Community Living

Center for Community Inclusion and Disability Studies

2014

Planning Accessible Meetings and Conferences: A Suggested Checklist and Guide

University of Maine Center for Community Inclusion and Disability Studies,

Speaking Up For Us of Maine

Planning Accessible Meetings and Conferences

A Suggested Checklist and Guide

Plan for inclusion and create a welcoming environment with meaningful participation for everyone.

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Acknowledgments

The University of Maine Center for Community Inclusion and Disability Studies, Maine's University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD); and Speaking Up for Us of Maine (SUFU), Maine's Self-Advocacy Network; wish to acknowledge the following individuals, committees, and organizations for their valuable contributions to the development of this publication.

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Introduction

This checklist is designed to help any person, group, or organization plan a meeting or conference that is inclusive and welcoming for everyone. It offers helpful suggestions in many areas of event planning, including choosing a location, using respectful language for registration questions about accommodations, and tips on refreshments and meals. Its purpose is to provide practical recommendations that promote meaningful participation for everyone.

The checklist was developed and field-tested by the University of Maine Center for Community Inclusion and Disability Studies (CCIDS), Maine's University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, with funding from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Community Living, Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Grant No. 90DD0005.

CCIDS and Speaking Up for Us (SUFU), Maine's self-advocacy network for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, partnered to form a workgroup to review the checklist draft. The workgroup met several times at the Disability Rights Center of Maine (Maine's Protection and Advocacy agency) and reviewed the checklist, word-by-word. Difficult or confusing words were replaced with shorter, less complex words suggested by the self-advocates (people with disabilities who advocate for themselves). Self-advocates agreed, however, that some difficult words were important words for them to learn and these appear in the glossary at the end.

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Suggested citation:
University of Maine Center for Community Inclusion and Disability Studies & Speaking Up for Us of Maine. (2014). *Planning accessible meetings and conferences: A suggested checklist and guide.* Orono: University of Maine Center for Community Inclusion and Disability Studies.

Event Details

Conference, Event or Meeting: _____

Event Date: _____

Location: _____

Event Coordinator(s): _____

Important Contacts

Name: _____   Name: _____

Address: _____   Address: _____

Phone: _____   Phone: _____ _____

Email: Email:

_____   _____

Name: _____   Name: _____

Address: _____   Address: _____

Phone: _____   Phone: _____

Email: Email:

_____   _____

Name: _____   Name: _____

Address: _____   Address: _____

Phone: _____   Phone: _____

Email: Email:

_____   _____

Pre-Planning Considerations

Planning for Accessibility	Add the costs of providing <u>accommodations</u> and <u>communication support services</u> into the expense of hosting the event (American Sign Language interpreter; <u>C-Print captioning</u>; or <u>CART captioning</u>—communication access real-time translation or computer-aided real-time translation, etc.). Find out how long it will take to obtain a captioning service or an interpreter, <u>before</u> choosing a final date for the event. It may take several weeks to secure these accommodations (if requested), depending on your location.
Choosing a Location	**Tip:** When possible, conduct an on-site visit! Is the facility truly accessible? Check corridors and aisles; dining rooms; doorways (entrance and inside); elevators, fitness center or health club; light controls; meeting rooms; parking lots; restrooms; signs; sleeping rooms; stairways; telephones; temperature controls; transportation services; and water fountains. Are there dog runs available for service animals? Are there accessible transportation choices to this location (air and ground)? Ask about planned remodeling or current construction that might impact accessibility during the event. Arrange meetings and overnight accommodations at the same hotel, whenever possible.
Outside Access	What is the availability of accessible parking close to the main entrance? Can more spaces be added temporarily, if needed? If reserving a parking lot for a meeting or conference, don't include the accessible parking area. It may be needed by employees or visitors. Are there accessible routes from a car or taxi to the meeting site entrance (<u>curb cuts</u> or level access)? A covered or sheltered drop-off area in front of the building is preferred. Can you see the name and street address of the meeting or conference location from the outside? Include a photograph of the building or facility for participants when possible.

Pre-Planning Considerations (b)

Pre-Planning Considerations

Outside Access		Is the outside walkway stable, firm and made with a safe surface that's not slippery when wet or humid?
Inside Access		Does the meeting or conference location use international symbols of accessibility, such as a wheelchair?
		Do the floors have either low carpeting or a non-slip hard surface?
		Do the meeting rooms have comfortable chairs or seating?
		Are the elevators accessible? (Braille labels on elevator buttons; voice output announcing floor number on arrival.)
		Is there at least one fully accessible male and female restroom near the meeting rooms? Are the hand dryers, soap, lotion, and towel dispensers accessible to everyone, including a person using a wheelchair or scooter?
		Is there a family restroom available for caregiver and child, a person with a disability, or others living with special health care needs?
		Is there a private space for breast-feeding mothers? This space should have a door with a lock, an electrical outlet and hand washing facilities.
		Do the staff at the meeting or conference facility understand that service animals must be permitted to enter the building and remain with their owners, per the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)?
		Is access to a telephone, videophone, and/or text telephone (TTY) centrally located?
		Is wireless Internet available?
		Is there a thermostat in each meeting room?
		Are the heating and air-conditioning systems quiet while operating and not a distraction?
		Is there a sensory-friendly (quiet) area or lounge near the conference or meeting rooms to accommodate and respect everyone's sensory preferences?

Event Preparations

Registration Forms, Promotional Materials, and Program Materials

Create meeting or conference materials with accessible document design in mind. Use a clean and simple layout with graphics and text and provide ample white space. Use non-decorative fonts (no handwriting fonts) with a minimum font size of 12-point. Use upper-case letters and italics sparingly. Choose light-colored paper and high contrast colors for text and background. An 18-point font is recommended for large print materials.

Use respectful language for registration questions regarding accommodations. For example: "I will need the following accommodations to fully participate." Provide participants with some examples of accommodations and a checklist.

Include all menu options that will be available (vegetarian, gluten-free, diabetic, etc.).

Provide a variety of ways to register: mail, email, website or fax. Include the 711 number for Telecommunications Relay Services. Sample language: TTY Users Call Maine Relay 711

Include a registration deadline to allow enough time to respond to participants' or presenters' requests for accommodations.

Provide an agenda in advance whenever possible, to help everyone, including people who are non-readers, to understand the purpose of the meeting.

Request workshop or session preferences.

Register the participant and the person who supports him or her.

Include a map and directions for the meeting location. Provide contact information for the meeting or conference coordinator.

Create an organized system for processing requests for accommodations.

Confirm all registrations. Include helpful information about the meeting place (with a photo, if possible), location, transportation, parking, Internet access, and service animals. Provide notice of any special policies like a fragrance-free environment.

Provide materials in multiple formats ahead of time online, on a CD, in print, Braille, or recorded.

Event Preparations (b)

Event Preparations

Communication Supports	**Tip:** many of these services must be booked well in advance of your event. Providers of accommodations/communication supports need to be included in the event planning and may have modest support needs of their own (an extra screen, a reliable Internet connection, a staff contact person, or a specific area near the podium, for example). C-Print and C.A.R.T. captioners often request advance electronic copies of welcoming remarks, keynote speeches, and workshop or conference presentations. As your budget allows, you may wish to include your interpreter, captioner, or note-taker as your guest for event refreshments and meals. American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter C-Print Captioning Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) FM Loop (an assistive listening device that helps a participant to hear the speaker or presenter) Note-taking services
Signs for the Event	Create or request signs to identify the following key areas: parking, registration, meeting or conference rooms, dining locations, restrooms, and elevators. The most helpful signs are large, clearly printed and mounted at a comfortable height for everyone, including people who use wheelchairs, motorized scooters or have low vision.

Event Preparations (c)

Meeting and Conference Rooms

Tip: Plan for extra space when meeting or conference participants will be using wheelchairs or motorized scooters.

Is there an accessible ramp to the podium or stage area?

Is the stage well-lighted and possibly raised? (An interpreter can be seen more clearly from a stage or raised platform.)

Can the room be arranged so that sunlight or artificial lighting behind the presenter or interpreter won't blind participants? This can make speechreading difficult.

If a podium is used, is it accessible to all speakers and presenters, including those using wheelchairs or motorized scooters?

If a podium is not accessible to all speakers and presenters: do not use one at all. Another option is to use a head table instead with different types of microphones, such as a tabletop, handheld and/or lapel microphone.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) recommends that all aisles and pathways are a minimum of 36 inches wide. Measure aisle width with chairs pulled away from the table as they would be if occupied. Wheelchairs and motorized scooters need at least a 60-inch circle to turn around.

For wheelchair access, a minimum of 30 inches is recommended between the bottom of the tabletop and the floor.

Reconsider the use of floor-length table linens: these can create hazards for everyone.

Are electrical outlets conveniently located?

Use microphones for all sessions.

Coat racks and hangers should be accessible to everyone, including people using wheelchairs or motorized scooters.

Think about the quality of your accommodations. For example: do participants who use wheelchairs, motorized scooters or service animals have the same choices as everyone else?

Supports for People

Workshop Packets	Provide meeting materials in advance whenever possible.
	Provide an organized schedule of workshops or sessions.
	Provide clear, understandable maps of the meeting and meeting room locations.
	Provide handouts in different formats (large print, CD, flash drive, download from a designated website, etc.).
	Use string-style nametags or badges.
Workshop Sessions	Have volunteers on hand who can give information and help participants get to where they need to go.
	Train staff and volunteers to speak directly to a person with a disability and not to his or her support person.
	Arrange the room in a way that best suits the purpose of the meeting or workshop. For example: to promote conversation, arrange the chairs in a circle; if participants will be taking notes, provide tables and chairs.
	Build in short breaks for sessions or workshops that last longer than 90 minutes to help prevent participants from becoming mentally and physically tired.
	Plan workshop activities in ways that everyone can take part in.
	Allow enough time for participants to transition between workshops or sessions.
	Tape down all wires, cables, and cords.
	Consider adding an extra half-day or day to the event instead of packing the agenda too full.

Supports for People (b)

Moderator Responsibilities	Assists with seating or special needs.
	Reminds participants to silence their cell phones and limit their laptop use.
	Acts as a host: welcomes participants and introduces speaker(s) and/or presenter(s).
	Asks participants to avoid side conversations: these can be distracting to others.
Presenter Responsibilities	Uses person-first language in presentation and materials. For example: people with disabilities (or) an individual on the autism spectrum, instead of "the disabled" or "the autistic."
	Provides presentation materials in ways that are accessible to everyone.
	Invites participants to briefly introduce themselves, slowly and clearly.
	Asks that participants speak one at a time and identify themselves, so everyone knows who is speaking.
	Uses captioned films, videos or slideshows in his or her presentation.
	Makes eye contact with the audience.
	Remembers to speak more slowly and avoid using words that are not understandable to everyone.
	Explains the meaning of any acronym used in the presentation or discussion.
	Assures that the key points from the presentation are written on a blackboard, whiteboard or chart paper to help everyone follow the discussion.
	Describes all charts, graphics, images and videos used in the presentation.
	Repeats questions as needed.
	Practices patience during Question and Answer (Q&A) periods.
	Plans for online or other ways of distributing session materials.

Supports for People (c)

Refreshments and Meals

Tip: Working lunches are not a good option for everyone.

Are reception or refreshment areas large enough for everyone, including participants with service animals, wheelchairs, or motorized scooters?

Reconsider the use of floor-length table linens: these can create hazards for everyone.

Served meals are preferable to buffet lines: buffets can be challenging for everyone, including people with mobility or visual impairments.

If a buffet line is offered, provide catering attendants to assist everyone. Provide trays to carry plates and bowls.

Practice cultural awareness and sensitivity when choosing food for the menu. Offer diabetic, vegetarian, gluten-free, non-dairy and other alternatives.

When using wine or champagne glasses, also provide standard drinking glasses as well.

Use light, but sturdy plates and cups when possible.

Keep food, plates, glassware and silverware within easy reach.

Provide bendable straws.

Include extra napkins.

Offer sugar substitutes.

As your budget allows, include your interpreter, captioner, or note-taker as your guest(s) for event refreshments and meals.

_____   _____

Signature of lead event planner   **(Date)**

Note: Definitions for the words with the dash underline *can be found in the Glossary section.*   10

Glossary

accessible document design - documents that are designed to be used by the largest number of possible users: the text is large enough to read easily; images or pictures have alternative text or captions to describe them; and lines of text are spaced for easy reading.

accommodation - to provide an adjustment or a modification to a place or activity so a person can participate more fully (example: providing an interpreter for a person who is hard of hearing or deaf).

acronym - a word formed by using the first letter of other words (example: ADA is an acronym for Americans with Disabilities Act).

communication support services - providing a sign language interpreter, a captioner, or listening devices for people who may be hard of hearing.

C.A.R.T. - a form of captioning called communication access real-time translation or computer-aided real-time translation.

C-Print captioning - computer-aided speech-to-print captioning service.

cultural awareness - understanding, accepting and appreciating the differences of cultures other than your own (different attitudes, traditions and values).

curb cuts - a ramp cut into a street curb at a corner to allow easy access for a wheelchair, stroller, or bike.

FM Loop - a headset and a receiver worn to help hear a presenter or other speaker in a large room.

formats - the form of how information is presented. Common formats include regular size print, large print, audio recordings, video or film, and DVD or CD.

fragrance-free environment (or scent-free environment) - scented products may cause health problems for some individuals. Fragrance-free means a meeting or gathering area where people are asked not to wear perfume or cologne. This includes the use of scented shampoo, aftershave, deodorant or lotions. Scented candles, magic markers, sprays, air fresheners and cleaners should also not be used in an area designated as fragrance-free.

head table - a table set up in the front of the room where the presenters are seated.

Glossary (b)

Internet - information found on the world wide web (also called the internet) using a computer or other device such as an iPod, iPad, tablet or phone.

keynote - the keynote address or speech identifies the message or main idea/reason for a gathering, meeting, workshop and to get the audience excited about the event.

lapel - the area of a jacket, shirt or blouse near the collar that folds back against the piece of clothing where a microphone can be attached to allow people to hear what the speaker is saying.

low vision - loss of eyesight that makes everyday tasks difficult. This can include losing straight ahead (or central) vision, or not being able to see things off to the sides (called peripheral vision). Low vision may not always be corrected by wearing eyeglasses.

non-decorative fonts - fonts ot type that do not have fancy curves at the ends of the letters.

participate - to join an activity or share with other people (example: join a group of people in a workshop or share work at a job).

podium - a tall stand, often with a microphone, used by speakers in front of an audience.

speechreading - also known as lip-reading: this is done when a person looks at a speaker's mouth and face to determine what he or she is saying.

symbols of accessibility - a series of black and white pictures used to indicate the accessibility of places, programs and other activities. For example: a common symbol of accessibility is the wheelchair symbol.

TDD/TTY (Telecommunications Device for the Deaf/TeleTYpewriter) - a user terminal with keyboard input and a printer or display, used over a standard analog phone line, by individuals who are Deaf, hard of hearing, and/or speech impaired.

Telecommunications Relay Service (TRS) - is a telephone service that allows persons with hearing or speech disabilities to place and receive telephone calls. TRS is available in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the U.S. territories for local and/or long distance calls. There is no cost to the TRS user. Source: http://www.fcc.gov/guides/telecommunications-relay-service-trs.

whiteboard - a white, glossy board that uses dry-erase markers instead of chalk. Whiteboards have replaced chalkboards is many places.