Helpful Resources

Accessible Presentation Design

USDOT, Disability Resource Center, "Checklist for Planning Accessible Meetings and Events," http://www.drc.dot.gov/documents.html

USDOJ, 1991 and 2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design, http://www.ada.gov/

US Access Board, Public Rights-of-Way Guidelines (for sidewalks, etc.) http://www.access-board.gov/prowac/index.htm

Accessible Meeting Design

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South West Transit Association

Accessible Meetings Guide

Goal

Provide simple and easy-to-use information for SWTA members to incorporate when conducting effective ADA-compliant meetings.

This guide will address the venue, meeting rooms, lodging, food service, restrooms, meeting logistics, staff training and the specific concerns of people with a range of disabilities. Also addressed are mobility devices and/or service animals. Additionally, the guide provides information to assist presenters in the development of accessible presentations, handouts and other meeting materials.

Why Are Accessible Meetings Important?

For public agencies, including public transit authorities, towns, cities, counties and instrumentalities of state or federal government, holding accessible meetings, conferences and workshops is not just a good idea; it's the law.

However, the benefits of accessible meetings, conferences and workshops go beyond legal compliance.

Making accessibility a priority in your meetings and events makes sense in that people with disabilities offer a high degree of experience and expertise. Because they are typically frequent riders, people with disabilities have perspectives which can benefit transportation planners and providers as they design, plan, build, operate, maintain and oversee transportation services of all kinds.

When your conferences, workshops and meetings are accessible, you are helping to ensure that customers with disabilities are well-informed about the services you provide, and you are creating an opportunity to hear from one of your most loyal customer groups.

Handouts – If handouts are provided speakers should be prepared, to the extent possible, to provide them in formats that are accessible to and usable by people with disabilities.

Presenters should be asked to provide copies of ADA compliant handouts in print, large print and electronic formats (preferably MS Word or an accessible PDF format).

Print Document Guidelines:

- 14-point or larger font size – The ADA Accessibility Guidelines specify 14-point, but the disability community recommends an 18-point typeface.

- Fonts should be simple. Arial, Helvetica and Verdana are suitable choices.

- If possible, paper should be non-glossy. A pale color, such as light yellow, is preferable to bright white.

- Text should be in mixed case—not all capitals.

- Text columns should be avoided, and there should be ample white space around text blocks.

Electronic Format Guidelines:

- MS Word, text files or accessible PDF files are preferable.

- If there is more than one file, use descriptive file names that convey the file's contents.

- If multiple electronic documents should be read in a specific order, name the files in such a way that they appear in the correct order in a file list.

- When writing on a flip chart or wall board, the presenter should read what he/she is writing.

- When reviewing materials written on flip charts or wall boards, the presenter should read aloud and in such a way as to convey not only the content but also the order and relative importance of the content.

  For example: when reading a list of "next steps", the presenter might read as follows:

  "Next Steps…

  1. Schedule our next meeting.

  2. Send out invitations to the key stakeholders.

  3. Develop information packets for distribution,"etc.

Incorporating Remote Presenters - A primary challenge in incorporating remote presenters is ensuring that people who are hearing impaired are able to access the presenter's remarks and to interact with the presenter in the same way as other attendees.

- Ensure that the telephone or computer monitor used by the remote presenter is wired into the PA system.

- Provide a sign language interpreter or video captioning if needed.

- Provide these presentation guidelines to the presenter so that he/she can do his or her part to ensure an accessible presentation.

Key Definitions

Although the following definitions embody the letter and spirit of the ADA, they are not legal definitions. Rather, they are practical definitions which agencies can use when evaluating the extent to which their meetings and communications are accessible.

What is an Accessible Meeting?

A meeting can be a small assembly, conference, workshop or other event, to which staff, consultants, vendors, or other members of the public are invited for the purpose of sharing information, asking questions or giving input regarding a product, policy, procedure or program.

To be accessible, the meeting, conference, workshop or event must comply with all applicable ADA accessibility requirements as well as any other applicable, federal, state or local accessibility-related laws. The meeting must also be conducted in such a way that all participants (regardless of disability) can participate in an equal and meaningful way, either with or without accommodations.

The meeting, conference, workshop or other event might include verbal, written or visual presentations which convey information to meeting attendees or other readers/viewers.

The presentation(s) must enable the broadest possible range of readers or attendees to acquire the information being presented, regardless of any physical or sensory impairment—either with or without special accommodations.

Who Might Benefit from an Accessible Meeting or Presentation?

Although people with obvious disabilities are beneficiaries of an accessible meeting or presentation, there is a wide range of people who can benefit from improved accessibility. The following examples are meant to illustrate the broad range of people who may benefit.

The bottom line is that by taking the time to anticipate and address the potential range of physical, sensory and cognitive challenges that the average audience may have, an agency can make its meetings and presentations more engaging to more people.

Incorporating Videos and DVD's Videos and DVD's can spice up a presentation, but for people with visual or hearing impairments, they can be problematic. Here are some tips for maximizing the value of video presentations for people with these disabilities:

- If possible, use DVD's and Videos that include closed-captioning. If closed-captioning is not available, look for an alternate video or DVD which includes this functionality. If this cannot be done, consider using a sign language interpreter or video captioning to address this deficiency.

- Turn up the volume. Be sure that the volume is loud enough for all attendees to easily hear the spoken words. If this cannot be accomplished from the video player, then consider integrating the video player into the room's PA system.

- Some video presentations include dialogue and spoken content which adequately conveys the overall story or message, but some video presentations are visually oriented, and the verbal content is insufficient for someone with a visual impairment to follow the action. If this is the case, consider arranging for someone to sit next to an attendee with a visual impairment and quietly describe what is happening on the screen.

Using Flip Charts and Wall Boards Like any other visual presentation, the key to incorporating flip charts and wall boards involves adding verbal descriptions to the action to ensure maximum accessibility.

PowerPoint and Other Visual Presentations

PowerPoint, Excel, video clips and other visual presentations can liven up a verbal presentation, and assist people with visual learning styles to retain presented information.

However, PowerPoint and other visual presentation media can be very difficult for the sight impaired. Here are some tips to make visual presentations easier to follow:

- Keep it simple. Use a simple slide design, and avoid too many words and graphics on each slide.

- Keep as much white space around words as possible.

- Keep graphics as simple as possible and only use them when their presence adds to the slide's message.

- When delivering the presentation, summarize the key points of each slide, and if you know that there is a visually impaired person in the audience, share key data points or facts verbally—don't assume that everyone can read them.

- When showing slides that use graphical images, pictures, charts or graphs to convey information, provide a verbal summary of what the slide shows.

- If possible, provide printed or electronic copies to members of the audience who may be better able to read the information from a paper copy, by using text-enlargement or screen reading computer software.

Examples of People Who Might Benefit From Improved Accessibility:

A person who uses a wheelchair or an older person with limited mobility will benefit equally from a short and accessible path-of-travel, and if the path of travel must be long, a person with limited mobility; a person who fatigues easily; and/or one who has a medical condition which precludes heavy exertion will benefit from places to stop and rest along the way.

A visually impaired person of any age or an older person with reduced vision will benefit equally from written materials which are presented in a larger type face and from presenters who describe materials presented in slide shows.

A young woman with a slight hearing impairment or a senior citizen with slightly diminished hearing will equally benefit from a presenter using a lapel microphone while speaking.

A young man with dyslexia who has difficulty reading long passages may benefit from a simple graphic representation of complex materials and/or from a brief explanation by the presenter of difficult materials.

Meeting Notice

Invite your participants to make requests for accommodation on all your communication (registration form, flyers, web pages, e-mails and print). For example:

"[the Site] is wheelchair accessible. For questions about accessibility or to request accommodations such as assistive listening devices, real time captioning, a sign language interpreter, or other accommodations, please contact (name) at (include phone and an e-mail address so that someone with a hearing or verbal disability can make inquiries). Providing at least 72 hours advance notice will help to ensure availability."

The person or office sponsoring the event should assign a contact person who is familiar with the event. When the key contact cannot answer a question about an accessibility need, simply take down the request and the individual's contact information. The meeting coordinator can then contact a local ADA Coordinator for assistance in locating resources and implementing accommodations.

Staff responding to requests should be prepared to ask detailed questions regarding necessary accommodations. A more detailed registration form requesting information on specific needs can also be used.

Sample Detailed Registration Question:

I need the following accommodations to best participate:

ASL	**Assistive Listening**	**Audio Cassette**
Braille	**Captioning**	**Disk. List Format** _____
Note Taker	**Wheelchair Access**	**Diet Restrictions:** _____
Large Print	**Orientation to**	**Accompanied by assistant**
Other:_____		

Accessible Presentations

Speak at a moderate pace and avoid verbal pauses. Many are tempted to rush and overfill a verbal presentation, but trying to fit too much into a limited amount of time will cause the presentation to be more difficult for people to hear and absorb. This is particularly true for people who do not have an audible learning style. Verbal pauses such as "uh" and "you know" tend to fill up natural pauses in the delivery of verbal information, but they can rise to a level of a distraction. Although it may not feel comfortable for an inexperienced presenter, a second or two of silence is preferable to a verbal pause.

Use a microphone. If the presentation is in a small room with very good acoustics, it may be possible to avoid the use of a microphone, but if the room has poor acoustics and/or if it is larger than a typical small classroom, a microphone will help to ensure that everyone in the audience can hear. Although it may be possible for someone to project his/her voice to the far corners of a large room, talking loudly can distort voice quality and make it harder for someone with a hearing impairment to understand what is being said.

Other tools. If the speaker will be using a microphone, make sure that there is an accessible alternative for people who are deaf or severely hard-of-hearing. Options can include a sign language interpreter or video captioning.

Provide directions to the intellectually disabled.
Staff should be trained to break complex information or instructions into smaller bits of information and then to provide this information one piece at a time rather than providing the entire series of information or instructions at once. For example, if assisting someone to find a meeting room, it may be easier to accompany the person than to try and give complex directions that involves several steps.

Open doors and retrieve objects. Staff should be trained to provide appropriate assistance with the opening of doors and with the retrieval of objects for people who cannot reach and/or see them.

Use appropriate language. Staff should be trained to use appropriate "people first" language when referring to people with disabilities. Staff should also be trained on specific words and phrases which should be avoided, such as ""crippled", "handicapped", "mentally retarded", etc.

Accurately assess when help might be needed and how to offer assistance. Not all people with disabilities need or want assistance, but sometimes they may need and want assistance but decline to request it. Staff should be trained on how to observe a person in order to determine whether or not help might be needed and on how to offer assistance in a respectful and non-invasive manner.

Accessible Meetings
Selecting an Appropriate Venue

The Location
The meeting venue should be as close as possible to public transportation, and the path-of-travel from public transit should be accessible as defined by the ADA. The more access to public transit (e.g. the more routes serving different areas of the community) the better. If someone thinks that the effort to get to the venue is too great, they may choose to not attend the meeting.

The path-of-travel between public transit and the meeting venue should include as many of the following features as are available:

- Continuous sidewalks and/or paved surfaces between the nearest public transit stop(s) and the meeting venue

- Curb cuts and detectable warnings for street and parking lot crossings

- Audible pedestrian signals for signalized intersections

- Places to stop and rest (preferably with shelter) if the walking distance is greater than two or three blocks

- Abundant signage directing attendees to and from the venue

Accessible parking which can be accessed from the meeting venue via an accessible path-of-travel.

The Meeting Facility

- The facility should comply with all ADA Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG) published by the Department of Justice in 1991 and as revised in 2010.

- Accessibility elements (accessible entrances, elevators, accessible restrooms, etc.) are located near conference meeting space and common areas.

- Technology and signage directing guests to accessibility features and meeting locations is abundant and accessible.

Things to Consider

Communications Access

- Proper consideration and implementation allows all to participate, resulting in a better or higher quality meeting because all were able to contribute.

- Meeting rooms with minimal outside noise (ventilation systems, noise from adjacent rooms, etc.)

- Technology infrastructure (e.g., outlets, microphones, audio looping system, Wi-Fi)

- Blinds/drapes on windows to prevent glare

- ADA compliant signage should notify guests of facility elements such as accessible restrooms, exits, elevators and other hotel amenities.

Staff Training

An enlightened and helpful staff can be invaluable during the event. Ensure staff has some level of disability awareness, knows their responsibilities, and can respond appropriately to various scenarios. Staff may need training to address the following topics:

- **Know how to best communicate with people with a range of different disabilities**. Staff should be trained to communicate with people who are blind or visually impaired, people who are deaf or hard-of-hearing and people with significant speech impediments.

- **It is okay for staff to be proactive if they see a person having difficulty.** The person may not have an aide with them or know who to ask for assistance.

- **Learn to give directions to and/or guide people who are blind or visually impaired.** Staff should be trained to use the "Sighted Guide" technique for leading people who are blind or visually impaired.

- **Know appropriate communication with people in mobility devices.** Staff should be trained to avoid looking down from above a person in a mobility device when having a face-to-face conversation. A better approach is to sit or kneel so that the staff member can maintain eye contact on a comparable level with the person in the mobility device.

- Be prepared to assist people with disabilities to prepare and carry trays, to find open seating and to get drinks, napkins, silverware and other necessary items.

- Ensure that lighter weight cups and straws are available for attendees who need them.

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Service Animals

- Before the event, staff should scope out service animal relief areas around the facility. The best relief areas include grass, dirt, gravel or some other type of low ground cover. The area should be in close proximity along an accessible path of travel to a building entrance that is as close to meeting spaces and/or hotel elevators as possible and which is unlocked during as many meeting hours as possible.

- There should also be a permanent trash can for animal refuse located along the path of travel between the relief area and the building entrance; locations near the building entrance are preferable. Ensure that all meeting organizers and hotel staff (if applicable) are familiar with where the animal relief areas are located so that any appropriate event support personnel can clearly explain and/or show meeting attendees where to find the areas.

- Be prepared to guide the handler and their animal outside for needed breaks.

- Be aware that most, but not all, service animals are domestic dogs.

Physical Access

🚌 **Entrance to the Building**

- Is there an automatic door, a push button, or a doorman?

🚌 **Elevators**

- Does the elevator meet the size requirements established within the ADA?

- Are the elevator controls positioned at the proper level and in accordance with ADA requirements?

- Are elevator controls marked with raised print and Braille as required by the ADA?

- Although not required by the ADA, it is desirable for the elevator to either announce each floor the elevator passes and those upon which it lands. Alternatively, it is acceptable for the elevator to emit a tone for each passing floor.

- Are there floor-level signs in raised print and braille on both sides of the elevator's entrance on each floor as required by the ADA?

- Are there backup elevators if one breaks?

🚌 **Restrooms**

- Check toilet height/placement, clear floor space, grab bars, sinks, etc., in wheelchair accessible stall

- Is there a push button to open the door? If not, can they be propped open?

🚌 **Confirm Availability of Accessible Hotel Rooms**

Meeting Room Set-up

- Open spots for mobility devices and service animals should be scattered throughout a meeting room. If the gathering will attract a large number of people using mobility devices and/or service animals, then assume 20% less capacity for a given meeting space.

- Aisles between chairs (when occupied) should be at least 38 inches wide. Wider is better because a large percentage of meeting attendees may leave chairs pulled out when not in use. A person in a mobility device will have to make numerous turns to navigate around tables and chairs; additional room may be needed to accomplish turns.

- Tables should be at least 36 inches high. Check for obstructions underneath tables, such as table legs with wide pedestals or bases. These can interfere with space for mobility devices and/or with space for service animals to occupy during the meeting.

- Avoid table cloths that hang down to the floor level as these interfere with the parking of mobility devices and the placement of service animals.

- Secure electrical cords and remove obstacles.

- The floor surface should not be slick or slippery.

- The path to the podium should be accessible – not an obstacle course. If it is on a stage make sure there is a ramp/stairs with rails.

- Establish a space with good visibility near the stage for sign language interpreters, and reserve nearby seating for people who are deaf or hard-of-hearing.

Emergency Evacuation

- Are accessibility elements (accessible entrances, elevators, accessible restrooms, etc.) located near conference meeting space and common areas?

- Identify the accessible emergency exits.

- Are there tactile floor plans showing emergency exits? If not, have a plan for providing this information to visually impaired meeting attendees.

- Are there visual fire alarms? People who are hearing impaired may not be able to tell when an emergency is under way.

- Be aware of those who may need extra assistance evacuating and know how to get help in an emergency.

Food and Beverages

Self-serve food/drinks can present a big challenge for wheelchair users and people with visual impairments. Plated meals and butlered receptions are much easier for most people with disabilities to manage. For self-serve functions:

- Work with the venue to provide extra personnel for assistance to those who need it.

- Be sure that all plates, cups, napkins, tableware and food items on a serving line are within reach of a person using a mobility device.