Universal Design and Assistive Technology

UD is the process of creating products that are usable by as wide a range of people as possible. UD features are integrated into devices, environments, processes, and systems such as architecture, kiosks, telecommunications, restrooms, and other physical elements. Specific examples include door handles, keyboards, telephones, and transportation features that are more inclusive.

Sometimes, even with UD built in, some equipment may not be usable by individuals with different types of disabilities, which warrant consideration to purchase assistive technology (AT) as an accommodation. AT is any item, piece of equipment, or product system, whether acquired commercially off the shelf, modified, or customized, that is used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities.

A key consideration in selecting any type of equipment, especially electronic and information systems, with UD features is the concept of interoperability. Interoperability means that the system is compatible with other technologies and has features that support the integration of AT. Without interoperability, it may be very difficult and time consuming to make changes, increase accessibility, or integrate AT. Working to make interoperability a part of the initial purchasing phase can help eliminate these problems.

> **Tips for Choosing Equipment that Includes Universal Design Features**

The following list provides ideas for consideration when selecting AT devices with UD features:

1) Consider equipment that has UD features integrated into its design.

2) Assess new and emerging electronic and information systems for interoperability with AT.

3) Evaluate whether the equipment can be maintained easily.

4) Evaluate whether the equipment can be upgraded easily.

5) Determine if the system can be used by a majority of the individual.