

Which way in?

HOW TO HOST ACCESSIBLE EVENTS

What a tragedy if people with disabilities couldn't get into a workshop designed just for them. But that does happen. Here's how to avoid such embarrassment.

It can seem difficult to plan for access – there are many things to consider. Having physically accessible venues may be difficult in an area where the choice is limited, but this is not the only factor to consider.

Overall, it's important to think about access issues ahead of time, so as much as possible can be done to make the event accessible.

It's best to set-up an access group with representatives from a variety of Disabled People's Organisations (DPOs) to help you to consider a wide range of perspectives. These discussions need to happen as early as possible – and make sure your budget can accommodate access provisions.

The following guidelines will help you start thinking about some of the key issues. These are designed with large events in mind – such as a conference or workshop. But they can also be adapted to cover any meeting:

EVENT PUBLICITY

1. Publicise your event in places familiar to disabled people such as through local DPOs. Make note of accessible features, and invite people to notify

organisers if they have a disability-related support that isn't listed.

2. Put 'sign-language interpreters available on request' in your advertisements. Make sure you budget for this provision and provide interpreters as needed.
3. Provide interpreters with papers, data etc. in advance so they are prepared.
4. Pay attention to contrast and type size in visual advertisements for people with low vision. Most large print documents should be produced with body text in 18 points type in Arial, or Times New Roman.
5. Some disabled people will require an assistant to attend with them (as a guide, personal assistant or advocate). It's important to take into account these assistants when estimating the number of participants.

EVENT TRANSPORT

1. Choose a venue centrally located and easy for people to reach through public or private transport.
2. For disabled participants, consider arranging transport for them – or through their local DPO to ensure they can get to the venue. Reimburse their taxi fare if public transport isn't an option.

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3. Have someone stand by the main entrance to direct people to the meeting room, and provide support to those who request it.

EVENT PARTICIPATION

1. Make sure the event space is accessible. Check width of doors (at least 36 inches), accessible bathrooms, seating space in event room, wheelchair space, lighting, ambient noise and head-level obstructions.
2. Make sure staff and volunteers know what accessible features are available, their location and how to use them.
3. Ask all presenters and participants what accommodations or modifications they require ahead of time so changes can be made. For example, if a presenter is a wheelchair user, ensure any raised podiums are accessible.
4. Make sure there are no obstructions – such as chairs, tables – blocking major pathways.
5. Prepare alternative formats of materials. For example, provide handouts on CD in Word format. A few copies of the materials should be available in 16-point font for people with low vision.
6. If using sign language interpreters, make sure they're well positioned both to hear what the presenter is saying and to be seen by deaf people in the audience.
7. Ask presenters to read all the information presented in Power Point presentations – or other similar visual aids – to facilitate the participation of people who are visually impaired or are using a sign language interpreter.
8. Allow for individuals to take unscheduled breaks if needed. But also consider the need for regular short breaks (five minutes each hour) when planning the schedule.