



# Accessible Events Guide

Jesse C. Suter (June 24, 2020)

## Table of Contents

<b>Why have accessible events?</b> .....	<b>2</b>
To Promote Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion .....	2
It is the Law .....	2
Accessibility Helps Everyone .....	2
<b>What are common accessibility considerations?</b> .....	<b>3</b>
A Few Basics .....	3
Mobility .....	3
Cognitive, Developmental, and Hidden Disabilities .....	3
Hearing .....	4
Vision .....	4
<b>What should you do before the event?</b> .....	<b>4</b>
Site selection .....	4
Technology and software selection .....	5
Advertising, flyers, event website .....	5
Registration and accommodation requests .....	6
Program and schedule .....	6
Expectations for conference staff, presenters, and vendors .....	6
<b>What should you do during the event?</b> .....	<b>6</b>
On-Site Support .....	6
Presentations .....	7
<b>What should you do after the event?</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>Resources</b> .....	<b>8</b>
Basic Information and Etiquette .....	8
Accessible Language, Websites, and Documents .....	8
Event Planning for Accessibility .....	8
Examples from Higher Education .....	9

# Why have accessible events?

## To Promote Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Disability is a natural part of human diversity. 1 in 4 adults in the U.S. (61 million people) have a disability ([Okoro et al., 2016](#)). People with disabilities are discriminated against. This is called *ableism* ([Olson, 2019](#)). Not sure if something is ableist? Ask yourself if it would be okay to do or say about race, gender, or for a non-disabled person ([George, 2019](#)). Remember there is also great diversity among people with disabilities ([Pulrang, 2020](#)).



## It is the Law

Discrimination against people with disabilities is against the law. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act must be followed by schools, colleges, and universities. This includes all programs and activities (e.g., events), not just for students and classes ([Office of Civil Rights US Department of Education, 2020](#)).



## Accessibility Helps Everyone

An *accommodation* is a change made for people with disabilities. Some accommodations are helpful for everyone. For example, ramps are important for people using wheelchairs and parents with baby strollers. Similarly, providing presentation content before a training can help people with intellectual disabilities and others to prepare. [Universal Design](#) is a strategy to make a space accessible to everyone. [Universal Design for Learning](#) is a framework for improve teaching to meet diverse learners' needs.



CLEARING A PATH FOR PEOPLE WITH SPECIAL NEEDS CLEARS THE PATH FOR EVERYONE!

# What are common accessibility considerations?

## A Few Basics<sup>1</sup>

- Plan your event with people with disabilities. “Nothing About Us Without Us” is the main slogan for disability rights ([Charlton, 2000](#)).
- Start early. Creating accessible events takes knowledge, skills, and resources. See Resources section at end of guide.
- Use respectful language and avoid outdated terms. For many this means [people-first language](#) (“person with a disability”). For others this means identity-first language (“Autistic person” [Brown, 2011](#)).
- Always ask before you help. Do not assume someone with a disability needs your help. And respond positively when requests are made.
- Do not make assumptions. People with disabilities are the best judge of what they can and cannot do.
- Speak directly to person with a disability, not to companion or interpreter.



## Mobility

- 14% of adults have serious difficulty walking or climbing stairs ([Okoro et al., 2016](#)). They may or may not use a wheelchair.
- Accessibility of the environment is important (e.g., entrances, doors, halls, spaces between tables, walkways, stages, ramps, height of podium).
- Consider spaces outside event (e.g., transportation, hotel, restaurants).

## Cognitive, Developmental, and Hidden Disabilities

- 11% have serious difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions ([Okoro et al., 2016](#)).
- Provide clear information. Use [plain language](#).
- People may have chemical or sensory sensitivities. Fragrance-free events, natural lighting, and quiet break rooms can be helpful for accessibility.

<sup>1</sup> Many from [Disability Etiquette: Tips on Interacting With People With Disabilities](#) (United Spinal Association, 2015)

## Hearing

- 6% are Deaf or have serious difficulty hearing ([Okoro et al., 2016](#)).
- Ensure all audio (e.g., announcements, presentations, videos) is accessible (e.g., interpreters, captioning, always use microphones).

## Vision

- 4.5% blind or have serious difficulty seeing ([Okoro et al., 2016](#)).
- Ensure all visual information (e.g., signs, schedules, PowerPoint) is accessible (e.g., accessible digital versions of written information, read aloud text on slides, describe visuals, use large print and high contrast fonts, good lighting).

## What should you do before the event?

Accessibility and accommodations should be considered for each step of event planning. Here are a few considerations and questions to ask.

### Site selection

For events at your university, you learn about the accessibility features of different spaces you could use. For off-campus events, you should always ask about accessibility. In both cases you can often learn a lot more by visiting the location yourself and walking through the space with an [accessibility checklist like this one from Arizona University](#).



- How will attendees receive information about the site and directions?
- Is transportation to the site accessible?
- Where is accessible parking? How can they get from parking to the accessible entrance? Is the accessible entrance welcoming, or could it be considered disrespectful (e.g., main entrance is not accessible, ramp at loading dock)?
- What is the accessible route from the entrance to your event? Will the registration desk be accessible for all?
- Will any barriers need to be removed? Where will signs and people be most helpful to help with the accessible route?
- Will people with disabilities be able to participate fully by attending performances, activities, exhibits, break-out rooms, etc?

- Will room layouts promote accessibility (see [“Meeting Room Layouts and Considerations” in this guide](#))?
- Will restrooms, concessions, and other amenities be accessible?
- If you are recommending local restaurants or other attractions to your attendees, are they accessible?

## Technology and software selection

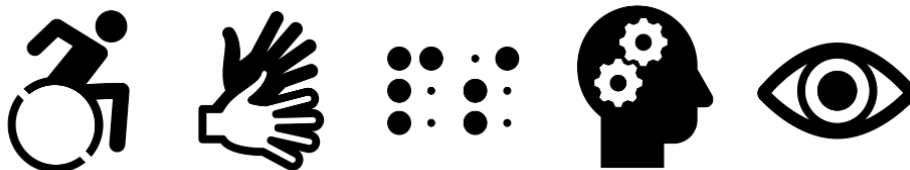
Just as the physical space must be reviewed for accessibility, so should technology, apps, and software that are part of your event. This is true for fully online events or in-person events that require specific software or apps (e.g., CrowdCompass, Eventbrite).



- Is the software or app accessible for people using [screen readers](#)?
- Is the software overly complicated to use?
- Does it rely on images, icons, pictures, or video that someone who is blind could not access?
- Will the text be large enough with enough contrast to be easily viewed?
- Is all audio captioned?
- What alternative formats might be needed for your attendees if the software is not accessible (e.g., print outs, braille, plain language with pictures, large print)?

## Advertising, flyers, event website

- All information about your event (print and digital) should be accessible and share clear information about the accessibility of the event.
- [WebAIM is an excellent resource for creating accessible websites and digital documents.](#)
- Let people know what accessibility features will be available for your event (e.g., American Sign Language interpreters, Communication Access Real-time Translation, fragrance-free).





## Registration and accommodation requests

- Make sure your registration system is accessible (use [WebAIM](#) for website or documents).
- Clearly tell people how to request accommodations and by when. This can be a person to contact or a checklist (see [Cornell University checklist](#) for an example).
- Provide different ways for people to communicate with you before the event (e.g., phone, email, text, social media).
- Follow up with all accommodation requests.
- Ideally registration deadline and accommodation request deadline should be the same.

## Program and schedule

- Is your program and schedule accessible (use [WebAIM](#) for website or documents)?
- Send schedule well in advance of event (see schedule in [Autistic Self Advocacy Network guide](#)).
- Is the time between sessions long enough for people with disabilities affecting mobility?
- Provide digital versions of presentations before the event.

## Expectations for conference staff, presenters, and vendors

- Who are the people helping run the event and what will their roles be for promoting accessibility? Who will lead accessibility efforts?
- What training will they need (e.g., how to give directions, offer assistance, presenting to diverse audiences, using microphones)?
- If they are presenting (e.g., speaking, posters, sharing information at tables) will their presentations be accessible?
- Can you promote accessibility by providing templates or other resources to presenters (see [AUCD presenter guidelines](#))?

## What should you do during the event?

### On-Site Support

- On the day of the event check all routes, accommodations, and other accessibility features. Often there are unexpected and last-minute barriers to accessibility (e.g., locked doors, boxes stacked in hallways, chairs setup too close, microphones with dead batteries).

- Let attendees know what the accessibility features are at your event and how to get support if needed.

## **Presentations**

- There are many good guides online (e.g., [AUCD presenter guidelines](#)).
- Send PowerPoint presentations to attendees ahead of time.
- Make sure text and images are large.
- Less is more. PowerPoint slides are for key points, not presenter notes.
- Designate someone to monitor accommodations during presentation.
- If there is an interpreter, wait for them to be ready before beginning.
- Always face your audience and use a microphone.
- State your name before speaking. Ask attendees to introduce themselves before speaking.
- Give your audience a clear outline.
- If there are opportunities to ask questions or interact, let people know how and when that will happen. Ask people to speak one at a time and wait for the microphone before they start speaking.
- Speak clearly and do not rush. Spell out all acronyms.
- If you present any text, read it for the audience. Avoid directions such as: "I'll let you read this while I talk about..."
- Describe any images, figures, charts, or other visual that provides important information.
- Make sure all video is captioned. Avoid computer generated auto captions as these can be inaccurate and lack punctuation.

## **What should you do after the event?**

- Provide any presentation or event materials in accessible formats.
- Video recordings should be captioned, and pictures described.
- Ask for feedback from your attendees about accessibility of presentations, space, schedule, accommodations, etc.

# Resources

## Basic Information and Etiquette

- [Etiquette: Interacting with People with Disabilities](#) (DC Office of Disability Rights). Want a 4-minute video with tips and some humor?
- [Disability Etiquette: Tips on Interacting With People With Disabilities](#) (United Spinal Association, 2015). Guide for people who want to “interact more effectively with people with disabilities” with basics and recommendations for different types of disabilities.
- [Ableism 101: What it is, what it looks like, and what we can do to fix it](#) (Olson, 2019).
- [Universal Design for Learning in Higher Education](#)
- [Episode 18: Accessibility & the ADA](#) (Disability Visibility Podcast, 2018). Like podcasts? Here’s a brief (30 min) episode about accessibility and the Americans with Disabilities Act with Lia Seth and Dara Baldwin. They talk about experiences at a few events.

## Accessible Language, Websites, and Documents

- [Plain Language](#) (Green Mountain Self-Advocates, 2019). This resource includes a recorded webinar, simple checklist, and other resources.
- [Web Accessibility in Mind](#) (WebAIM). Great website for making sure your website, PowerPoint, Word, and PDF documents meet accessibility standards. Trainings are also available.
- [Word and PowerPoint Accessibility Evaluation Checklist](#) (WebAIM). Online guide explaining how to use Microsoft Office built-in accessibility checker.
- [Web Accessibility Evaluation Tool](#) (WebAIM). Type in your website address to see how accessible your website is and what you may need to fix.
- [PAVE](#) (ICT Accessibility Lab). Upload a PDF (max 5MB) to check its accessibility. Corrections can be made online.

## Event Planning for Accessibility

- [Holding Inclusive Events: A Guide to Accessible Event Planning](#) (Autistic Self Advocacy Network, 2019).
- [20 Tips for a More Accessible Event](#) (McKinley, 2018). Tips start with site selection to supporting attendees during the event.
- [Accessible Meetings, Events, & Conferences](#) (ADA Hospitality, n.d.). Comprehensive online guide with search feature to find specifics fast.



- [A Planning Guide for Making Temporary Events Accessible to People with Disabilities](#) (ADA National Network, 2015). Comprehensive guide on event accessibility. Need to know if putting posters in hallway leaves space for wheelchair access? Grab your measuring tape and this guide.
- [Ensuring Virtual Events Are Accessible for All](#) (Appelbaum & Ascher, 2020). *RespectAbility* created this brief guide during COVID-19 pandemic to improve accessibility of online meetings and events.
- [Presenter Guidelines: Accessibility & Inclusion](#) (Association of University Centers on Disabilities). AUCD hosts an annual conference on disability and inclusion and expects all presenters to follow these accessibility guidelines.

### **Examples from Higher Education**

- [A Guide to Planning Inclusive Events, Seminars, and Activities at Syracuse University](#)
- [Arizona University A Guide to Planning Accessible and Inclusive Events](#)
- [Cornell Accessible Meeting and Event Checklist](#)
- [Oregon State University Accessible Event Planning](#)