

Accessible Events

Creating an accessible event at a university involves thoughtful planning to ensure inclusivity for all attendees, including those with disabilities. It is the responsibility of the department hosting the event to ensure that it is accessible. Here are some tips to help you:

1. Venue Selection:



- **Accessibility Audit:** Conduct a thorough accessibility audit of potential venues. Check for wheelchair ramps, elevators, accessible parking, accessible doors, and accessible restrooms.



- **Room Setup:** Ensure rooms are spacious enough for wheelchair maneuverability and have adjustable seating options.



- **Communication:** Clearly communicate the accessibility features of the venue in event invitations and promotional materials. For example: Location of elevators and accessible routes to and from locations.



2. Promotion and Registration:



- **Accessible Formats:** Provide event information in accessible formats such as HTML emails, plain text, and Word documents.



- **RSVP Options:** Offer multiple ways for attendees to RSVP, including online forms, email, and phone calls. Do not include a QR code as the only method for RSVPing.



- **Accommodation Requests:** Provide space on your registration form or on the event invitation for people to identify if they have any accommodations or special requests.



- **Detailed Information:** If the attendee selects “Yes”, provide a text box where they can specify their needs. This could include requests for meeting them at the entrance, assistive technology, software, wheelchair or other accommodations.



- **Follow-up:** Ensure there is a process in place to review these requests and follow up with attendees for further clarification if needed. This proactive approach can help ensure all attendees can fully engage with the event.



- **Provide a Contact for Accessibility:** Alternatively, include contact information (e.g. phone number and e-mail address) so that attendees can contact the event coordinator with their accommodation requests. Indicate a date by which a request for accommodation must be made to ensure the service is available in time.

- **Social Media Accessibility:** Use alt text for images on social media and ensure that all posted videos are captioned. ** See: Formatting Materials

3. Event Materials:



- **Accessible formats:** Provide event programs and handouts in accessible formats such as electronic copies, large print, and Braille. Consider making materials available in advance upon request to persons with disabilities.



Encourage and support presenters to offer copies of their material in different formats before their presentation starts.



- **Formatting Materials:** In preparing any websites, emails, hardcopy mailouts, posters and all other promotional/event materials the following basic accessibility principles should be observed: recommended text size is 14 point or larger. The recommended font is a sans serif font such as Arial. Fancy, cursive, small or italic scripts are not accessible. Use high contrast colours – simple use of dark text on light background is preferred. Do not embed essential information, including the name, date, time and location of the event in a graphic. Graphics often cannot be ‘read’ by a screen reader being used by a person with a visual disability.



4. Physical Accessibility:



- **Pathways and Seating:** Keep pathways clear of obstacles and ensure seating areas are accessible for individuals with mobility impairments and service animals.



- **Designated Spaces:** Reserve seating areas for attendees who use wheelchairs or need additional space.



- **Scents and fragrances:** Promote a scent-free environment for all events.



- **Smudging Ceremony:** Confirm whether a smudging ceremony will take place and communicate this in advance to attendees to ensure awareness and accommodation needs are met.



- **Construction:** Connect with the Facilities Department to see if any construction/maintenance work will be happening that may impact the event space or routes leading to the space.

5. Assistive Technology Needs:



- **Computers and Technology:** Ensure computers and other technology used during the event are accessible, with screen reader compatibility and alternative input methods if necessary.



- **Inclusive Registration Form:** Include a question in the registration form that asks, “Do you require any specific technology or tools to enhance your participation in this event?” Provide options for “Yes” and “No”.



- **Detailed Information:** If the attendee selects “Yes”, provide a text box where they can specify their needs. This could include requests for specific assistive technology, software, or other accommodations.



- **Follow-up:** Ensure there is a process in place to review these requests and follow up with attendees for further clarification if needed. This proactive approach can help ensure all attendees can fully engage with the event.

- **Remote Streaming Platform:** Ensure you select an accessible remote streaming platform that is user friendly and adheres to accessibility standards. Platforms such as Microsoft Teams, Zoom, and others come equipped with built-in captioning features.

6. Interpreters and Captioning:



- **Sign Language Interpreters:** Arrange for qualified sign language interpreters if requested. Ensure they are positioned appropriately for visibility.



- **Notes in advance:** Provide interpreters or support persons with materials such as, agendas, presentation outlines, videos, and other supporting materials in advance of the event so they can adequately prepare.



- **Real-Time Captioning:** Provide real-time captioning (auto-captioning may suffice in some cases) services for all audio and video presentations and discussions.

7. Food and Dietary Needs:



- **Menu Planning:** Offer a variety of food options that cater to common dietary restrictions and allergies. (e.g., gluten-free, dairy free, vegetarian, nut-free, and combinations...)



- **Request in Advance:** Give participants the opportunity to request dietary preferences and order enough to include interpreters or support person as

well as staff. Staff may not complete a registration form; ensure you inquire with any staff that will be present at the event.

- **Allergen Information:** Clearly label ingredients and allergens for each food item.

8. Staff Training and Awareness:



- **Disability Etiquette:** Train staff and volunteers on disability etiquette, including how to interact respectfully with attendees with disabilities.
- **Support and Assistance:** Ensure staff are knowledgeable about accessibility features and available to assist attendees as needed.

9. Emergency Preparedness:



- **Emergency Exits:** Ensure that all emergency exits are accessible and clearly marked.



- **Emergency Procedures:** Develop and communicate clear emergency procedures. Make sure these procedures are accessible and understood by all attendees, including those with disabilities.

10. Transportation:



- **Accessible Transportation:** If transportation is provided as part of the event, ensure it is accessible for all attendees. This could include wheelchair-accessible vehicles or shuttles from nearby public transit stations.

11. Speaker and Presentation Accessibility:



- **Microphone Usage:** Encourage all speakers to use microphones, even in small settings, to assist those with hearing impairments.



- **Presentation Slides:** Ask presenters to use high-contrast slides with large text. Also, suggest they describe any visuals or videos for attendees with visual impairments.

12. Feedback and Continuous Improvement:



- **Feedback Mechanisms:** Provide a way for attendees to give feedback on accessibility after the event. Use this feedback to improve future events.

Remember, accessibility is not a one-size-fits-all solution. It's about creating an inclusive environment where everyone feels welcome and can participate fully. Continually seeking feedback and making improvements will help ensure your events are truly accessible.

Resource for creating for diverse learners: <https://designingfordiverselearners.info/>