

DOUGHERTY COUNTY SELF-EVALUATION PROCESS PLAN

INTRODUCTION

Dougherty County, Georgia, is conducting a self-evaluation of its programs, services, activities, and facilities for compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Department of Justice's 2010 revised ADA regulations. The goals are to:

- Meet the requirements of the ADA
- Increase awareness of ADA within County Departments
- Promote progress in ensuring equal opportunity for people with disabilities
- Establish an ADA compliance monitoring system that is sustainable
- Involve community stakeholders in planning for ADA compliance

This process will result in development of an action plan and will be followed by preparation of a transition plan that will detail needed modifications/changes, with timelines for implementation.

OVERVIEW OF TITLE II AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) covers all activities of state and local governments. It requires public entities like Dougherty County to ensure that people with disabilities have an equal opportunity to and access to all local government programs, services, and activities. Title II extends to all programs, services, and activities, including those of the Board of Commissioners, public assistance programs, communications, parks and recreation, libraries, public safety, correctional programs, courts, licensing, and purchasing/procurement.

The ADA Act and regulations give comprehensive civil rights protections to “qualified individuals with disabilities,” including those who have, have a record of, or are regarded as having, a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a major life activity. The 2010 regulations are found at 28 C.F.R. part 35 or

http://www.ada.gov/regs2010/titleII_2010/titleII_2010_regulations.htm. Requirements include that the County, at a minimum:

- Eliminate policies or practices that deny opportunities for people to participate simply because of a disability.
- Eliminate unnecessary eligibility standards or criteria unless necessary for the program/activity.
- Make reasonable modifications to policies, practices, and procedures that deny equal access, unless a fundamental program change would be required.

- Provide effective communication with people with disabilities, including providing auxiliary aids and services such as oral and sign language interpreters, captioning, and alternate formats such as Braille or large print documents and accessible electronic formats.
- Provide the same protections to people who are associated with a person with a disability.
- Refrain from charging individuals with disabilities to cover the costs of necessary measures, such as interpreters and alternate formats.
- Ensure that any programs carried out by contractors or others on behalf of the County comply with ADA.
- Ensure that people with disabilities are not excluded from programs or activities, or otherwise discriminated against, because of inaccessible facilities. The “program access” provision requires that Dougherty County operate its programs so that, when viewed “in their entirety,” each is accessible to people with disabilities.

All activities must be provided in the most inclusive setting appropriate to the needs of individuals with disabilities.

Per ADA, the County is generally not required to take steps that would impose an undue financial or administrative burden, cause a fundamental change in the operation or nature of a program, or pose a direct threat to the health or safety of others.

Title II regulations require Dougherty County to conduct a self-evaluation of its services, policies, and practices and determine whether any modifications are required in order to comply with the regulations. The County must then implement modifications to services, policies and practices. The public must have an opportunity to review documents and submit comments. For three years after completion of the self-evaluation, Dougherty County will be required to maintain the following items on file and make them available on request:

- A list of the interested persons consulted
- A description of areas examined and problems identified and
- A description of modifications made.

If physical changes are needed in order to ensure program accessibility Dougherty County will be required to develop a transition plan setting forth the steps necessary to complete the changes. Similar public participation and record-keeping provisions apply.

THE FIRST STAGE OF THE PROJECT

Scope

The first stage of the project will be to assess the applicable Dougherty County programs, services, and activities and the limited number of Dougherty County's existing facilities to which ADA standards will apply for the first time under the 2010 ADA standards. The County will be assisted by a consultant, and County staff will be directly involved in the self-evaluation work, based on training and assistance from the consultant. County staff will be asked to help identify areas of potential restricted program access and will be encouraged to help find solutions to bring programs into compliance and keep them in compliance. At the subsequent transition planning stage, plans will be established to bring facilities into compliance where required for program access, new construction, or alterations.

Related to the above, after completion of the self-evaluation for program access, Dougherty County human resources personnel and the Dougherty County ADA Coordinator will, in association with training and surveying, evaluate the County's employment policies and practices, information technology and web access, emergency evacuation and response other than evacuation from individual facilities, voting, pedestrian access (curb cuts and sidewalks) in the public right of way, and 911 services.

Approach to assessment and process

The County has retained AMEC to assist County staff with the first stage of the project, self-evaluation for program access. AMEC will provide training, survey forms, and technical assistance to the Dougherty County ADA Coordinator. Following collection of survey data, AMEC will prepare a draft report of self-evaluation findings.

Start-up and program development

In the initial step, Dougherty County Departments will work with AMEC to identify all applicable programs. Department heads will be asked to help identify their programs, services and activities. Programs identified will be categorized, and surveying will be structured according to program categories.

A "program" is defined by ADA as an activity through which a department offers services, advantages, opportunities, or benefits to the public or specific groups who are eligible for the services. In some instances, for purposes of the assessment, clusters of services will be grouped together as one, if they are administered in the same or closely similar way or are implemented together.

The ADA Coordinator and AMEC will review and confirm the list of programs.

The ADA Coordinator will also work with AMEC to identify an ADA County Staff Facilities Team (ADA Team). The ADA Team will be responsible for gathering information and responding to a program survey that will be developed by the consultants.

Following confirmation of the list of programs, AMEC will prepare and provide draft survey forms for programs and activities. Survey questions will be simplified and formatted to calls for a yes/no answer, with comments.

During the initial stage of the self-evaluation effort, Dougherty County will also determine the best way to obtain public input about the self-evaluation, including consultation with local advocates for the disabled.

Training and information gathering

AMEC will develop a training agenda and provide training to Dougherty County staff. The training will cover the basics of ADA, what is meant by program accessibility, what is meant by self-evaluation, and how to use the survey forms. The training will also include an overview of the facilities requirements and program access and instructions on surveying.

After the training, the County ADA Team and Department representatives will complete surveying. The County ADA Coordinator and AMEC will review survey forms to check if they have been filled out accurately. Information received from surveys will be compiled and organized. This information will summarize the results of the programs and services surveys and identify areas that are potentially out of compliance with ADA.

Draft report and recommendations

AMEC will prepare a draft report, including analysis and recommendations, based on the survey information provided by Dougherty County, as well as input from the public. The report will identify areas within each program where improvement is needed. Recommendations will set priorities for implementation to fix deficiencies based on the importance of each program to the community, the cost/challenge to make changes, etc.

The County ADA Coordinator will review the draft report, provide comments, and work with AMEC to finalize the report.

NEXT STEPS

Following completion of the Self-Evaluation report, it is anticipated that Dougherty County will begin work on the related Transition Plan.