



DISABILITY INCLUSION TOOLKIT

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BACKGROUND + PURPOSE

Dear Social Change Makers:

Given the deep inequality faced by disabled people and philanthropy's lack of experience supporting disability, social justice movements have mostly failed to include disabled people as partners, leaders and agents of change. People with disabilities often remain in a laundry list of marginalized groups to be targeted rather than a powerful community to engage, organize and advocate with. Most social justice and human rights organizations have little experience or expertise to advance disability inclusion in their organizing or policy work.

It is with this reality in mind that we share the Disability Inclusion Toolkit, commissioned by the Ford Foundation's Civic Engagement & Government (CEG) program. This toolkit, written and designed by key leaders in the disability community, Mia Ives Rublee (writer) and Andraéa LaVant (copy editor & designer) provides key resources to help social justice organizations advance disability inclusion in their work. Through a series of interviews with a set of CEG grantee partners, Mia Ives-Rublee sought to explore and understand their organizational capacity needs around disability inclusion.

These conversations, coupled with Mia's expertise in disability inclusion led to the development of a toolkit that focuses on disability 101 materials (definitions & language guidelines) and guidance on accessible in-person and virtual events, social media, and disability inclusive employment practices from recruitment to retention. While this knowledge building project prioritized the patterns and needs that came out of the conversations with CEG's partners, the CEG team recognized that this information could be useful to other non-disability groups. Therefore, we pivoted our dissemination strategy to ensure that this toolkit serves as a public good to any organization that can benefit from the tools, tips, and guidance offered in these pages.

Reasonable Accommodations Process

People with disabilities are a diverse group of individuals with varying needs. There is no one-size fits all accessibility approach, which is why this toolkit emphasizes the need to create pathways for people to share their access needs and solicit feedback to identify areas of improvement. With this understanding in mind, we share that this toolkit is 508 compliant, meaning that it is screen reader compatible for individuals who are low vision, blind, and/or require a screen reader due to physical, intellectual and/or developmental disabilities. We recognize that it may not meet the needs of some people with disabilities, for example those who require plain language materials. As we seek to model disability inclusion in our grantmaking and internal practices, we want to fully disclose the limitations of this toolkit.

INTRODUCTION TO DISABILITY INCLUSION

By Mia Ives-Rublee

On September 12, 2016, Ford Foundation President Darren Walker committed the Ford Foundation to work on disability justice and inclusion. His essay titled, “Ignorance is the enemy within: On the power of our privilege, and the privilege of our power” discussed how disabled leaders in the community helped show him his own ignorance on the topic and explained the need to commit to ensuring the disability community is fully included in equal rights and justice work. Since then, the Ford Foundation has reached out to numerous leaders in the disability community to help them map out a plan to be more inclusive of our community.

The Ford Foundation’s Civic Engagement & Government (CEG) program requested I create a toolkit to increase their grantees’ understanding of how to increase disability inclusion within their programmatic work and/or organizational practice by using a disability justice lens. This was a significant request, as disability inclusion in its previous forms have never been enough to help tear down all the barriers keeping disabled people from participating in civic engagement organizations.

Disability inclusion, in its original form, often relied heavily on the medical model and charity framework of disability. It saw disabled people like me as broken individuals that needed fixing and that any inclusion-focused activities were acts of charity. It devalued what a person like me could contribute by leaving us out of decision making processes and only seeing us as passive objects with no perspectives on how we want to be included.

This toolkit discredits those models and emphasizes the importance of including disabled people throughout the process of organizational change. An organization must commit to welcoming disabled people to participate throughout their organization and ensuring we are able to actively contribute. People with disabilities must be included in planning and leadership roles.



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ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

In order to become more disability inclusive, organizations will need to cycle through systemic changes to break down the intentional and unintentional barriers that have historically kept disabled people from participating. Think of organizational change like a ferris wheel (see a more detailed version here):



Organizational change is a never ending cycle of identifying, committing, evaluating, researching, creating, implementing, and reviewing. After reviewing, organizations will go back to identifying issues and cycle through the process again. In essence, there will always be room to improve and no organization should remain static.

The Cycle

- 1 Organizations should always begin by identifying the change they would like to see. Your organization has taken the first step just by deciding to review this toolkit.
- 2 An organization's leadership must commit to this change. Without this commitment, an organization will remain rudderless as they will have significant difficulties implementing the policy changes needed to make their organization more friendly to disabled people.
- 3 Leadership and staff should review organizational policies. An organization may choose to do a full review of all its policies or it may target just a few to get started.



ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

4

Seek input from disabled experts. It's important to include disabled people throughout the process. However, it is especially important to include them as you begin to think about creating new policies. Disabled experts can be staff members, disability inclusion contractors, policy experts, board members, and volunteers who have disabilities. It is good to get someone with a disability to help. It is even better to get a disability expert who has a better understanding around a wider variety of disabilities, ensuring your policies are as inclusive as possible.

5

With the help of your disabled experts, use this toolkit to help your organization work on improving its policies to make them more disability included. This toolkit includes introductory and more advanced guides on improving an organization's policies around event planning and employment. It also includes introductory guides for being more disability inclusive in social media and disability-specific language guidelines.

6

Evaluate! It is always important to evaluate to see the progress your organization has made. This toolkit includes two surveys, a workplace disability climate survey and an accessible event survey.

7

Do it all over again!

FINAL THOUGHTS

Working on improving disability inclusion in organizations can be challenging, but very satisfying work. Use this toolkit to help guide you. But also use your disabled inclusion experts, disabled community members, and research to help grow your arsenal of tools to become more inclusive. You may run into barriers, especially when trying to find disabled experts, employees, and participants. Understand that disabled people still face numerous barriers and trust issues when it comes to interacting with non-disabled people. It may take time to build enough trust so that more disabled people come out to participate in your events, volunteer, and apply for your jobs. All the work your organization puts towards disability inclusion will go a long way and the disability community will react positively to your dedication and persistence.

If you have any questions about the toolkit, please contact Claribel Vidal at c.vidal@fordfoundation.org.



Disability Inclusion Diagram of Change



A GUIDE TO DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT

Hiring disabled employees is one of the best ways to build a disability inclusive organization. People with disabilities are a highly untapped resource and can significantly improve organizational diversity and outcomes. In fact, evidence proves the perspectives, qualities, and experiences disabled employees bring to the workplace help organizations yield a variety of positive results. These include better employee retention, increased brand loyalty, enhanced staff morale, higher work quality, greater innovation, and so much more.



Often stereotypes and preconceived ideas about the needs and abilities of disabled people cause employers to feel apprehensive about hiring disabled employees. By being open and willing to think creatively and adjust attitudes, organizations can ensure they are prepared to hire and retain employees with disabilities.

Before building out a hiring plan, organizations should understand disability-focused laws and best practices to ensure they can effectively support job candidates and employees with disabilities.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), first signed into law in 1990 and amended in 2008, provides the framework to understand the rights of employees with disabilities and the responsibilities of employers. Title I of the ADA covers disabled employees who work at private entities, state and local governments, employment agencies, and labor unions. While it refers to entities with 15 or more employees (and those who are subject to federal contracting and federal assistance laws), all organizations should strive to meet and exceed ADA rules and guidelines.

“By being open and willing to think creatively and adjust attitudes, organizations can ensure they are prepared to hire and retain employees with disabilities.”



STEPS FOR CREATING AND IMPLEMENTING DISABILITY INCLUSIVE EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES

You may or may not be aware, but it's quite likely your organization has already hired a disabled employee or has had an employee become permanently or temporarily disabled. Unfortunately, it's common for employees with disabilities to feel their prospective or current work environments are unwelcoming and, thus, feel unsafe disclosing their disabilities to employers. Below are steps organizations can take to proactively create more welcoming environments for disabled employees.



01

ESTABLISH BUY-IN

From senior leadership to Human Resources to other organizational departments and teams, all entities within an organization should commit to prioritizing disability inclusive hiring and retention. Employers can demonstrate this commitment by sharing formal statements from executive leaders about the importance of focusing on disability issues (check out the [Ford Foundation statement](#) from Darren Walker, President). They can also provide training for current employees on disability-inclusive topics such as disability etiquette, reasonable accommodations, and/or disability justice.



02

ASSESS

Organizations should thoroughly review policies, procedures, and environments that may affect a disabled person's ability to obtain and maintain employment. This should include assessing application and interview processes, accommodation request procedures, physical and sensory accessibility, and much more. Organizations can hire contractors from the disability community to review policies, practices, and procedures. They can also develop working groups of disabled community members to help complete these reviews (these should also be paid positions).



03

IMPLEMENT

After assessing the issues, gaps, and barriers disabled employees may potentially encounter within your organization, it's important to create and implement plans to address these areas. Organizations should develop implementation plans with input from disabled members and employees in the organization. It's important to reveal this plan to the entire organization. It's even better to share the plan with the public as well.

04

EVALUATE

Organizations should continuously track progress and obtain feedback from employees. Evaluation is critical to understand where your organization started and how much progress it is making. Evaluations can include reviewing data that pertains to disability (such as measuring how many employees self-identify as having a disability or chronic health condition and how many employees request work accommodations). Evaluations can also include surveys asking employees about their views on the organization's attitudes on disability within the workplace.

“

The perspectives, qualities, and experiences disabled employees bring to the workplace help organizations yield a variety of positive results: better employee retention, increased brand loyalty, enhanced staff morale, higher work quality, greater innovation, and so much more.”



HIRING PRACTICES

Hiring qualified workers with disabilities takes diligence and persistence. According to the [US Bureau of Labor Statistics](#), only 30% of disabled people are employed (compared to 74% of non-disabled people).

There are numerous factors that influence the low rate of employment for people with disabilities. Factors can include:

1. Employers' unconscious bias or stigma about disabled people's ability to perform jobs
2. Inaccessibility of work environments
3. Lack of opportunities to resources like education, transportation, housing, etc. that negatively affect a disabled person's ability to qualify for positions or even apply for a job

Organizations can take steps to make their hiring processes more accessible to the disability community. Here's how:

RECRUITMENT

Some recruitment tactics can deter qualified disabled candidates from applying for jobs. Organizations must review their policies and procedures to understand if they have inadvertently created unnecessary recruitment barriers.

WORDS, PHRASES, AND IMAGES USED IN A JOB POSTING CAN EITHER ATTRACT OR DETER A DISABLED CANDIDATE FROM APPLYING.

Inclusive Verbiage & Imagery

Words, phrases, and images used in a job posting can either attract or deter a disabled candidate from applying:

A

Ensure supervisors carefully review the essential tasks of a position and take out anything extraneous. When creating a job posting, often hiring managers use a template which includes physical demands that aren't essential to a position. One of the most prevalent essential tasks used in job postings is the requirement of the candidate to "be able to lift over 25 lbs." Many positions, especially in office environments, don't actually need an individual to be able to lift this weight. However, phrases like these can immediately discourage a potential, otherwise qualified applicant from applying.



RECRUITMENT (cont.)

Inclusive Verbiage & Imagery (cont.)



Include current universal practices or benefits you already provide at your organization. These can include flexible work schedules, telecommuting, paid family and medical leave, etc. Many of these benefits, sometimes viewed as accommodations, incentivize candidates with disabilities to apply for open positions.



Often in job postings, organizations make statements encouraging women and people of color to apply. Organizations should add people with disabilities to this list, which will communicate to potential candidates that you welcome them. Additionally, ensure your postings clearly state how a disabled applicant can request accommodations to complete an application and/or interview.



In addition to stating that your organization prioritizes hiring disabled employees, job postings and advertisements that include images should also include images of employees with disabilities. Although many disabilities aren't visible, depicting employees with disabilities in images can encourage disabled job candidates to apply.

Some recruitment tactics can deter qualified disabled candidates from applying for jobs. Organizations must review their policies and procedures to understand if they have inadvertently created unnecessary recruitment barriers.

Accessible Advertising

Hiring managers know that advertising is essential to attracting the perfect job candidate. However, many don't understand that some forms of advertising remain inaccessible to potential applicants with disabilities.

Advertising a position in multiple formats and platforms will ensure you are able to target a more diverse group of people. Formats can include advertising on the radio/tv, websites, social media, etc. Electronic ads and online applications, whether video or print, should be accessible for screen readers and other assistive technology devices. Use the WCAG web accessibility requirements to learn how to make your web content more accessible to people with disabilities.



RECRUITMENT (cont.)

Targeted Advertising

Organizations that prioritize hiring disabled employees should connect with disability-focused agencies/organizations and job boards targeting the disability community.

This can include:

Connecting and partnering with state and local disability employment agencies/organization

These partnerships can help source potential highly qualified applicants. Examples of state and local agencies and organizations to partner with include:

- Centers for Independent Living
- Employment Networks (EN)
- State Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies
- Department of Veteran Affairs Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Services
- College/University Disability Services Offices

Posting open positions to websites that target disabled applicants.

Examples include:

- AAPD Career Center
- abilityJOBS
- AbilityLinks.org
- Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD)
- disABLEDperson, Inc.
- Getting Hired
- Job Opportunities for Disabled Veterans
- National Business & Disability Council
- OutAbility Connect
- RecruitDisability.org
- Talent Acquisition Portal
- WRP.jobs



INTERVIEWS

Interviews are an essential time for hiring managers and supervisors to get to know a job candidate. They are also great opportunities for candidates to determine if an organization and position fits their needs and goals. However, when an employer is unfamiliar with providing accommodations for candidates with disabilities or is influenced by unconscious bias against individuals with visible and hidden disabilities, the interview process will likely be unsuccessful.

Before proceeding with intentional disability-inclusive hiring processes, organizations should review their interview practices to ensure disabled applicants have a fair and equal opportunity to be hired for any available position.

Here are a few tips to help you develop strong inclusive interview practices:

1

Provide disability etiquette/unconscious bias training to hiring managers and supervisors to reduce bias (conscious or unconscious) throughout the hiring process. (See Resource List for recommended trainers).

2

Review job interview processes to determine which parts of the processes are essential. If an individual has a disability that affects social interaction, speech, or their affect, are there other methods the organization can use to determine if an applicant has the skills needed for the job? This can include allowing the applicant to provide work samples, creating job simulations, etc.

3

Inform candidates of the tasks they must complete and ask ALL candidates if they require accessible accommodations for the interview. Do not assume you know a candidates' needs. (Note: Never require a candidate to disclose that they have a disability. For information on the ADA requirements around non-discrimination during the hiring process, please visit the EEOC FAQ webpage. The Job Accommodations Network (JAN) also provides a DOs and Don'ts list interviewers should review before handling an interview.



INTERVIEWS (cont.)

4

Have a list of vendors available to accommodate certain requests (i.e. ASL interpreters, ramps, accessible equipment rental, etc.) so you don't have to scramble to find a vendor during the hiring process. (See Resource List for recommended vendors).

5

Do not assume a location is physically accessible. Examine the location, entrances, and walkways to look for any barriers. Use the Guide to ADA Standards to help you look for them. If a candidate has a physical or sensory disability, inform them of accessible routes or barriers before the day of the interview.

SAMPLE ORGANIZATIONAL STATEMENT: INTERVIEW INVITATION EMAIL

Here's an example of an organizational statement to include on your interview invitation email:

"[Organization name] is committed to providing Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) to employees and applicants for employment regardless of color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, genetic information, sexual orientation or political affiliation. [Organization name] is committed to complying with all applicable federal, state and local laws that pertain to employment, and to providing a work environment that is free from discrimination of any kind.

If you require accommodations, please make the request at least forty-eight (48) hours in advance of the time the accommodation is needed. You may submit your request to [contact name and email address.]"

Thank you,
[Insert name and title here]



REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS

Reasonable accommodations must be provided to both job applicants and employees who request them. Individuals with disabilities differ greatly and require different accommodations based on personal needs and the requirements of the job. Additionally, it's important to remember that not all employees with disabilities require accommodations.

Reasonable Accommodations Process

Each employer should have a process to review reasonable accommodation requests on a case-by-case basis. If an accommodation request places an “undue burden” on the organization, organizations should make every effort to find alternatives before completely denying a request.

Employers should review their reasonable accommodation request guidelines in their employee handbooks. Many organizations use templates to create their employee handbooks. An organization's leadership should review the reasonable accommodations section in the handbook and adjust wording to align with the organization's individual request process. Providing explicit guidelines on how to make a reasonable accommodation request will make it simpler and less stressful on both the employer and employee.

WHAT IS A REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION?

A ‘reasonable accommodation’ is a “modification or adjustment to a job, the work environment, or the way things usually are done that enables a qualified individual with a disability to enjoy an equal employment opportunity.”

Put more simply, job accommodations allow disabled people to do their jobs – they are not extras or special treatment. The ADA requires employers of 15 or more employees to provide reasonable accommodations. However, all organizations should aim to follow these rules and guidelines, no matter the size.



REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS (cont.)

For example, an average template for many organizations' reasonable accommodation request reads as follows:



“Employees with a disability who believe they need a reasonable accommodation to perform the essential functions of their job should contact the Director of HR and Finance.”

This template doesn't provide enough information for an employee or employer to understand the full process to request a “reasonable accommodation” or what qualifies as a disability. Organizations should be upfront about the process and help define terms.

The [Job Accommodation Network's Sample Accommodation Policy and Process](#) provides a strong example of an organization's accommodation request policy. Note the detail and definitions in the policy included that help the reader understand key terms such as “workplace reasonable accommodation,” “interactive process,” and “accommodations consultant.” It also provides specific timelines and responsibilities of each key player in the process. Finally, it provides an option for an employee to appeal the decision.

Types of Reasonable Accommodations

There are numerous types of reasonable accommodations to meet the job performance needs of employees with disabilities. These vary widely based on the person's medical condition, form of disability, and role within the organization. Responding promptly and appropriately to reasonable accommodation requests can help ensure the employee and employer develop a positive and trusting relationship. Each request should be treated individually in a highly interactive process that ensures full involvement of HR, managers, and the employee. This should all be outlined in the employee handbook.

When working with employees or applicants to discuss their accommodation needs, a designated person within the organization should meet with them to discuss their individual needs. Some organizations have a representative from the HR department, while others have a formal reasonable accommodation coordinator. HR personnel handling accommodations should familiarize themselves with the Job Accommodations Network (JAN), which provides extensive examples of accommodations for specific disabilities. However, note that there are a variety of ways to accommodate concerns or needs that occur in the interview process or workplace, thus, coordinators shouldn't limit themselves solely to these examples.



TIPS FOR CREATING AN INDIVIDUALIZED REASONABLE ACCOMODATION POLICY

- Explicitly state that your organization provides reasonable accommodations for applicants and employees who need them for medical or religious reasons, as required by law.
- Identify and provide contact information for the person in charge of handling the requests.
- State an estimated timeline for managers to respond promptly to the requests.
- Include that, in certain circumstances, the organization may need further documentation. This may include letters or medical information to determine the type of accommodation needed. This should be a simple process and employers should not request the employee or candidate's full medical history. Explain how the organization plans to protect the information collected, for example, ensure it will be kept in a separate file from the general employee file.
- Explain how applicants and employees can report discrimination related to requesting or using reasonable accommodations. Describe the consequences of violating the reasonable accommodation policies.



HIRING PRACTICES (CONT.)

REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS (cont.)

There are three categories of “reasonable accommodations”^{**}:



“modifications or adjustments to a job application process that enable a qualified applicant with a disability to be considered for the position such qualified applicant desires; or



modifications or adjustments to the work environment, or to the manner or circumstances under which the position held or desired is customarily performed, that enable a qualified individual with a disability to perform the essential functions of that position; or



modifications or adjustments that enable a covered entity’s employee with a disability to enjoy equal benefits and privileges of employment as are enjoyed by its other similarly situated employees without disabilities.”

^{**}U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission., and U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. “Enforcement Guidance on Reasonable Accommodation and Undue Hardship under the ADA.” Enforcement Guidance on Reasonable Accommodation and Undue Hardship under the ADA | U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. Accessed June 14, 2020. <https://www.eeoc.gov/policy/docs/accommodation.html>.

Examples of Reasonable Accommodations

- **Telework/Working from home or other remote locations**
- **Modified work schedules**
 - Changing required start and end times
 - Allowing for more frequent breaks
- **Communication modifications**
 - ASL or ESL interpreters for Deaf individuals or individuals who are hard-of-hearing (HOH)
 - Qualified personal readers for blind people, people with low vision, or individuals with learning disabilities
 - Text-based communication for autistic people, people who have auditory processing disabilities, and people who have speech related disabilities
 - Simple, direct language usage to help individuals with intellectual disabilities
- **Allowing use of a job coach**
 - Public and private disability organizations sometimes provide job coaches to help assist an individual in learning new job tasks or helping them complete their job tasks more proficiently.
- **Modifying policies or workplace rules**
 - Allowing an individual to sit on a stool
 - Allowing someone with blood sugar regulation difficulties to eat at their desk
 - Allowing bathroom breaks
 - Banning artificial scents
 - Providing a desk for an employee in a private space or allowing them to telework if they have sensory disabilities
- **Modifying or purchasing equipment or devices**
 - Providing speech-to-text software
 - Purchasing ergonomic equipment
 - Allowing noise canceling headphones for individuals with sensory or auditory processing disabilities
- **Position restructuring**
 - Changing some of the less essential job tasks and shifting them to another position. This can include lifting or physically strenuous tasks for a position that is primarily administrative.
 - Changing leave policies
 - Providing less strict leave policies can help individuals who are receiving medical treatment or recovering from an illness or injury
 - Building renovations
 - Building a ramp
 - Adding an electronic door switch to entrances
 - Adding handrails to the bathroom





FINAL TIPS FOR AN EFFECTIVE ACCOMMODATIONS PROCESS

- **RESEARCH:** Make sure your organization's reasonable accommodations coordinator, HR employees, and managers understand the ADA and its implications.
- **PLAN AHEAD:** Create a step-by-step process on how job applicants/employees can request reasonable accommodations.
- **EDUCATE:** Inform all employees and applicants of their rights and responsibilities regarding these policies. You never know who may need reasonable accommodations. Not all disabilities are visible, and some are acquired later in life.
- **COLLECT AND DISTRIBUTE RESOURCES:** All organizations should pull together a set of resources to support applicants or employees who request accommodations. Resources can include information/suggestions on types of accommodations, grants/funding to help pay for accommodations, etc.
- **REVIEW:** It's important to review how your process and policies impact applicants and employees. Check in with applicants and employees to ensure their accommodations are working. Have a plan for handling situations when an accommodation isn't working.



RETENTION AND PROMOTION

Retaining employees with disabilities and promoting them to supervisory and leadership positions is an important part of becoming a more disability inclusive organization. Many retention and promotion plans used within organizations can be adapted to be more inclusive of disabled employees.

BEST PRACTICES FOR DISABILITY INCLUSIVE RETENTION & PROMOTION

The following best practices will help you develop disability inclusive retention and promotion plans and practices:



01

REVIEW POLICIES

Make your organization more disability friendly through education and policy review. Provide disability sensitivity training for all employees, including leadership and board members. Ensure all employees within the organization understand the importance of diversity, which includes disability, and how your organization will hold individuals accountable for discrimination. Review policies to ensure they cover disability-related topics, including accessibility, inclusion, and discrimination.

Remember, not all trainings are equal. It is better to use trainings led by organizations run by disabled people rather than by organizations run by medical providers. Organizations like the [American Association of People with Disabilities \(AAPD\)](#), Sins Invalid and local centers for independent living are great places to start. For legal guidance, consider contacting a local [Protection & Advocacy Agency \(P&A\)](#) agency or [ADA center](#) to get suggestions. Lastly, [JAN](#) provides training on job accommodations, the ADA, and the Rehabilitation Act.



02

THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX

When considering accommodation options, it's important to remain flexible to ensure employees' needs are met. Often supervisors and leaders are tied to traditional structures of work, ensuring all employees stick to a strict hourly work schedule within a specific location. However, emerging research proves that frequent breaks, telecommuting, and less conventional workplace strategies can be beneficial for workplace productivity.



BEST PRACTICES FOR DISABILITY INCLUSIVE RETENTION & PROMOTION (cont.)

03

ENSURE WORKPLACE OPPORTUNITIES ARE ACCESSIBLE TO ALL EMPLOYEES

Whether offering an ‘optional’ workplace fieldtrip, conference, or educational opportunity, help ensure your employees with disabilities receive necessary accommodations to participate. If your organization covers the cost of these activities, include reasonable accommodation costs in the budget to ensure all employees can participate.

04

CREATE A RETURN-TO-WORK STRATEGY FOR EMPLOYEES WHO PLAN TO RETURN AFTER AN INJURY OR ILLNESS

Return-to-work strategies can include bringing an employee back to work part-time, allowing them to telecommute, modifying work schedules/tasks, and/or providing other workplace accommodations.

05

TRACK YOUR ORGANIZATIONS PROGRESS AROUND DISABILITY INCLUSION USING THE FOLLOWING STRATEGIES

- Collect and track data on your organization’s disability employment rate on the same form you track other demographic data, including gender, race, etc.
- Develop anonymous disability climate surveys and survey your organization annually (see sample).
- Offer specialized leadership and mentorship programs for employees with disabilities similar to other programs provided to other underrepresented groups.

“

Retaining employees with disabilities and promoting them to supervisory and leadership positions is an important part of becoming a more disability inclusive organization.



A GUIDE TO ACCESSIBLE EVENT PLANNING

All organizations should make their public events accessible for people with disabilities. Making your events accessible not only ensures more people can participate (which helps create a more dynamic experience for everyone), but it's also required by law. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) prohibits disability discrimination when providing public accommodations. This includes public events.

Rather than wait for accommodation requests from participants, organizations should take proactive steps to ensure their events are always accessible.

Here are two reasons why disability access should be mapped out at the beginning of the planning process:

1. Disabled people are often more likely to attend an event if they know the organization is prepared to make accommodations for them. Informing people of disability access allows them to plan ahead, including leaving time for them to figure out travel plans or modify their schedules as needed.
2. It costs much less to include disability accessibility in the beginning of the planning process. For example, if you pick an event location that is already physically accessible, your organization won't have to spend extra money on lifts, ramps, amplification devices, etc.



“Disabled people are often more likely to attend an event if they know the organization is prepared to make accommodations for them.”



WHO SHOULD LEAD THE EVENT PLANNING?

Hiring someone who's well-qualified to assess environments for access and accommodations is a primary way to ensure your events are accessible. Hiring an individual with a disability with strong connections to other disabled people is an even better way to ensure your events are accessible. Having more disabled voices involved in planning can help your organization establish stronger disability inclusion standards for events and other programs and initiatives. When it comes to disability, there is no "one-size-fits-all" model for inclusion, thus it's important to have as many disabled people as possible involved in your planning process to address the various need of the disability community. Disabled people are most knowledgeable on disability issues because they have lived experiences and are best to provide guidance on accessibility. They will be able to provide real time feedback and suggest creative alternatives for the issues you might run into while planning an event.



The following organizations can often provide local contacts for disability inclusion and accessibility or provide guidance on ADA standards:

- [ADA Regional Center](#)
- [Protection and Advocacy Organization \(P&A\)](#)
- [Center for Independent Living \(CIL\)](#)

If you don't have resources to hire a qualified consultant to provide this guidance, invest time in educating your staff on how to host a disability inclusive event (using this guide and resources it refers to). All teams should ensure they have at least one person who understands the needs of individuals with disabilities, to include both visible and invisible disabilities.

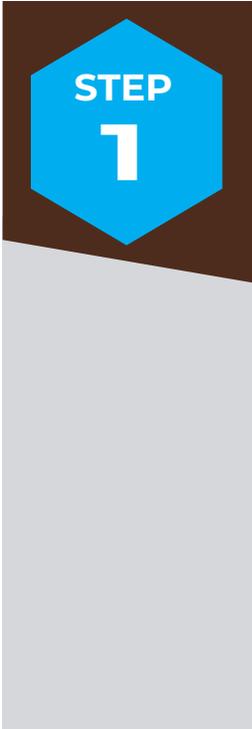


STAGES OF EVENT PLANNING FOR ACCESSIBILITY

All event planners or designated staff should think through at least three stages: **Pre-Event Planning**, **At the Event**, and **Post-Event Evaluation**. During each of these stages, event planners can take specific steps to ensure their event is accessible for disabled people. A few resources planners can reference include “[A Planning Guide to Making Temporary Events Accessible to People with Disabilities](#)” by the ADA Network and the [Event Accessibility Checklist](#).

PRE-EVENT PLANNING

As a reminder, your organization should plan for disability access in the initial planning stages of an event. Community engagement organizations often host large conferences and speaking engagements. They also organize small events such as rallies, marches, canvassing, and social meetups. Each type of event presents its own set of considerations when addressing accessibility. Large events may require event planners to implement a wider variety of accommodations. Small, more person-to-person events may require a different set of accommodations. Planning ahead will provide opportunities to be more innovative in the planning process and troubleshoot potential problems. It will also save time, money, and potential stress.



STEP 1

WHO WILL PARTICIPATE IN THE EVENT?

Determine your audience and potential presenters/speakers for your event early on. This will help guide where and how you advertise.

After you define your audience, use the following guidelines to encourage individuals with disabilities to attend your event:

Accessible Advertising

Not all advertising is accessible. Print advertisements and many websites are inaccessible to individuals who are blind or low vision. Videos without captioning are generally inaccessible to Deaf individuals or people who are hard-of-hearing. Additionally, keep in mind, language that is plain to one set of readers may not be plain to others. To assist with accessible language, visit plainlanguage.gov.





STEP
1
(cont.)

WHO WILL PARTICIPATE IN THE EVENT? (CONT.)

Accessible Advertising (cont.)

Using various advertising platforms (social media, websites, video, print ads, etc.) can help ensure you capture a wide variety of individuals with different backgrounds and access to resources, including disabled people.

It's also important to ensure your advertising platforms are accessible. The [WAVE Web Accessibility Tool](#) is a great resource to help determine if a website is accessible. The US Government Services Administration (GSA) also has a more in-depth resource, the [Section 508 compliance toolkit](#), which helps individuals, organizations, and government agencies comply with electronic disability accessibility standards.

Targeted Advertising

Advertising is all about adjusting messaging to a target audience. Targeting the disability community means ensuring you let disabled people know you are proactively considering their needs. If your organization is working on a social justice issue, mentioning the disability community as a subset of those affected by your issue helps ensure disabled people know you recognize their right to full inclusion. For example, if you are addressing immigration and specifically discussing the difficulties of detention camps, list disabled people as one of the groups most affected.

Example:

- a. Doesn't mention disability: "We are fighting for pregnant women, transgender people, and children who are unable to get the services they need at detention camps."
- b. Mentions disability: "We are fighting for pregnant women, transgender people, disabled people, and children who are unable to get the services they need at the border."

Example "b" includes disabled people as a group affected by the issue. While this may seem like a simple change, it can mean a lot to the disability community. Disabled people, who are a part of every thread of society, are affected by every social issue in unique ways that are often ignored by mainstream society. They are often the first to be negatively affected by poorly written policies. As Rebecca Cokley, an Obama Administration Alum and director of the Disability Justice Initiative at the Center for American Progress, often says, "Disabled people are the canaries in the coalmine."



**STEP
1
(cont.)**

WHO WILL PARTICIPATE IN THE EVENT? (CONT.)

Targeted Advertising (cont.)

Targeting your advertising also means ensuring you promote your events and information in locations that disabled people may be.

These locations not only include medical facilities such as hospitals, clinics, nursing homes, group homes, and rehabilitation facilities. They also include social settings such as independent living centers, Protection & Advocacy Agencies, and Deaf or blind schools and universities, and every other place that non-disabled people go. Partner with disability organizations that can help ensure their communities and networks know about your event.

Finally, your targeted advertising should share some of the types of disability access you plan to provide. This can mean either sharing a list of services you'll have (e.g. American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters, CART services, Braille documents) and/or stating that people can request disability accommodations. This will demonstrate your commitment to disability inclusion.

WHAT TYPE OF EVENT ARE YOU HOSTING?

Analyze the type of event you are organizing. When analyzing, ask the following:

How many people will attend?

While you may not know the exact number of people who'll attend, aim for a rough estimate. After you determine this number, estimate that up to 25% of your attendees may need some form of accommodation.

How much space will you need for the event?

It's critical to consider how much space you need for the number of people you think will attend your event. Speeches and rallies require less room than marches and conferences. However, you should keep safety in mind when estimating space for an event. Remember that people who are shorter (wheelchair users, people of short stature, and children) may feel uncomfortable in extremely crowded areas. Your event organizer should plan to keep high traffic areas safe for people to move to exits, bathrooms, and areas of interest.

**STEP
2**

STEP
2
(cont.)**WHAT TYPE OF EVENT ARE YOU HOSTING? (CONT.)*****How much physical activity is required for the event?***

When planning events that require physical activity, remember that individuals with mobility or stamina-related disabilities may need accommodations to participate. This includes wheelchair users and with other mobility devices such as walkers and canes. It also includes people with hidden disabilities (such as chronic fatigue) that may affect mobility at certain times. If you need individuals to travel more than 100 meters during the event (i.e. a march), think about how to accommodate those with mobility disabilities as they navigate from one area to the next.

If planning a march, consider how you will ensure disabled people feel included. Think about ways to ensure someone with a disability can participate in your canvassing event. Each of these questions can be addressed with early forethought and planning. To ensure people didn't trip or push individuals with disabilities while marching.

A great example of access for an event like this is the 2019 Women's March held in Washington, DC. The organization planned over a mile-long march to the White House and back to the rallying area. The consultant ([Mia Ives-Rublee](#)) worked with the event coordinator to rent shuttle buses for disabled people with mobility-related needs to follow behind the march. This allowed disabled individuals who could not complete the distance to participate. They also created a safe zone for individuals with disabilities to march in front of the group.

Here's why safe zones can be beneficial during a march or other large gathering:

1. To allow disabled people to set the pace of the march.
2. To provide enough room for individuals to avoid claustrophobia.
3. To ensure people don't trip or push individuals with disabilities while marching.



STEP
2
(cont.)

WHAT TYPE OF EVENT ARE YOU HOSTING? (CONT.)

You can also make a canvassing event accessible. Many individuals with disabilities may feel uncomfortable walking/pushing long distances to canvas. Accommodating this can include allowing people to stand/sit in place canvassing in high traffic areas for passersby. It can also include allowing people to drive door-to-door to eliminate the need for walking long distances. You can also provide opportunities for disabled people to help coordinate volunteers at your headquarters or have them input data upon canvassers' return. There are numerous ways to ensure disabled people can lead and participate in the events you coordinate. That said, it is very important to provide options, as often disabled people are relegated to administrative tasks without other options to participate. Organizations should take responsibility for providing accommodations to ensure their events are accessible to all who want to participate.

What time of day will the event be held?

The time of day is also extremely important to keep in mind when planning an event. Not only can it affect individual availability, but it can also affect transportation and visibility for those with vision-related needs. For those who rely on accessible transportation, sometimes availability is restricted

THE TIME OF YOUR EVENT CAN NOT ONLY AFFECT INDIVIDUAL AVAILABILITY, BUT IT CAN ALSO AFFECT TRANSPORTATION AND VISIBILITY FOR THOSE WITH VISION RELATED NEEDS.

to specific timeframes. Also, hazards can increase for people with visual impairments when it grows dark. Thus, it's increasingly important to ensure all pathways are well lit and free of barriers. Additionally, individuals who use visual means of communication (such as sign language or written notes) may need extra lighting.



A blue hexagonal graphic with the text "STEP 2 (cont.)" inside. The hexagon is positioned on a dark brown vertical bar that has a light grey triangular shape at the bottom left corner.

STEP
2
(cont.)

WHAT TYPE OF EVENT ARE YOU HOSTING? (CONT.)

Will it be held indoors or outdoors?

When addressing disability access for events, indoor and outdoor event spaces hold their own specific challenges. Time of year may affect temperature and precipitation. Medical conditions and age can make it more challenging for individuals to tolerate temperature extremes. High humidity or precipitation can affect medical equipment or wheelchair functionality. Organizations should also be especially conscious of allergies when in enclosed spaces and should request individuals not wear or bring items that could cause severe allergic reactions like perfumes, colognes, or peanuts.

How much space will you need for the event?

Events that rely on audible communication will need to consider individuals who are deaf or hard-of-hearing. Events that rely on visual communication styles will need to consider individuals who are blind or have low vision. In general, there should always be multiple accessible forms of communication. These can include sign language interpreters, closed captioning/CART, digital documents, Braille, etc.

Access isn't just for large scale events. For example, many organizations enjoy hosting formal or informal happy hours to allow their members to meet each other and/or meet network with community members. Unfortunately, many happy hours are hosted in loud, dark restaurants. These may be inaccessible to those who are hard-of-hearing. Additionally, those who require visual cues or other forms of visual communication (such as sign language or lip reading) may have difficulty navigating and communicating with other participants. Organizations planning to host happy hours should ask event spaces to brighten the room, open windows to allow more lighting, or find another location that has more lighting. They should also plan to have a sign language interpreter on stand-by in case an individual requires this to participate. If your event is primarily centered around visuals, like a movie or performance, provide audio description as well. Audio description is provided by trained individuals who provide verbal descriptions of what's occurring on stage/screen.




**STEP
3**

WHAT KINDS OF GENERAL DISABILITY ACCOMMODATIONS WILL YOU PROVIDE?

General accommodations are accommodations that you plan to provide without requiring individuals to request them beforehand. The larger the event, the more general accommodations you should try to provide without advanced request. Individuals with disabilities will often assume your organization will provide these accommodations without having to request them. Many of these accommodations should typically be provided in the event space.

General accommodations fall under three categories:

Physical accommodations:

- Accessible entrances (no stairs, ramps not rising more than 1 in. for every 12 in in length [Fig. A], thresholds being no taller than ½ in, doorways being approximately 32 in. wide, elevators being at least 51 in. x 68 in., automatic or push button doors)
- Well-lit, barrier free pathways
- Accessible bathrooms (minimum width of stall is 60 in, grab bars behind the toilet, and at least one side)
- Accessible seating near front or scattered throughout seating area with companion seating (which allows families and friends to sit together)
- Accessible parking and/or drop-off locations near event space
- Service dog toileting areas (Service dog toileting areas can be provided by either finding a grassy area outside the building with signs pointing to area or by having astro turf inside)
- Scooters or manual wheelchairs, especially when using a large venue space

Communication accommodations:

- Audio amplification system for individuals who are hard-of-hearing (Some spaces are already equipped with speakers and a microphone. Your organization could also purchase a portable speaker and microphone. If there are limited options, at minimum use a megaphone to help amplify speech. You can also rent or purchase a set of assistive listening devices (ALDs).)
- Sign language interpreters (Organizations should have a list of local sign language interpreters or sign language interpreting groups for events and should always reserve them for large scale events. If you don't already have a list, check out the [Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf \(RID\)](#).)
- Large print or electronic documents accessible by screen reader

Environmental Sensitivity Accommodations

- No strobing lights unless warning is placed on event page, pamphlets, and outside of event area
- Scent-free environments
- Calming area (allows individuals to get away from noisy areas)
- If food is provided, offering allergy-free options

Note that these examples should not stop you from providing more extensive services. However, they provide ideas of ideal places to begin. While your organization may have limited resources (staff time and funding), including accessibility as part of your early planning can save time and money in the long run. Better to prepare than to have to make expensive, last-minute decisions or worse, exclude people from participating due to lack of access.

STEP

4

WHAT OTHER DISABILITY ACCOMMODATIONS WILL YOU CONSIDER PROVIDING?

It can be difficult to determine which accommodations to provide, especially when on a limited budget. While providing general accommodations is important, it's also important to listen to individual participant needs. Disabled people's accommodation needs can vary and no two people's needs are exactly the same. Sid, a Deaf person, may need an ASL interpreter because they find captions inaccessible. Dean, who is also deaf, may require captioning because they do not use sign language to communicate.

Registration form language:

"[Organization name] is committed to creating inclusive spaces. If you plan to attend [event name] and need to request a reasonable accommodation, please contact [person's name and/or email address] no later than [deadline date]."

The current standard for addressing these issues is to ask participants about the accommodations they need. Organizers should have a separate email box or designated contact person for accommodation/accessibility requests. Event pages should make this email address easy to locate. Registration forms should explicitly ask if a participant needs an accommodation and include a text box for these requests.

For a more substantial list of accommodations, please review "[A Planning Guide to Making Temporary Events Accessible to People with Disabilities.](#)"

STEP

5

WHAT'S YOUR BUDGET?

Event budgets can affect how you plan your event. Organizations operating with limited resources may have concerns about the costs of disability accommodations. One way to address these concerns is to add disability accessibility as a line item within your general operating and or project budget. This ensures you have money allocated for general disability-related accommodations and specific accommodations tailored to participant requests. Also, it provides the organization opportunities to request money from funders and sponsors.



STEP 5 (cont.)

WHAT'S YOUR BUDGET?

As you standardize the types of accommodations provided at events, you will get a more accurate picture to help create a strong annual accommodations budget. Some accommodations, like ASL interpreters and extra ramps, will cost money. However, finding accessible event locations that provide certain services like wheelchair rentals and ramps may help you save on the accommodations you plan to provide. This is why it's important to plan ahead for general disability accommodations before you begin to plan the full event and decide on location.

STEP 6

WHAT VENDOR(S) SHOULD YOU USE?

Finding the right vendors to provide accommodations/access support can save you lots of time and stress. It's extremely important to build good reputations with the vendors in your area. To find a good vendor, connect with disability-focused organizations or local disabled community members. Local disability organizations and/or disabled people who use specific accommodations often have ideas of reliable vendors. Note that you should always attempt to connect with vendors as far in advance as possible and aim to provide an outline of the event when scheduling.

Plan to save the vendor list for future use. This will not only ensure you don't have to take time to research them again for other events, but can also help you develop your disability access line items for your future operating/program budgets.

Types of Vendors

- Sign language interpreters (RID)
- CART (Communication Access Real-Time Translation) captioning (check out the National Court Reporters Association for local providers)
- Braille Document providers
- Disability accessible hotels
- Accessible port-a-potty rental companies
- Ramp and lift providers (If you already have a list of stage equipment or an event production provider, you should ask if they have ramps or lifts available)
- Disability accessible venue providers
- Wheelchair accessible van and bus rentals
- Wheelchair/scooter rental companies



**STEP
7**

HOW WILL YOU TRAIN STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS?

Train all staff and volunteers on disability sensitivity, etiquette, and accommodation services prior to your event. Then, make them aware of specific access & accommodations planned for the event. While serving on an accessibility team may not be a part of their specified roles, one can never anticipate when someone will need assistance. When disabled people interact with staff and volunteers who demean or degrade them because of their disability, their experiences of the event may become tarnished. It's important to let your staff and volunteers know you recognize and respect all people with disabilities.

**STEP
8**

PLAN FOR EMERGENCIES

Prior to the event, connect with security or police to go over emergency response plans. Ask them if they have ways to ensure the safety of disabled participants and if they have a deaf liaison. If they don't, guide them to organizations that can help them develop this role.

Key things to consider when creating an emergency response plan include coordination and training with first responders; training staff and volunteers; providing multiple ways to communicate evacuation plans; designating meeting points for individuals who may need assistance; and creating clear, accessible pathways to exit the venue or shelter in place location. (Review [FEMA guidelines](#) for ideas on how to interact with disabled people during emergencies).



DISABILITY ACCESSIBILITY EVENT CHECKLIST

Check your event space in advanced:

- Are there barrier free pathways to the event space (no stairs, ramps not rising more than 1 in. for every 12 in in length, thresholds being no taller than ½ in, doorways being approximately 32 in. wide, elevators being at least 51 in. x 68 in.)?
- Is there at least one accessible bathroom (minimum width is 60 in, grab bars behind the toilet and at least one side)?
- Are there several electrical outlets for laptops, assistive devices, voice amplifiers, captioning devices, etc.?
- Are the routes to the meeting area and the meeting area well lit (to help reduce trip hazards and allow for visual communication such as sign language)? Is it free of flashing lights?
- If there is a stage, is there a ramp or lift to get on it?
- Is there a separate 'quiet room' nearby to allow people to decompress?

Prepare for event:

- Ensure you provide event details as early as possible. Include accessibility details and ask participants if they have any other accessibility requests.
- Request that participants avoid wearing artificial smells or bringing snacks that include nuts.
- If food is included, ask participants if they have food allergies or if they need alternatives.
- Hire sign language interpreter, if requested, for small events (up to 15 people). If the event is larger, hire a sign language interpreting team. Check out Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf for suggestions.
- Create signage for accessible walkways, entrances, bathrooms, etc.
- Train all volunteers on how to interact with people with disabilities. Train them on accessibility services for the event. Have several volunteers in charge of accessibility issues at the event.

At event:

- Check all routes for possible new barriers, including misplaced items or cords. Check to see if automatic door openers work. Make sure accessible entrances are unlocked.
- Ensure signage to accessibility features are up, including signage for accessible entrances and pathways.
- Designate reserved accessible seating near the front with clear pathways to get to it. Accessible seating can be provided to people who use wheelchairs or other assistive devices, individuals with chronic illnesses, people who are injured, seniors, and pregnant individuals. Do not require people to explain why they need accessible seating. Trust them.
- Set up an amplification system and make sure those who are speaking to the crowd (including speakers and those asking questions) use the amplification system.
- If live streaming or videoing, make sure the videographer includes the Sign Language interpreter in the shot. Also, try to caption the videos. There are numerous companies that can help you caption live stream or regular video.

EVENT DAY

It's the big day and it's likely you have many things to juggle to ensure your event is successful. Hopefully, you have hired someone or have a designated volunteer (or both) to help coordinate disability accessibility services. Here are some tips to help you make it through event day:



CHECK AND DOUBLE-CHECK

Check to make sure all pathways remain clear of barriers. Often organizers set up events days or weeks ahead of time. Sometimes changes can occur between the time of setup and the event day. It's important to ensure that these changes don't impede disabled people's access needs. Barriers include locked accessible entrances, sidewalk barriers, and broken electronic doors.



PRIORITIZE COMMUNICATIONS

A strong system of communication is critical when managing a dynamic event. It's especially important when you have participants who may have varying levels of medical risks and sensitivities. If a participant becomes ill, has an accident, or simply needs assistance, your staff and volunteers need a quick way to communicate the issue and get the necessary assistance.



INCORPORATE AN INFORMATION SYSTEM/PROTOCOL

In addition to including access information on event promotional materials, it's also important to have clear visuals at the event to direct people to accessibility features. Participants with disabilities should be able to quickly locate entrances/exits, accessible restrooms, accessible seating, etc. The event should also have a location/person to ask for assistance. This person can either be included at the general information table/booth or separately at an accessibility information table/booth.



ACCESSIBLE SOCIAL MEDIA

Most events currently include a social media component. Ensure all social media event posts are accessible for all participants. Do this by creating image descriptions, using camelcase for hashtags (capitalizing the beginning of each separate word such as #CripTheVote), captioning videos, and including the ASL interpreter on screen. For more information, please review this [Accessible Social Media](#) article.



POST-EVENT EVALUATION

Post-event evaluation helps your organization gather information to help improve future events. Reviewing disability accessibility plans after an event is key to ensuring you're properly addressing your overall disability inclusion goals.

Use the following two methods to review your disability accessibility services and accommodations after an event:

MORE THAN ANY OTHER FORM OF EVALUATION, PARTICIPANT EVALUATIONS ARE MOST VALUABLE TO ASSESS THE EFFECTIVENESS OF YOUR EVENTS' SERVICES AND ACCOMMODATIONS.



PARTICIPANT EVALUATION

More than any other form of evaluation, participant evaluations are most valuable to assess the effectiveness of your events' services and accommodations. Event planners can either ask participants to fill out a survey after each portion of the event (such as a plenary or break out session) or at the end of the event. Questions should ask about interactions with workers and volunteers; the quality of the interpreters; wait times for certain accessibility features like bathrooms, general atmosphere, etc. In addition to print copies, also prepare digital versions to be sent either at the event or immediately after. It's best to get feedback while it's fresh in people's minds. Please review this [sample event questionnaire](#) to help you create an evaluation tailored to your own event.



STAFF/VOLUNTEER REVIEW

Staff and/or volunteers should also review disability accessibility services and accommodations. Individuals should first share their opinions of how they believe event access and accommodations went. Then, compare their perspectives to the perspectives of the participants. **If the two perspectives diverge greatly, that may mean your organization needs further education and training on how to create accessible spaces.**

After reviewing your event's disability access and accommodations, your organization should create step-by-step plans to improve them for the next event. View each event as an opportunity to improve previous events. For further guidelines and ideas on how to make an event accessible to people with disabilities, please check out "Virtual Event Planning."



POST EVENT SURVEY (SAMPLE)

At [organization name], we value attendees' feedback. We hope to continue to improve our disability accommodations and request that you fill out this anonymous survey. If you have further feedback or questions, please contact [contact name and email].

DATE:

EVENT NAME:

How would you rate the following in terms of accessibility? (indicate using an "x" in the appropriate box)

	VERY ACCESSIBLE	SOMEWHAT ACCESSIBLE	NOT VERY ACCESSIBLE	NOT ACCESSIBLE	N/A
Registration process:					
Communication (emails, text, apps, etc):					
Pre-event promotion/ information:					
Physical access:					
Signage:					
Food (if provided)					

How would you rate the following in terms of helpfulness?

	VERY HELPFUL	SOMEWHAT HELPFUL	NOT VERY HELPFUL	UNHELPFUL	N/A
Organization staff & volunteers (pre-event)					
Organization staff and volunteers (during event):					
Venue staff (if different from organization staff):					
Physical access:					
Security staff (if present):					
Signage:					

Please use the back of this form to provide further event feedback.

THANK YOU!

VIRTUAL EVENT PLANNING

While it's important to ensure your organization's in-person events are accessible for disabled participants, it's equally as imperative to ensure your virtual events are accessible. During the COVID19 global pandemic, many organizations that traditionally host their events in-person have shifted to online formats for their conferences, trainings, workshops, and more.

This document will outline some of the key components to keep in mind when aiming for full digital accessibility. It also emphasizes the importance of having disabled people involved in the design and implementation of the event.

(For more details on engaging disabled people in your event planning, see our Accessible Event Planning section of this guide.)

PRE-EVENT PLANNING

STEP 1

CREATE A STRATEGY

No matter the size of your virtual event, it's important to have a strategy. Beginning with a goal and overall concept will help you plan better.

Ask the following questions to help guide your virtual event strategy*:

- What kind of experience do you want people to have?
- Will the event be live, recorded, or both?
- Will we charge for the event or will it be free?
- When is the best time for the event?
- Will attendees need to register to attend?
- What platforms will you use to promote the event?
- Will people still have access to the event after it's over?
- What KPIs (Key Performance Indicators)/data do you plan to track?

**Modified from Hootsuite.com*

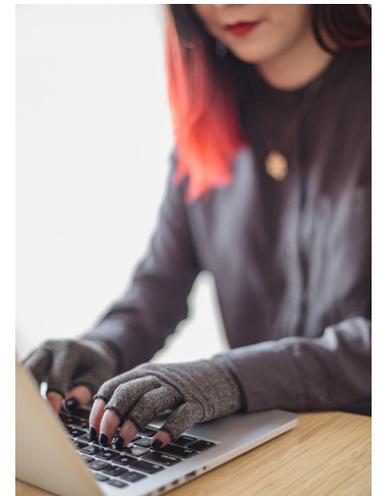
“Disability inclusion and engagement isn't a one-time program or person, it's a process you must commit to.”

- Andraéa LaVant

**STEP
2****IDENTIFY THE FORMAT**

As mentioned, there are many types of virtual events. **One of the most important first steps is determining the format(s) to use for your event.** Keep in mind that what may have worked in-person may not be as effective in a virtual space. For example, if you typically host an annual conference in-person with many featured panels and workshops, it may be necessary to narrow down the number of concurrent workshops you have based on access to technical support or the capabilities of the hosting platform you'll be using. If you tend to host Q & A panel discussions, consider whether this will be as effective in a virtual setting.

It's also important to determine your non-negotiables. If you tend to hear positive feedback about the great discussions that happen at your events, aim to identify a format that will still allow them to happen in a virtual setting. This could mean hosting virtual breakout rooms during a designated networking or break time. If you want attendees to have individual time for reflection or breaks, plan to build those into your virtual events as well. In general, many of the same formats used in-person can be used online, however, they often must be planned a bit differently.



For example, many organizations that typically host events with many concurrent workshops in two or three days extend their virtual events over a week or more to allow for fewer workshops at a time. Additionally, spreading events out over a longer timeframe prevents people from developing “Zoom fatigue,” a term that refers to the draining effects people may have from participating in virtual spaces continually.



STEP
2
(cont.)

IDENTIFY THE FORMAT (CONT.)

Often on videoconferencing platforms, people feel it requires more emotional effort to appear interested, and without verbal or other cues, the intense focus on words or sustained eye-contact can be exhausting. Virtual events can be even more draining for some disabled people, including those with neurological or cognitive disabilities such as autism. Video chatting can cause overstimulation and exacerbate sensory triggers such as loud noise and bright lights.

Depending on your budget, you can hire a design firm to help plan and execute your virtual event. If pursuing this option, be sure to ask about the firm's experience providing digital accessibility for events.

STEP
3

CHOOSE A PLATFORM

There are countless virtual platforms that work well for hosting virtual events. These include video conferencing platforms such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Google Hangouts, WebEx, and GoToMeeting/Webinar. Many events are also hosted or livestreamed on social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. Identifying the format of your event first can help guide you on which platform to use based on your goals for the event. For example, some platforms support breakout rooms for smaller discussions, while others offer virtual tools such as “whiteboard” writing spaces.

For guidance on which video conferencing platforms are best for accessibility, see this guide from [Bighack](#). Additionally, here are accessibility features for [Zoom](#), [Google Hangouts Meet](#), and [BlueJeans](#).



**STEP
4**

CHOOSE THE TIME/DATE

When planning virtual events, consider the day(s) and time(s) for hosting. Again, timeframes that may have worked in-person may not be as ideal in a virtual format. Perhaps moving an event online means not having it on a weekend. Or, as mentioned, it may be best to shift what was formerly intense days of morning-to-night events to multiple shorter days.

Virtual events must take time zones into consideration. Aim to choose times that consider multiple time zones, but that prioritize those who make up much of your audience. If your audience is broad, consider making recordings immediately available for those who can't watch in real-time.

**STEP
5**

PLAN FOR ACCESSIBILITY

Virtual events should provide options for people to request accommodations. If using a registration form, include a section for people to list accommodation requests or provide a direct email for people to send requests directly. While there are specific accommodations that you should provide regardless of whether a person has requested them, there are other individual needs people may have outside of those your organization has prepared.



Spreading events out over a longer timeframe prevents people from developing “Zoom fatigue,” a term that refers to the draining effects people may have from participating in virtual spaces continually.



Use the following guidance to plan for accessibility at virtual events:*

- Budget for and hire sign language interpreters, live-captioning, and other accommodations. For full accessibility, it's best to provide both ASL and live-captioning/CART (Communication Access in Real Time). For ASL interpreters, consider using the [Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf](#). For live-captioning, consider the following vendors: [20/20 Captioning](#), [Caption Access](#), and [Streamtext](#). Well-lit, barrier free pathways
- Ensure the event platform is compatible with assistive technology such as screen readers. (See this article on [Testing with Screen Readers](#))
- Ensure the event platforms allows for computer-based audio listening/speaking and phone-based audio listening/speaking and phone-based audio listening/speaking. Accessible parking and/or drop-off locations near event space
- Ensure your events are accessible to augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) users by offering multiple ways for attendees to participate, answer questions, submit questions, and interact. For example, if you plan to allow people to ask questions verbally on video, also allow participants to use the Q & A chat functions to type their questions.
- Provide training sessions with event organizers/volunteers prior to the event on how to use the platform(s) the event will be hosted on.
- Provide all accessibility information upfront and publicly to interested attendees.
- Appoint an accessibility point person who can assist with troubleshooting or access issues and provide contact information for them. Large print or electronic documents accessible by screen reader.
- Give attendees the opportunity to (anonymously, if desired) share any additional accessibility requests that were not covered in the event's access information.
- Share the format of the event (e.g. discussion vs. listening to a presentation, or something else) and how long it plans to run so attendees can plan around their need to take breaks, arrive late, leave early, etc.
- Provide any written or visual materials ahead of time to give people an idea of what to expect and the ability to plan. Be sure to use an accessible file format.
- Allow attendees to send questions and comments in advance.
- Give notice about questions that participants might be asked to respond to, even icebreakers (for example, "Everyone introduce yourself and say where you're from").
- Provide a glossary of terms that will be used during the event and define them.
- If you have chosen to use Zoom, take precautions to avoid "Zoombombing" and other security issues.
- Make sure everyone has access to any links or login codes they need to join a live video call ahead of time.

**STEP
6**

PROMOTE THE EVENT

Just as in-person events must be advertised, virtual events should be shared broadly to engage your desired audience. Using social media, your website, and e-newsletters are the best ways to promote your events to all people, including potential attendees with disabilities. Use tools such as Instagram or Facebook events to share full event information. If seeking a mainstream audience, consider sharing your event on sites such as Eventbrite.

Plan to share about different aspects of the event throughout the promotional season. This can include sharing the event schedule, speaker bios and videos, hosting a blog leading up to the event, and even providing guidance on accessibility and how to log into the event day-of. Identify an event hashtag and use it in promotional posts. Encourage followers to do the same.

Ensure your promotions are accessible

Just as it's important to prioritize accessibility for your event, accessibility should also be a priority in your advertisements. Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter all have features that make many aspects of their platforms accessible, but not all platforms are fully accessible. For example, while Instagram allows users to add "alt text" to still images so people who are blind and low-vision can better understand images on the screen, Instagram Stories does not provide ability to caption videos or provide image descriptions. Currently, Twitter's audio tweet feature is inaccessible to multiple communities of disabled people, including those who are deaf and hard-of-hearing, blind and low-vision users, and those with sensory needs/ photosensitivity.

For more information and to learn how to make accessible social media posts, see this document: "Is Your Social Media Accessible to Everyone? These 9 Best Practices Can Help"



**STEP
7**

HOST MULTIPLE TECH CHECKS

Inevitably, technical issues can arise during virtual events; however, it's possible to implement plans to troubleshoot potential concerns and create backup plans. Be sure to test the Internet connection and other computer features, including microphones, speakers, and web cameras. Plan to host at least one tech rehearsal to allow presenters to use the technology as well. Also, ensure computers are set up in locations that provide appropriate lighting and are away from potential noise distractions. These kinds of distractions and noises not only make it hard for participants to engage but can also be difficult for those who have an intellectual disability and find noises and lighting harmful. Test audio for sound quality and encourage speakers to use headsets when possible to help improve audio.

Ideally, you should have at least one person designated solely to provide technical support for your events. This includes supporting background details and providing technical access information for attendees who request it during the event.



EVENT DAY(S)

While most of your virtual event success will depend upon pre-planning, there are still elements to include during the event to ensure its accessible and engaging.

Incorporate the following elements to support accessibility during your events:

-  For presentations and visuals, ensure plain language, large fonts, and high color contrast are used. Incorporate captions and visuals for audio needs and image descriptions for visuals.
-  Ensure sign language interpreters can always be seen. Most platforms provide ways to “pin” or lock in place the video displaying the interpreter.
-  Incorporate captioning into your videos and discussions. Some platforms such as Google Meets, Microsoft Teams, and Skype offer built-in live captions, thus someone should provide verbal and written instructions on how to access captions. Other platforms, such as Zoom, will require hiring a CART provider. These providers typically use a third-party software and will provide a link in the chat feature of the platform to access captions. If you prefer to have the captions in the meeting room, give the CART provider the API key. More information on Zoom’s access features can be found [here](#).
-  Appoint and announce a tech person/moderator for your event so participants know to whom they can address their questions.
-  Have speakers say their name each time they speak and provide image descriptions when introducing themselves.
-  At the start of the event provide access instructions and explain how the event will run. If using a discussion format that permits participants to be seen/heard on video, provide instructions on how to use the video conference software. This includes sharing how to mute/unmute, turn video on/off, and use the chat function. It’s best to mute all attendees other than those speaking to avoid background noise.
-  Build breaks into your event, as this supports opportunities for processing and other access needs.



AFTER THE VIRTUAL EVENT

After the event, be sure to follow up with participants. If presenters had materials, be sure to share them in accessible formats. Additionally, be sure to send an electronic evaluation shortly after the event. Accessible evaluation platforms include [Survey Gizmo](#) and [Survey Monkey](#).

Plan to break down parts of the virtual event in a rating format to allow attendees to rate their experiences. This can include rating:

- Date & Time of the Event
- Accessibility Features
- Speakers
- Breakout Sessions
- Sponsors & Exhibitors
- Networking Opportunities
- Registration process
- Pre-event promotion (i.e. social media ads)
- Communication (email, text, apps)
- Support staff



TOOLKIT TERMINOLOGY & DEFINITIONS

Ableism

The systematic discrimination of disabled people and favoring of non-disabled people. Ableism comes in many forms via policies, structures, events, and interactions. People and systems can do it consciously or unconsciously. A disabled person can participate in ableism against other disabled people.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA):

The original act, passed in 1990, was the first piece of civil rights legislation that recognized and protected the rights of people with disabilities. It regulates three areas of society: state and local governments, public accommodations, and employment. In 2010, the ADA was revised to expand the definition of disability and include further protections.

ADA Generation

This is a group of people who were born a little before or after the ADA was passed into law. Research has been collected on [identity around the ADA Generation](#), showing how the landmark legislation affected their perception of self and their ability to navigate society. Overall, research shows the ADA generation as having increased self-perception and improved perception of disability.

Job Accommodations

“An adjustment to a job or work environment that makes it possible for a disabled person to perform their job duties.” - [US Department of Labor](#)

Chronic Illness

A chronic illness is a medical condition or illness that is persistent or lasts for long periods of time. Individuals with chronic illnesses have created a community with their own set of beliefs, terminology, etc. Some individuals with chronic illnesses may not identify as disabled and many support research on developing cures and treatments to reduce pain, fatigue, and other symptoms.

Disability

Disability (under the [American’s with Disabilities Act](#)):

“A person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, a person who has a history or record of such an impairment, or a person who is perceived by others as having such an impairment.”



TOOLKIT TERMINOLOGY & DEFINITIONS (cont.)

Disability (cont.)

Disability (under EEOC guidelines):

Not everyone with a medical condition is protected by the law. In order to be protected, a person must be qualified for the job and have a disability as defined by the law.

A person can show that he or she has a disability in one of three ways:

- A person may be disabled if he or she has a physical or mental condition that substantially limits a major life activity (such as walking, talking, seeing, hearing, or learning).
- A person may be disabled if he or she has a history of a disability (such as cancer that is in remission).
- A person may be disabled if he is believed to have a physical or mental impairment that is not transitory (lasting or expected to last six months or less) and minor (even if he does not have such an impairment).

Disability Accessibility

A term to discuss providing tools to allow disabled people equal access to their community, activities, and services. These should never be seen as “benefits,” only as leveling tools. Society has created environments that are standardized to societal beliefs that human beings have averages and should only be structured to meet an “average” person’s needs.

Disability Community Leaders

Disabled community leaders are individuals who have worked on disability policy or rights issues. These individuals should have a proven track record of working for the betterment of the disability community.

Disability Frameworks

Charity Model of Disability:

The charity model of disability views disabled people as objects of pity who require help, care, and protection. It is a paternalistic approach.

Disability Identity:

A term that refers to the belief that a person specifically identifies as disabled and participates in the disability community. People who identify as a “disabled person” see the label as a way to show they share a common life experience and perspective of the world.



TOOLKIT TERMINOLOGY & DEFINITIONS (cont.)

Disability Frameworks (cont.)

Disability Justice:

A framework that examines disability and ableism as it relates to other forms of oppression and identity. It requires the understanding that disability is an identity that cannot be siloed away from other identities because there are disabled people with multiple marginalized identities. The framework was created by the Disability Justice Collective (DJC), a group of Black, brown, queer, and trans people including Patty Berne, Mia Mingus, Stacey Milburn, Leroy F. Moore Jr., Eli Clare, and Sebastian Margaret. The DJC created a set of 10 principles to Disability Justice: intersectionality, leadership of the most impacted, anti-capitalist politic, commitment to cross-movement organizing, recognizing wholeness, sustainability, commitment to cross-disability solidarity, interdependence, collective access, and collective liberation. For more information, visit www.sinsinvalid.org.

Disability Inclusion:

Providing the means for which disabled people can fully participate in societies, communities, organizations, and events. Basic inclusion has often meant providing accommodations for individuals to participate passively. Full inclusion means that systems allow disabled people to help actively lead in decision making, planning, and implementation.

Disability Rights:

This was the original framework for the disability rights movement. It works to secure equal opportunities and rights for people with disabilities.

Medical Model of Disability:

A framework around disability that comes from the medical community. It's a belief system that argues that disability is a medical condition and should be cured. People with disabilities should work to make themselves less disabled and fit into societal norms.

Neurodiversity

"A movement that promotes social acceptance of neurological difference as a part of the broad landscape of human diversity." (Autistic Self Advocacy Network) It was coined by an autistic person, Jim Sinclair, and is often used in the autistic self-advocacy community. However, the neurodiversity movement has spread to other parts of the disability community to include learning and mental health disabilities.

Social Construct of Disability

A framework that believes that society creates systemic barriers, both intentionally and unintentionally, which limit disabled people's ability to function in their community. A disabled person's limitations are thus wholly the fault of how society constructs communities and systems. These barriers can be physical and/or attitudinal.



TOOLKIT TERMINOLOGY & DEFINITIONS (cont.)

Disability Frameworks (cont.)

Spoon Theory:

A theory that accepts that individuals with chronic illnesses and disabled people have a reduced amount of physical or emotional energy. Spoons provide a visual representation of the amount of energy an individual has throughout the day. There is an understanding that every activity or interaction uses up a certain number of spoons. An individual may need to refill (recharge) their spoons in order to participate fully. A common phrase the spoonie community uses is “I am out of spoons” to tell individuals they do not have the energy to do a certain task, activity, or interaction. The spoon theory came from Christine Miserandino in 2003 in her essay «The Spoon Theory» and was first embraced by the chronic illness community and has spread into the wider disability community.

Disability Inclusion

Providing the means for which disabled people can fully participate in societies, communities, organizations, and events. Basic inclusion has often meant providing accommodations for individuals to participate passively. Full inclusion means that systems allow disabled people to help actively lead in decision making, planning, and implementation.

Disability Community Ally

An individual or organizational structure that fully understands and supports the disability community. They listen to and uplift disabled people’s ideas and opinions rather than speak for them.

Disabled Person vs. Person with a Disability (Identity First vs. Person-First Language):

These two ways are how individuals who belong to the disability community generally identify. Each person in the community may identify differently and there is no consensus that reflects the entire disability community. In general, individuals who were born before the disability rights movement use the term person with a disability to highlight that they are a person first (often referred to as “person first language”). Individuals born a little before or after the passage of the ADA often identify as disabled person to show how they believe disability is an identity (often referred to as “identity first language”). It is best to ask each individual how they identify. For the purpose of this toolkit, the two terms are used interchangeably.



TOOLKIT TERMINOLOGY & DEFINITIONS (cont.)

Euphemisms

There are numerous euphemisms used to describe disability. In general, the disability community discourages the use of euphemisms and have even developed a campaign called #SayTheWord. Euphemisms are often used because the person sees disability (whether consciously or unconsciously) as having a negative connotation. The disability community is trying to change those thoughts and believes using the word will help decrease those negative connotations. Euphemisms include differently abled, disAbled, handicapable, special needs, challenged/differently challenged, etc.

Intersectionality

A sociological theory created by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 which states that all aspects of political and social identity discriminations overlap or intersect. Crenshaw coined the term to address the issues that black women faced in society. She expanded the term to include other identity groups, showing how different systems of oppression interlock. Overlapping identities impact how institutions and society reacts, suppresses, and discriminates. This must be taken into account when fixing or tearing down these systems/structures in order to promote equality and justice.

Inspiration Porn

A term to describe how society uses disabled people and disabled experiences for their own motives to show either how life isn't so bad because they don't have it as bad as a disabled person, that a person is inspirational based solely on the fact that they have a disability, and/or a non-disabled person providing assistance to a disabled person to boost their own public persona. Inspiration porn puts non-disabled people's words and beliefs over a disabled person's words and beliefs. It takes agency away from a disabled person. An example would be if an organization filmed a disabled person (often without their expressed permission) being helped by a non-disabled person and the non-disabled person talking about how it felt to help the disabled person.



LANGUAGE GUIDELINES

**Always ask individuals first how they identify. Language use always changes and it's important to remain respectful when describing an individual or group of people. **

Preferred Language Use	Avoid
<p>“disabled person” or “person with a disability” (depends on person’s preference)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “handicapped,” “crippled,” “gimp,” “invalid,” “lame” (note that some in the disability community have reappropriated “crippled” and “gimp” to be used within their community) • euphemisms including “disAbility,” “handicapable,” “special needs,” “differently abled,” etc.
<p>person “has”/”is diagnosed with” ‘x’ diagnosis/disability</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • person “suffers from”/”afflicted with”/”stricken with” ‘x’
<p>“Deaf person” (with the ‘d’ capitalized) or “person who is deaf/hard-of-hearing” (depends on person’s preference)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “deaf-mute” or “deaf-dumb” or “hearing impaired” or using “deaf” in derogatory way (i.e. “It fell on deaf ears.”)
<p>“sign language interpreter”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “sign language translator”
<p>“autistic person” or “person with autism” (depends on person’s preference)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “high functioning” or “low functioning”
<p>“intellectual disability”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “retarded,” “dumb,” “stupid” • “intelligence level of a [age]”
<p>“non-disabled”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “able bodied” or “normal”
<p>“wheelchair user”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “wheelchair bound”



LANGUAGE GUIDELINES

**Always ask individuals first how they identify. Language use always changes and it's important to remain respectful when describing an individual or group of people. **

Preferred Language Use	Avoid
"someone experiencing a drug/alcohol problem"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "addict," "junkie"
"blind person" or "person with a visual disability"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "visually impaired person" or "person with a visual impairment" or using "blind" in a derogatory manner (i.e. "He was blind to her suggestions.")
"someone with cerebral palsy"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "spaz" or "spastic"
"congenital disability" or "genetic disability"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "congenital defect/deformity" or "genetic defect/deformity"
"little person" or "person with dwarfism"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "congenital defect/deformity" or "genetic defect/deformity"
"little person" or "person with dwarfism"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "midget," "dwarf"
"sustained/received an injury"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "suffered from an injury"



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Advocates for Youth

Autistic Self Advocacy Network

Center for Popular Democracy

We hope that the resources shared in this toolkit guide you in beginning your implementation of disability inclusion efforts within your organizational practice.

Communities for Just Schools Fund

Democracy Initiative

Genders & Sexualities Alliance Network

Make the Road New York

Movement Strategy Center

National Disability Rights Network

People's Action Institute

Texas Civil Rights Project

Texas Organizing Project Education Fund

YR Media

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