additional details about accessible entrances on the website for meeting information
- Offer Hybrid & virtual meetings
- Offer meetings with municipal partners to meet on 1-1 level
- Have open communication w/ municipalities and sharing what projects you are engaged on.
- Include deficiencies and cost estimates in documents and plans.
- Verify if there are colleges in the area that could contribute to match funds
- Offer meetings at different times to give more opportunities for people to join
- Use multi-pronged channels and ensure digital communication has accessible engagement

**(High Impact, High Effort)**

- Communicate together across municipalities to get a broader reach of what's going on
- Use school systems to reach parents/residents as a resource for further engagement
- Advocate for free fare transit system and revamping paratransit back to cars and vans
- Advocate for utilizing both traditional paratransit models and connections with rideshare and taxis
- Make sure the disability community and planners attend the meetings
- Create a map to showcase upcoming ADA improvements
- Set up meetings at a location on a bus / subway route
- Encourage large businesses to invest in public transportation in municipalities, through donations & fair tax
- Participate in advisory board or steering committee meetings that focus on ADA accessibility.
- Work with community partners that can help facilitate with disability community.
- Identify the right people / most affected communities to join advisory committees.
- Build connections between ADA coordinators & municipal staff to collaborate on funding opportunities & strengthen trust with the disability community

Impact

**(Low Impact, Low Effort)**

- Print resources in large print
- Use Snail mail/ physical copies of information
- Increase employment opportunities in paratransit for people with disabilities
- Use Disability dates/months to leverage community engagement

**(Low Impact, High Effort)**

- Offer parking vouchers/free parking at meetings
- Provide a stipend to organizations to provide feedback on plans/policies/impementations
- Work with municipalities to find ways for them to match money

Low

Effort

High

## Key

- Physical Accessibility
- Resource Opportunities
- Community Engagement