

NATIONAL CENTER ON HEALTH, PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND DISABILITY



Discover Inclusive Events

A guide to creating access and inclusion at all events.



Disclaimer:

This toolkit does not ensure ADA compliance. To find standards required by law, please visit [www.ada.gov](https://adata.org/guide/planning-guide-making-temporary-events-accessible-people-disabilities) or other similar documents such as: <https://adata.org/guide/planning-guide-making-temporary-events-accessible-people-disabilities>

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Introduction

Currently, 1 in 4 people in the United States has a disability. That means no matter the size, location or topic of your event you are most likely serving individuals with a disability. The goal of all organizations should be to host inclusive events that allow all individuals, including individuals with a disability, the opportunity to participate fully in the event. However, organizations often define inclusion and accessibility in many different ways, leaving individuals with a disability with an unclear understanding of what will be provided for them and the amount of access they will truly have. This toolkit will provide guidance on how to best serve the needs of all individuals in any event setting.



Framework for Inclusion

1

Introduction

Defining inclusion so that all organizations can foster an environment that provides full participation and equitable experiences for all attendees.

2

Disability Education and Sensitivity

The primary building block for inclusion starts with disability education. This section will cover the core competencies for all staff.

3

Marketing

Effective communication and the right marketing tools are essential for reaching your intended audience.

4

Registration

Registration can set the stage to show individuals just how accessible your event will be.

5

Selecting a Venue

When selecting a venue, it is important to consider how all individuals will both navigate a space and engage in a space.

6

At the Event

Event staff should be prepared to handle any needs that arise. Accessible food service can be a critical component of the event details.

7

Types of Events

Events can include any number of things, such as conferences, sporting events, events that require hotel accommodations and exhibit hall booths.

Introduction



What is Inclusion

This toolkit will provide guidance on how to best serve the needs of all individuals in any event setting. First, we must define inclusion and have an understanding of what it means.

Inclusion means

- To transform communities based on social justice principles in which all community members:
 - Are presumed competent
 - Are recruited and welcomed as valued members of their community
 - Fully participate and learn with their peers; and experience reciprocal social relationships.

Universal Design

Creating an inclusive event means creating an event that is free of barriers, engaging for the broadest audience, and goes beyond Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance to universal design. When hosting an event, the goal should be to foster an environment that provides full participation and equitable experiences for all attendees. Planning committees should include individuals with a disability and/or members from local disability organizations. Examples of disability organizations could include Centers for Independent Living, Special Olympics, Autism Society and others. It is also important that your committee has cross-disability representation.



"The design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design."

-Ron Mace

Disability Education and Sensitivity

Core Competencies for All Staff

As host, you must ensure that you are addressing inclusion in all areas, including the knowledge and education of your staff. All staff, regardless of whether they will have direct or indirect contact with attendees, should have a solid foundation of effective and accessible communication. This is a primary building block of inclusion. What is said and how it is said can have a significant impact on attendees at any event.

Person First

Person-first language is a way of speaking about people with disabilities that refers to the person first and not their disability. Its goal is to ensure that individuals are seen as just that and not their disability or their diagnosis. An example would be a person who uses a wheelchair versus a Down's person, or a handicapped individual.

**Individuals
with a
disability**

Identity First

The other way to refer to someone is to use identity-first language. For many, leading with the disability validates who they are as a person and their disability. To be clear, this does not include leading with a diagnosis or a mobility device but simply affirming an identifier for that person. Talking about being a “disabled person” is fundamentally empowering because it acknowledges that their disability is a fundamental part of who they are.

**Disabled
people**

Avoid

People with disability are unique and do not all carry the same opinion and may prefer to use different language. Moreover, you should always avoid euphemisms that no one appreciates, such as “differently-abled,” “handicapable,” and other similar terms. Another guaranteed “no, no” is the use of negative phrases such as wheelchair bound, suffers from, victim of, and confined to. While not only derogatory in use, they most likely aren't true. For example, a wheelchair could provide someone with access and freedom as opposed to feeling confined. Educating all staff about appropriate language should be a top priority. This is especially true in how you speak about people with a disability in all of your marketing and advertising materials.

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Disability Specific Competencies



General

First and foremost, relax and be yourself. Treat all individuals in an age-appropriate manner and in a way that you would want to be treated. It is okay to ask if someone needs assistance with something, but allow them to answer and respect their answer if they say no. If a person has an interpreter or caretaker with them, be sure to speak directly to the individual and not their interpreter or caretaker.



Vision Loss

- Individuals with vision loss or blindness can have any level of vision, and not all adaptations will be the same.
- Be sure to announce when you are entering and leaving a conversation. Call the individual by name whenever possible so they are aware you are talking to them.
- Individuals with vision loss may use a cane or service animal, and both are always permitted to accompany them. However, if a person requires direction, never initiate touch; instead, allow the individual to take your offered arm.
- Educate all staff to offer to read any materials that haven't been offered in alternate formats, such as menu items or check-in documents.



Hearing Loss

- Individuals with hearing loss or deafness may have any level of hearing, and not all adaptations will be the same.
- All staff should be trained to confirm that any communication made is effective. For example, most individuals do not read lips, and it is best.
- Practice checking for comprehension by asking follow-up questions.
- If a person is deaf, there is no need to yell, speak louder, or alter your voice in any way.
- All staff, particularly any check-in or registration staff, should know how to use Telecommunications Relay services or TRS. TRS is a free service that works by using an operator to relay messages back and forth. You can access TRS by dialing 711.
- It is important to note: All staff should be trained that if they receive a call and the caller says "Hello, this is the relay service . . ." they should not hang up! The event may also need to provide an assistive listening device and educate staff on its use.

Disability Specific Competencies



Mobility Disabilities

- Mobility disabilities are often the most recognized due to the use of mobility devices; however, each individual is unique, and their preferences or needs may vary.
- A mobility device is a personal item. Never touch or move a mobility device without asking. It is also never appropriate to ask someone if you can remove their mobility device from their location. For example, if an individual chooses to sit in a provided chair, it is not okay to ask if you can move their wheelchair, walker, or other assistive device to another part of the room.
- If the placement of a mobility device beside an offered chair would cause a blocked aisleway or other complication, it is your responsibility to plan accordingly ahead of time and not place the responsibility on the user.
- All staff should be knowledgeable of accessible entrances, restrooms, and paths of travel. Appropriate signage should also be used to allow an individual with a mobility device the ability to navigate the space independently.



Intellectual Disabilities

- Individuals with an intellectual disability may need more time to think or process instructions. Allow them extra time to do so without added distractions and with due respect.
- Be sure to limit directions to one step at a time and model or provide examples whenever possible.
- Remember to treat an adult as an adult and never talk down to someone or treat them like a child if they are not.

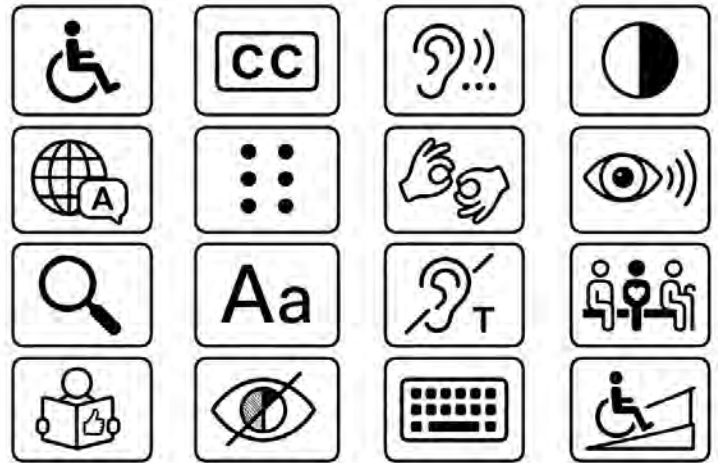


Invisible Disabilities

- Some disabilities may not be obvious or visible. Regardless, all staff should be trained to treat all people with an equal amount of respect and provide accommodations.
- The use of Universal Design principles benefits all users and should be implemented whenever possible. Examples of universal design principles include larger print, the use of more than one mode of delivery, such as written and verbal, and the use of clear, simple directions.

Marketing

In marketing, effective communication is vital. Without proper descriptions, imaging and text, campaigns may prove futile in certain communities. Marketing materials are the first impression given to your audience. You want to make all individuals feel invited and welcome at your event, and inclusive marketing materials can leave a great first impression. Appropriate accessibility symbols should be used to indicate services that will be provided. The use of multiple delivery forms will be most effective in getting the word out to the largest community. Below you will find a list of best practices when designing an inclusive marketing campaign.



Principles of Inclusion

- 1 in 4 messages should feature and carry a message relevant to people with disability.
- Flyers/ Posters should use inclusive imagery.
- Use Sans Serif fonts.
- Use high-contrast colors such as black and white.
- Avoid busy backgrounds and text over images.
- Use large print. At least 16-point font.
- List what accommodations will be provided.
- Provide alternate formats such as Braille or audio.
- Avoid italics and fancy fonts.
- Avoid the use of all capital letters. Check grade level and readability ratings.
- If a PDF, check for screen reader accessibility.
- Provide appropriate captions, text, and audio descriptions.
- Avoid animations and flashy content.
- Provide accessible electronic formats.
- Consult web accessibility resources, such as www.webaim.org or www.section508.gov.

For more information on effective communication click [here](#).

Registration

The registration process and associated paperwork can be very telling of an organization's readiness to serve individuals with a disability. It is important to be clear and specific about any accommodations that will be provided or that can be requested. The more information delivered upfront, the more confident individuals will be of the services you provide. After stating what is provided, ask what other accommodations may be needed.

Example Statement 1

An example statement could be: "We strive to host inclusive, accessible events that enable all individuals, including individuals with disabilities, to engage fully. Please note that our event space is physically accessible. To be respectful of those with allergies and environmental sensitivities, we ask that you please refrain from wearing strong fragrances. To request an accommodation or for inquiries about accessibility, please contact (name, email, phone)."



Example Statement 2

Provide a list of available accommodations. Please check which of the following accommodations you would like to request at our meeting:

- Interpreter services- please indicate what kind (ASL, Cued Speech, Deaf-Blind interpretation, other)
- Assistive listening device
- Captioning reserved
- Front row seat
- Large print
- Advance copy of slides to be projected; wheelchair access
- Wheelchair access to working tables throughout room
- Scent-free room
- Lactation room
- Gender neutral bathroom
- Diet restrictions.
- Other

It's very important that you plan for accommodations well in advance, especially for those that require additional personnel or significant time, such as sign language interpretation or the creation of Braille materials.

Providing Directions

When providing an address and directions to your event be sure to include the location of accessible parking and paths of travel. You may also need to include directions from public transportation. Directions should include specific names or room numbers of the space you will be in. Registration is also a good time to disclose of any triggers that might be present at the event. For example, will there be use of loud buzzers or fireworks. Registration forms should also be provided in alternate formats including large print. If registration will take place in-person, the number of accommodations you are able to provide may become limited. If this is the case, be sure to provide the most inclusive environment from the start. Registration tables should be at standard heights (34 inches or lower) with an option to sit and fill out any paperwork requested. Staff should also be on hand to provide assistance in filling out paperwork or reading through it.

Selecting a Venue

The details and specifics of a venue can make or break the accessibility of an event and consequently the attendance of individuals with a disability. There are many things to consider when selecting a location. Choosing a venue presents another opportunity to partner with the disability community. One critical step you can't take is to conduct an accessibility survey with people with disabilities and/or disability advocates. This section will cover the basics when it comes to site selection both inside and outside a facility and will be divided into two sections: navigating the space and engaging in the space.



Access: Navigating a Space

You should expect the same standard of excellence from your vendors as you do for your own team; access and inclusion should always be a part of that standard. One of the first steps in selecting an event venue should be to note access to the event. Are individuals able to take public transportation to the event? Are there sidewalks around the event location that are accessible? Are there accessible parking spots, including a van accessible spot that leads to an accessible path of travel to the main entrance?

It is never acceptable to expect individuals who use a mobility device to enter a separate entrance from the rest of the guests. There should be clear accessible signage from the parking lot throughout the facility. Signage should indicate accessible paths of travel, names or numbers of buildings and rooms, the location of accessible restrooms, and the location of accessible emergency safe spaces and more.

The venue must offer ADA-compliant accessible restrooms on the same floor and within a reasonable distance from the meeting space. The meeting space must offer options for an individual who uses a mobility device to choose to participate. Chairs should be removed from numerous locations in different areas of the room to allow an individual who uses a mobility device to self-select where they would like to sit. There should also be extra space next to different seating areas for an individual who uses a mobility device to be able to transfer to a stationary chair and still have space for another individual to pass by.

Inclusion: On Stage

If your event requires the use of a stage, make sure that the stage is accessible with a ramp and/or handrail for assistance. If you are hosting a panel on the stage, consider having all your panel members sit if one panel member is sitting. Make sure that there is space on a stage for a person who uses a mobility device to be able to turn around and maneuver. If a stand or podium will be used on stage or on floor level, it should have the ability to raise and lower so an individual of any stature could use it comfortably; this includes individuals who use a wheelchair. They should not be hidden by the stand or made to position themselves beside it. The use of latex balloons should be prohibited.



Selecting a Venue

All participants should be given every opportunity to equally engage in the event space. This will require the event host to make extra considerations when preparing the space. While visiting and deciding on an event space, this is an important time to include your inclusive planning committee to ensure the space will work for all.

Set the Stage: Engaging in a Space

As you design or prepare your meeting space, include more than visual engagement. Provide tactile or audio descriptions for displayed materials, and place items such as whiteboards, tables and refreshments at accessible heights.

Keep ambient noise to a minimum and require speakers to use microphones. Do not ask attendees whether they can hear without one, as this may require individuals to disclose personal information. If a venue does not have a sound system, consider a portable speaker and provide seating near the speaker for people with hearing loss.

Arrange Communication Access Real-Time Translation (CART), or real-time captioning, and American Sign Language (ASL) interpretation when needed. These services should be secured in advance, with a clear written process for requesting accommodations. Assistive listening devices should also be available through the venue or rental.

Consider providing a quiet space away from the main activity with options such as noise-cancelling headphones or sensory supports.

Finally, check the space after setup to ensure it remains accessible for guests who use mobility devices. Furniture, equipment and other additions can unintentionally block accessible routes, so a final accessibility check is an important last step.

At the Event

Event Hosts

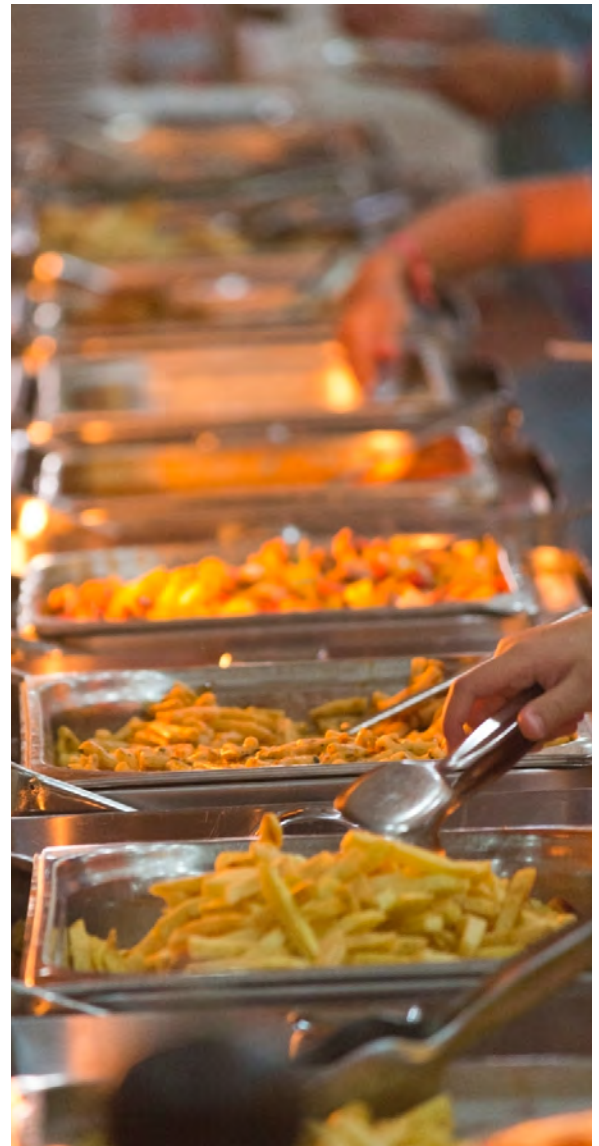
Once participants arrive at your event, you and your staff will need to be prepared to handle any accessibility needs that arise in a timely manner. Staff should be available for questions and assistance throughout the meeting. While all staff should be knowledgeable about the accommodations, it may be helpful to designate one person or a team of people as accommodation specialist and indicate their role with a name tag or badge. These specialists may assist in providing direction, acquiring needed materials, providing assistive listening devices, or answering questions. Be sure your staff is proactive in asking if any assistance is needed. If any doors require more than 5 pounds of pressure to open, be sure to keep them open or station someone at the door at all times to assist with opening and closing the door.

Food Service

Catering/ Meals

There are a number of items to consider maintaining accessibility if food will be offered at your event. First, it is important to always provide access to water regardless of whether food will be served or not. Some people are more prone to dehydration and need continual access to water. Always offer seated options at any meal. If high-top tables are offered, low-top tables must also be available. When serving food buffet style, you should set the food out to allow individuals to be as independent as they chose to be. This includes but is not limited to:

- Set the food at a height that is able to be reached by all individuals.
- Allow space between food options for individuals to place their plates down so they don't have to hold their plate while also trying to serve themselves.
- Make sure drink canisters are raised so individuals can put their cups down while filling them.
- Make sure any levers are large enough to be used independently by individuals with minimal dexterity.
- Label all foods with large-print, clear-to-read signage.
- Provide information on common allergens.
- Provide straws.
- Make sure plastic or silverware is not sealed in plastic but open and easy to access.
- Provide pre-cut food options, such as sliced apples or cubed meat, to assist fine motor skills.
- Avoid soup as it can be difficult to serve and/or carry. However, it is okay to serve soup if there is table service.
- Avoid long tablecloths as they can be a tripping hazard or get stuck in wheels.



While acceptable, buffet-style service can be difficult for many individuals. Be sure to provide servers to assist attendees when needed. Serving assistants may need to describe items, read menus, reach for food, or carry drinks and plates to the table. They should also ask if individuals need help with things like opening products, buttering an item, or anything that requires fine motor skills like cutting or stirring. For individuals who are blind, servers should be stationed at each item to describe the food and place the item on their plate. The plate should then be handed to the next server in line.

Types of Events

Conferences, Speakers, Performances

If there is an agenda for your event, make sure to stick with it. Many people rely on those breaks for personal hygiene needs. Make sure there are multiple options for individuals who use assistive devices to sit and that they are not all segregated to one section.

When expecting participation from the crowd, you should reconsider asking individuals to stand for any portion of the event. Not only are some individuals unable to stand, but seated individuals will no longer be able to see. Instead, you could ask individuals to raise a hand or provide an accessible form of participation like virtual surveys.

The same can be said of taking standing or walking breaks. Instead, they can be referred to as moving breaks. If presentations will be given, require all presenters to turn in the materials early so they can be delivered to individuals who use assistive devices like screen readers ahead of time.

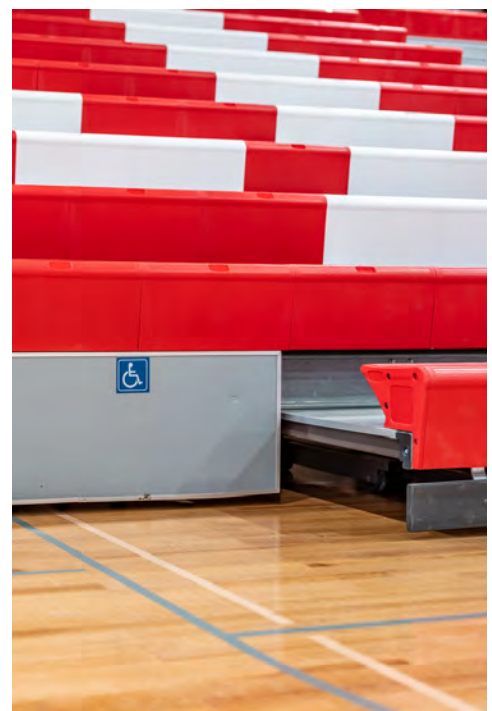


Sporting Events

Just like any other event, both participants and spectators may have a disability; therefore, it is important to consider the accessibility needs of all involved. A sensory room or designated quiet space could be very beneficial for events that have large crowds and/or loud noises or buzzers. This area should be set up apart from the crowds and noises.

Inside the space should be noise cancelling headphones, sensory items such as balls with different textures, and mats should someone need to lie down. Sporting events that rely on the use of a buzzer, gun, or whistle should also have corresponding hand gestures. Closed captioning or assistive listening devices should be available whenever possible.

Accessible restrooms and port-a-potties must be provided on an accessible path. Spectator viewing options should be available and accessible for individuals who use a mobility device. They should not be expected to sit alone unaccompanied by a friend or family member. These should be located throughout the viewing area and not off to the side or in one general location.



Overnight Events with Hotel Accommodations

Before recommending a hotel as the host site, take an in-person tour to note any accessibility issues. This could be yet another exercise you could do in partnership with a disability organization such as a Center for Independent Living (CIL). Local disability advocates may even be able to tell you the best hotels and venues to hold an event since they often have to look for accessible meeting spaces or lodging themselves. If guests will be staying at the hotel, you need to ensure that the hotel has enough accessible rooms. Not only in number but in the layout of the room itself. You may need to work with hotel staff to see if they are willing to work with different scenarios, such as removing a box spring for lower transfer surfaces or removing extra furniture from a room for better mobility throughout the space.



It is also important to make sure the hotel staff is educated on disability language and etiquette. If guests with a disability will be asked to access anything or experience the event any differently than other guests, then you should look for another host hotel. Examples could include using a different entrance, having to take an alternative route, or not being able to access any of the hotel's features. If a free shuttle is offered, be sure to ensure it is accessible and allows individuals who use a mobility device to board.

Booths

First and foremost, make sure your booth is accessible. Tables should be at standard height and not intended for standing. Materials should be placed at a level everyone can access. If individuals need to enter your booth, be sure to provide at least 36 inches of clear path and a five-foot diameter to turn around if needed. Materials should be offered in alternate formats, including large print. Staff should be available to answer any questions, assist in reaching any items, or to read and describe any materials that are out.

Additional Resources

The National Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Network has a vast array of resources related to accessible temporary events. You can view their guide to temporary events at <https://adata.org/guide/planning-guide-making-temporary-events-accessible-people-disabilities> or contact your Regional ADA Center at 1-800-949-4232 or www.adata.org.

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