

## **Accessibility in Action**

### **October 3, 2007**

#### **Tip #15: Working with Individuals Who are Blind or Visually Impaired**

According to the American Foundation for the Blind, there are an estimated 10 million people in the United States who are blind or visually impaired. The term visual impairment includes conditions ranging from the presence of good usable vision, low vision, or to the absence of any sight at all - total blindness.

#### **Communicating with Individuals Who are Blind or Visually Impaired:**

- Speak to the individual when you approach him or her.
- State clearly who you are; speak in a normal tone of voice.
- When conversing in a group, remember to identify yourself and the person to whom you are speaking.
- Be descriptive when giving directions; verbally give the person information that is visually obvious to individuals who can see. For example, if you are approaching steps, mention how many steps and how close they are.

- If you are offering a seat, gently place the individual's hand on the back or arm of the chair so that the person can locate the seat.
- Tell the individual when you are leaving.
- Do not attempt to lead the individual without first asking; allow the person to hold your arm and control her or his own movements.
- Never touch or distract a service animal.

### **Accommodations for People Who are Blind or Visually Impaired:**

- Provide information in large print or Braille
- Improve lighting or use task lighting.
- Allow the use of a cassette recorder or digital recorder.
- Place blinds on windows.
- Allow the use of a service animal for assistance with mobility.
- Allow the use of a mobility aid (cane, electronic aid, other).
- Provide a driver.

- Allow for the use of public transportation.
- Provide an assistant to identify colors – a volunteer or co-worker.
- Add voice output to the computer.

### **Remember:**

- Relax.
- Treat the individual with dignity, respect and courtesy.
- Listen to the individual.
- Offer assistance but do not insist or be offended if your offer is not accepted.

### **ACTION**

- Review the suggestions in this tip with staff, volunteers, CSOs and partners (VSPs).
- Apply the suggestions in this tip to the appropriate situations.