

How to Plan Events Everyone Can Attend



What Does Accessible Mean?

When people with disabilities can fully use services, facilities, or programs, we say they're "accessible." When we provide ways for people with disabilities to communicate effectively, we have made communication accessible. An example of this is when we provide interpreters.

What is Inclusion?

It's the act of including or the state of being included. It's also a way of thinking. Inclusion happens when people of all ability levels are appreciated and welcomed as valuable community members. They can take part fully and meaningfully alongside their peers without disabilities. An inclusive environment meets all accessibility requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

People feel welcome when they can fully participate in an event. It's your role to make sure everyone can take part, whether or not they have a disability. This brochure guides you to consider attendees' physical and developmental abilities – and reduce barriers that may limit their participation. This is what it means to create an inclusive event.

Benefits of Inclusion

Inclusive events:

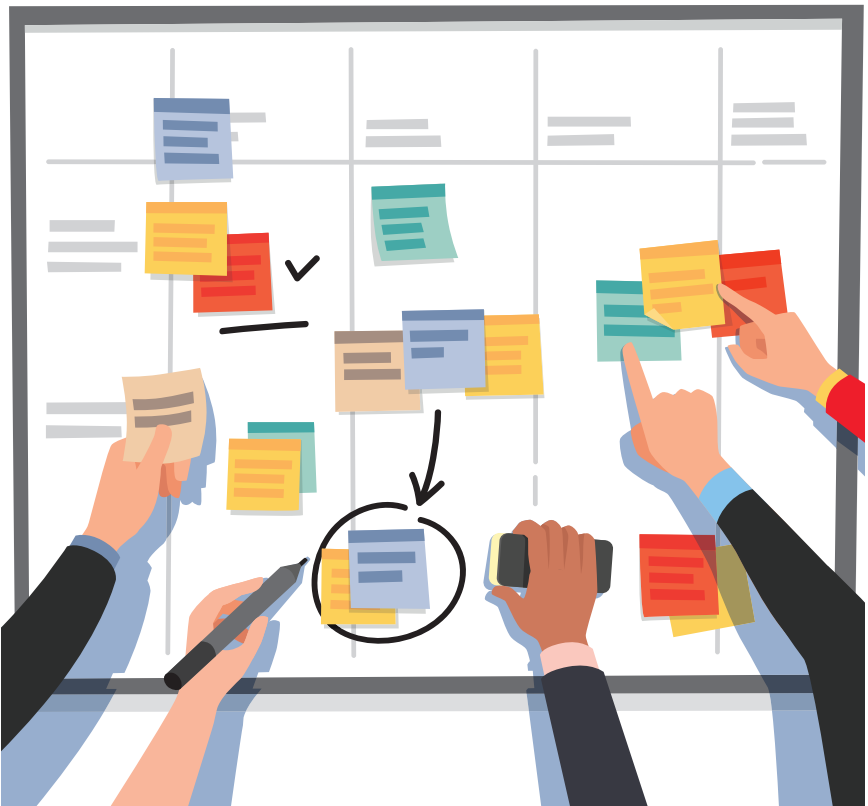
- Are good for your business. Working-age adults with disabilities are a big part of the economy. After paying for their basic needs, they have \$21 billion to spend as they wish¹. This is according to American Institutes for Research.
- Increase social connection and recognize everyone's contributions to society.
- Reach more people. The more inclusive the event, the larger your potential audience.
- Help your event meet, or even exceed, ADA requirements.



The Success of Your Event Starts with Planning and Preparation

Invite people with disabilities to actively participate in your planning committee. Think outside the box to plan and design in ways that will meet everyone's needs. Consider what might create barriers to participation. Design ways to remove these barriers.

Check often with the location's staff and all service contractors. Be sure your accessibility and inclusion requests will be met. Work with the site's staff to enhance their knowledge of inclusion. Suggest ways to remove barriers.



Create a Budget

Be sure to set aside funds to meet the needs of accommodation requests. Your organization is responsible for these costs.

Before the event you may need to send materials to an attendee or pay for an interpreter.

Budget for a space large enough to hold everyone. You will need to set up each area with 36-inch wide aisles – accessible pathways. A rule of thumb: use space that can hold 30% more people than you expect to attend.



Choose a Venue

Do a site visit before you pick a venue. It's good practice to have a person with a disability take part in the site visit. Make sure it's truly accessible, not just promoted that way. If barriers exist, make sure the venue has ways to address them.

Consider the following:

- Be sure the location is serviced by public transportation.
- Make sure shuttles, parking, and hospitality vehicles are available and accessible.
- Attendees should be able to access all you have to offer. Consider each exhibit, activity, and amenity. Make sure an accessible route connects arrival locations and parking with all of them. ADA Guidelines generally require a minimum width of 36" (3 feet) for aisle space, making it a clear pathway.
- If the event is held indoors be sure the venue has automatic doors – or a functioning, accessible button to open doors. If not, place a person at each door.
- Make sure these are accessible: meeting rooms, restrooms, common areas, and guestrooms. If 10% or more of your participants use wheelchairs or other mobility devices, you need 30% more space.
- Tables should be designed so that people using manual or electric wheelchairs can sit comfortably at the table.



- Is there an area set aside for service animals' relief?
- Is there a quiet area or rooms where people can take sensory breaks? These areas should be away from noise, lights, and crowds.
- Are there alternative alarms – such as visual alerts for people who are hard of hearing?
Is an emergency plan in place to assist attendees with disabilities?
- Will your event be held for more than one day?
If so, are there enough accessible overnight accommodations?
- Can the site meet each attendee's dietary needs?

Before the Event

- Create promotional materials such as fliers or e-mails in alternative formats, for example, large print or electronic. Place them at various heights and locations to increase access.
- On promotional materials, say that you can meet, or accommodate, a variety of needs. This is called an accommodation statement.
- Registration forms should include a deadline and an accommodation statement. It is always best to reach out to anyone asking for accommodations. This will ensure that you are prepared.
- Assign a contact person for accommodation requests.



- Examples of these requests include, but are not limited to:
 - Closed captioning/Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) services
 - Sign language interpreters
 - Large-print materials
 - Microphone(s)

- Materials provided in advance
- Installing a temporary ramp
- Documents that are screen reader-compatible
- Service animal-relief area
- Extra seating for personal assistants
- Dietary needs, or restrictions
- Tell venue staff and presenters details about accommodation requests you received.



- Give presenters guidelines for making their presentations inclusive and accessible.
- Create slides that are clear, simple, and concise.
- Use plain language and speak in a well-modulated voice. Keep an even pace.
- Present key concepts in a variety of ways. Also, describe what is on each slide, such as images, charts, graphs, and text.
- If interpreters are being used, presenters should always stay where interpreters can see them.
- Be mindful of chemical sensitivities. Consider hosting fragrance-free events.

During the Event

- Clearly mark accessible entrances and routes. Tell attendees where they are. Also keep them unlocked and free from barriers.
- Use multiple ways to announce changes during the event. For example, notify attendees verbally, and through apps, texts, email, signage, or personal contact.
- Let attendees know if you will use special effects, strobe lights or alarms, fireworks, or chemicals.
- Always use microphones or amplification systems. Require speakers and attendees to use them when speaking.
- Seat everyone together. Do not create separate seating areas. Mix seating for attendees using mobility devices and other equipment, within all seating areas.
- Maintain good ventilation and airflow.



After the Event

- Make sure attendees can access all of the materials that were presented.
- To get feedback, send attendees a survey. Ask questions about accessibility.



A Final Note

When you plan for inclusion, you'll set a standard for equal opportunities for all. This will benefit everyone.

Would you like help to make your event inclusive? Contact the Disability and Health Program at DHP@health.ny.gov. We can provide information about disability awareness and etiquette.

Here's an example of an accessibility checklist – as well as resources for more information:

- Cornell University Accessible Meeting & Event Checklist: https://hr.cornell.edu/sites/default/files/documents/accessible_meeting_checklist.pdf
- ADA Accessible Meetings Events and Conferences Guide: <https://www.adahospitality.org/accessible-meetings-events-conferences-guide/book>
- AUCD Presenter Guidelines: Accessibility and Inclusion: <https://www.aucd.org/conference/index.cfm/presenter-guidelines-accessibility--inclusion2017>

Endnotes

- 1 Michelle Yin, Dahlia Shaewitz, Cynthia Overton, and Deeza-Mae Smith (2018, April 17). A Hidden Market: The Purchasing Power of Working-Age Adults with Disabilities. Retrieved from <https://www.air.org/resource/hidden-market-purchasing-power-working-age-adults-disabilities>



**Department
of Health**