

How to Plan an Accessible Meeting

Meetings happen all the time. Most of us never think about how we will be included in a meeting – it has never been an issue. However, it is time most of us expanded our view to consider how, or if, everyone we've invited to a meeting can actually participate.

People with disabilities can face challenges

physically accessing the meeting space, and also face challenges participating in the proceedings of the meeting. Here are some considerations to think about the next time you plan a meeting.

Building Location

Visit the location of your meeting to ensure that it is an accessible-friendly building.

An accessible building should have ramps and elevators, automatic doors, accessible washrooms, and parking spots. Take a look outside to ensure that all paths to the building are free of obstructions that your location is in the service area of parallel transit or accessible city buses.

Meeting Room

It is ideal to have a meeting room that is on the ground floor and large enough to accommodate participants who may be in wheel chairs or have guide dogs. Also make sure that the meeting room is free of obstructions, such as wires on the floor. A final consideration is to

listen for loud background noises, such as the humming of a fan, which may make it difficult for someone hard of hearing to hear meeting proceedings.

Proceedings

Assistance may be required during the meetings to help people with visual or hearing impairments. Knowing ahead of time who might need assistance will help you plan to have the right equipment or personnel available. Systems such as Real-Time captioning, computerized note taking, assistive listening systems, and sign language interpreters will be able to assure the full participation of participants with disabilities. You may want to consider having other kinds of language interpreters present as well to assure the full inclusion of all participants.

Communications

Inviting participants to the meeting and sending meeting proceedings may require the use of different communication formats. Communications may need to go out in several

languages, Braille, or audio format. You should also consider the content of E-mail and use accessible web standards. Image files, and text as graphics cannot be read by screen reading software used by the visually impaired.

Refreshments

Dietary considerations should be taken into account when ordering refreshments for meetings or conferences. Make non-sugar beverages and fruits and vegetables available. Inquiring into people's dietary needs beforehand will help you to plan accordingly.

Finally, planning how the food will be served is essential. People with mobility or visual impairments will have trouble accessing a buffet, therefore, consider ahead of time who will assist people needing additional help. These are just some of the considerations to keep in mind when you are planning your next meeting. This information was made available by Citizens with Disabilities –Ontario For additional information on planning accessible meetings, conferences, and events, visit their website: <http://www.cwd-o.org/cwdo/resources/>

New Accessibility Resource on SPARC BC's Website!



ORGANIZING A COMMUNITY DIALOGUE: A Guide to Hosting an Accessible On-Site and Remote Dialogue August 2006

This Guide is intended to be used by communities as a tool to build ongoing civic engagement. SPARC BC developed a program that prepares and empowers people with developmental disabilities to participate in a dialogue discussion in their own community. Known as the 3D Project, it can be used to assist other groups and communities in developing, and in completing similar programs. The complete program includes a curriculum, lesson plans, a participant manual, and a community guide.



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