



Planning Accessible Events

So everyone feels welcome



Are you organizing a community event like a block party, wedding, bingo or fair?

Do you want some quick tips on how to plan your event so guests with disabilities feel welcome?

This booklet will show you many low-cost and no-cost things you can do to make your event more inclusive. It also includes a checklist so you can be sure that everyone can participate.

Whether you're planning your first or 21st small community event, this guide is for you!

Venue

The key to making events inclusive and accessible is to think about the many barriers that can exist for people with disabilities, and address them at the planning stage. It starts with your venue.

Whenever possible, visit the site of a potential venue. Think about people with different disabilities who may attend your event, and the barriers they could encounter when they arrive. In particular, think about the following points, and ask yourself the following questions:

Accessible parking

Is there any? Where is it? These are things you need to know, and they are things you need to let your guests know.

Accessible transportation

Is the venue close to public transportation, and are the transit vehicles serving that route accessible? If so, your guests will need to know where the passenger drop-off areas are located.



Outdoor and indoor surfaces

Are there barriers along outdoor and indoor paths that might cause problems for people who use canes, crutches or wheelchairs? Make sure that things like garbage cans and sandwich boards can be moved so there is at least a one-metre wide path of travel for people using wheelchairs or walkers.

Check if surfaces are level, as well as firm and stable. Avoid soft, thick pile carpeting or loose mats. While asphalt and cement are great outdoor accessible surfaces, crushed limestone screening is also considered firm and stable.

Doors

Are automatic doors available? If not, make sure you can prop doors open, or at least make sure there will be volunteers who can help people trying to go through.

Washrooms

Are the washrooms accessible? Is there room on the floor area beyond the swing of the door for a wheelchair or walker? Check also that there are grab bars, and that a person using a wheelchair can reach the sink, soap and paper towels.

Lighting levels

Are lights adjustable so you are able to control the brightness of the room? Good lighting helps people who are Deaf or hard of hearing read lips or communicate using sign language.

In addition, check that you can adjust the amount of natural light for daytime events. Direct natural light can cause shadows and glare, making it difficult for people with low vision to see.

Acoustics

Does the main room have a loud echo? Environments with significant echo create barriers for people who are hard of hearing.

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Invitations and Promotion

Once you know about the accessibility features of your venue, make sure to inform your guests about them as well.

- Provide contact information so guests with disabilities can learn about the accessibility features you noted during your site visit, or let you know what accommodations you can make so they can participate.
- Use a variety of ways to communicate, such as telephone, email and print, to ensure that your guests with disabilities receive the information they need, and are able to provide information back to you in a way that works best for them.
- Use at least 12 point sans serif fonts such as Arial or Verdana for print materials.



Food and Refreshments

Consider the following points when planning to serve food or refreshments:

- If it is a buffet-style event, be sure to place food, drinks and utensils in easy reach of a person using a wheelchair.
- Provide bendable straws as well as some cups with handles. People who have limited use of their hands have difficulty grasping or holding objects such as cups.
- Ask volunteers to offer assistance or seated service to guests with disabilities.

Room Set-up

Simple adjustments in the way that your room is set up can eliminate many common barriers and make a world of difference for guests with disabilities. Think about the following:

Easy-to-read signs

Use common words and simple, short sentences to make signs easier for some people with disabilities to understand.

Clear floor space

Make aisles or space around tables wide enough for people using mobility aids such as wheelchairs or walkers to easily move. An aisle width of about one metre or more is recommended. In addition, cover electrical cables or cords that cross over aisles or pathways so everyone can safely get across them.

Registration or ticket sales 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.
- Make sure there is enough room for a person using a wheelchair or scooter to approach and maneuver in front of registration tables.

Accessible seating

There are several ways you can make sure that people with disabilities can sit comfortably and enjoy your event.

- Make sure there are spaces without chairs at the tables for every person using a wheelchair. Where bar height tables are used, provide some lower dining height tables for people using wheelchairs.
- Provide a variety of chairs with and without armrests if available.
- Reserve seating for people with various disabilities, and consider the nature of their disability when doing so. For example, people who rely on lip reading will need to sit closer to speakers.
- Provide seating for those who can't stand for long periods at events where people will be mostly standing.

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Speeches and Presentations

Share the following tips with presenters or speakers:

- Use a microphone, speak slowly and describe images that are projected on the screen during a presentation.
- Be aware that if presentations run longer than planned, people who use specialized transportation services may need to leave your event on time.

Service Animals

Service animals are not pets. They work to make life easier for people with disabilities, and they are welcome in public areas where food is served (though not where food is prepared). Make sure there is a relief area for these animals, and make sure their owners know where it is.

Also, like your other guests, service animals can get thirsty. Having a water bowl on hand is a very good way to make a guest with a service animal feel welcome.



Volunteers

This booklet mentions some situations in which volunteers can make a big difference. Consider contacting your local high school for community service volunteers. They can do a great deal to help make your event more inclusive and welcoming for people with disabilities.

- Assign a volunteer to troubleshoot and resolve accessibility barriers on the day of the event.
- Remind your volunteers not to make assumptions about what a person with a disability can or cannot do. Tell them to simply ask, “How may I help you?”

Accessible Events Checklist



Use the checklist to help you plan your event, so everyone can participate.

Name of Event

Date and Time

Event Location

Number of attendees

Venue

- ☐ Accessible parking/passenger drop-off area
- ☐ Located near public transportation
- ☐ Outdoor and indoor pathways free of barriers
- ☐ Doors easy to open
- ☐ Accessible washrooms
- ☐ Adjustable lighting
- ☐ Good acoustics (minimal echo)

Invitations and Promotion

- ☐ Due dates and contact information for accessibility requests included
- ☐ A variety of communication methods used
- ☐ A minimum of 12 point fonts for printed materials

Food and Refreshments

- ☐ Food, drinks and utensils easy to reach for people using wheelchairs
- ☐ Bendable straws and cups with handles available
- ☐ Food buffet assistance available

Room Set-up

- ☐ Clear, easy-to-read signs
- ☐ Clear floor space
- ☐ Cables and wiring secured
- ☐ Chairs provided and volunteer stand-ins near registration or ticket sales tables
- ☐ Reserved seating available

Speeches and Presentations

- ☐ Speakers provided tips on accessibility

Service Animals

- ☐ Relief area for service animals
- ☐ Water bowl provided

Volunteers

- ☐ Volunteer assigned to resolve accessibility barriers
- ☐ Volunteers reminded to ask guests, "How may I help you?"

Additional Event Resources

Meetings

For information on planning accessible meetings, see the Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (OMSSA) website: omssa.com/accessible-community-engagement/omssa-guides/

Outdoor Events

For information on planning large outdoor events, see the Guide to Accessible Festivals & Outdoor Events available at tiaontario.ca/atresources

Find Out More

To learn more about accessibility for people with disabilities visit ontario.ca/accessibility

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