

Disability-Accessible Conference and Event Planning Checklist

This checklist is designed to support the planning and delivery of inclusive, accessible, and welcoming conferences and events. It reflects best practices for physical, digital, communication, and sensory access and is intended to help planners proactively identify and reduce barriers to participation. Meaningful inclusion requires actively engaging people with disabilities in the planning, design, and evaluation of events to ensure lived experience informs accessibility decisions. Because every event and every participant has unique needs, this checklist is meant to serve as a flexible guide rather than a one-size-fits-all solution. Accessibility is an ongoing commitment that, when approached thoughtfully and in partnership with participants, improves the overall quality and impact of an event.

BEFORE THE EVENT

1. Registration & Communication

Accessible registration and communication set the foundation for an inclusive conference. When information is shared in multiple accessible formats and on multiple platforms, participants can make informed decisions, request necessary accommodations, and feel confident that accessibility is a priority. Clear labeling, materials in advance, and designated accessibility contacts reduce barriers, prevent last-minute crises, and signal respect for diverse communication needs.

Communication Considerations

- ☐ Include a clear accessibility commitment statement in all event promotions and registration materials (e.g., commitment to ADA compliance and inclusive participation).
- ☐ Provide event information in multiple accessible formats (accessible PDF, Word, HTML, plain language).
- ☐ Include a fragrance-reduction or fragrance-free guidance statement to support participants with chemical sensitivities.
- ☐ Clearly identify an accessibility contact (name, email, and phone) responsible for accommodation requests.
- ☐ Ensure all communications meet [WCAG 2.2](#) guidelines, including alt text for images and meaningful link labels.
- ☐ Share materials via accessible platforms (e.g., Google Drive, Dropbox, Microsoft OneDrive/SharePoint) with proper permissions. Key considerations include screen reader support, accessibility checkers, and adherence to ADA and WCAG guidelines.
- ☐ Label shared files consistently (session number, speaker's last name, presentation title) for screen-reader navigation.
- ☐ Offer an electronic bulletin board or message hub for accessible announcements.
- ☐ Provide accessible slide submission guidelines to presenters (contrast, font size, alt text), [Accessibility Guidelines](#).
- ☐ Include an agenda and venue map with registration confirmation.
- ☐ Share accessible transportation and lodging options in advance. [Section 2- Ensuring Accessible Accommodation and Travel](#).

Registration Forms / Website

- ☐ Ensure online forms are screen-reader compatible (JAWS, NVDA, VoiceOver) and keyboard navigable.
 - ☐ Minimize visual clutter and avoid time-limited form sessions.
 - ☐ Include clear accommodation request fields.
 - ☐ Ask participants their preferred contact method for accommodation follow-up (email, phone, text).
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2. List of Available Accommodations

Providing a clear, written list of available accommodations ensures transparency, consistency, and equity. When participants know what accommodations are available—and how to request them—they are more likely to attend and fully participate. This section helps planners anticipate needs, allocate resources responsibly, and meet both legal and ethical accessibility obligations while remaining flexible for late or emerging requests.

- ☐ Publish a written list of available accommodations, request instructions, and deadlines (while accepting late requests when feasible).

Communication & Physical Accommodations

- ☐ Sign language interpretation (ASL, Cued Speech, Deaf-Blind, as requested)
- ☐ CART / real-time captioning services
- ☐ Assistive listening systems (ALS) with spare batteries
- ☐ Advance access to presentation materials
- ☐ Lactation room access
- ☐ Gender-neutral and accessible restrooms
- ☐ Wheelchair-accessible seating integrated throughout
- ☐ Wheelchair access to working tables and exhibitor areas
- ☐ Sensory accommodations (quiet rooms, lighting adjustments)
- ☐ Service animal relief area

Dietary & Environmental Accommodations

- ☐ Dietary restrictions and food allergies accommodated
 - ☐ All food items clearly labeled with allergens
 - ☐ Food service options available upon request
 - ☐ Fragrance-reduction guidance reinforced
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3. Venue Considerations

The physical environment directly affects who can participate and how independently they can navigate the event. Thoughtful venue planning ensures that individuals using mobility aids, service animals, interpreters, or sensory supports can move safely and comfortably throughout the space. Addressing exterior access, interior circulation, restrooms, lighting, and emergency evacuation procedures reduces physical, sensory, and safety barriers for all attendees.



Exterior Access

- ☐ Venue located near accessible transit, hotels, and dining; transportation connects all locations
- ☐ Exterior signage is clearly visible and well-lit
- ☐ ADA-required number of accessible parking spaces, including van-accessible spaces, located closest to the entrance. [Accessible Parking Spaces](#).
- ☐ Firm, slip-resistant parking surfaces
- ☐ Curb cuts or level access from the parking area to the main entrance
- ☐ Continuous accessible route from parking/drop-off to entrance (≥ 36 in wide)
- ☐ Ramps meet ADA requirements ($\leq 1:12$ slope, ≥ 36 in wide, handrails where required)
- ☐ No temporary barriers (construction, cords, uneven surfaces)
- ☐ Door clear width: ≥ 32 in (815 mm) when open 90°
- ☐ Door hardware: operable with one hand, no tight grasping, pinching, or twisting; operating force ≤ 5 lb (interior).
- ☐ Door Thresholds: $\leq 1/2$ in (13 mm); if $> 1/4$ in, must be beveled (1:2)

Interior Access

Entrances and Lobbies

- ☐ Entrances and lobbies are well-lit
- ☐ Clear, high-contrast directional signage provided

Elevators

- ☐ Controls within reach range (15–48 in) with Braille and tactile markings
- ☐ Audible and visual floor indicators
- ☐ Sufficient interior turning space for wheelchairs

Interior Considerations

Meeting and Conference Rooms

- ☐ Meeting room is large enough for circulation and seating for participants who use a mobility aid.
- ☐ Wheelchair seating options throughout with companion seating immediately adjacent.
- ☐ 36-inch aisles, minimum 48 inches preferred for high-traffic areas
- ☐ Tables between 28–34 inches high. Knee clearance: 27 in high min, 30 in wide, 19 in deep
- ☐ Exhibitor booths include reachable materials (reach range 15–48 inches)
- ☐ Worktable/registration table height: 28–34 in
- ☐ Provide ramp or lift to stage; ramp slope $\leq 1:12$, width ≥ 36 in
- ☐ Accessible podium available
- ☐ Space is well-lit for sign language interpretation.
- ☐ Adjustable lighting and window coverings to reduce glare and enhance contrast.
- ☐ Accessible emergency exit near the main conference room
- ☐ Carpet securely attached, low pile ($\leq 1/2$ in), and firm backing; avoid busy patterns.

Restrooms

- ☐ Door clear width: ≥ 32 in; hardware operable without tight grasping.
- ☐ Clearance around the toilet provides a 60-inch turning space
- ☐ Grab bars: 33–36 inches above floor
- ☐ Toilet seat height 17–19 inches
- ☐ Sink height 34 inches max with knee clearance 27 in high min; faucets operable without tight grasping
- ☐ Pipes insulated to prevent contact burns
- ☐ Mirror bottom edge: ≤ 40 in above floor.
- ☐ Provide at least one gender-neutral restroom with an accessible stall

Lactation Room, Service Animal Relief Area & Sensory Rooms

- ☐ Lactation room: private, lockable, seating and outlet available, and an adjacent accessible route.
- ☐ Service animal relief area in proximity. Ensure the location is communicated.
- ☐ Designated accessible sensory room with low noise and lighting with reduced sensory input

Venue Lighting

- ☐ Ensure event room lighting is adequate and non-glaring.
- ☐ Avoid strobing or flickering lights

Hotels and Lodging

- ☐ Identify accessible lodging options [Accessible Lodging](#)
- ☐ Accessible transportation to/from airports and venues.

Vendor Services to Consider

- ☐ ASL Interpreters
- ☐ CART captioning
- ☐ Braille transcription

[Communicating Effectively with People With Disabilities](#)



4. Language & Interaction

Respectful language and interaction practices help create a welcoming, dignified environment. Using current, disability-inclusive language and training staff to interact appropriately reduces stigma, avoids harm, and supports positive participant experiences. This section reinforces that accessibility is not only physical or technical—it is also cultural and relational.

- ☐ Use respectful, current disability-inclusive language, avoiding stereotypes, euphemisms, and deficit-based phrasing. [Communicating About People With Disabilities](#).
- ☐ Ensure verbal and written communications follow plain-language principles. [Plain Language Principles](#)
- ☐ Staff and volunteers use respectful, disability-inclusive language and speak directly to participants
- ☐ Assistance is offered politely and provided only after consent, respecting individual preferences
- ☐ Communication is clear and accessible (appropriate pacing, verbal descriptions when needed)
- ☐ Accessibility concerns are acknowledged promptly, with staff knowing how and where to escalate for support

5. Staff & Volunteer Training

Well-trained staff and volunteers are essential to delivering accessibility in practice. Clear guidance on how to offer assistance, give directions, describe environments, and support participants during meals or transitions ensures consistent, respectful support across the event. Ongoing education helps staff respond confidently, appropriately, and inclusively to a wide range of needs.

- ☐ Staff and volunteers receive basic training on disability awareness, respectful interaction, and inclusive communication practices
- ☐ Staff understand how to appropriately offer assistance, respect personal autonomy, and respond to individual access preferences
- ☐ Roles related to accessibility are clearly defined, including who to contact and how to escalate accessibility concerns during the event
- ☐ Staff and volunteers are familiar with the location and purpose of key accessibility features (accessible entrances, restrooms, quiet rooms, interpreters, service-animal relief areas).

6. Information Sharing (Pre-Event)

Advance information empowers participants to plan effectively and reduces uncertainty and anxiety. Sharing maps, transportation details, session locations, accessibility contacts, and presenter guidance allows attendees to prepare supports, manage energy levels, and navigate the conference independently. This proactive approach increases participation and minimizes on-site barriers.

Venue Navigation

- ☐ Share accessible venue maps (digital, large print, braille upon request)
- ☐ Provide written map descriptions
- ☐ Confirm session locations and accessibility features in advance
- ☐ Identify key locations (keynote, meals, exhibits, service animal relief)

Transportation & Dining

- ☐ Accessible transit options listed with estimated costs
- ☐ Shuttle schedules shared in advance
- ☐ Restaurant accessibility and Braille menu availability noted

Presenter Guidance

- ☐ Slides are uncluttered, high contrast, and readable
- ☐ All videos captioned and transcribed
- ☐ Visual content verbally described during presentations

DURING THE EVENT

1. Venue Navigation

Clear, accessible navigation supports independence and reduces reliance on assistance. High-contrast signage, consistent font choices, accessible room placement, and clear communication about service animal relief areas help participants move confidently through the venue. Good wayfinding benefits everyone, especially first-time attendees and those with visual or cognitive disabilities.

- ☐ Provide clear, high-contrast signage in large print and Braille at key decision points (entrances, elevators, meeting rooms)
- ☐ Use consistent, sans-serif fonts and simple language across all signage and wayfinding materials
- ☐ Position meeting rooms, registration, and core event spaces close together to minimize travel distance and fatigue
- ☐ Clearly communicate locations of accessible restrooms, elevators, quiet rooms, and service-animal relief areas
- ☐ Ensure event staff are stationed in high-traffic areas to assist with directions as needed



2. Exhibit Hall & Poster Sessions

Exhibit spaces often present unique accessibility challenges due to crowding and layout barriers. Ensuring adequate aisle widths, turning space, reachable materials, and accessible formats allows participants to explore exhibits without barriers. Accessible maps and staff support further promote equitable access to information and networking opportunities.

- ☐ Maintain clear aisle widths of at least 36 inches throughout the exhibit area (60 inches preferred in high-traffic or turning areas)
 - ☐ Provide ample turning space (60-inch diameter) at aisle intersections and near popular displays
 - ☐ Ensure display and poster materials are within reachable heights, with key information positioned between 15–48 inches from the floor
 - ☐ Make exhibit content available in accessible formats, including QR codes linking to accessible digital materials (screen-reader compatible PDFs, HTML pages)
 - ☐ Provide large-print or alternate-format summaries of posters upon request
 - ☐ Ensure cords, rugs, and equipment do not create tripping or navigation hazards
 - ☐ Assign staff or volunteers to the exhibit hall to assist with navigation, reading materials, or accessing digital content upon request
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3. Presentation Access

Accessible presentations ensure that content is usable by participants with diverse communication, sensory, and mobility needs. Maintaining clear aisles, providing real-time captioning, and ensuring microphone access support full participation. This section focuses on removing physical, sensory, and communication barriers so all attendees can engage equally in sessions.

- ☐ Maintain a minimum 36-inch clear aisle width throughout all meeting rooms to support mobility access
 - ☐ Ensure real-time captioning (CART) is provided and visible for all sessions
 - ☐ Require microphones for all speakers and audience questions, regardless of room size
 - ☐ Verify that captioning screens, interpreters, and presenters are clearly visible from all seating areas
 - ☐ Confirm presenters follow accessible practices, including describing visual content aloud and utilizing accessibility features
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4. Name Tags

Accessible name tags support communication, connection, and a sense of belonging. Large, high-contrast text, clear organization, and pronoun inclusion help participants identify one another easily, including those with low vision or cognitive disabilities. Thoughtful badge design also assists staff and fosters respectful social interaction.

- ☐ Use large, high-contrast, sans-serif text that is easy to read at a distance
- ☐ Include first names prominently, with optional pronouns offered
- ☐ Organize name tags alphabetically, with staff or volunteers available to assist with pickup

5. Participant Experience

Accessibility should be supported throughout the entire event, not only during presentations. Providing intentional support during transitions, meals, networking, and informal moments helps participants manage sensory needs, fatigue, and navigation, and ensures all attendees can engage comfortably and confidently.

- ☐ Ensure interpreters and captioning displays are consistently visible in all applicable settings, including large gatherings and plenaries
 - ☐ Display real-time captioning clearly and ensure it remains active during discussion and Q&A
 - ☐ Offer verbal descriptions of room layouts, transitions, and key environmental changes, especially at the start of sessions
 - ☐ Provide verbal descriptions of meals and clearly identify food allergens and options
 - ☐ Offer a remote-sighted or navigation assistance option for participants who may benefit from additional wayfinding support
 - ☐ Make space for optional social-connection or community engagement opportunities, clearly identifying accessible ways to participate
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6. Presenter Communication

Presenter practices play a critical role in accessibility and significantly shape whether participants can fully understand and engage with content. Clear verbal communication, inclusive language, accessible visuals, and thoughtfully prepared materials help ensure presentations are usable by all in attendance. This section emphasizes shared responsibility among presenters to support equitable access for all attendees.

- ☐ Begin each presentation with a brief self-description, including name, role, and visual description (as appropriate)
- ☐ State slide titles and headings aloud to support participants who cannot see the screen
- ☐ Provide clear verbal descriptions of all visual content, including images, charts, graphs, and demonstrations
- ☐ Use plain, inclusive language, avoiding exclusionary phrases, idioms, or unexplained acronyms
- ☐ Ensure slides follow accessible design practices (high contrast, minimal text, readable fonts)
- ☐ Have available large-print handouts (18-point or larger) and accessible digital versions
- ☐ Make braille or alternate formats available upon request with advance notice
- ☐ Speak at a clear, moderate pace and use microphones consistently, even in smaller rooms
- ☐ Speak directly to attendees when working with interpreters or captioners—not to the interpreter
- ☐ Allow time for captioning and interpretation lag, especially during Q&A
- ☐ Adjust lighting as needed to balance screen visibility and line-of-sight for interpreters
- ☐ Ensure all videos are captioned and audio-described when visual information is not otherwise conveyed
- ☐ Identify a technical support contact for presenters to address accessibility-related issues during sessions

AFTER THE EVENT

1. Follow-Up with Attendees

Accessible and inclusive follow-up ensures that all participants have an equal opportunity to share feedback, ask follow-up questions, and remain connected after the event. Providing accessible communication channels and evaluation tools allows people with disabilities to reflect on their experience and offer valuable insights. Thoughtful follow-up is essential for accountability, relationship-building, and improving accessibility in future events.

- ☐ Provide accessible contact information (email and phone) for post-event questions, feedback, or accommodation-related concerns
 - ☐ Send an accessible post-conference survey that meets digital accessibility standards
 - ☐ Include a mix of multiple-choice and open-ended questions to capture both quantitative data and personal experiences
 - ☐ Ask specific questions about accessibility and accommodations, including what worked well and what could be improved
 - ☐ Offer multiple ways to provide feedback (survey, email, phone call, or voice note)
 - ☐ Share post-event materials (recordings, slides, summaries) in accessible formats
 - ☐ Communicate clearly about how feedback will be reviewed and used to inform future events
 - ☐ Follow up individually, when appropriate, with attendees who requested accommodations to ensure needs were met
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2. Reflect & Improve

Intentional reflection allows organizations to move beyond compliance toward continuous improvement. Reviewing accessibility efforts, documenting lessons learned, and centering participant feedback help identify successes, gaps, and opportunities for growth. This process strengthens future event planning, builds institutional knowledge, and reinforces a long-term commitment to accessibility.

- ☐ Conduct a post-event review of accessibility efforts, including logistics, communication, accommodations, and participant experience
- ☐ Review attendee feedback and accommodation requests to identify patterns, barriers, and unmet needs
- ☐ Identify specific areas for improvement and prioritize actionable changes for future events
- ☐ Document lessons learned, effective practices, and challenges for internal reference
- ☐ Update checklists, templates, and planning processes based on findings
- ☐ Share key insights and recommendations with internal teams, leadership, and planning partners
- ☐ When appropriate, share successes and lessons learned with peers or community partners to support broader accessibility learning



3. Professional Development

Accessibility is an evolving practice that benefits from continuous learning and reflection. Staying informed about current standards, engaging in disability-informed training, and collaborating with peers and disability-led organizations help planners strengthen their skills, adapt to emerging best practices, and design more inclusive events over time.

- ☐ Stay informed about current accessibility standards and guidance (e.g., ADA, WCAG, inclusive event practices)
 - ☐ Participate in accessibility-focused trainings, workshops, or webinars on a regular basis
 - ☐ Seek out learning opportunities led by people with disabilities and disability-led organizations
 - ☐ Collaborate with peers and partners to share strategies, challenges, and solutions related to event accessibility
 - ☐ Incorporate lessons learned from past events into ongoing professional development goals
 - ☐ Allocate time and resources for accessibility skill-building as part of event planning roles
 - ☐ Encourage staff, volunteers, and presenters to engage in ongoing accessibility education
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Key Resources

ADA National Network – Accessible Events Guide

Practical guidance resource providing recommendations, checklists, and technical assistance to support accessible meetings, conferences, and any type of temporary events under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

<https://adata.org/guide/planning-guide-making-temporary-events-accessible-people-disabilities>

Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.2 – W3C

International technical guidelines outlining requirements and success criteria for making websites, digital platforms, and electronic materials accessible to people with disabilities. <https://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG22/>

Section 508 Standards -Creating Accessible Digital Products

Guides for creating accessible digital products, such as Word documents, websites, presentations, social media posts, and other virtual platforms that meet federal accessibility standards <https://www.section508.gov/create/>

Accessible Lodging Fact Sheet – ADA National Network

Educational fact sheet explaining accessibility requirements and considerations for hotels and lodging facilities, including accessible guest rooms, amenities, and reservations. <https://adata.org/factsheet/accessible-lodging>

Accessible Conference Guide – SIGACCESS

Conference planning guide offering practical strategies and considerations for creating inclusive, accessible academic and professional conferences.

<https://www.sigaccess.org/welcome-to-sigaccess/resources/accessible-conference-guide/>

Conference Accessibility Resources

General compilation of tools and best practices to support accessibility planning across all stages of conference and event design, including physical, digital, and communication access.

<https://zeroproject.org/tools/conference-accessibility>