SIGACCESS

ACM's Special Interest Group on Accessible Computing

- SIGACCESS_v
- News_v
- ASSETS (Conference)_v
- Resources_v
- Awards_v

Accessible Conference Guide

Shari Trewin 1, with additional input from Vicki Hanson, Jen Mankoff, and Donal Fitzpatrick

Institution:

      1. IBM T.J. Watson Research Center, Hawthorne, New York, USA

Email:
      trewin-ta-us-tod-ibm-tod-com

This document contains information for organizers of academic conferences who wish to make their events as accessible as possible, so that people with disabilities can participate fully. It is not intended as an accessibility checklist or requirements document, but offers general ideas and information that conference planners may wish to consider. These ideas are based on experiences in running the ACM SIGACCESS Conference on Computers and Accessibility (ASSETS). ASSETS is a conference of around 130 people, consisting of technical paper presentations, posters and demonstrations. The conference proceedings are published in the ACM digital library. Most attendees are non-local, and stay in the conference hotel. ASSETS is often attended by people with disabilities. In a typical year, there might be attendees who are blind, have low vision, are deaf or hard of hearing, use a power wheelchair or an electric scooter, have limited dexterity, and limited mobility. ASSETS strives to create an environment in which all attendees can participate and socialize together.

Table of Contents

Location and Hotel Selection

When selecting a location and a specific hotel, consider the following:

- Is there accessible public transport from the airport (or other likely arrival points) to the hotel? How complex is the journey?
- Is the hotel ADA-compliant (or equivalent accessibility regulation for non-US sites)? Even if the hotel claims to meet the appropriate standards, implementation varies widely, so it is still valuable to ask more detailed questions and visit the site in person wherever possible. Hotels in the US should be able to provide an ADA compliance statement indicating how they meet the accessibility requirements of the law.
- Is the hotel willing to reserve the wheelchair accessible rooms and rooms on the ground floor and near elevators for conference attendees to book?
- Is the building wheelchair accessible through the main entrance?
- Large, open public spaces with few landmarks are difficult to navigate without vision.
- Are there at least 2 wheelchair accessible guest rooms? Specific adaptations include easily operable door handles and room keys, lowered spyhole and light switches, and room to maneuver bulky electric wheelchairs.
- If the event is more than one day, is there a wheelchair-adapted room with a roll-in shower?
- Are the elevators accessible? (Ask about tactile buttons, auditory feedback, visual feedback, wheelchair-height controls).
- Does the hotel have Braille labeling, especially in elevators? (For ASSETS, we have even provided adhesive Braille labels for elevators.)
- Does the hotel have alternative emergency devices for Deaf and hard of hearing guests?
- How much walking is required to get between the nearest disabled parking space, the lobby, guest rooms, meeting rooms, nearest restrooms and lunch location? What is the wheelchair route between these locations?
- Are there accessible restrooms near the meeting rooms, on the same level or with an elevator very near? The accessible stall should accommodate a large power wheelchair.
- If there is a raised stage in the meeting room, is there a way for a wheelchair user to get to the podium? Are there railings on steps up to the stage?
- Do the meeting rooms have an induction loop?
- Will there be room to seat wheelchair users in the meeting sessions?
- Obstacle-free environment (free of protruding objects and trip hazards)
- Have the hotel staff had any disability awareness training?
- How willing are the hotel staff to accommodate special requests?

Budget

- Captioning and sign language translation are expensive. Plan for approximately $1500 per day in the budget to cover this service, in case it is requested. Sign language interpretation should include coverage of breaks and social events. The choice of whether to provide interpreters or captioning will depend on the requests made by attendees. For conferences where there will be attendees who sign in different sign languages, captioning can be used to accommodate everyone with a single service.
- The audio-visual budget should include microphones for speakers, and for asking questions.
- When deciding how many student volunteers are needed, consider that student volunteer duties might include assisting attendees with accessibility requests, such as guiding people to the restrooms or helping at the buffet.
- Some attendees may require helpers or assistants to accompany them at the conference for care giving and/or language interpreting. These helpers should not have to pay the full conference fee. A suggested

alternative is to have them pay for a 'meal-only' fee if they will be eating at the conference.

Website

- The conference website should meet W3C's WCAG 2.0 accessibility guidelines and be tested for usability when fonts are enlarged, when style sheets are turned off, when images are turned off, and without using a pointing device (keyboard-only access). Testing with a screen reader and screen magnifier is also beneficial.
- The website can provide information about accessibility of the conference hotel, accessibility of transportation to the hotel (including for bulky electric wheelchairs), details of local accessibility information services, and contact people at the conference hotel, and on the organizing committee for accessibility questions.
- The website can offer information on how to create an accessible submission to the technical program.
- Posting details and advance registration for social events on the website can facilitate access for those who are not able to see onsite notices.

Online Registration

- Include a place for participants to indicate accessibility requirements.
- Include a place to indicate dietary requirements
- Allow registrants to request electronic proceedings, if the default is paper.
- Check that the online registration process is accessible, using the same process as for the website.
- Follow up with registrants to clarify accessibility requests

Catering

- It is helpful to have a system (e.g. colored stickers on the conference badges) to identify people who have requested special meals, if these meals are served separately by hotel staff
- Ask the hotel to provide labels on buffet dishes listing ingredients or indicating the presence of gluten/meat/dairy products/fish
- Make sure that non-sugar beverage and healthy snack options are available
- Ask the hotel staff to make drinking straws available
- Have student volunteers assist with buffet-style food where needed.

Local Arrangements

- Gather information on local emergency doctors, hospital facilities, wheelchair repair, physiotherapist and veterinarian.
- Make sure the room seating allows for wheelchair access to the podium and the microphone for asking questions.
- Make sure there are sufficient wheelchair seating places.
- Offer an orientation session before the conference, for attendees and presenters to get to know the meeting room layout and seating arrangements. The room should already be set out as it will be for the meeting.
- Make sure there is a connection into the PA for laptops
- Make student volunteers available to attendees who request assistance.
- If the conference provides an attendee list, have an electronic version available for reference at the registration desk, so that visually impaired attendees can browse the list for people they may wish to talk with. An alternative is to have attendees ask at the registration desk whether specific people are present.
- Communicate with hotel staff about what to expect, and what accessibility requests they may receive from conference attendees. Specifically, staff should be available to show blind attendees to their rooms, and around the inside of their rooms to familiarize them with the layout. They should also be prepared to show

attendees how to get to the meeting rooms. Make staff aware that Deaf attendees may communicate in different ways. Some may speak, others may write.

Conference Sessions

- In advance of the sessions, presenters should be encouraged to prepare as accessible a presentation as possible, including captions for video. If presentations can be made available ahead of time, this is very helpful to attendees with visual impairment, captioners and sign language interpreters.
- The printed session schedule should also be available electronically, in large print, and if possible Braille (1 Braille copy is sufficient).
- At the start of the conference, if there are attendees in the audience with vision impairments, all slides, videos and visual demos will need to be described as part of the spoken presentation.
- Remind the audience to use a microphone to ask questions, so that everyone can hear, and should state their name before speaking, for the benefit of those who cannot see who is speaking.
- If there is an interpreter or captioner present, the lighting should be good enough that they can be easily seen by the deaf attendee(s). Explain to presenters that they should speak with a normal tone and pace, unless asked to slow down by the interpreter. For personal conversations, the attendees should be reminded to speak directly to the person, not to the interpreter.
- A presenter with a visual impairment may request assistance from a student volunteer to advance slides. The session chair, or a volunteer, can also facilitate question asking.

Proceedings

- Work with the proceedings publishers to ensure that the index and table of contents of the electronic proceedings are available in an accessible format. If they are html, the W3C WCAG 2.0 guidelines apply. For pdf documents, the Adobe Acrobat accessibility check applies (see resources below for more information about creating accessible pdf documents).

Social Activities

The social side of a conference is equally as important as the technical content. Try to avoid events that exclude some attendees. Consider whether:

- Accessible transportation is available to any off-site events
- Offsite venues (e.g. restaurants) are wheelchair accessible with an accessible restroom
- Sign language interpretation is available for the social event.
- Participants will need to be informed of the walking distance to nearby events, so they can decide how best to get there.
- The event will have broad appeal (e.g not purely visual or auditory)

More Information and Resources:

- Producing accessible pdf files
- Planning and giving an accessible presentation
- Planning Accessible Conferences and Meetings: An ERIC/OSEP Information Brief for Conference Planners
- ADA Requirements checklist
- W3C Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2.0)
- Testing Web sites for accessibility: www.webaim.org is a good starting place. The WAVE Firefox plugin is a useful tool.

[Information Director](#)

Tiago Guerreiro is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Informatics, Faculty of Science of the University of Lisbon, and a researcher at LaSIGE. His research focuses on mobile accessibility, text-entry, and on accessible and usable privacy. He has focused most of his efforts on improving the quality of life of blind and visually impaired people, people with motor impairments, and people with dementia. He was a local chair for ASSETS 2015 and has collaborated in several other editions, as an organizer, committee member, and author. Tiago holds MSc (2008) and PhD (2012) degrees from Técnico, University of Lisbon, both in Information Systems and Computer Engineering.

[View all posts →](#)

Resource List

- [Accessible Conference Guide](#)
- [Accessible Writing Guide](#)
- [Conflict of Interest](#)
- [Thesis Repository](#)