



September 11, 2023

Report to council re: ADA symposium experiences

To the Mayor and Council Person of the City of Columbia, MO:

As requested on August 7, 2023, The Disabilities Commission of the City of Columbia, MO is providing a brief summary, including attendee testimonials, regarding their attendance at the 2023 ADA National Symposium.

As a review, the Disabilities Commission had \$6,000 available in the budget for Travel Training to send commissioners to the ADA symposium. Total spent is estimated to be \$5,300. **For the current budget considerations, the Disabilities Commission has requested a continued budget in addition to City Funding to send the DEI officer and at least one other city staff member to the ADA Symposium each year.**

A total of seven members of the disabilities commission attended the ADA national symposium May 2023; of these, three members were fully funded by the city, one member attended on scholarship with accommodations funded by the city. The other members attended on scholarship from Great Plains ADA center, as part of their employment or at their own expense.

Commissioner experiences and reflections are as follows:

- I greatly appreciated the opportunity to attend the ADA conference in 2023. Not only did I learn important details during the sessions, the opportunity to connect with other disabled people and people who work to further the goals of the ADA was thrilling. I also had the good fortune to reconnect with a Deaf advocate who I met 17 years ago. At that time, he had created a prototype for a device that provides an opportunity for Deaf and hearing people to communicate face to face. At that time, I was serving on the Governor's Council on Disability and was able to arrange for him to present his idea at one of our meetings. The device is now on its third version and Medicare pays for them. I was very happy to see his success, and to be reminded of the value of small acts of encouragement in our community. –Rene Powell, Disabilities Commission Member
- I was incredibly grateful for the opportunity the city provided for me, and some of my commission colleagues, to attend the National ADA Symposium at the end of May. I've been a passionate advocate and activist for accessibility and inclusion for over 15 years, but I had not yet had the opportunity to attend this important conference, as it wasn't in my budget. Not only did the experience facilitate camaraderie among the commission members who were able to attend, it also led to networking with fellow conference-goers, advocates and accessibility experts, from across the country. I attended a great number of sessions, engaging on everything from accessible playgrounds, to law enforcement and the ADA, and was impressed by both the knowledge of the speakers



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and that of many of the audience members. My overall time at the symposium was invaluable, and I hope I am able to go again in the future. –Gretchen Maune – Member

- Thank you for allowing me to go to the ADA Symposium. I found it to be very informative. The Keynote speaker was awesome! My first session was about Accessible Airport Terminal and Columbia got it right on. I went to more one sessions about housing mandates to see if HUD has changed and they haven't, sorry to say. One session was on Pedestrian Signals and how MODOT isn't doing it right. I'm glad I went even though the hotel wasn't ready for us! They didn't put me in an ADA room even though I asked for one months ago. – Dawn Zeterberg – Member
- The symposium offered training sessions on multiple subjects including employment, increasing access to municipal programs, housing, transportation, access to entertainment venues, voting rights, recreational activities and more. Numerous presenters stressed the importance of being an informed advocate and coming to the table with knowledge and experience when advocating for civil rights under the ADA. The opportunity to meet, interact and learn from attendees as well as presenters made in-person attendance invaluable. With a better understanding of the ADA I am better able to evaluate current practices and work towards greater compliance where that is lacking. – Ann Marie Gortmaker – Member
- I am glad I had the opportunity to attend the National ADA Symposium in June. The breadth of subject matter covered was quite impressive. The issues related to blindness, of course, are more familiar to me, but I learned a great deal about problems faced by people with other disabilities, both physical and cognitive. Each seminar subject was presented in depth, but with clarity. I became aware, again, of what a tangled skein the inter-relationship of various legislative programs, old and new, can be, and the difficulty of matching them with the needs of people with disabilities. I have become more knowledgeable about problems faced by people with all types of disabilities. The issues are no longer mainly physical in nature, but barriers to information itself. These involve web access and the use of apps for travel, shopping, access to recreation, etc. This will become even more prevalent with the increased reliance on technology in every aspect of life, both in the home and in the community. I think the knowledge I gained will help me better understand the issues coming before the Disabilities Commission, and I hope to learn more in the future. – Hazel Fields – Member.



Below are the experiences from City staff:

- My name is Elizabeth Farr, I am an Engineering Specialist, in the Public Works – Engineering Department with the City of Columbia, in Missouri. The 2023 ADA Symposium in Kansas City, Missouri was my first time attending this conference and my overall experience was great. I had a positive learning experience at the sessions that made me more aware of all my designs, but also look closely at external designs and everyday activities. ADA standards and compliance has become an essential part of every project. Through the ADA Symposium, I learned it is our responsibility to make sure the project design is ADA compliant, but also that these ADA standards get implemented. The ADA Symposium showed new techniques and devices we can use in our designs for better accessibility and help keep us up-to-date on any changing standards. The location of the Symposium was very accommodating with constant drinks available throughout the day and a great breakfast and lunch spread. All employees, whether with the conference or the hotel center, were cheerful, pleasant and helpful the whole time. I highly recommend this conference for anyone in my field.
- I attended my first 2023 National ADA Symposium in the Westin Hotel, Kansas City, Missouri from May 22 to May 24, 2023. The symposium was a comprehensive training event on the Americans with Disability Act. The National ADA Symposium is a gathering of experts. As an engineer, I have been involved with the ADA standards and Accessible design issues for many years. I found new insights during the symposium that will help guide my designs in improving accessibility. My participation in the National ADA Symposium was satisfyingly beneficial. I would recommend this ADA symposium to anyone that wants to expand their knowledge of ADA issues, and it is also an excellent way to network and share ideas. It was one of the most well organized and informative symposiums I have attended. I was impressed by the application of technology both in marketing, registration and during the event, such as the ADA Symposium App for my iPhone and use of on-line and electronic materials. I look forward to the next Symposium. – A.K.M. Nazmul Hussain, Ph.D, P.E. Engineer, Public Works Department
- The National ADA Symposium is an outstanding conference, and I believe it is a valuable and unique training opportunity for staff from all departments of local government. It is helpful for professionals who regularly practice in areas related to the ADA, as well as staff who are brand new to accessibility- related issues. This year was the 5th national ADA symposium that I have attended and it has greatly benefited me in my role as the ADA coordinator for the City. – Adam Kruse – Staff, ADA Coordinator



CITY OF COLUMBIA, MISSOURI

Disabilities Commission

The Disabilities Commission is thankful for your support. We look forward to continued work with the Council and City Staff as we progress towards accessibility for all persons in all physical and virtual spaces in our city.

Sincerely,
Dr. Jacque Sample
Disabilities Commission, Chair