



THE ACCESS COALITION
Creating More Inclusive Retail Spaces

ANNUAL REPORT

**Annual Report for
October 1, 2024 to
September 30, 2025**

Prepared By:

Kimberly Knackstedt, Ph.D.
Unlock Access, LLC
Senior Advisor

Prepared For:

Founding Members and
Infrastructure Partners of
The Access Coalition



The Access Coalition

Dear Founding Members, Infrastructure Partners, Strategic Advisors, Stakeholders, and Friends -

We are concluding the first year of The Access Coalition, and I want to take a moment to reflect on the journey we've taken to get here, together. I am going to go back further than one year to March 2024 when Starbucks Coffee Company, Walmart, and the American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD) initially decided that we would try to do something bold in uncertain times: create a shared space where competitors and partners would move beyond compliance and reimagine what accessible retail could look like. We had the foundation of Starbucks's Inclusive Spaces Framework, and we hoped that by working together, we could transform the retail experience so that it would better reflect the needs of all customers and employees, in particular disabled people. Along the way this past year, we were joined by CVS Health, an instrumental Founding Member, Otis Elevator, Sam's Club, LockNet, and Step 'n Wash. Plus, we already have a new member that has joined us for year two who will bolster our digital work, Inclusive Web.

Year One has been a year of learning, growth, and collaboration. A highlight of the year was our two-day design sprint in Bentonville, AR, home of Walmart, where we came together to co-design solutions for inclusive restrooms. This work reinforced what we know to be true: accessibility requires human-centered design, constant feedback from people with lived experience, and the recognition that small changes—whether in signage, fixtures, or layouts—can make a meaningful difference.

At times, we faced set-backs and progress felt slow. However, together we made big changes and have achieved our goals together. As you will read throughout this report, we added to the Inclusive Spaces Framework, building out the restroom functional area. We drafted a playbook to help companies begin their inclusive design journey. And we elevated the Coalition's visibility and credibility through a successful press release and social media campaign during Disability Pride Month, which generated more than 31,000 organic impressions and strong brand recognition for members. We are beginning to demonstrate that accessibility is not only the right thing to do—it is also good for business, as we will continue to do moving forward.

As we look ahead to Year Two, just around the corner, our goals are ambitious but achievable. We will launch a research study to strengthen the business case for accessibility. We will build out and publish another version of the Inclusive Spaces Framework. We will capture and share case studies of design changes implemented by members. Most exciting, we are launching a feedback community of retail shoppers with disabilities to guide our work.

This first year has proven that what we built works. By listening to lived experience and collaborating across sectors, we can design retail environments that are welcoming to all. It has been an honor to be the senior advisor to this work, and I am deeply grateful for your commitment, investment, and trust as we created a successful foundation. Together, we are proving that accessibility is just good business.

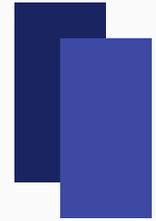
Sincerely,



Kimberly Knackstedt, Ph.D.
Senior Advisor
The Access Coalition

Background

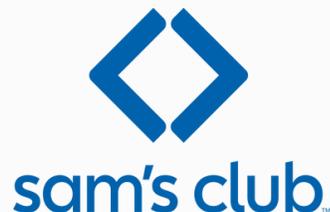
The Access Coalition is innovating through inclusive design to include all people in retail and infrastructure experiences and create spaces that reflect the needs of diverse populations.



In March 2024, Starbucks, Walmart, and the American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD) teamed up to plan for the launch of a coalition that could change the landscape of retail. Built on the Inclusive Spaces Framework, originally developed by Starbucks, the goal of the coalition was to develop best practices for retailers to go above and beyond the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and create better experiences for customers and employees.

The Inclusive Retail Spaces Coalition, later rebranded to The Access Coalition: *Creating More Inclusive Retail Spaces* (“The Access Coalition” and “Coalition”), launched in October 2024. As Year 1 concludes, there are seven member companies with additional companies joining for Year 2.

This annual report provides an overview of accomplishments, learnings, metrics, and analysis of The Access Coalition. A look ahead for Year 2 is also provided.



The Access Coalition Structure & Governance



Coalition Mission

The coalition helps retailers and others create inclusive spaces that welcome everyone by building co-authored frameworks, sharing open-source solutions, and proving the business case for accessibility.



Coalition Structure, Year 1

- Third- Party Convener, American Association of People with Disabilities
- Senior Advisor, Kimberly Knackstedt, Ph.D.
- Founding Members: Starbucks, Walmart, CVS Health
- Infrastructure Partners: Otis Elevator, Sam's Club, LockNet, Step 'n Wash



Guiding Principles

The Coalition is grounded in five guiding principles for all work.



Human centered design is the methodology of putting people and their lived experiences at the center of the design process and problem solving. Removing common barriers people with disabilities face in retail environments, whether as a customer or employee, results in spaces that work better for everyone.



A **systems approach** to the design and implementation work of the Coalition supports bigger picture, more connected thinking. In practice this means holistically considering every step of a customer or employee journey. It also means being more intentional about how the built environment, digital and operational elements, and critical infrastructure in and between retail settings integrate to create a great experience.



Co-creating solutions with people most impacted by barriers to inclusive systems and inaccessibility serves as a bedrock for this work. It requires elevating the perspectives of disabled people and remaining responsive, honest, humble, and creative as we learn how to design spaces that are more welcoming to all.



The Coalition is committed to using **research and evidence** to guide its actions. This includes leveraging existing data, as well as breaking new ground. The Coalition seeks to expand and deepen the evidence that accessibility is a smart investment that can be cost effective when integrated early, provides a clear business return, and can expand over time with a continuous improvement strategy.



A unique element of the coalition is multiple companies coming together, putting competition aside, and working toward improvement in accessibility and inclusive design. **Transparency** and openness about our wins, challenges, and data-based strategies to keep improving over time makes the Coalition a unique learning space and forum to drive toward industry-wide innovation in retail experience

The Access Coalition Strategic Advisors

When established, the Coalition included a panel of strategic advisors. The advisors were groups and individuals that would bring perspectives, insights, and knowledge to the work of the Coalition members. The advisors are selected based on sectors they represent, interest in the work, and commitment to improving the accessibility of retail. The Coalition is grateful for the advisors' time and work during the first year and looks forward to ongoing partnership.

Amazeum

"The Amazeum exists to spark and nurture the curious and creative spirit in all of us." Visit <https://www.amazeum.org/> to learn more about this incredible cultural institution and our great advisor.

Disability:IN

Disability:IN is the leading nonprofit resource for business disability inclusion worldwide. Disability:IN partners with leading companies and drives progress through initiatives, tools, and expertise that deliver long-term business impact. Are You IN? Check out: <https://disabilityin.org/>.

Made Welcome

"Accessibility where you work and gather." Made Welcome was instrumental in developing and continues to update the Inclusive Spaces Framework. Check out the website here: <https://www.made-welcome.com/>.

Snowsound

"We have helped make spaces sound as good as they look." Snowsound's innovative sound solutions are in some of our retailer's stores and help to make the retail experience more welcoming to all. Learn more here: <https://snowsoundusa.com/>.

Woodland Park Zoo

"A zoo for all." The Woodland Park Zoo has a robust accessibility guide and is a leading cultural institution on accessibility, providing great insight to the Coalition. Learn more here: <https://www.zoo.org/access>.

Center for Inclusive Design & Environmental Access

"We're a dynamic group of researchers united by our shared values. We're committed to creating a more inclusive world – for our clients, our team, and our community." Visit <https://idea.ap.buffalo.edu/> to learn more.

Gensler

"We are creating a better world through the power of design." Check out their website at <https://www.gensler.com/> to learn more about this global architecture, design, and planning firm.

McKinsey & Company

"Partnering on America's toughest challenges." McKinsey is a global management consulting firm that was with Starbucks since the conception of the Inclusive Spaces Framework. Learn more here: <https://www.mckinsey.com/>.

United States International Council on Disabilities

"Building a global community of persons with disabilities." USICD has a strong global perspective on disability rights. Check out their website here: <https://usicd.org/>.

World Institute on Disability

"Trusted worldwide, WID partners with communities, governments, and businesses to shape disability policy, accessible and inclusive design, workforce access, and disaster risk reduction." Learn more here: <https://wid.org>.

Year 1 Goals and Milestones

Year 1 was a year of learning and growing for the Coalition. The first six months were focused on expansion and bringing in new members in addition to establishing ways of working. After a successful two-day design sprint in Bentonville, AR (home of Walmart), the Coalition solidified its path forward. With renewed energy and a vision for success, the Coalition launched into collaborative work sessions aimed at meeting the Year 1 Goals.



Goal 1: Iterate and update the Inclusive Spaces Framework

- **Milestone:** By end of Year 1, additional spaces have been added to the Inclusive Spaces Framework that represent the Founding Members. While always an iterative process, select spaces may be focused on for Year 1 expansion of the framework.

75%

Goal 2: Co-design and develop more inclusive restroom spaces to integrate standards into the Inclusive Spaces Framework. Implement if possible.



- **Milestone 1:** Partnership established with a research entity to acquire baseline data on restrooms and begin methods for analysis of implementation of design.

100%

- **Milestone 2:** Coalition visit to Walmart HQ in January 2025 for initial design of new restroom space.

100%

- **Milestone 3:** Fully developed standards and specs of the “ideal” restroom space from design within Q2.

75%



Goal 2: (Continued)



- **Milestone 4:** Implementation of new standards in a renovation, new build, etc. for each Founding Member by end of Year 1 (goal, may be in 2026). **moving this to Year 2*



Goal 3: Develop a playbook for companies entering the inclusive design and inclusive spaces journey to support their initial entry and exploration.

- **Milestone 1:** Draft playbook (building on start from Starbucks) developed with a deck to present at Disability:IN or other such conference.

50%

- **Milestone 2:** Release of playbook at the end of Year 1.

****Unless otherwise noted, all goals anticipated to be completed and assets published by end of calendar year 2025.**

Deeper Dive: Two-Day Design Sprint



Lessons Learned from Design Sprint

- ***User testing and feedback are critical.***
Listening, exploring solutions with the customers, and iterating outside the box after trying various solutions allowed for better solutions to be created. Embedding feedback at every point of the process is absolutely critical and should include perspectives of a variety of disabilities, families, caregivers, and multiple ages, including older adults.
- ***Prioritization is key.***
A lesson learned is that we do not need to boil the ocean as small changes have big impacts. While that may seem limiting, moving beyond the status quo will make a difference. Prioritizing where to start and next steps allows for thoughtful progression and meaningful impact.
- ***Design sprints give direction.***
From architects to digital accessibility leads to senior strategy advisors and more, all members of the Coalition found value in coming together, moving through a clearly and thoughtfully designed agenda, and co-creating and designing solutions that can be taken back and put into practice.

Outcomes & Takeaways on Restrooms

- ***Business is being lost due to inaccessibility - and we need to prove it.***
An alarming, but not surprising takeaway from the customers was that they leave retail spaces if the bathroom is inaccessible. Through a research partnership, a goal of the restroom design work will be to carry out research that seeks to prove that accessibility is good for business.
- ***Restrooms are a good starting point.***
Opportunities to explore wayfinding, signage, doors, and digital solutions to improve accessibility allow testing in small spaces with big impact. Restrooms also were identified as one of the key locations in a retail entity that customers must have accessible.
- ***The needs of the disability community are varied. Human centered design and co-creation are always needed.***
The Coalition must ensure multiple disabilities are represented in the design process and multiple perspectives of caregivers, families, and older adults.

Year 1 Learnings

Ways of Working Matter.

Establishing effective ways of working across varied organizations, schedules, IT tools, and starting points with integrating inclusive design methodologies takes time. Checking and adjusting to settle into a consistent and practical rhythm of work has enabled members to move quickly and efficiently toward the Coalition's goals. Year 2 is positioned to build on these shared expectations and efficiencies.

Collaboration Improves Results.

The Coalition is unique in convening such a range of brands and perspectives to innovate retail experience through an accessibility lens. Leveraging expertise spanning across architecture, UX research and product design, program management, communications, and disability policy ultimately strengthens the Coalition's output and tools openly available for use across the retail sector.

User Feedback is Critical.

From initial conception of the Coalition, feedback from those most impacted was deemed an essential component. This became more critical as the work continued. Strategic advisors, including national leaders from disability community, provided key feedback and held the Coalition accountable on the work. In addition, focus groups greatly informed the work of the Coalition, in particular in relation to evolving the Framework. User feedback will be a larger element of the work moving forward.

Brand Awareness Supports Success.

After close coordination across members, the Coalition made a formal press release in July 2025 after launching a [LinkedIn page](#). The press release and a disability pride social media strategy was met with overwhelming success with external audiences. In three months, the LinkedIn page had more than 31,000 organic impressions. The press release, through re-posting, gathered more than 25,000 impressions and more than 2,500 clicks, all but two positive (unusual for social media). See the metrics page for additional analytics on engagement. Continuing to raise the profile of the Coalition's work and maintaining a strong presence virtually in other forums is critical to continued success.

Research is Needed.

The Coalition quickly discovered the lack of detailed research quantifying ROI driven by accessibility investments in the physical environment. This gap in knowledge makes accessibility a social impact issue rather than a business imperative. A stronger evidence base is needed to make the case for change with companies new to the work, and where it already has some traction to sustain it across economic, political, and organizational changes.

Small Changes have Big Impacts.

The Coalition learned from initial research that even small changes can have big impact - like altering a sign, swapping out fixtures, and choosing different tile. Prioritization is key in this work and determining where to start to progress along a path of good, better, and best to demonstrate meaningful impact to customers and employees in retail spaces.

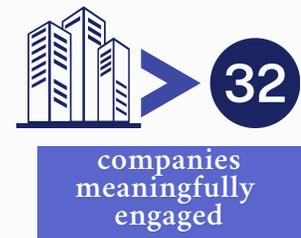
Performance Analysis

The Coalition's Founding Members recognized that Year 1 would be a year of growth and learning very early on in the process. When establishing the strategic guiding document and Year 1 goals, milestones were established as compared to measurements for data, with an expectation that data measurements would be added in future years. However, several metrics were collected from Year 1 of the Coalition, which serve as measurements of success.

New Member Engagement

During the planning phase and Year 1 of the Coalition, bringing in new members was a key measure of success. Two events were held: 1) a reception at Disability:In in July 2024 and 2) a reception at M:Enabling in October 2024. In addition, outreach, emails, meetings, and phone calls were made to companies.

More than 32 companies were engaged in meaningful conversations. 13% of those companies joined the Coalition. 16% of those companies are still involved in ongoing conversations.



Organic Outreach

A guiding principle of the Coalition is co-creation. Engagement with people with disabilities, design experts, people interested in inclusive design, and others is a key aspect of the work. A metric of success is the organic outreach that occurred about the Coalition.

The Senior Advisor received 39 organic emails expressing interest in the Coalition from October 3, 2024 - September 3, 2025. 26 of those emails were directly related to the press release.



LinkedIn Metrics

The Coalition members saw the need for a formal announcement about the work of the Coalition. In conjunction with Disability Pride Month 2025, a press release was released. To help promote the press release, a LinkedIn page was created to develop a social media presence for the Coalition. A social media campaign was approved and launched with the press release throughout July.

The LinkedIn page had more than 31,000 organic impressions since launch. The press release post gathered more than 25,000 impressions and more than 2,500 clicks.



Budget & Spend Analysis

The Coalition's Year 1 budget was adjusted throughout the year with approval from members due to new members joining and shifts in goals. At the six month mark, the Coalition determined research was a goal and funds were set aside for a research firm partnership. The following is a breakdown of the Year 1 budget at the time of the report and a projection of spending for Year 2.



Year 1

\$ → **Funds In \$210,000**

\$150,000 Three Founding Members
\$60,000 Four Infrastructure Partners

← **\$** **Funds Out**

85.7%	2.4%	3.4%	8.6%
Support of Coalition	Branding	Framework Support	Remaining
Third-Party Convener and Senior Advisor contracting for one year.	One time branding workshop to change name & mission statement.	Contracting to take framework from Coalition edits to alignment with industry standards	Remaining funds as of September 2025 to be used for graphic support of Playbook and Framework or Year 2 carryover.

Year 2, Anticipated

\$ → **Funds In \$225,000**

\$150,000 Three Founding Members
\$75,000 Five Infrastructure Partners

← **\$** **Funds Out**

80%	14.2%	3.4%	2.7%
Support of Coalition	Research	Framework Support	Remaining

Looking Ahead: Year 2 Goals & Activities



Coalition Activities

- Engage a broad base of retailers, suppliers, national disability rights leaders, and others in a combination events.
- Create an Access Coalition Feedback Community composed of retail shoppers with disabilities to provide ongoing input.
- Add members to the Coalition at both tiers of membership (Retail Members and Infrastructure Partners).

01.

Conduct a research study to expand and establish an evidence base for the return on accessibility investments for businesses, with a focus on restrooms for the initial project. Publish results in a user-friendly format.

02.

Iterate, update, and expand the Inclusive Spaces Framework to publish a Version 3 at the end of Year 2 of the Coalition. Collaborate and replicate work as done with restrooms during Year 1 with expansion and additional functional areas addressed and expanded. Specific focus on integrating digital into the framework.

03.

Founding Members and Retail Members commit to one or more design changes to be written into a case study for publication to produce a qualitative story of implementing inclusive design to make change as a Coalition. Such design changes may be currently in progress, have recently been implemented, or can soon be implemented given budgets and timelines.

Looking Ahead: Year 2 Members

AS OF PUBLICATION OF REPORT



FOUNDING MEMBERS

- » Starbucks
- » Walmart
- » CVS Health

INFRASTRUCTURE PARTNERS

- » Otis Elevator
- » Sam's Club
- » LockNet
- » Step 'n Wash
- » Inclusive Web



Conclusion

The first year of the Coalition was successful. The financial investment from each company yielded the intended results and advanced inclusive design efforts on the national stage. Year 1 goals are being finalized into fall 2025 and all will be completed as drafted in the strategic guiding document.

An additional success was positive brand recognition. In difficult economic and political climates, brands that included their logos and names on the press release and LinkedIn page received significant positive recognition for involvement in the Coalition.

The Coalition will conclude Year 1 and enter Year 2 with momentum. With clearly articulated goals, a research partner, and new brands interested in engagement, the future of the Coalition is bright.

The Coalition members have a vision of creating communities that are accessible to all people and create a sense of belonging for everyone, while centering the needs of people with disabilities. With investments from members and achievements on annual goals, this long-term vision will become a reality.

