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Accessible by Design: What AV Professionals Should Know About ADA

Custom AV furniture plays a vital role in making technology-rich environments accessible to all users. Whether it's an instructor's station in a university, an attorney lectern in a courtroom, or a control desk in a corporate setting, designing with ADA compliance in mind is not just a best practice—it's a commitment to inclusivity.

Why ADA Matters in AV-Equipped Rooms

In tech-ready spaces, furniture is the user's primary point of access to the technology. It's where people operate controls, view displays, connect devices, and instruct or engage with one another. If the furniture isn't designed to meet ADA standards, it can limit—or even prevent—access for individuals with disabilities.

ADA-compliant AV furniture ensures that all users, regardless of physical ability, can interact with the technology comfortably and independently.

Designing AV furniture with ADA compliance in mind is more than just a best practice because it reflects a commitment to equity, dignity, and universal access. Here's why:

Ensure Equal Access For All Users

Whether users are presenting, training, speaking, meeting, or collaborating in a team setting, accessibility shouldn't be an afterthought; it should be built into the core of how spaces are designed and function.

Go Beyond Compliance

Providing equal access to users demonstrates a proactive, people-first mindset. It's about meeting real human needs, not just checking a box.

It Future-Proofs Your Spaces

Designing with accessibility in mind now avoids costly retrofits later. As teams grow and change, accessible lecterns, meeting room tables, and multimedia workstations can easily adapt to serve a diverse range of users.

Plan Smart. Design for What's Next

Retrofit or Plan Ahead

At many institutions, existing classroom standards are being revisited to accommodate wheelchair accessibility better. In other cases, universities and organizations are partnering with AV managers, architects, interior designers, and facilities teams to design and implement ADA-compliant furniture solutions from the ground up. Whether a retrofit or planning for the future, careful planning is necessary.

Space Planning

When designing an accessible space, it's important to account for accessible route paths, clear floor space, and overall maneuverability. Carefully consider how users will navigate the room and interact with the furniture once they enter. Placement should support ease of movement and full access to all necessary components.

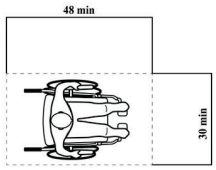
Be sure to reference Figures a, b, c, and d below, which illustrate accessible route dimensions, turning space requirements, and guidelines for protruding objects.

Whenever possible, collaborate with space planners and facility personnel to evaluate these considerations in advance. Their input can help ensure the space meets ADA guidelines and accommodates all users effectively.

Accessible Routes

Clear Floor or Ground Space

Ensure there are compliant pathways to access furniture in rooms and entryways



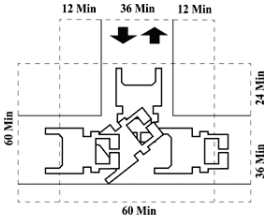
(a)

Clear Floor Space

Turning Spaces

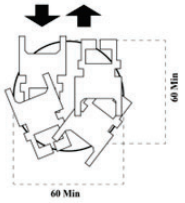
T-Shaped Turning Space

Consider in conference rooms and collaboration spaces for access to tables and podiums



(b)

T-Shaped Space for 180° turns



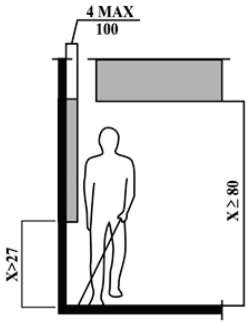
(c)

60-inch Diameter Space

Protruding Objects

Limits of Protruding Objects

When in public spaces/entryways and corridors, low-profile credenzas below wall-mounted displays can help comply with this guideline



(d)

Walkway or Clear Floor Space for

Cane Sweep

Image Source: *access-board.gov/ada/guides Chapter 3: Clear Floor or Ground Space and Turning Space*

Thoughtful Planning

From knee clearance and reach ranges to operable parts and approach paths, thoughtful planning during the design phase helps eliminate barriers and promotes true inclusivity. Key features to consider include:

Think About the Approach

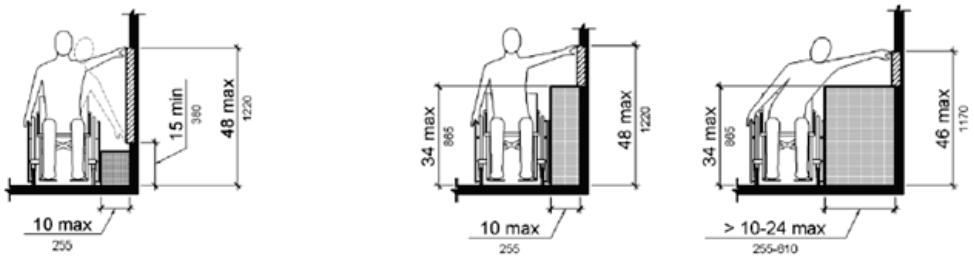
Reach ranges and height clearance vary depending on how the user will interact with components and controls integrated into the furniture. Kiosks, wall mounted touch panels and sometimes monitor arms or surface controls on AV lecterns are approached from the side. Tables, teaching stations, and control desks are mostly operated from a front approach. Consider figure(s) below to make certain technology is placed within operable reach ranges.

Often, incorporating height adjust in addition to compliant reach ranges allows for sit to stand functionality. This ensures comfort and optimum user experience for both seated or standing users.

Accessibility-Interaction-User Experience

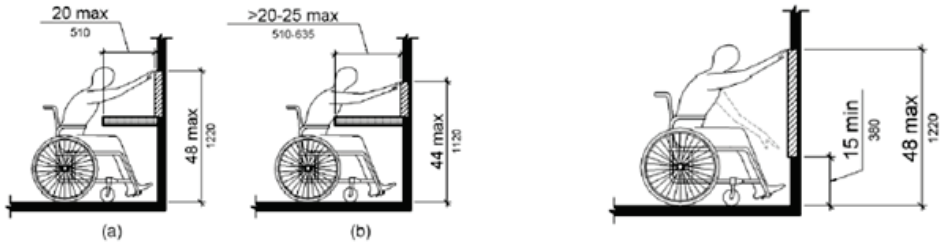
By anticipating the users needs early in the design process, you ensure that your AV furniture is not just functional—but truly accessible for all.

Side approach reach range for controls and equipment



Unobstructed Side Reach Obstructed High Side Reach

Front approach reach ranges for controls and equipment



Obstructed High Forward Reach Unobstructed Forward Reach

Image Source: access-board.gov/ada Chapter 3: Building Blocks Reach Ranges

Create Workspaces Where Everyone Can Engage

Incorporating ADA principles into AV furniture design is not just about compliance—it's about creating environments where everyone can fully participate. By planning ahead, understanding user needs, and collaborating with design and facilities professionals, you're building spaces that are not only functional and future-ready, but welcoming to all. When accessibility, interaction, and user experience are prioritized from the start, the result is AV furniture that enhances the technology, supports your people, and reflects a true commitment to inclusive design.