Event Accessibility Guide

Disability:IN Minnesota offers participating employers resources for hiring candidates with disabilities, information on disability issues and topics, and recognition for best disability employment practices. To support its participating employers, partners, and sponsors in maximizing accessibility and inclusion when hosting member events, Disability:IN Minnesota recommends the following criteria when planning a disability inclusion event.

Introduction

What is "Accessibility?"

According the U.S. Office of Civil Rights, "'Accessibility' means a person with a disability is afforded the opportunity to acquire the same information, engage in the same interactions, and enjoy the same services as a person without a disability in an equally effective and equally integrated manner, with substantially equivalent ease of use. The person with a disability must be able to obtain the information as fully, equally and independently as a person without a disability."

Accessibility is the degree to which a product, device, program, service, resource, or environment is available to a given user. For example, if a building has a wheelchair ramp leading to its main entrance, that entrance is accessible to wheelchair users. If a lecture includes sign language interpreters, that lecture is accessible to attendees who are deaf or hard of hearing and who understand sign language. If an in-person event requires participants to wear a mask, that event is accessible to immunocompromised individuals.[1]

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[1] https://academicaccessibility.virginia.edu/what-does-accessibility-mean

What is the difference between "accessibility" and "accommodations?"

"Accessibility" is *proactive* and strives to remove barriers *during the design stage* of an event, program, or service.

"Accommodation" is *reactive* and strives to remove barriers caused by inaccessible design. This ensures people with disabilities have the same access as people without disabilities.[2]

In other words, accessibility *precedes* accommodations. Accessibility is facilitated during the planning process to create an inclusive environment for all. Accommodations happen in response to inaccessibility to eliminate barriers, often upon request.

Inaccessible design excludes people.

Accommodations give access to whomever is there at the moment. They often require extra work.

Accessible design means that current and future viewers will have access, without extra work.

Image Source: [University of Minnesota Accessible U](#)

Image Description: Three (3) variations of an illustration showing three (3) individuals watching a soccer game from behind a fence. From left to right:
1. "Inaccessible design excludes people:" Each individual is standing on a wooden box peering over a solid wooden fence. Two (2) out of three (3) individuals are able to see the game. The shorter individual is unable to access a view of the game due to the height of the fence.
2. "Accommodations give access to whomever is there at the moment. They often require extra work:." The wooden boxes have been redistributed and rearranged. The two (2) shorter individuals are standing on either one (1) or two (2) wooden boxes peering over a solid wooden fence. All participants can view the game from the same height.
3. "Accessible design means that current and future viewers will have access, without extra work:" All wooden boxes have been eliminated from the illustration. Each participant is standing on the ground, each a different height. All participants are able view the game from various heights because the fence was changed to a chain link (see-through) fence.

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[2] https://accessible.wisc.edu/guides/accessibility-vs-accommodation/

Planning an Inclusive Event

[Universal Design](#) aims to create an accessible and inclusive environment for all. Including a short "Accessibility Note" in the event invitation that describes what accessibility features are built-in to the venue or virtual platform (i.e. "Wheelchair accessible bathrooms, masks required, size-friendly seating, closed captioning available, etc.) is a helpful best practice so community members know what to expect and/or ask for.

Including accommodations in event registration

Ask participants what they need prior to the event. To increase access and generate dialogue, event organizers may invite registrants to submit accommodation requests in advance. **As a best practice, meeting hosts may ask registrants to share their access needs through the event RSVP form to get a sense of what additional accommodations your audience needs in order to participate.** For example, including a question such as "Do you need any accommodations to participate in this event? If yes, please describe." Providing an email address for accessibility questions is recommended.

Incorporating accessibility into the event design and experience

To help ensure your event is as inclusive and accessible to as many people as possible, including people with apparent and [non-apparent disabilities](#), Disability:IN Minnesota recommends considering the following accessibility features during the planning process:

___ [Assistive listening devices](#) (ALD)
___ American Sign Language (ASL) Interpretation
___ [Remote access](#)
___ [Live captioning](#)
___ Reserved front row seat
___ Acoustics and Speaker amplification
___ Large print
___ Advance copy of slides to be projected
___ Accessible parking
___ Wheelchair access

___ Wheelchair access to working tables throughout room
___ Wheelchair accessible bathrooms
___ [Size-friendly seating](#)
___ [Low-scent or Fragrance-free space](#)
___ Lactation room
___ [Sensory room](#)
___ [Sensory fidgets available](#)
___ [Gender neutral bathroom](#)
___ Space for Service Animals
___ Diet Restrictions (i.e. vegetarian, vegan, gluten-free, dairy-free, Halal, or Kosher options)
___ Universal masking requirements and other measures to mitigate risk of contracting airborne illnesses[3]

Planning inclusive & accessible events in the era of COVID-19

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), COVID-19 is an airborne virus that can cause severe illness or death and continues to evolve in unpredictable patterns. Unlike the common cold and flu, COVID-19 is not a "seasonal" illness, but rather surges year-round.[4]

People with disabilities, elderly people, and others with certain medical conditions are disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 and are high-risk of severe outcomes of the illness.[5]

Planning a virtual or hybrid event that includes the option to join online increases access for disabled people, high-risk groups, and others who may not be able to participate in person. See Harvard University's Guide for [Hosting Accessible Hybrid Meetings](#).

Hosting Accessible In-Person Events

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[3] This checklist was drawn and developed from Cornell University's [Accessible Meeting and Event page](#)
[4] https://www.cdc.gov/ncird/whats-new/covid-19-can-surge-throughout-the-year
[5] https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-with-medical-conditions

To reduce the spread of COVID-19 and other airborne illnesses, the CDC promotes mask wearing to protect yourself and others from infectious diseases.[6] Numerous studies show the effectiveness of universal mask-wearing to prevent community spread of COVID-19.[7] Research shows that 60 percent of transmissions occur from asymptomatic carriers.[8] Universal mask requirements make in-person events safer and more accessible to immunocompromised/high-risk community members because masking works two-ways to protect the wearer as well as the people around them.[9]

Additionally, requiring masks at your event helps break the stigma associated with disability. Some individuals may not feel comfortable disclosing their disability or medical condition by way of wearing a mask. Mask requirements and compliance is a way to increase safety for all participants while showing respect, welcome, and support for those who do not have the privilege of unmasking in public settings.

Research shows that KN95 and N95+ respirators are most effective at preventing the spread of COVID-19.[10] Having high-quality masks available at the door is a best practice when implementing mask requirements.

At times, access needs may conflict, and some people are unable to wear a mask due to a physical or medical condition. Mask requirements increase safety for those who are unable to wear a mask due to a disability. Incorporating language such as "Masks are required unless it is an access barrier," is an option to accommodate varying needs.

Additional resources for planning an inclusive event

- Cornell University's Accessible Meeting and Event Checklist
- University of Wisconsin's Accessibility Guides
- Job Accommodation Network (JAN)'s Accessibility, Accommodation and Compliance Guide

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[6] https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/publicppe/community-ppe.html
[7] https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2776536
[8] https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2774707
[9] https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/publicppe/community-ppe.html
[10] ama-assn.org/delivering-care/public-health/what-doctors-wish-patients-knew-about-wearing-n95-masks

- Job Accommodation Network (JAN)'s [Universal Design in the Workplace Guide](#)
- University of Buffalo, Center for InclusiveDesign and Environmental Access (IDEA)'s [Universal Design Guide](#)