

# Holding Inclusive Events: A Guide to Accessible Event Planning

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## 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 hooyer 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, hoist 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

At least 12 months before	6 months before	4 months before	2 to 3 months before	1 month before	2 weeks before
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop budget for conference</li> <li>• Create list of accessible venues</li> <li>• Conduct site visits</li> <li>• Select venue and pay deposit</li> <li>• Reserve at least one large meeting room and one sensory free room</li> <li>• Reserve between 3 to 4 accessible rooms for overnight stays</li> <li>• Submit proof of insurance if required</li> <li>• Contact potential speakers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confirm speakers</li> <li>• Finalize conference schedule</li> <li>• Send out applications or nomination packets</li> <li>• Prepare or update information packets with accommodation and travel forms</li> <li>• Create list of medical equipment companies near the venue</li> <li>• Start promoting conference</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Send information packets to confirmed conference goers</li> <li>• Send agreement form to support staff</li> <li>• Begin arranging approved accommodations (i.e. CART, ASL, Braille, etc.)</li> <li>• Continue promoting conference through emails, social media, website posting, and flyers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arrange travel for staff and participants (if applicable)</li> <li>• Arrange catering (if applicable)</li> <li>• Create travel arrival schedules</li> <li>• Reserve accessible shuttles (to and from venue)</li> <li>• Send travel pick up schedules (if participants are flying in to conference)</li> <li>• Review drafts of presentations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prepare name tags</li> <li>• Assemble training booklets (at least a month is often needed to produce braille booklets)</li> <li>• Assemble folders with finalized agenda, list of accessible transportation options, and list of dining options</li> <li>• Check in with venue about participant and staff arrivals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Print out training materials</li> <li>• Assemble folders with agenda, list of accessible transportation options, and list of dining options</li> <li>• Do a run through of event with venue</li> <li>• Check in with catering services (if applicable)</li> <li>• Do a final site visit to make sure accessible doors and elevators are working</li> </ul>

# One Day Events

## Before Event

- Date that does not conflict with other major events
- Flyers in plain English with details about event (purpose, location, room number, accommodation requests, etc.)
- Promote on website, email, social media
- ADA parking near meeting spaces
- ADA entrance near meeting spaces
- ADA meeting rooms
- ADA bathrooms
- Public transportation nearby
- Media equipment set up
- Accommodation requests (send out form at least a month in advance)
- CART
- Braille
- Large Print
- No flash photography and fragrance free policies
- Agenda available in advance

## During Event

- Sign-in area
- Name tags
- Color communication badges
- Agenda in large font with digital format option
- Presentations and print outs in large font/braille
- Videos with captioning
- CART during event (funds permitting)
- ASL interpreters visible
- Video record event (ask people permission to appear on camera first)
- Accessible seating and tables
- Signs for accessible bathrooms and break rooms
- Reminder: no flash photography
- Remind people materials will be made available online

## After Event

- Prepare surveys asking for feedback on event (hard copy and email versions)
- Make event materials and video recording available online and through email
- Offer to send hard copy materials to event goers who do not have emails

# 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)

Yes  No

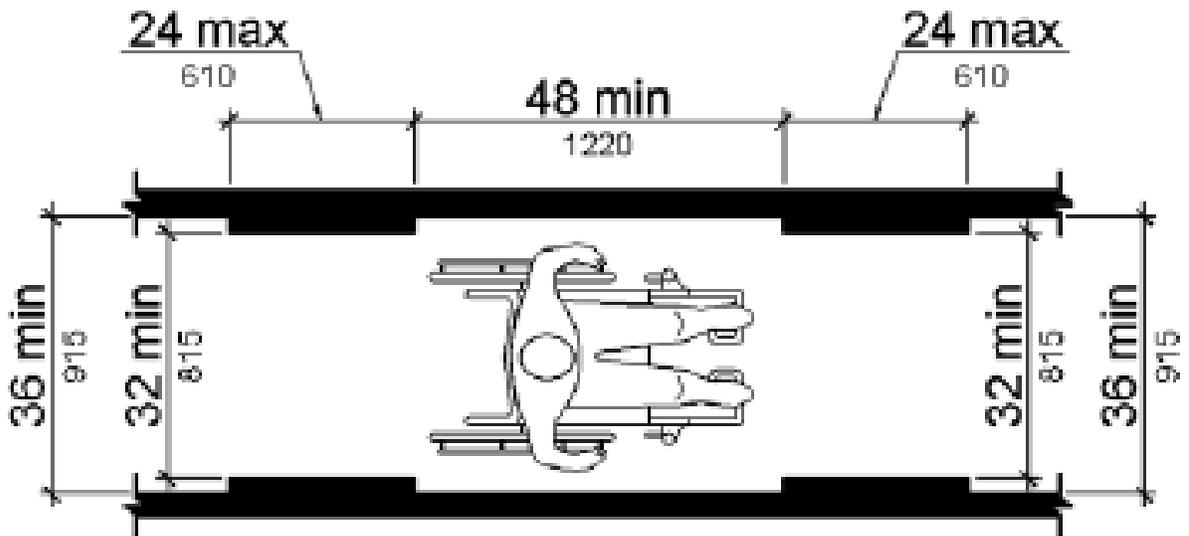


Figure retrieved from [access-board.gov](http://access-board.gov)

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**

[http://sudcc.syr.edu/\\_documents/InclusiveEventsSeminarsGuide.pdf](http://sudcc.syr.edu/_documents/InclusiveEventsSeminarsGuide.pdf)

## **Beds in Accessible Sleeping Rooms**

<http://dredf.org/anprm/beds-in-accessible-sleeping-rooms.shtml>

## **Accessible Meetings, Events and Conferences Guide**

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

## **A Guide to Planning Accessible Meetings**

[http://www.adahospitality.org/accessible-meetings-events-conferences-guide/  
book](http://www.adahospitality.org/accessible-meetings-events-conferences-guide/book)