



Washington State Bar Association

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Accessibility Toolkit

In 2006, the WSBA established a policy on accessibility to all WSBA services, programs, events, and facilities including section and committee meetings for persons with disabilities. WSBA policy is to fully comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (“ADA”) and the Washington State law against discrimination, to provide WSBA services, programs and events, and to use facilities that are accessible to persons with disabilities. In order to fully live up to our commitment, WSBA has developed a procedure to help our staff and volunteers evaluate the accessibility of venues. Moreover, we have developed a list of venues that we have determined to meet basic accessibility requirements and those that don’t.

Attached you will find an accessibility toolkit created by the American Bar Association. This toolkit provides checklists and guidance to assist you in fully evaluating any venue under consideration for accessibility to people with disabilities or impairments. Merely asking representatives of the venue about ADA compliance and accessibility is insufficient (see page 2 of the toolkit) and an on-site visit is strongly encouraged.

This toolkit contains several checklists for specific areas of accessibility. Please make sure you consider all of the following before selecting a venue:

- ✓ Exterior accessibility
- ✓ Interior accessibility
- ✓ Meeting/Event Room accessibility

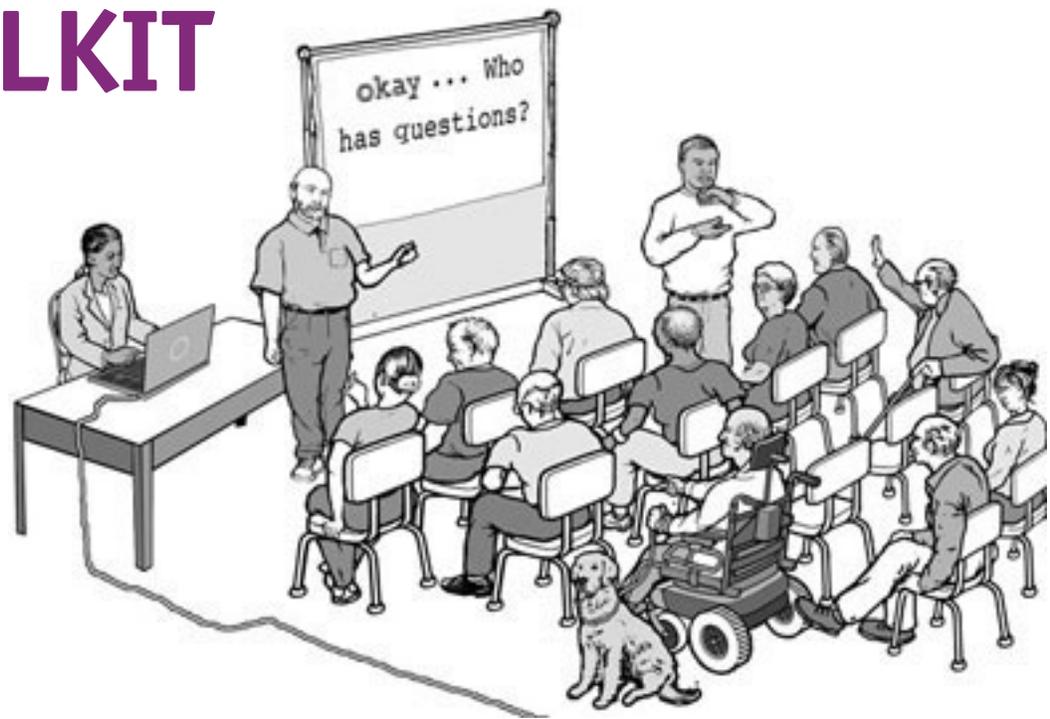
Also provided in the toolkit are other helpful checklists, including:

- ✓ Promotional/registration materials checklist
- ✓ Presentations checklist
- ✓ Meeting materials checklist
- ✓ Meals/social functions checklist
- ✓ Staff/volunteer training checklist

We are excited to share this toolkit with you. As you plan upcoming events, we encourage you to refer to WSBA staff as a resource and to inquire whether venues you are considering have already been evaluated.

Planning Accessible Meetings and Events

A TOOLKIT



Overview

Planning fully accessible meetings and events might at first glance seem overwhelming, but with proper planning can become second nature. An effective approach begins with raising planners' awareness of disability diversity within the legal profession, as well as the barriers that limit or preclude participation by persons with disabilities. During a lifetime, most everyone is likely to experience a disability, whether due to aging, a chronic disease, illness, or an injury. Every reasonable effort must be made to ensure that no person with any type of disability is prevented or discouraged from attending—and from fully and equally participating in—the meeting or event, or any part of it, based on any accessibility issue. Planners should reach out to persons with various types of disabilities, disability organizations, independent living centers, and the ADA National Network Centers for assistance. Note that some individuals may not disclose their disability-related needs, so meeting and event planners should be proactive in addressing potential barriers to participation.

Planners must work with attendees and presenters in an interactive fashion so that the most appropriate accommodations can be identified and provided. It is helpful to have a general understanding of the various types of disabilities, including mobility, sensory, cognitive, learning, and psychiatric. Some accommodations may be unreasonable, i.e., they pose an undue hardship or change the fundamental nature of the service being provided. However, most barriers to participation can be removed without incurring great expense, imposing an administrative burden, compromising the nature of the activity, or raising health and safety concerns.

This toolkit is intended to assist entities in planning meetings and events that are accessible to persons with disabilities. It provides recommendations and checklists for all phases of a meeting or an event, from choosing the venue to promotion, registration, presentations, materials, social events, meals, and staff and volunteer training. Note, however, that it is impossible to anticipate every barrier that might limit or preclude participation by a valued member. Moreover, because new ideas for improving accessibility and new technologies continue to emerge, this toolkit should be viewed as a living document that is meant to evolve.

Choosing a Venue

Physical accessibility of a venue is essential to making a meeting or an event accessible for persons with visual, hearing, and mobility impairments. Planners should evaluate the accessibility of the facility itself, as well as the surrounding area. For instance, is the venue located in close proximity to airports, rail stations, taxi or shuttle services, and public transportation routes? Also, are there accessible restaurants, shops, and tourist attractions nearby?

Before booking any meeting or event, plan an on-site visit of the venue to determine whether barriers to accessibility exist for persons with a wide range of disabilities. Do so far enough in advance so as to find an accessible venue without the time pressures created by an impending meeting or event. Of course, an on-site visit should take place in cooperation with representatives from the particular venue. Note that merely asking these representatives whether the venue is accessible is not sufficient. Many times, staff will claim that the venue is accessible when it is not. Also, check whether the venue has participated in an accessibility audit.

Prior to the on-site visit, prepare a checklist of specific accessibility items. For assistance, get in touch with persons with various types of disabilities; even better, bring them along to the visit, as they can be helpful in identifying barriers. In addition, seek guidance from disability organizations and governmental agencies with expertise in barrier-free access, or hire an independent access consultant to assess the site.

We have prepared some sample checklists for the exterior and interior features of the venue, as well as the meeting/event rooms. Note that generally we do not provide exact measurements (e.g., height, width, requisite number, etc.). These can be found in the Department of Justice's regulations implementing Title III of the Americans with Disabilities Act, 28 C.F.R. pt. 36, at http://www.ada.gov/regs2010/titleIII_2010/titleIII_2010_regulations.htm. Note that some items, such as ramps, temporary Braille and tactile signs, detectable warning devices, and additional parking spaces, may need to be temporarily added to make the venue accessible. Therefore, planners should do a walk-through of the venue close to the time of the meeting or event. To obtain additional sample accessibility checklists, as well as local expert assistance with conducting facility audits, you can also contact your region's ADA National Network Center at <http://adata.org/contact-us>.

Furthermore, prior to confirming the date of the meeting or event, find out whether any disability-related events are taking place during the same time. These events will have an impact on your meeting or event in terms of participants, as well as on the availability of service providers.

Venue Exterior Features Checklist

- Barrier-free, clearly marked (signage), well-lit accessible main entrance at street level so that all individuals can use this entrance
- Entrance connected by an accessible route to public transportation stops, accessible parking and passenger loading zones, and public streets or sidewalks
- Main entrance/exit doorways that are wide enough (32 inches with the door open 90 degrees) to accommodate wheelchairs/scooters
- Other entrances that are at street level or accessible by ramps or lifts
- Easy-to-open (automatic/push button door openers, lever handles), light (no more than 5 pounds) doors; no revolving doors
- Glass doors with contrasting door frames, stickers, or bright signs
- Clearly marked (Braille and tactile/raised signage), covered drop-off and pick-up points adjacent to the main entrance, with curb cuts
- Accessible transit services (private and public)
- Accessible, clearly marked (symbol of accessibility) parking spaces (1 space for every 25 spaces) located on the shortest accessible route of travel from adjacent parking to an accessible entrance
- Slip-resistant, level surfaces
- Barrier-free/step-free paths of travel
- Close proximity of venue from airport, train station, and public transportation
- Close proximity of venue to restaurants, theatres, shops, and other attractions
- Curb ramps/cuts so that persons who use mobility devices are not traveling in the street
- Crosswalks with visual and audible signals
- Ramps for inaccessible areas, equipped with handrails on both sides if the rise is greater than 6 inches, and level landings
- Stairs with continuous handrails on both sides; no open risers (space between steps)
- Tactile ground surface indicators that signal stairs and ramps for people who are blind or have visual impairments
- Toileting area for service animals

Venue Interior Features Checklist

- Registration/concierge desks at a height accessible by wheelchair/scooter users that allows for a frontal approach and provides adequate knee clearance under the desk
- Clearly marked (Braille and tactile signage) elevators located on both sides of the door and along an accessible route
- Elevator call buttons with visual and audio signals, reachable by wheelchair/scooter users
- Elevator control buttons that are designated by Braille and raised characters or symbols and are reachable by wheelchair/scooter users
- Elevator interiors adequately illuminated and wide enough for wheelchairs/scooters to enter, maneuver within reach of controls, and exit
- Elevator voice and visual display two-way emergency communication
- Easy-to-open, light (no more than 5 pounds) doors with lever handles that are easy to grasp with one hand or automatic/push button openers
- Wide (32 inches with the door open 90 degrees) doorways for wheelchairs/scooters to enter/exit
- Clearly marked (Braille and tactile signage), accessible exits
- Sufficiently wide (64 inches for two-way traffic), barrier-free hallways and corridors to allow everyone to move about freely
- Even, stable, regular, slip-resistant, non-sloped paths of travel
- Clearly marked (Braille and tactile signage) accessible restrooms located on an accessible route
- Accessible sleeping rooms (check on number available) with roll-in showers
- Accessible fitness center, including restrooms and showers
- Accessible restaurants (including ability to provide for dietary restrictions and large print/Braille menus), bars/lounges, and shopping
- Emergency procedures for persons with disabilities (audio and visual alarms in halls and sleeping rooms)
- Procedures to respond to medical issues/emergencies
- Accessible space for walking service animals
- Availability of TTY, hearing-aid compatible, and volume-control telephones reachable by wheelchair/scooter users
- Televisions with closed-captioning
- Well-lit areas; adjustable lighting

Venue Meeting/Event Rooms Checklist

- Signs (with Braille and tactile characters, sans serif or simple serif large type, sentence case, and good contrast) that direct attendees to all rooms
- Barrier-free path to rooms
- Seating aisles that are wide enough (36 inches) to accommodate wheelchairs/scooters
- Well-lit rooms for participants with visual and hearing impairments
- Good acoustics and a functioning auxiliary sound system
- Prominent, well-lit, visible space for interpreters to stand (e.g., raised platform with a dark, solid color background)
- Assistive listening devices, hearing or induction loops, and Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) for participants who are deaf or hard of hearing
- Location of all audio visual equipment in an area that does not block paths of travel
- Clear line of sight to interpreters and real-time CART
- Roving microphones for audience questions
- Multiple sets of outlets for laptops and other electronic aids
- Well secured, covered cables, wires, cords, and microphones placed outside of paths of travel
- Doors wide enough (32 inches with door open 90 degrees) for wheelchairs/scooters to enter/exit
- Easy-to-open, light doors (no more than 5 pounds) with lever handles or automatic/push button openers
- Speaker podium at ground level or accessible via ramp or lift
- Tables for materials and food/beverage at a height (28 to 34 inches) reachable by wheelchairs/scooters and in an accessible location
- Accessible exhibit areas
- Rooms large enough to allow all persons to move about freely
- Barrier-free aisles wide enough (36 inches) to permit wheelchairs/scooters to navigate
- Accessible bathrooms in close proximity to rooms
- Elevators in close proximity to rooms and along an accessible route
- Quiet break space in close proximity to rooms
- Accessible, integrated seating throughout the room, with preferred seating for persons with visual and hearing impairments in the front rows
- Toileting space and water for service animals
- Proper air circulation with temperature controls

Promotional/Registration Materials

Promotional and registration materials are a fundamental avenue for communicating about the accessibility of your meeting or event. We have put together a sample checklist of items relevant to persons with disabilities. Stating in these materials that your meeting or event is accessible is not only essential to drawing persons with disabilities, but also demonstrates your commitment to diversity and inclusion. Consider including images of persons with various disabilities, as well as the universal symbols of access (available at <http://www.aarts.net.au/resources/universal-access-symbols>). In addition, use people-first language in your materials: a person with a disability rather than a disabled person. Remember, the person, not his or her disability, is the focus. To further reach attendees with disabilities, identify and contact those organizations that advance the rights of, or are led by, persons with disabilities.

Be sure to include in your promotional and registration materials a statement that invites persons with disabilities to request accommodations, as well as a deadline that gives you sufficient time to respond to the requests and provide the accommodations. Asking questions beforehand about accommodations allows planners to identify participants' needs, find local service providers, make all of the arrangements in advance, budget for these accommodations, and minimize any last minute "surprises." Of course, always be prepared for accommodation requests made a few days before, or the day of, the meeting or event.

Here is a sample statement: "We welcome people with disabilities. For questions about accessibility or to request an accommodation, please attach your requirements to this form or contact [name] at [voice and/or TTY phone numbers]; [fax]; or [e-mail]. Requests should be made at least [specific time period] prior to the event." For registration materials, planners may want to include a more specific statement, such as "I will need the following accommodations: Interpreters (ASL, Oral, Voice, Signed Voice, Other [blank space]); intervenors (trained in sign language that involves touching client's hand in a two-hand, manual alphabet or finger spelling); Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART); assistive listening devices; hearing or induction loops; captioned videos; sighted guide; Braille; large print; notetakers; readers; computer disk [format]; audio CD; scent-free environment; wheelchair access; accessible transportation; orientation to the facility; dietary restrictions [blank space]; and other [blank space]." In addition, include a statement that materials are available in alternative formats, providing some examples (Braille, large print, disk, audio cd), and leaving a blank space.

Offer a range of accommodation options since not all individuals with the same disability use the same accommodations. What works for one person may not work for another. Listening is key to determining each person's unique needs. On a separate note, provide a range of alternative registering options: online, telephone (voice and TTY), text phone, and email. Make sure your registration forms are accessible for persons using assistive technology.

Some persons with disabilities may bring their personal care attendants to the meeting or event. On the registration form, ask about this issue. Here is a sample statement: "A personal care attendant will be accompanying me: Yes No." Remember to count the attendant in the final tally of participants and in seating and meal arrangements. We recommend not charging the attendant a registration fee.

Designate someone on staff to handle all accommodations issues. Ensure that he or she responds to

accommodation requests promptly. Note that it may take several communications to work out the details. This process provides a wonderful opportunity to establish a relationship with participants and make them feel welcome. If several types of accommodation are available, always give primary consideration to the option preferred by the person with a disability, unless doing so is unduly burdensome.

The contact person should be prepared to receive phone calls via the Telecommunications Relay Service (TRS), where a special operator types whatever you say so that the person you are calling can read your words on his or her TTY display. He or she will type back a response, which the operator will read aloud for you to hear over the phone. In addition, the contact person should notify the venue chosen far in advance of those accommodations needed that are within its control. In turn, the venue should notify that person of any accommodation requests it has received.

Promote the meeting or event on your website and be sure to place an accessibility link in a prominent place. On that linked page, include all details about the meeting or event that are relevant for persons with disabilities. For instance, include information regarding accommodations; accessibility of the sleeping rooms, including a list of amenities; accessible parking and local transportation services; public transportation in close proximity to the venue; a description (oral and electronic, as well as a map) of venue, as well as the layout of the meeting rooms, that includes accessible features; accessible restaurants and shopping; accessibility barriers that cannot be eliminated; and the availability of materials in alternate formats. This information should be attached to all promotional and registration materials as well.

Make sure that the website itself is accessible and compatible with the range of hardware and software used by persons with disabilities. All web pages should comply with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines at <http://www.w3.org/TR/WAI-WEBCONTENT/#Guidelines>. Provide text equivalents to auditory and visual content (e.g., videos and images). When using images, ensure that the ALT text (Alternative text attribute) of the image tag conveys what is important or relevant about the image.

And, most importantly, offer all of your promotional and registration materials in alternative formats, such as Braille, large print, and electronic files, that are accessible to persons with disabilities. The format will depend on the type of disability and the needs of the particular individual.

Promotional/Registration Materials Checklist

- Include a statement that meeting/event is accessible
- Include a request for accommodations statement
- Designate a contact person to handle accommodation requests
- Ensure that your website is accessible
- Include an accessibility link for meeting/event on your website in a prominent place
- Identify any barrier that cannot be eliminated
- Offer materials in alternative formats
- Provide alternative registration options (online, telephone, text phone, email)

Presentations

It is crucial that planners communicate with all speakers/presenters well in advance to ensure that their presentations and materials will be accessible for persons with a wide range of disabilities. Building universal design into presentations ensures maximum inclusion and benefits everyone. Explain both the types of disabilities that attendees have and their requested accommodations. Emphasize that there is not a one-size-fits-all accommodation, and that persons with the same disabilities may have different needs. Ask presenters to submit their materials about a month before the meeting or event in order to allow enough time to produce alternative formats, and to provide the materials to interpreters and other service providers and participants.

Note that the presenters themselves may also have disabilities. In fact, diversity should be a factor to consider when selecting presenters. Ask each presenter well in advance whether he or she requires an accommodation.

Prepare, well in advance, an accessibility checklist. We have provided a sample checklist on the next page. Schedule a briefing session with the presenters to go over the items on your checklist. Set out your expectations from the start.

Presentations Checklist

- Announce when the meeting begins and ends
- At the start of the meeting, introduce the interpreter(s) and other service providers
- At the start of the meeting, orally describe the room layout and location of emergency exits, food/beverages, and restrooms
- Inform attendees in the presentation description and at the start of any writing or reading activities during the meeting so people with visual, cognitive, or motor impairments can fully and equally participate
- Keep the presentation clear, simple, concise, and organized
- Provide an overview of the presentation at the start and a summary of the key points at the end
- Avoid using gestures and visual points of reference
- Use simple language; avoid acronyms, jargon, and idioms
- Always face the audience; never turn away
- Keep hands and other objects away from your mouth when speaking
- Be visible to everyone; stand in good light
- Use a microphone
- If interpreters are being used, do not walk while speaking
- Speak to the person for whom the interpreter is working, not the interpreter
- Speak in well-modulated tones and at a pace that allows interpreters to interpret accurately and persons with learning and cognitive impairments to process
- Describe verbally all visual materials (e.g., slides, charts, overheads, videos) in detail
- Ensure that visual aids are printed in large font and make print copies available
- Provide a written description of all images
- Allow participants extra time to look at visual materials (for instance, individuals who use interpreters cannot look at both the interpreter and the materials simultaneously and persons with learning disabilities and cognitive impairments need time to process the information)
- Use multiple communication methods for different learning styles (verbal information, pictures and diagrams, text, auditory)
- Give people time to process information by pausing between topics
- Check in with participants to ensure that presentation is understood and clarify if needed
- Provide a verbal overview of information in textual materials
- When reading directly from text, provide an advance copy and pause slightly when interjecting information not in the text
- Provide audio descriptions (i.e., describe facial expressions, body language, actions, and costumes) and captioning or CART for all videos

- Instruct participants to wait to be called on, not to interrupt, speak one at a time, and speak clearly into the microphone)
- Repeat questions posed by people in the audience before responding
- Allow for written questions
- Build in sufficient time for participants to get from session to session
- Prepare all materials (papers, PowerPoints, agendas, slides) in alternative formats (e.g., large print, Braille, audiotapes, computer disks, CD-Roms)
- Make electronic versions of materials available in plain text, rich text, or Microsoft Word
- Allow persons with visual or learning disabilities to tape meetings
- Make materials available in advance of the meeting to allow persons with learning and other cognitive impairments, as well as interpreters and other support personnel, to familiarize themselves with the materials and ask any questions
- Tab and label materials
- Make text and visuals large enough to be read from back of the room
- Reserve seats in front of presenter for persons with visual, hearing, and cognitive impairments
- Ensure that all accessible seating is integrated within the room so as to avoid sitting all persons with disabilities together
- Allow for regular breaks (about every 45 minutes) for questions and answers; people/service animals restroom; access service providers such as interpreters, CART providers, notetakers, readers

Meeting Materials

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

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

- Braille;
- Large Print: Font Size _____;
- Audio;
- Disk: Format _____
- Other _____.

The statement should be in large, sans serif font so that people who need an alternative format will be able to know what is available. When setting the deadline for receiving all materials, factor in the time it will take to produce the alternative formats requested.

Materials provided in a print or an electronic format must be accessible to persons with visual impairments. Make electronic versions of materials available in plain text, rich text, or Microsoft Word. Avoid PDFs unless they are made accessible. We have prepared a checklist of some general guidelines to follow on the next page.

Meeting Materials for Persons with Visual Impairments Checklist

Text Format

- Use a 16-point font size, but if not practical, at least 14 point
- Avoid using highly stylized typefaces
- Use easy-to-read fonts with clearly defined letters and clear spacing between the letters, such as sans-serif fonts (e.g., Helvetica, Verdana, Arial)
- Avoid using blocks of capital letters for more than a couple of words
- Avoid underlining or italicizing large volumes of text
- Spell out numbers, as persons with visual impairments often have trouble distinguishing between the numbers 3, 5, 8, and 0

Layout

- Align all text on the left, rather than centered or right justified
- Avoid centralized or justified paragraphs
- Do not hyperlink URLs because underlining reduces readability
- Do not place text directly over or wrap text around an image
- Use at least 1.5 spacing between lines of text paragraphs
- Use column lay out where practical, making sure to input space or use a vertical line to mark the end and beginning of each column

Contrast and Color

- Ensure good contrast between the font and background colors
- Use black text
- Use cream instead of white paper
- Use a single solid color for documents with a colored background
- Use pastel blue or yellow, not pink, red, or green, if color paper is required

Paper

- Choose a matte rather than a glossy finish
- Avoid using thin paper, which can bleed images and text from the reverse
- Print on one side

Meals/Social Functions

Planners must ensure that meals and social functions, such as receptions, are accessible to persons with disabilities. These networking opportunities can be as important to attendees as the substantive meetings and presentations. We have put together a sample checklist on the next page.

Meals/Social Functions Checklist

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

Staff/Volunteer Training

Staff (both event and venue) and volunteers (e.g., readers, notetakers, guides, and personal assistants) are critical to holding an accessible meeting. ABA entities often sponsor programs using volunteer organizers and limited budgets. Thus, planning accessible meetings and events will require the commitment of volunteer organizers, members, and staff to identify and remove barriers to full participation. A sample checklist is provided on page 17.

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

For assistance with developing or providing training, contact one of previously mentioned 10 regional ADA Network Centers that make up the ADA National Network.

Make sure to train those staff responsible for registering attendees and answering questions about the event. They should be knowledgeable about the available accommodations, the use of assistive devices, emergency procedures, and the accessibility features of the venue and meetings, as well as the etiquette for communicating and interacting with persons with disabilities, which is discussed on pages 18-20. Before the meeting or event, hold an orientation for all staff and volunteers that addresses how to best assist and communicate with individuals with disabilities. Emphasize that accessibility and creating a welcoming and inclusive environment are priorities and set forth expectations. Discuss both apparent disabilities and hidden disabilities, such as learning, cognitive, and mental health impairments. Review all meeting and event activities, including social events, and determine how they can be made accessible.

In addition to an orientation for staff, hold an orientation for interested persons with disabilities. Assure them that trained staff will be on site. Review the accessibility features of both the venue and the meetings and provide a tour. To help participants with visual impairments find the meeting and event locations, tactile maps or prerecorded instructions can be very helpful. In addition, identify the location of services such as assistive listening devices. Also, take care of any additional accommodation requests. For instance, people with visual impairments may need a guide to go from one meeting or event to another. Persons with cognitive impairments may need an explanation of what meetings and event will be going on and where.

Furthermore, in the days prior to the meeting or event, the point person—accompanied by the appropriate staff and volunteers—should do a walk-through of the facility and the meeting/event rooms. All technical equipment should be tested upon its arrival, as well as on the day of the event. On the day of the event, double check that all routes of travel are clearly marked and that temporary access accommodations and signage are in place.

Staff/Volunteer Training Checklist

- Appoint a point person for accessibility issues and list as contact on all materials
- Contact regional ADA Network Centers for assistance with training
- Train staff/volunteers about accommodations, use of assistive devices, emergency procedures, and accessibility features of the venue and meeting/event
- Hold orientations for staff/volunteers on types of disabilities and disability etiquette
- Hold orientation for attendees with disabilities to review accessibility features, location of meetings/events, and accommodations
- Do a walk-through of the venue a few days before and the day of the meeting/event
- Test all technical equipment when it arrives and the day of the meeting/event

Effective, Respectful Communication

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

Every Person

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

Persons Who Use Wheelchairs/Scooters

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

Persons Who Are Blind or Have Visual Impairments

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

Persons Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

- Ask the person how he or she prefers to communicate (e.g., sign language, gesturing, writing, or speaking)
- Advise the person if you have trouble understanding the person
- Face the person when talking
- Find a well-lit room, but avoid glare
- Speak clearly, avoiding gum chewing or obscuring your mouth with your hand
- Use your normal tone of voice and volume
- Avoid spaces with background noise
- Have pen or paper or device to text on hand as alternative communication method
- In groups, request that people speak one at a time
- Address the person rather than his or her interpreter
- When communicating with a person who reads lips, speak clearly in a normal way that does not over exaggerate words, use short and simple sentences, avoid blocking your face, and stand in a well-lit place
- Ensure that the venue has an induction loop that stops background noise interfering if the person is wearing a hearing aid
- Ask, if you have any doubts, if the person understood you
- Do not pretend to understand when you do not
- Be aware of situations involving announcements or calling out names so you can notify persons who are deaf or have other hearing impairments

Persons with Speech Difficulties

- Ask each person what will make him or her most comfortable
- Listen carefully
- Do not pretend to understand when you do not
- Give the person your full attention
- Find a quiet space
- If you do not understand, ask the person to repeat; if you still are unable to understand, ask the person to write the information or to recommend an alternative method of communicating
- Do not finish sentences for the person or interrupt
- Consider writing as an alternative means of communicating

Persons with Learning/Cognitive Difficulties

- Ask each person what will make him or her most comfortable
- Listen carefully
- Speak clearly
- Check for understanding
- Use clear, concrete language, avoiding abstractions
- Allow the person extra time to process the information and ask questions
- Ask the person how he or she prefers to communicate (e.g., written or verbal)
- Don't overload the person with too much information
- Find a quiet place without distractions

Persons with Developmental Disabilities

- Ask each person what will make him or her most comfortable
- Speak clearly
- Use simple words and concrete, not abstract, concepts
- Break down complex concepts into small parts
- Do not use "baby" talk
- Ask neutral questions
- Verify responses by repeating questions in a different way
- Allow time for decision-making
- Keep to the person's schedule and routine
- Model your pace of speech and vocabulary on that of the person
- If you are not sure if the person understood you, ask him or her to repeat the information for your benefit

Persons with Psychosocial Conditions

- Ask if there is a preferred time to communicate
- Schedule communications in the late morning or early afternoon
- Keep the pressure of the situation to a minimum
- Use automated reminders to highlight times and locations of meetings
- Provide written instructions
- Allow for breaks

Post-Meeting/Event Survey

All meetings and events should include a survey for attendees to provide their feedback. To determine how you did in terms of accessibility, include an accessibility question in the survey. For instance, How would you rate the accessibility of the:

	Very	Somewhat	Not Very	Inaccessible	N/A
Registration Process	<input type="radio"/>				
Registration Materials	<input type="radio"/>				
On-site Registration	<input type="radio"/>				
Accommodations Process	<input type="radio"/>				
Promotional Materials	<input type="radio"/>				
Website	<input type="radio"/>				
Meeting/Event Site	<input type="radio"/>				
Hotel Rooms	<input type="radio"/>				
Transportation	<input type="radio"/>				
Parking	<input type="radio"/>				
Meeting/Event Rooms	<input type="radio"/>				
Presentations	<input type="radio"/>				
Presentation Materials	<input type="radio"/>				
Receptions/Social Activities	<input type="radio"/>				
Meals	<input type="radio"/>				

Please explain your rating. _____

These questions will allow planners to examine ways to both increase and improve the accessibility of your future meetings and events.

Conclusion

We recognize the sheer volume of information provided in this toolkit. Understanding it will take some time and require staff trainings. In the meantime, if you have any questions, contact: Amy L. Allbright, Director, Commission on Disability Rights, 202.662.1575, Amy.Allbright@americanbar.org.