

EVENT PLANNING ACCESSIBILITY GUIDE



The COVID-19 pandemic forced a continuation of the national conversation about making organized group events accessible, inclusive, and safe for all.

Immediately, key learnings emerged regarding how little many of us knew about the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), its impact, and its limitations. The ADA (a U.S. law for equality and protection of individuals with disabilities) prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities for everyday activities such as employment, purchasing goods and services, and navigating public places. The concepts of accessibility and safety are much broader than ADA compliance alone. While ADA compliance specifically relates to the minimum legal requirements within the United States, accessibility and safety extend beyond legal obligations, encompassing a broad approach to inclusivity that is both grounding and dynamic.

This needed reckoning is why so many of us found ourselves yearning to investigate how to implement a set of actions that could make our shared Just Transition principles come alive in a truly transformative way. With gratitude for the incredible work spearheaded in 2005 by Sins Invalid [a collective of disabled Queer Women of Color], we have adopted a Disability Justice Framework to help guide us on this journey, taking a more comprehensive approach to securing accessibility for all by recognizing the intersectionality of many barriers to feeling as if one "belongs" and is safe in a given space.

"A Disability Justice framework understands that all bodies are unique and essential. All bodies have strengths and needs that must be met. We are powerful, not despite the complexities of our bodies, but because of them. All bodies are confined by ability, race, gender, sexuality, class, nation-state, religion, and more, and we cannot separate them." [Adapted from Patty Berne's "Disability Justice - A Working Draft" Published in *Skin, Tooth, and Bone: The Basis of Movement is Our People*, A Disability Justice Primer, Second Edition]

Since its inception, the Chorus Foundation has been experimenting with intentionally and deliberately centering accessibility and inclusivity in program planning. While much of this took the form of removing financial barriers and providing support for family caregiving "while at work," the COVID-19 pandemic forced communities to expand event planning protocols far beyond ensuring that a venue was ADA compliant alone. Simply put, much like everything else around us, event planning is also in a moment of transition where we are being asked to commit to grounding it in justice as well.

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Below, you will find our low-cost and no-cost recommendations for setting up an inclusive and accessible in-person event. These recommendations are based on our recent implementations and observations, aimed at expanding what moving toward a Just Transition for all truly means. The guide includes a checklist to ensure everyone can participate. Whether you're planning your first or 21st small community event, this guide is for you!

Rooted in the praxis of Disability Justice, we base our recommendations on "Access Intimacy." This framework reorients event planning away from exclusively centering able-bodied individuals (participants, staff, vendors). It means we should not ask disabled people to "squeeze into the able-bodied world," just as we should not ask any marginalized community member to fit into any privileged person's world. At its core, "Access Intimacy" asks event planners to commit to investigating what barriers may exist for people to fully attend, find a way to remove such impediments and add as many support items or plans as may be needed. Above all, it asks planners to be honest and transparent, sharing available access and any limitations.

We recognize that initial attempts at making event programming more inclusive may result in moments where individuals initially feel unsuccessful, as this requires more planning time, staff time, financial resources, and tough decision-making. With this in mind, we recommend that communities embrace the transition with the guiding principle of "Progress Over Perfection." This looks like engaging in regular communication, being willing to pivot when new solutions are needed, and an agreement to promptly admit and rectify mistakes. Whether you're planning a Zoom Webinar or a multi-day in-person event for over 100 folks, we hope this guide helps!

How to Use This Guide

Think about the following particular areas for the rest of your event planning. Ask yourself the questions posed to assess the proximity of the potential barrier, discover what your options are for removing them, and decide what needs to be communicated to your participants/guests. This guide was adapted from an "Event Accessibility Recommendations and Considerations Plan," originally written by Betsy Dorsett who has over 15 years of experience in website management, design, and usability, with a specific focus on website and digital accessibility.



Pre-Event Intake

Attendee Needs Assessment/Survey

Prior to the event production or planning, create and share a survey asking all participants and attendees to share the specific access support needs they will have in order to fully participate in your event. Survey questions should cover needs regarding any of the following that may apply to your event:

- travel/transportation costs resource or planning assistance
- registration fees payment options
- sleeping accommodations
- food & beverage allergies/preferences
- language interpretation/translation needs
- mobility support
- guests or support personnel
- ASL and hearing support
- visual support
- seating needs
- quiet/destimulation rooms or lactation rooms

Be sure to send surveys out with ample time to adequately explore both what is needed and what is possible (due to any constraints outside of your control, or to allow for critical pivots that may allow for accommodations possibility). This is usually a minimum of between 30-90 days prior to the event. Decide internally whether you need to translate the survey and make it available in multiple languages.

Site-Visit

Whenever possible, the entire event production team should physically visit the site of the potential venue. (This includes making sure planners are familiar with any “virtual locations” like Zoom or Google Hangouts.) While on site, think about people with a range of abilities who may attend your event. What barriers might they encounter when trying to attend (costs, proximity to airports, transportation to and from, physical terrain, weather, politics of the area, recent safety concerns, familiarity with area/platform, wifi or internet access, language needs)? Be sure to take notes, photos, and videos to help bring the visit to any team members who may not be able to attend.



Location & Venue

Carefully review the sections and use them as a guide for all of the venues you may be using during your event from meeting rooms, restaurants, and theaters. Remember that all event venues must meet required ADA guidelines.

Mobility

Things to ensure

- Pathways should be as wide as possible, but at least 3 feet wide (indoor and outdoor – i.e. in meeting rooms/between chairs)
- Outdoor paths should be free of overhanging branches or other hazards
- Are there slip or tripping hazards? (inside and outside - i.e. irregular surfaces, high pile carpet, flooring transitions, steps, loose cords, etc.)
- Curb cuts or ramps are available if needed

Key information to know and share with participants

- Is parking limited? Is there accessible parking, how much? Is parking close to entrances and exits? (Parking = Accessible Parking NOT Handicapped parking)
- Are there stairs or steps?
- Are there working elevators (if applicable)?
- How far is it from point to point? Along the way, are there steps or steep slopes?
- What is the terrain like along the way (sandy/rocky, some uphill, flat, paved)?
- Are there manual doors and if so, are they heavy?
- Are doors at least 34 inches wide? (36 is ideal)
- Does the venue or hotel use unscented cleaning products in bathrooms, sleeping rooms, and other spaces?
- Is the venue or hotel close to public transportation?
- Are any of the transportation vehicles accessible? (public or private transportation)
- What, if any, are the transportation options offered (shuttle, walking in a group, golf carts, cabs, bikes, etc)?



Restrooms

Things to ensure

- Restrooms are easy to locate
- The restrooms are accessible - check that there are grab bars, that the toilets are the appropriate height, and that a person using a wheelchair can reach the sink, soap and paper towels

Key information to know and share with participants

- Are there any all-gender restrooms?
 - Can you create any all-gender restrooms on site?
- Are there family restrooms (with baby changing stations)?

Additional Spaces

Key information to know and share with participants

- Is there a room that can serve as a quiet space (sensory room)?
 - Comfortable seating
 - Neutral wall/floor/ceiling colors
 - Provide fidgets and/or tactile tools
 - Sensory light that participants can turn on and off
- Is there a Lactation Room?

Lighting/Signage/Chemical Sensitivity

Things to ensure

- Make sure venue areas (specifically where folks will be moving around) are well lit throughout the day
- Provide clear signage pointing directions and identifying locations
- Make sure fragrance-free hand soap is available for participants to use in the restrooms during and before the event
- Remove obvious sources of fragrance such as “air fresheners,” potpourri, incense, and scented candles

Key information to know and share with participants

- Does the hotel use unscented cleaning products in bathrooms, sleeping rooms, and other spaces?
 - Request that scented cleaning products not be used in the event space for several days before the event (especially for longer sessions, and especially products used on soft surfaces like carpets)
- Lighting - fluorescent lighting can trigger seizures



Seating

Things to ensure

- Make sure all seats allow folks to clearly see the front of the room
- Make sure that you are providing a variety of chairs with and without armrests
- Reserve seating at the front of the room for people who lip-read, are hard of hearing, and who use electronic hearing aids (people who use sign language interpreters will need space to sit at the front of the room)
- Confirm that people with disabilities get priority seating with their companion(s)

Key information to know and share with participants

- Let all attendees know about the type of reserved seating available to them based on the information above

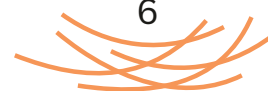
Sound

Things to ensure

- Ensure good sound, microphones for speakers and audience and ensure extra batteries for mics are available
- Have assisted listening devices available and ensure batteries are charged
- Use closed captioning
 - If you have good internet access you can use Google Slides and turn on the closed captioning (In your system and browser preferences, check your microphone settings and make sure it is using the plugged in external microphone.)

Key information to know and share with participants

- Ensure that there will be good internet connection for attendees to use (this will help with online and cell platforms that assist with closed captioning and translation services)



Food/Beverage/Catering

Things to ensure

- Ensure that food is prepared with latex free gloves
- Post ingredients of food (or read them out loud before people start eating) and indicate if foods contain gluten, meat, dairy, nuts, garlic, fish or shellfish
- Having breakfast available until later in the morning
- Have water and snacks available throughout the day
- Provide bendable plastic straws as well as some cups with handles
- If you have a self-service buffet be sure to place food, drinks and utensils in easy reach of a person using a wheelchair
- Provide an option for a designated server to bring food directly to the table of the requester
- Provide a mocktail menu and alcohol-free drink options at the conference happy hour
 - All drink options should be out at the same time - avoid, "If you want a non-alcoholic drink you have to go inside and order."

Key information to know and share with participants

- Is your caterer willing to work with diet restrictions and faith-based dietary needs?
- Stagger the buffet area by inviting areas or tables up one at a time and starting with, "Those who need extra time - please come up to the buffet first."
- Need meal options for (based on registration question responses): Vegetarian, Vegan/Dairy-free, Diabetic, Gluten-free, No red meat, Kosher, Fish allergy, Shellfish allergy, Peanut allergy, Tree nut allergy, Sesame seed allergy, Garlic allergy, Low-carb

Registration

Things to ensure

- Registration area is easily located
 - Set up near the venue entrance and have visible signs or banner
- Make sure there is enough room for a person using a wheelchair or scooter to approach and maneuver in front of registration tables
- Make sure there are chairs for people who use canes or crutches and find it hard to stand in lines for long periods
 - Provide volunteers to stand in their place

Key information to know and share with participants

- Inform attendees where Registration is located and it is available (days and times)

Program

Activities

Things to ensure

- Make sure ice-breakers, breakout sessions, competitions, and other activities within the event are also accessible or multi-sensory
- When designing the agenda, provide ample time for attendees to move between sessions, use the restroom, and get refreshments
- Make sure your audience identifies with your programming by seeing accurate representation at the front of the room.
 - Hire women or Black, Indigenous, LGTQIA, Disabled, and People of Color (BIPOC) as speakers, moderators, or MCs
- Provide seating for those who can't stand for long periods at events where people will be mostly standing
- Be mindful of the assumptions you make when developing group activities.
 - When you ask people to move around a crowded room, you might be alienating participants for whom this is difficult
 - Be sure that all information can be received through multiple senses. Avoid activities that limit sensory input, (i.e. a game in silence)
 - Be flexible - if you realize that every participant will not be able to participate in your planned activity, the activity should be replaced with another

Key information to know and share with participants

- Will there be police and/or security presence during or around your event?
 - Is this necessary? Is this needed? Will this help or hurt attendance?

Schedule

Things to ensure

- Stay on schedule while allowing people to move in and out of participation; build flexibility into the schedule

Key information to know and share with participants

- Share the schedule and any subsequent updates



Slides/Presentations

Things to ensure

- Share an accessible version of the presentation decks that you'll be using ahead of time
- Check if projection screens are visible from all seats
- Check if fonts are large enough to be read up to the last row of seats, images are of high quality, and messaging is clear
 - Use large fonts (44 point for titles, 36 point for information).
 - Use sans-serif fonts
 - Limit the number of fonts used (2 to 3)
 - Do not use all caps
- Make sure your slide background provides enough color contrast with the light-colored text (use a high-contrast color scheme - example black and white).
- Keep information displayed on each slide to a minimum
- Use standard slide transitions and avoid decorative fillers
- All videos shown should be captioned (free captioning software is available online)

Key information to know and share with participants

- Request a digital copy of any presented slide deck before the talk and share the link with participants (share this afterwards if you are unable to receive it prior)
- Are there enough electrical outlets for those who need to use laptops and adaptive devices?

Handouts

Things to ensure

- If there are handouts, have large print (18 point font) versions available (let people choose which one they need/want)
- If handouts include graphic elements, ensure good color contrast
- Language access - Do you need to offer printed materials in other languages?
- Use sans-serif, limit the number of fonts used (2 to 3)
- Do not use all caps

Key information to know and share with participants

- If speakers have prepared remarks, make those marks available ahead of time and let folks know where they can obtain a copy



Speakers

Things to ensure

- Speakers should describe themselves (self-description)
 - Briefly describe yourself along the lines of skin color, gender identity, hair length and texture, wardrobe, and any other distinguishing features to make your program accessible to those who are Blind or have low vision.
- Share pronouns
- Always use a microphone
- Always face audience when speaking
- Speak at a moderate pace
- If the audience asks a questions or says something without a microphone, repeat what they said
- Read information on slides and describe relevant visual content (don't ask the audience to read slides)
- Use closed captioning
 - If you have good internet access, you can use Google Slides and turn on the closed captioning. (In your system and browser preferences, check your microphone settings and make sure it is using the plugged in external microphone.)

Key information to know and share with participants

- How will folks be able to access things like closed captioning, interpretation devices, or other assisted listening devices?
- Offer personal land acknowledgement
 - Don't ask an Indigenous person to deliver a "welcome" statement for your organization
 - Recognize that a Land acknowledgment alone is not enough - it's a starting point
 - Support Indigenous organizations by donating your time and/or money
 - Support Indigenous-led grassroots change movements and campaign and inform participants on how they too can get involved

Name Badges & Swag

Things to ensure

- Provide name badges/tag
 - Pre-printed are preferred with ability to print on-site if needed
 - Allow participants to view and change their names/share their preferred names



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- Include pronouns in addition to printed name tags/badges and encourage attendees to use them
 - Stickers work well because people can use a different sticker on different days if they wish, they don't crowd the name badge, having them available at any registration table reminds others to use them
 - Have an array of options, including a blank sticker to allow people to write their own pronouns
- Offer pronoun ribbons for attendees' event badges
- If your swag is a T-shirt, be sure to offer neutral colors and styles in all sizes
- Make sure items don't take up too much baggage space

Key information to know and share with participants

- Will there be a participant directory for the event? (sharing name, pronouns, organizational affiliation, role, ways to communicate, interests, etc)

Attendance/Participation Alternatives

Things to ensure

- Consider the costs for everyone to attend (not just people with your resources, body, and preferences) when deciding on a location and prices for registration
- Offer a way for people to participate online
 - Ensure that video, audio, and captioning are working for virtual attendees before activity/session begins (should include captions)
 - Pie in the Sky Recommendation: Let people attend as robots that they can control remotely.

Key information to know and share with participants

- Can you offer financial assistance to those who wish to attend and need this level of support?
 - This could be in the form of providing attendance scholarships, pricing windows, travel grants, and/or pricing tiers (What is the process and deadlines for this?)
 - Pie in the Sky Recommendation: Make the conference or gathering completely free for attendees, including travel grants



- Will folks be able to access notes from a session (or a part of the event) or have a way to learn about the information - in case they need to step out or can't make the event
 - Consider using a shared Google doc to take notes, including answers to questions, that participants can access
 - Have someone as the designated note-taker (any changes to improve accessibility of the document can be completed after the meeting)

Support & Safety

Service Animals

Things to ensure

- You have asked in your participant needs assessment survey if folks will be bringing a service animal
- Having a water bowl on hand is a very good way to make a guest with a service animal feel welcome

Key information to know and share with participants

- Make sure there is a relief area for these animals, and make sure their owners know where it is

Family/Caregiving

Things to ensure

- Assign a volunteer to troubleshoot and resolve accessibility barriers on the day of the event
 - Assign a volunteer to troubleshoot and resolve accessibility barriers on the day of the event (remind your volunteers not to assume they know what kind of support is needed and to ask instead, "How may I help you?")
- Have a plan with a designated staff person/people to address any caregiving specific needs
- You have asked in your participant needs assessment survey if folks will be bringing a caregiver or family/community members with them

Key information to know and share with participants

- Is there a plan for childcare?
- Are there kid-inclusive activities?
- Is there a designated person to address questions about any care specific needs? How can one reach them?



Health & Safety

Things to ensure

- Have a plan with a designated staff person/people to address any on or off-site emergencies
- Create behavioral expectations of all participants and organization responses to lack of adherence (Community Agreements, Conference Attendee Guidelines, or Code of Conduct)
 - Be sure to include
 - Responsible consumption of alcohol and drugs
 - Consent and respect of bodily autonomy
 - Any COVID specific protocols
- Ventilation - Open windows if possible
 - Bring or add hepa filters for indoor activities (especially meals)
- Provide masks: N95, KN95 or KF94 masks
- Encourage people to take precautions while traveling to the event to help prevent COVID:
 - Get vaccination/boosters
 - Wear a mask
 - Limit contact with other people and objects
 - Wash hands frequently
 - Maintain a distance of at least 2m (the length of one velociraptor) from other people if possible.
- Practice harm reduction to protect venue and program staff by keeping participant areas and staff areas separate where possible
 - Have seating for program staff and set up all seating away from pathways that are high-traffic for venue staff

Key information to know and share with participants

- What are the COVID Protocols for the event? What are the specific expectations?
- Communicate the behavioral expectations of all participants (can be done by directing folks to a specific webpage, area of text, and/or a poster in the venue space)



Communication

Invitations and Promotion

Things to ensure

- Create a central online place where folks can learn important details about the event
 - Make sure your [website is ADA Compliant](#)
 - Run a [website accessibility audit](#) and comply with the recommendations
 - Use empowering symbols to communicate that the event is accessible

Key information to know and share with participants

- Once you know about the accessibility features of your venue and program, make sure to inform your guests about them
 - Create a page on the website with access information

Announcements and Conversations

Things to ensure

- Give attendees a way to let you know about any access needs (designated email address, daily website updates, a daily text messages, or a hotline)
- Try to cultivate an expansive understanding of what access can mean
- Ask for people to consider what access they can provide at the in-person event (i.e. sharing a cab, meeting to take the ferry together, taking notes, sharing responsibility for child care)
- Make sure your PDF is Accessible or Avoid PDFs
 - PDFs are inherently inaccessible to users who use screen-readers
 - Alternatively use a web page (Hypertext Markup Language) or have your PDF files go through an accessibility audit and a remediation process to fix any gaps

Key information to know and share with participants

- Create and share an accessible version of the program ahead of time
- Will you be sharing information about the event location and venue before participants arrive (i.e. orientation webinar or video)?
 - Plan to record and caption orientation meetings and share transcripts
 - Get familiar with the assistive capabilities of the virtual meeting platform prior to the meetings
 - Allow participants to send questions ahead of time or after the fact
 - Allow participants to ask questions verbally or in chat

