



## **Adaptive Equipment Loaner Closets: Considerations and Possibilities for Mobility Aids**

Mobility aids can play a vital role in ensuring that birding is accessible to people with a wide range of mobility disabilities. Adaptive equipment loaner closets offer a way to make these devices available on-site for visitors who need extra support while exploring outdoor spaces. However, it is important to recognize that not all mobility devices are one-size-fits-all, and not all devices are appropriate for every person or every condition. Below are some important considerations and possibilities to keep in mind when including mobility aids in an adaptive equipment loaner closet.

### **Types of Mobility Devices and Their Uses**

#### **Manual Mobility Aids:**

- **Rollator Walkers** are ideal for people who can walk but need extra support with balance or need to take breaks while moving. Rollators with seats, strong brakes, and storage are versatile and helpful for a wide range of users.
- **Seat Canes** can be a great lightweight option for individuals who walk short distances and benefit from rest breaks.
- **Standard Walkers** may work well for individuals with more limited balance or strength, particularly if they are foldable and easy to transport.
- **Manual Wheelchairs** are helpful for short distances and visitors who may not bring their own device but still benefit from wheeled support. However, they may not be suitable for individuals who cannot self-propel or who require customized seating.

for posture or safety.

### **All-Terrain Mobility Devices:**

- **GRIT Freedom Chairs** are lever-driven manual wheelchairs designed for rugged terrain. They can be empowering for users with upper body strength and trunk control, and are well-suited to unpaved trails.
- **TerrainHopper or TracFab Chairs** are powered all-terrain mobility devices. These are ideal for users who cannot self-propel over rough ground, but who can transfer into a different chair and operate a joystick.
- **Beach Wheelchairs** provide access to sand and are typically designed to be pushed by a companion. They are not usable independently.
- **All-Terrain Strollers** can serve older children or adults who do not use standard wheelchairs but benefit from being pushed in a supportive seat.

## **Key Considerations**

### **Customization and Non-Transferability:**

Many people with disabilities use highly customized wheelchairs that are tailored to their individual needs. These might include molded seating systems, tilt or recline features, posture supports, and specific joystick control systems. For users with higher support needs, such as those with advanced multiple sclerosis or spinal cord injuries, transferring to a standard loaner device may not be safe, feasible, or comfortable. Loaner devices are generally not a substitute for a personal mobility aid that provides essential support, skin protection, or positioning assistance.

### **Weight Capacity and Sizing:**

Loaner devices must be selected to support a wide range of body sizes and weights. Weight capacity and seat width are essential for safety, comfort, and dignity. Providing multiple size options and clearly labeling them can help ensure that users can choose what works best for them.

### **Environmental Fit:**

It is essential to consider where the devices will be used. A basic wheelchair or rollator

might be fine on a paved path, but trails with gravel, grass, or uneven terrain may require rugged tires, stability, and other adaptive features. Matching the right mobility aid to the environment is a key part of inclusive access.

### **Transfer Ability:**

Loaner devices are only useful to individuals who can safely transfer into and out of them. Not all wheelchair users can transfer independently or at all. Some require mechanical lifts, transfer boards, or extensive assistance to move between mobility aids. Others rely on their personal devices for safety and function and may not be able to use any loaner equipment.

### **Transporting Devices:**

One major barrier to using adaptive mobility devices is transportation. Most all-terrain wheelchairs and rugged rollators are bulky, heavy, and not easily collapsible, which can make them difficult or impossible to transport in a standard vehicle without specialized equipment or assistance. Renting or borrowing these devices from off-site locations often poses additional challenges, such as needing to pick them up during limited hours, having help to load and unload them, and securing them safely during transport. Because of this, the most effective and equitable way to ensure these devices are truly usable is to have them available **on site**, already in place and ready to go. This removes multiple layers of logistical barriers and allows people with mobility disabilities to participate more fully in birding and nature experiences with ease.

### **Possibilities**

Including a small selection of thoughtfully chosen mobility aids in your adaptive equipment loaner closet can significantly increase access to birding spaces. Start with tools that have the most flexible use cases, such as rugged rollators, adjustable trekking poles, or a Freedom Chair. Engage with local disability communities to learn what is most needed, and seek out funding to expand your offerings slowly.

No single device will meet every need, but thoughtful planning, inclusive design, and community collaboration can create a space where more people can experience the joy of birds and nature.