Planning Accessible Meetings and Events Toolkit

Guidance provided by
Office of Departmental Equal Employment Opportunity (ODEEO)

Overview

- This toolkit is intended to assist entities in planning meetings and events that are accessible to persons with disabilities.

- It provides recommendations and checklists for all phases of a meeting or an event, from choosing the venue to promotion, registration, presentations, materials, social events, meals, and staff and volunteer training. *Note, however, that it is impossible to anticipate every barrier that might limit or preclude participation by a valued member.*

- Because new ideas for improving accessibility and new technologies continue to emerge, **this toolkit should be viewed as a living document that is meant to evolve**.

1 Choosing a Venue

- Physical accessibility of a venue is essential to making a meeting or an event accessible for persons with visual, hearing, and mobility impairments.

- Planners should evaluate the accessibility of the facility itself, as well as the surrounding area. For instance, is the venue located in close proximity to airports, rail stations, taxi or shuttle services, and public transportation routes? Also, are there accessible restaurants, shops, and tourist attractions nearby?

Schedule event venue

- Schedule venue at least 6-months prior to the event

- Contact HUD Broadcast, via email, to access the availability of the Brooke-Mondale Auditorium OR the Lower-level Training Room for specific dates for your event. OR

- Contact various Program Office contacts to reserve their conference/meeting rooms

Plan an on–site visit

- The site visit should consider barriers to those with a wide range of impairments (visual, hearing, mobility, etc.) in all of the areas used including:
  - o Accessibility/availability of parking, hotel shuttles, and public transportation;
  - o Entrances and interior doorways – width, ramps, automatic door openers, etc.;
  - o Signage – location of accessible bathrooms, entrances, etc.;
  - o Corridors, doorways, and aisles – width for wheelchair access, etc.;
  - o Elevators – easy access and adequate numbers;
  - o Meeting rooms – allow for extra room capacity & table space to accommodate wheelchairs & assistance animals. Also allow space for a clear line of sight to the interpreter/captionist from an appropriate number of seats in the audience;
  - o Restrooms;
  - o Dining facilities & catering (including ability to provide for dietary restrictions);
  - o A quiet break space for people and;
  - o Toileting space for assistance animals.

2 Accessible Communication

- Promotional and registration materials are a fundamental avenue for communicating about the accessibility of your meeting or event. Stating in these materials that your meeting or event is accessible is not only essential to drawing persons with disabilities, but also demonstrates your commitment to diversity and inclusion.

- Remember, use people-first language in your materials: a person with a disability rather than a disabled person. The person, not his or her disability, is the focus.

- To further reach attendees with disabilities, identify and contact those organizations that advance the rights of, or are led by, persons with disabilities.

Pre-event Contact (Participants)

- Invite participants to make requests for accommodation on all your communication (registration form, flyers, web pages, e-mails and print).
  - Suggested statement: *"We are committed to providing equal access to this meeting for all participants. If you need alternative formats or other reasonable accommodations, please contact (name of person) at (number) or via email: (email address) with your request by close of business (deadline)."*

Pre-event Contact (Service Providers)

- Contact Interpreter services at least 10 business days in advance. Send Calendar Invite email to: Interpreterservices@HUD.gov. Include in your email invitation the following:
  - What – type of meeting/event
  - Where – location and point of contact information
  - When – time/duration of meeting/event
  - If possible, provide the following information to the interpreters:
    - Agenda;
    - PowerPoint slides; and
    - Handouts/Flyers

- Inform Audio Visual team/Event Producer that captions/ audio description must be turned on if

a participant is deaf, hard of hearing or has a visual disability.

- Ask Event Presenters to describe visual information for participants with visual disabilities

3 Meeting Room Setup

- The consideration for your meeting room layout and design will vary according to the space you choose.

- You need to know how large a space you'll need to accommodate all your attendees. You certainly don't want your guests to feel that they're uncomfortably packed in, but you also don't want the room so large that it appears the crowd is too small. As a general rule of thumb, plan on 10 to 20 square feet per person.

Logistics/ Room Setup

- Contact the Office of Administration's Property Management Branch to provide them with the room layout for the event. Provide this information no EARLIER than two weeks prior to the event.

Accessibility Room Setup Checklist

- Aisles between chairs are 38" or wider and meeting room tables are 36" or higher.
- Provide a ramp to dais/podium if presenter has a physical disability.
- Leave space near the podium/speaking area for sign language interpreters. Reserve seating for participants who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- Remove chairs from various locations in the set up for participants who use wheelchairs.
- Phone access for participants – ensure hearing aid compatible and/or has amplifier and TTY available to participants who are deaf.
- Participant has guide dog – offer bowl of water and provide directions where dog can be walked.

4 Presentations

- Communicate with all speakers/presenters well in advance to ensure that their presentations and materials will be accessible for persons with a wide range of disabilities.

- Building universal design into presentations ensures maximum inclusion and benefits everyone.

Checklist for meeting with event presenter(s):

- Explain both the types of disabilities that attendees have and their requested accommodations. Emphasize that there is not a one-size-fits-all accommodation, and that persons with the same disabilities may have different needs.

- Ask presenters to submit their materials about a month before the meeting or event in order to allow enough time to produce alternative formats, and to provide the materials to interpreters and other service providers and participants.

- Note that the presenters themselves may also have disabilities. Check for the needs of presenters (ramping or podium requests, a reverse interpreter, sighted guide for a person with limited vision, etc.) In fact, diversity should be a factor to consider when selecting presenters. Ask each presenter well in advance whether he or she requires an accommodation.

- Discuss with each presenter prior to the meeting the importance of developing a presentation that will be accessible to all participants.

- Instruct the presenter to include the key points of the presentation on overheads or slides. Be sure they are completely legible, with large print and sharp, contrasting colors. In addition, ask the presenter to limit the number of overheads or other visual aids used in the presentation and to allow adequate time for the audience to read the visual aids.

- Ask the presenter to accompany materials, including presentations and handouts, with a complete verbal description. If slides, overheads, videos or other visual aids are used, the speaker must describe them orally.

5 Meeting Materials

- Ensure that all attendees have equal access to the materials provided so they can fully participate. Accordingly, it is essential to offer all materials in alternative formats. Doing so will not only expand the pool of potential attendees, but also demonstrate your commitment to accessibility.

Registration

- Include in your registration materials a statement that lets attendees know that alternative formats are available upon request. Here is a sample statement:
  - *"The materials are available in alternative formats upon request. Please contact [name, email address, telephone number (including TTY)] by [deadline date]." Or, "The materials are available in alternative formats. Please check the format you need:*

    ☐ *Braille;*
    ☐ *Large Print: Font Size____ ;*
    ☐ *Audio;*
    ☐ *Disk: Format____;*
    ☐ *Other _____.*

  The statement should be in large, sans serif font so that people who need an alternative format will be able to know what is available.

- When setting the deadline for receiving all materials, factor in the time it will take to produce the alternative formats requested.

- Materials provided in a print or an electronic format must be accessible to persons with visual impairments.

- Make electronic versions of materials available in plain text, rich text, or Microsoft Word.

- Avoid PDFs unless they are made accessible.

6 Meals/ Social Functions

- Ensure that meals and social functions, such as receptions, are accessible to persons with disabilities. These networking opportunities can be as important to attendees as the substantive meetings and presentations.

Checklist

- Provide chairs with arms
- Make tables available
- Ensure that tables and bars are at a correct height (28 to 34 inches) for persons using mobility devices
- Avoid fixed seating attached to tables
- Avoid counter-top high tables and chairs
- Ensure adequate room under dining tables for wheelchairs/scooters to roll under
- Ensure sufficient space between seating areas for wheelchairs/scooters
- Ensure sufficient room for everyone to maneuver safely and independently
- Ensure that there is an accessible route of travel to the food and entertainment and between tables
- Avoid seating persons with disabilities in one area or on the fringes of the venue
- Ensure that any entertainment is accessible
- Arrange for accessible transportation
- Avoid self-serve meals or buffets; otherwise, have personal assistants on hand
- Include finger foods that do not require persons to use utensils or hold plates
- Set up more than one food and beverage area
- Account for special dietary needs (gluten-free, sugar-free, vegan, etc.) and clearly mark and place food/beverages on separate platters
- Provide a choice of cutlery and crockery (e.g., straws, lightweight plastic cups and plates)
- Avoid long, billowy tablecloths
- Have personal assistants and interpreters on hand
- Include personal assistants and interpreters in the estimated number of participants

7 Staff/Volunteer Training

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- Staff and volunteers (e.g., readers, notetakers, guides, and personal assistants) are critical to holding an accessible meeting.

- In the planning stage, appoint a point person for accessibility who will be responsible for ensuring that all aspects of the event are accessible. He or she should be listed as the contact on all materials and be the person staff go to with their accessibility questions.

Checklist

- Appoint a point person for accessibility issues and list as contact on all materials

- Contact regional ADA Network Centers for assistance with training

- Train staff/volunteers about accommodations, use of assistive devices, emergency procedures, and accessibility features of the venue and meeting/event

- Hold orientations for staff/volunteers on types of disabilities and disability etiquette

- Hold orientation for attendees with disabilities to review accessibility features, location of meetings/events, and accommodations

- Do a walk-through of the venue a few days before and the day of the meeting/event

- Test all technical equipment when it arrives and the day of the meeting/event

8 Effective, Respectful Communication

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- Communicating with individuals with disabilities should be no different than the same respectful, clear communication deserved by everyone. This is especially important to remember, given that the majority of disabilities are "hidden" or "invisible," i.e., not obvious.

General guidelines for Effective, Respectful Communication…

Every Person

- Treat the person with the same respect that you extend to every person
- Focus on the person, not his or her disability
- Ask each person what will make him or her most comfortable
- Always ask the person if he or she needs assistance and how you can assist; do not assume he or she needs help
- Do not make decisions for the person
- Address the person directly rather than the sign language interpreter, reader, or other access provider

Persons Who Use Wheelchairs/Scooters

- When speaking for more than a few minutes, bend to eye level or pull up a chair
- Never lean on, push, move, or touch the mobility device

Persons Who Are Blind or Have Visual Impairments

- Introduce yourself and others if present
- Ask the person his or her name
- Identify your job or role
- Be descriptive when giving directions
- Avoid using visually-oriented references
- Do not pet or distract service animals
- Walk on the opposite side of the service animal
- Offer your arm if person needs to be guided
- Describe where you are going and any obstacles if you are serving as a guide
- With permission, guide the person's hand to the back of a chair if you offer someone a seat
- Let the person know when you are leaving
- Find a place with good lighting, but not too bright

9 Survey

- Include a survey for attendees to provide their feedback to determine how you did in terms of accessibility.

For instance, How would you rate the accessibility of the:

- Registration Process
- Registration Materials
- On-site Registration
- Accommodations Process
- Promotional Materials
- Website
- Meeting/Event Site
- Hotel Rooms
- Transportation
- Parking
- Meeting/Event Rooms
- Presentations
- Presentation Materials
- Receptions/Social Activities
- Meals

10 Useful Links

- From Various Federal Agencies

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)
http://www.targetcenter.dm.usda.gov

U.S. Centers For Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/hearingloss/transcripts/Making-Meetings-Accessible.pdf

U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT)
https://www.transportation.gov/sites/dot.dev/files/docs/DRC_meetings.doc

U.S. General Services Administration (GSA)
http://www.section508.gov/content/learn/create-accessible-events