Some human service facilities (e.g., community centers, child-care centers, senior centers, etc.) are places where people obtain critical services, find recreation opportunities and meet to socialize with their peers. Other human service facilities (e.g., police stations, court houses, etc.) combine community functions with civic missions carried out by professionals. These places are often key points of contact between city employees and the public.

Location

Human service facilities should be located in the heart of neighborhoods where they are readily identifiable and reachable by all the people they serve.

Guidelines:

- Locate the facility within an active community context and provide strong connections to related community facilities.
- Design connections to existing neighborhoods to encourage chance encounters and social integration among all users.

Figure 4.2f.1. This municipal court building provides both a ramp and steps with handrails at its entrance to enable everyone to enter.
Site Design

The design of the site will play a large role in determining how well the building fits into the community context and makes connections to the pedestrian and transportation systems. The sites of buildings like community centers, child-care centers and senior centers also can provide key outdoor activity areas.

Guidelines:

- Accessible parking should be located close to the main entrance. Senior centers should provide more than the minimum required accessible parking.
- The routes from parking and transit stops to the entrance should be safe for pedestrians and free of steps and steep grade changes.
- Protection from the elements should be provided at the entrance to reduce exposure in bad weather. Ideally, this protection should extend to the drop-off area or pedestrian pathway. Even positioning a building to provide protection from prevailing winds is enough to make a difference.
- Provide outdoor patios or courtyards with accessible seating areas in both sun and shade as an extension of lobby/waiting areas.
- All terraces, courtyards and play areas should be reachable by paths of travel without steps. In child-care centers, controlled access from the street is critical.
In facilities used at night, provide good illumination at entrances, parking and approach paths.

**Entrances**

Entrances provide a transition space between the public environment and the organization’s realm and from the outside to the inside.

**Guidelines:**

- Provide enough window area to allow inspection of the interior from the surrounding public pedestrian pathways.
- An automated door should be provided at the main entrance. This could be a low-power slow operating door that can also be used without power.
- Provide direct access to restrooms from the entry area.
- Information about upcoming events and activities should be available in a variety of forms (e.g., bulletin boards, electronic message boards, or video monitors) to ensure communication of essential information to all users.
- Provide a waiting area with direct access to the passenger loading area, where one is provided. In child-care settings, parents should be able to wait outside the children’s area without being detectable to the children so as not to disturb activities.
- Main administration areas should be in close proximity to the entrance. This is particularly important in police stations for security purposes.
- Provide ample space for coats, bags, boots, etc. This space should be out of the flow of traffic and have an area that can be used by anyone, whether standing or seated, for removing outerwear. In child-care settings this is a key activity area.

**Figure 4.2f.4.** This entry to a community center has a reception desk, enough space to wait around the desk without obstructing access and a bench for people to wait. Although there is good control, the desk is to the side, reducing the impression of supervision.

**Figure 4.2f.5.** The curved form of this bench and the alcove it is in at this service facility reduces circulation conflicts between people passing by and those waiting.
The reception desk should be identifiable and usable by all staff and visitors.

Where communications take place through a security screen, provide visual and auditory access to the receptionist for people of all statures whether standing or seated.

Meeting Rooms

Most human services facilities have rooms where public meetings are held. These rooms need to be easy to find and have the space and equipment to ensure that all citizens can participate.

Guidelines:

- Provide a clear path of travel that can be negotiated by everyone between meeting rooms and the main entrance. Accessible public amenities (e.g., restrooms, drinking fountains, etc.) should be located along this path. If nighttime access is provided from a different entrance, equivalent public amenities should be available in the night access area.

- Provide enough circulation space around furniture to enable easy movement by all users including people with wheeled mobility devices.

- Meeting rooms should have good acoustics, lighting and sight lines to promote full participation by all users.

- Equip all meeting rooms with assistive listening systems (ALS) or provide a portable device in the building.
Spatial Organization

Human service facilities are often designed on a very low budget. Efficient spatial organization is the key to keeping costs down and making sure that the budget does not compromise the usability of the facility.

Guidelines:

- Group related social and recreation spaces together to increase interaction between activity areas, promote vicarious participation, and increase casual socialization.

- Separate non-compatible uses. In senior centers, it is particularly important to separate noisy activities from areas where conversation takes place.

- The spatial organization of community centers should provide all users access to stages without requiring the use of steps or stairs.

- Provide restrooms close to social recreation areas that can be used by everyone.

- Design patios, courtyards and terraces as extensions of indoor activity areas so it is easy to move activities outside in good weather. Consider public access to provide a neighborhood amenity.

- Windows should be large and low enough to enable use by everyone whether they are standing or seated.

Figure 4.2f.8. This large patio is directly accessible from the adjacent dining spaces inside, enabling everyone to move outside easily when the weather is good.