

UNIVERSAL DESIGN (1986, R1994, R2000, R2001, R2010, R2022)



Policy Statement

The American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) believes that all people should have equitable access, independence, and inclusion in their surroundings. ASLA endorses Universal Design as an inclusive design approach, beyond Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Architectural Barriers Act (ABA) requirements, that enables equal use by all people, without separation or segregation of any users with varying degrees of disability or ability.

ASLA supports and encourages:

- Building an understanding in the community of the need to incorporate inclusive design concepts in all projects.
- Working with government agencies and allied professions to ensure the built environment is designed and maintained to meet the needs of people with disabilities in a fair, inclusive, and equitable way.
- Incorporating accessibility, inclusion, and Universal Design into landscape architectural curricula as a requirement for program accreditation and professional licensing and hiring professors and practitioners with disabilities.
- Continued research to enhance and refine the profession's body of knowledge, with high regard for input from all disability communities.

Justification

Landscape architects are leaders in providing design solutions that meet the needs of all people. Landscape architects design to accommodate the range of short-term and long-term disabilities—from physical to sensory to neurocognitive—that could affect each of us at any time in our lives. Landscape architects are educated, trained, and practice the application of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) legal requirements. Going beyond these minimum requirements, landscape architects use the principles of Universal Design to create better projects that provide safe, welcoming, and comfortable spaces with equitable access for all individuals.

Landscape architects use an accessible and inclusive design process by seeking out and engaging a diversity of stakeholders, which includes providing accommodations to ensure full participation in community engagement. With the skills in ongoing project engagement, landscape architects ensure community representation from project inception through project use. Landscape architects bring specialized knowledge in the principles of Universal Design and its value in creating equitable and inclusive design solutions that improve public health, safety, and welfare.

Issues

There is a significant need for public spaces to be designed or redesigned to accommodate a broad range of abilities, needs, and desires. One in four people in the United States live with a disability “associated with health conditions (such as arthritis, mental, or emotional conditions) or events (such as injuries).” ([CDC Disability and Health](#))



Disabilities are experienced in different ways at different times over people’s lives, ranging from physical or mobility disability (such as paraplegia, cerebral palsy, and injuries) to sensory disability (such as deafness and blindness) to neurocognitive disability (such as autism, Down syndrome, and dementia).

Public recognition and understanding of the need for equitable design begins with communication. Each of the two approaches to disability terminology, including person-first language (“people with disabilities”) and identity-first language (“disabled people”), may affect how people with disabilities respond and participate in the design process. Person-first language, used in the title of the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act, may not account for those community members who prefer to use identity-first language to support their sense of pride and directly acknowledge their disability. The debate around which terminology to use requires engaging directly with people in the disability community and asking their preferences. ([Language Guidelines](#))

The current regulatory environment does not adequately address the needs of all people with disabilities in the design of the built environment. The 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act ([ADA Standards](#)) and accompanying guidance set requirements around the design of public spaces or publicly funded projects to ensure accessibility for physically disabled and blind or low vision people, framed around the removal of barriers. While this was seen as a significant advance in civil rights for people with disabilities, it has not gone far enough to ensure inclusive and accessible spaces for the broad spectrum of disabilities. As a result, Universal Design guidelines evolved, striving for full inclusion while avoiding the creation of additional and separate facilities. Universal Design recognizes the broad range of disabilities—physical, sensory, and neurocognitive—within the overall design context. ([Design Beyond ADA](#)).

Universal Design principles are essential in creating environments that can be used and enjoyed by people of all ages and abilities. The seven principles of Universal Design—developed in 1997 by Ronald Mace, a disabled architect and professor at North Carolina State University—support inclusive design that is equitable, flexible, simple, and intuitive, clear and perceptive in communication, safe, accessible, and appropriately sized. These principles encourage creative design solutions that address accessibility and inclusion beyond regulated minimums. ([Universal Design - 7 Principles](#))

Resources

An extensive resource of documents related to Universal Design can be found on the ASLA Professional Practice webpage and the 2022 ASLA Research Report. Both hyperlinked below.

ASLA: Professional Practice: Universal Design
www.asla.org/universaldesign.aspx

ASLA Research Report Series. Principles of Accessibility Design for Landscape Architecture: ADA, ABA, and Other Accessibility Standards and Guidelines. 2022.

https://www.asla.org/uploadedFiles/CMS/Practice/Research_Reports/ASLA_Research_Accessibility_2022.pdf



U.S. Department of Transportation. Federal Highway Administration. Accessibility Resource Library. www.fhwa.dot.gov/accessibility/

National Association of City Transportation Officials. Designing for All Ages & Abilities: Contextual Guidance for High-Comfort Bicycle Facilities. December 2017. https://nacto.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NACTO_Designing-for-All-Ages-Abilities.pdf

Landscape Architecture Foundation. Landscape Performance Series. DeafScape Principles in Public Spaces. www.landscapeperformance.org/collections/deafscape

Inter-Related ASLA Policies

Community and Stakeholder Engagement

Heritage and Historic Sites

National Parks

Open Space

Public Lands

Rural Landscapes

State, Regional, and Local Parks, and Trail Systems

Visual Character and Scenic Resources

Public Affairs

Billboards and Signage

Housing

Human Health and Well-Being

Livable Communities

Memorials

Outdoor Lighting

Safety and Security Design

Transportation Corridors and Facilities