What is this guide?
This guide has the instructions to set up accessible events and conferences. Accessible means people can fully participate in conferences. Accessible event planning includes four steps. These four steps are universal design, physical accessibility, sensory accessibility, and cognitive accessibility.

Here is what each of these steps means:

**Universal Design**

- Universal design means everyone can go and take part at an event. Physical accessibility, sensory accessibility, and cognitive accessibility must happen for everyone to take part.
  
  - **Physical Accessibility:** The space has no problems for wheelchair users and people with vision disabilities
  
  - **Sensory Accessibility:** The event is safe for people with allergies. There are accommodations for people who are Blind, Deaf, or hard of hearing.
  
  - **Cognitive Accessibility:** Give clear information about the event. Provide all material in different formats and plain language. Let people know what to expect in advance.
  
  - Accept and deal with accessibility needs that are different from yours.

This guide includes an accessibility checklist and a sample accommodations form.
Physical Accessibility

All physical space used for the conference can be used by everybody. This includes hotels, elevators, and conference room.

**Examples of physical accessibility include:**

**Doors/Entrances**

- Signs with braille that say the names of buildings, room numbers, and where accessible entrances and elevators are
- Main entrances have wheelchair accessible ramps
- Working entrance buttons for wheelchair users
- Wide doors and hallways for wheelchair users
- Clear paths in and around your venue for blind people and wheelchair users
- Accessible elevators that work

**Surrounding Areas**

- No hills around your conference buildings and transportation
- Check for curb ramps that accommodate both wheelchair users and people with vision disabilities (see image at right)
- Restaurants nearby (no more than 5 minutes walking distance)
  - **Weather:** depending on your location, snow and ice during winter can prevent participants from attending your event. Try to schedule your events in the spring, summer, or early fall.
Seating
- Wheelchair accessible activity tables with room for snacks, medications, and session materials
- Chairs with high backs for people with balance issues
- Everyone can see the front of the room
- Accessible seating should be part of the room set up
- Do not separate accessible seating from the group
- Wheelchair accessible public bathrooms should be next to or near training session rooms

Transportation
- Accessible transportation near the location (no more than five minutes walking)
- Have a list of accessible transportation options
  - Bus
  - Taxis
  - Subway
  - Local non-emergency cabulance companies (businesses that offer wheelchair accessible transportation)

Overnight Lodging for Conferences
- Rooms with ADA automatic door opener
- Rooms with enough space for wheelchair users to move around comfortably
- Bathrooms have roll-in showers with a bench
- The beds are high enough for a hoyer lift but low enough for wheelchair users
Sensory Accessibility
There are two types of sensory accessibility:

1. Hearing and visual aids are available (sometimes overlaps with cognitive accessibility)
2. A safe place for people with chemical and light allergies and/or sensitivities.

Examples of hearing, visual, and tactile (sense of touch) accommodations
- Image descriptions for presentations and captioning for videos
- Sound devices for hard-of-hearing attendees
- Microphones
- CART and ASL interpretation
- Alternative formats: braille, digital, easy read (plain language with pictures), large print

Examples of accommodations for chemical and light sensitivities
- Fragrance free policies
- No flash photography policies
- ASL applause (or “flapplause”) instead of clapping
- Noise cancelling ear muffs
- Sensory free rooms
- Working air conditioning
Cognitive Accessibility

Everyone who comes to the event knows what to expect. Everyone knows: 1) What the event is about. 2) The schedule. 3) Where the event is. 4) What accommodations are available.

Examples of cognitive accessibility include:

Detailed Schedules

- Make a schedule for your event available on your website or in emails.
- Send schedules to people in advance of your event.
  - **Conferences**: send schedules that include airport arrival and departure times, training session names, speaker names, and breaks to participants and speakers **at least a month in advance** of your event. People who do not use email receive hard copy schedules.
  - **One-day events**: send a completed schedule/agenda **no later than 2 weeks in advance**.

Information Packets (for Overnight Conferences)

- Accommodations form with a list of accommodations people can request
- Include two types of event schedules: An event schedule and daily schedules (see appendix for example)
- Include information about quiet spaces
- Provide the name, email, and phone number of main contact person for the event
- Provide a list of local medical equipment stores with rental fees (for commodes, hoyer lifts, and other types of equipment event organizers cannot reserve)
- Add a brief note about expectations for support people
- **Note**: information packets should be sent to confirmed participants 3 to 4 months before your conference.
Cognitive Accessibility at the Venue

- Use nametags for everyone.
- Present sessions in different ways. (i.e. written and verbal instructions, visual aids such as photographs, drawings, and charts)
- Schedule many breaks throughout the day. Do not schedule sessions that go beyond an hour and a half.
- Allow people to move around to stim or pace.
- Provide and explain color communication badges.
- Make sure presentations are viewable from different angles.

Conflicting Access Needs

An access need is a support or accommodation a person needs to communicate, learn, and participate fully in an activity. People need different things to participate. Sometimes the needs of two different people conflict. Below are two situations and how to solve them.

Scenario #1: People with low vision need fluorescent lighting. However, people with sensory disabilities have headaches and become anxious with fluorescent lighting.

Possible Solutions:

- Provide high contrast electronic and hard-copy presentation materials for low vision participants in advance
- Allow participants with low vision to bring a personal lamp for tasks
- Use natural light when possible
- Bring light filters if natural lighting is not an option
Scenario #2: A person cannot process speech well. He needs to hear things multiple times to understand them. Another person has a physical disability. She cannot speak well.

Possible Solutions:

• Allow the use of tape recorders for the event so people can hear information many times.

• Allow text-to-speech devices.

• A person with a communication disability may ask a support person’s help. The support person repeats what they said to the group.
# Multi-Day Conference Preparation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>At least 12 months before</th>
<th>6 months before</th>
<th>4 months before</th>
<th>2 to 3 months before</th>
<th>1 month before</th>
<th>2 weeks before</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Develop budget for conference</td>
<td>• Confirm speakers</td>
<td>• Send information packets to confirmed conference goers</td>
<td>• Arrange travel for staff and participants (if applicable)</td>
<td>• Prepare name tags</td>
<td>• Print out training materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Create list of accessible venues</td>
<td>• Finalize conference schedule</td>
<td>• Send agreement form to support staff</td>
<td>• Arrange catering (if applicable)</td>
<td>• Assemble training booklets (at least a month is often needed to produce braille booklets)</td>
<td>• Assemble folders with agenda, list of accessible transportation options, and list of dining options</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Conduct site visits</td>
<td>• Send out applications or nomination packets</td>
<td>• Begin arranging approved accommodations (i.e. CART, ASL, Braille, etc.)</td>
<td>• Create travel arrival schedules</td>
<td>• Do a run through of event with venue</td>
<td>• Do a final site visit to make sure accessible doors and elevators are working</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Select venue and pay deposit</td>
<td>• Prepare or update information packets with accommodation and travel forms</td>
<td>• Continue promoting conference through emails, social media, website posting, and flyers.</td>
<td>• Reserve accessible shuttles (to and from venue)</td>
<td>• Check in with catering services (if applicable)</td>
<td>• Check in with venue about participant and staff arrivals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Reserve at least one large meeting room and one sensory free room</td>
<td>• Create list of medical equipment companies near the venue</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Send travel pick up schedules (if participants are flying in to conference)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Submit proof of insurance if required</td>
<td>• Start promoting conference</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Review drafts of presentations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Contact potential speakers</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
## One Day Events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Before Event</th>
<th>During Event</th>
<th>After Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Date that does not conflict with other major events</td>
<td>• Sign-in area</td>
<td>• Prepare surveys asking for feedback on event (hard copy and email versions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Flyers in plain English with details about event (purpose, location, room number, accommodation requests, etc.)</td>
<td>• Name tags</td>
<td>• Make event materials and video recording available online and through email</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Promote on website, email, social media</td>
<td>• Color communication badges</td>
<td>• Offer to send hard copy materials to event goers who do not have emails</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• ADA parking near meeting spaces</td>
<td>• Agenda in large font with digital format option</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• ADA entrance near meeting spaces</td>
<td>• Presentations and print outs in large font/braille</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• ADA meeting rooms</td>
<td>• Videos with captioning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• ADA bathrooms</td>
<td>• CART during event (funds permitting)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Public transportation nearby</td>
<td>• ASL interpreters visible</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Media equipment set up</td>
<td>• Video record event (ask people permission to appear on camera first)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Accommodation requests (send out form at least a month in advance)</td>
<td>• Accessible seating and tables</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• CART</td>
<td>• Signs for accessible bathrooms and break rooms</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Braille</td>
<td>• Reminder: no flash photography</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Large Print</td>
<td>• Remind people materials will be made available online</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• No flash photography and fragrance free policies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Agenda available in advance</td>
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</table>
Site Visit Check List

Name of Venue: ____________________________

Physical Accessibility: Meeting Rooms and Dining Halls

Classrooms and dining hall are close to our residence hall
Yes ☐ No ☐

*Wheelchair accessible routes
--No major obstructions on path (like *construction* or cobblestones)
--No extremely steep hills for participants with manual wheelchairs
Yes ☐ No ☐

Accessible sidewalks within route (if sidewalk crossing required)
Yes ☐ No ☐

Wheelchair ramps at entrances with signage
Yes ☐ No ☐

Braille signage on doors and other major architectural features
Yes ☐ No ☐

Railing on ramps and stairs
Yes ☐ No ☐

Doors have a functioning ADA-complaint door openers
Yes ☐ No ☐

Doors are wide enough for wheelchair users and easy to open
Yes ☐ No ☐

Working elevators on or near accessible routes
Yes ☐ No ☐

Wide hallways in classroom buildings (see image below)
Yes ☐ No ☐

Wide classroom and dining hall doors (at least 32 inches of clear width, see image below)
Meeting spaces large enough to accommodate wheelchair users comfortably
Yes ☐ No ☐

Clear pathway (at least 36 inches) in the meeting room for wheelchair users
Yes ☐ No ☐

Meeting room has moveable seating to create a more accessible space
Yes ☐ No ☐

Meeting room can accommodate between 30 and 40 people
Yes ☐ No ☐

Wheelchair accessible public restrooms
Yes ☐ No ☐

Physical Accessibility: Lodging

ADA guest rooms and bathrooms have sufficient turning space for wheelchairs
Yes ☐ No ☐
Clear pathway for a wheelchair (at least 36 inches) at least on one side of the bed
Yes ☐  No ☐

Beds are no more than 20 to 23 inches high from the floor to the top of the mattress
Yes ☐  No ☐

The space under the bed is at least 7 inches high for hoyer lifts
Yes ☐  No ☐

Emergency Exit doors at least 32 inches wide
Yes ☐  No ☐

Are ADA accessible rooms located on the first floor?
Yes ☐  No ☐

Restrooms in Guestrooms

Heights of sinks and toilets adjusted for wheelchair users
Yes ☐  No ☐

Grab bars next to the toilet and in the bathtub/shower stall
Yes ☐  No ☐

Bathtub/shower stall includes a bench
Yes ☐  No ☐

Does the venue offer rooms with roll-in showers?
Yes ☐  No ☐
If yes, how many?
1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3+ ☐

Public Transportation

Bus stops are near the venue (5 minutes walking distance or less)
Yes ☐  No ☐

Bus stops are located on flat areas (NOT on slopes or hills)
Yes ☐  No ☐
Public transit buses are wheelchair accessible
Yes ☐ No ☐

Public transit buses near the venue provide late night service
Yes ☐ No ☐

Does the venue have a shuttle system that runs all year (no interrupted service during summer months, for instance)?
Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, are the shuttles wheelchair accessible?
Yes ☐ No ☐

Sensory concerns

Are there different lighting options, such as natural lighting (no florescent lighting!)
Yes ☐ No ☐

Photographers/guests/conference participants have been informed that flash photography is prohibited
Yes ☐ No ☐

Presenters/conference participants/staff are aware that your event is fragrance free
Yes ☐ No ☐
Resources

A Guide to Planning Inclusive Events, Seminars, and Activities at Syracuse University


Beds in Accessible Sleeping Rooms


Accessible Meetings, Events and Conferences Guide

http://www.adahospitality.org/accessible-meetings-events-conferences-guide

A Guide to Planning Accessible Meetings