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Special Issue on Services to Patrons with Print Disabilities

The ARL Joint Task Force on Services to Patrons with Print Disabilities released this report to bring much-needed attention to the challenges of print-disabled individuals who are seeking access to both print and digital library products and services. Print disabilities prevent some users from effectively reading information resources because of visual, physical, perceptual, developmental, cognitive, or learning disabilities. The task force expands upon the ongoing work of the Library Copyright Alliance in support of an international instrument for the print disabled that is under active consideration by the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO). It also brings attention to the growing demand for instructional e-content and burgeoning digital library collections and the opportunities for collaboration among university leadership, research libraries, disability services, and information technology services.

The report contains nine recommendations for research libraries to make information accessible to their full range of diverse users equitably. In particular, the report focuses on critical partnerships necessary to fully exploit the opportunities of digital information resources to open an unprecedented quantity of information to print-disabled patrons. The report also includes practical recommendations for individual institutions to improve responsiveness and organizational capacity to address the needs of this community more effectively. ARL believes that research libraries are poised to provide critical direction—along with academic leadership, IT, and disability services—on the service and technology planning, procurement, and licensing necessary to create a fully accessible information environment.

Members of the task force were Mary Case (Illinois at Chicago), Chair; Cynthia Archer (York); Nancy Baker (Iowa); Will Cross (North Carolina State); John Harwood (Penn State); Sarah Hawthorne (California, Berkeley); Kurt Herzer (Johns Hopkins); Tito Sierra (MIT); Ed Van Gemert (Wisconsin-Madison); Tom Wall (Boston College); Prue Adler (ARL); and Judy Ruttenberg (ARL). Howard P. Knopf, Counsel, Macera & Jarzyna/Moffat & Co., and Peter Jaszi, Washington College of Law, American University, assisted in framing the copyright discussions of the report.

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