UNIVERSITY OF
CAMBRIDGE
Disability Resource Centre

# Making Meetings and Events Accessible to Disabled People

Disability Resource Centre
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Making meetings and events accessible to disabled people

It is always much easier to make an event accessible when doing so in the planning stages. Good access for all means more people can (and will!) attend your event. So this is best practice in addition to being a legal requirement to remove barriers to access for disabled people. This document draws heavily on 'Accessible Meetings and Events Minimize Surprises' by Ohio State University and the University of Cambridge is grateful for their permission to use this. It is a starting point to highlight some of the issues to consider.

It's worth remembering good practice for disabled people is good practice for all – everyone benefits from flexibility, good planning and clear information. On a logistical level, getting inclusion right from the start means that things run more smoothly for organisers and staff.

A good first step is to assign a contact person involved with the event This contact can be named on your application forms, and when you publicise the event for any questions relating to access for disabled people. Having a named person co-ordinating facilities is a good way to encourage potential disabled participants to get in touch to discuss their needs early on.

Budget

When budgeting for an event, include costs of adjustments as a standard budget item. You might need a sign language interpreter, induction loops, amplification of the speaker, media in an alternative format: a copy of the power point presentation, large print or Braille.

Staff

When you plan for moderators, facilitators and registration, identify individuals that would be willing to volunteer as readers, guides and other functions related to disabled participants. Be sure that these volunteers are included in any staff induction and orientation and make sure that they have training in working with disabled people and are aware of what access facilities there are.

Location

A site visit to potential venues should be conducted to determine whether barriers to accessibility exist. The site visit should consider barriers to those with a wide range of impairments (visual, hearing, mobility, ...) in all of the areas used. Typically that would include:
*    Parking and transport
*    Entrances and interior doorways
*    Signage
*    Corridors and aisles

* Lifts
* Bedrooms
* Meeting rooms
* Bathroom facilities
* Dining facilities & Catering (including ability to provide for dietary restrictions)
* A quiet break space for people and toileting space for working dogs

Don't forget to check the University Access Guide which can be found here, and information on communicating effectively with disabled people here http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/univ/disability/support/etiquette.html

Promotion and Registration

* Include a statement on your registration form, flyers, and computer or print advertisements confirming the access available.
* Organisers should arrange for all promotional material to be available in alternative formats, such as Braille, large print, or electronic files.
* In all conference/meeting materials, make participants aware that facilities and adjustments can be made for a variety of needs. The registration form must ask whether assistance is needed. Examples include statements such as the following:

1. If you have a disability or any additional needs and require assistance, please inform (organiser) by attaching your requirements to this form or contacting (organiser)

2. If you have a disability or any additional needs and require assistance in order to fully participate in this activity, please tick here. You will be contacted by someone from our staff to discuss your specific needs.

A more detailed registration form requesting information on specific needs can also be used. If a more general statement such as the one above is included, staff responding to requests should be prepared to ask detailed questions regarding necessary adjustments.

Sample registration questions
I will need the following adjustments in order to participate:
* BSL Interpreter
* Note taker
* Induction loop
* Large print
* Braille
Electronic materials in advance – please specify format
* Wheelchair access
* Help with orientation
* Special Diet - please specify
* An assistant will be accompanying me  Yes    No
* Parking

This list will need to be extended for residential events

Social Activities and Meals

When planning social activities and meals, planners should:
*	Include personal assistants and interpreters in the estimated number of participants.
*	Make adequate provisions for seating, allowing all participants to sit in the same area. Do not place people in wheelchairs, or those who use other mobility equipment or assistance dogs on the fringes of the dining area.
*	If you choose a buffet have waiting staff available to assist; buffets can be particularly difficult for persons with mobility or visual impairments, and ensure food is properly labelled.
*	Choose any outside entertainment and transport offered to participants with accessibility in mind.

Presentations

The conference/meeting organiser should work with invited speakers and presenters to ensure that presentations are accessible to disabled people.

*	Choose well-lit and easily accessible meeting rooms.
*	Control background noise to the greatest extent possible.
*	Choose a meeting room with good acoustics and an auxiliary sound system, if possible.
*	Provide written materials (handouts, overheads, etc.) disseminated at the meeting in a variety of formats, such as large print, Braille, and using a clear layout as standard
*	Discuss with each presenter, prior to the meeting, the importance of developing a presentation that will be accessible to all participants.
*	Instruct the presenter's to include the key points of the presentation on overheads or slides. Be sure they are completely legible, with large print, a sans serif font and sharp, contrasting colours. In addition, ask the presenter(s) to limit the number of overheads or other visual aids used in the presentation and to allow adequate time for the audience to read the visual aids.  It may be worth having presentation layout requirements provided in advance and only to allow handouts which meet these.
*	Ask the speaker(s) to accompany materials, including presentations and handouts, with a complete verbal description. If slides, overheads, videos, or other visual aids are used, the speaker must describe them orally. Ask presenter(s) to provide a copy of presentation materials well in advance (a minimum of three weeks) to allow for large print or Braille transcription..
*	Check for the needs of disabled presenters (ramping or podium requests, an interpreter, sighted guide for a person with a visual impairment, etc.)

Resources

Disability Resource Centre http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/univ/disability/

Guide to Accessible Meetings and Events
	Disabled People's Network Manchester
	 http://www.dpnsg.org.uk/guide.htm

RNIB See it Right – making text accessible for people with visual impairments
http://www.rnib.org.uk/xpedio/groups/public/documents/PublicWebsite/public_seeitright.hcsp

Creating materials accessible to people with dyslexia/Specific Learning Difficulties
http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/extra352.html

Useful overview of how and why to make events accessible
http://new.techdis.ac.uk/resources/files/accessibleevents.pdf

Resources from the US

Checklist for Planning Accessible Meetings and Events
	U.S. Department of Transportation, Disability Resource Center
	 http://www.connectoncampus.ca/resources/access.pdf

Removing Barriers Planning Meetings That Are Accessible To All Participants
	North Carolina Office on Disability and Health in collaboration
with The Center for Universal Design
	http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~ncodh/pdfs/rbmeetingguide.pdf

Accessible Best Practices (resources for accessible science centers, museums, exhibits, displays, presentations, tours, and meetings):
	Association of Science and Technology Centers
	http://www.astc.org/resource/access/best.htm

Planning Accessible Conferences and Meetings: An ERIC/OSEP Information Brief for Conference Planners
	Education Resources Information Center/Office of Special Education Programs
	http://www.hoagiesgifted.org/eric/e735.html