



Canadian Disability Policy Alliance

Alliance Canadienne concernant
les politiques reliées au handicap

TIPS FOR ACCESSIBLE MEETING PLANNING

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The following guidelines are offered for meeting planners who desire to ensure their events are accessible for people of various disability types. The tips are based on planning meetings for a “working board meeting” format of up to 35 people with sustained discussion between participants. Some details will need to be adjusted for lecture style meetings, conferences, or smaller working groups, but the general principles can be adapted to fit any meeting style.

Pre-meeting (3-6 months prior)

- Determine the accessibility needs of participants ahead of time as much as possible.
- Pre-screen potential meeting venues with the *Accessibility Checklist* and follow up with questions to ensure the venue is actually accessible. Site visits are preferred but meeting venue staff can often send pictures of the premises when necessary.
- Select venue and begin communicating about detailed requirements for making the meetings accessible.
- Be sure to budget adequately for the costs of making meetings accessible. Costs may include room set up, audiovisual equipment, translation and formatting of materials, captioning, interpreting services.

Visual accessibility

- Request that all handouts and slide decks be produced in a visually accessible format.
- Ensure that alternate formats of documents are sent to visually impaired participants at least one week prior to the meeting along with copies of the slide decks.
- Use high contrast colours for text and background. Printed material is most readable in black and white.
- Bigger is better, preferably between 12 and 18 points, depending on the font.
- The space between lines of text should be at least 25 to 30 per cent of the point size.
- Avoid complicated or decorative fonts. Arial and Verdana are good choices.
- Separate text into columns to make it easier to read, as it requires less eye movement and less peripheral vision.
- Use wide binding margins or spiral bindings if possible. Flat pages work best for vision

aids such as magnifiers.

- Use a matte or non-glossy finish paper to cut down on glare.
- Reduce distractions by not using watermarks or complicated backgrounds.
- For more information about visual accessibility, visit the CNIB:
(<http://www.cnib.ca/en/services/resources/Pages/default.aspx>)

Physical accessibility

- Plan meetings with universal design for maximum inclusion
([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universal_design#The Principles of Universal Design](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universal_design#The_Principles_of_Universal_Design))
- Ensure there is adequate space around tables for people in wheelchairs to travel to and from their seats, and can access washrooms and refreshments easily.
- Participants in powered wheelchairs often require tables to be raised to a height of between 69-74cm (27-29 inches) from the floor. Request venue staff to provide raised tables ahead of time for participants who require this and alert them that other tables may need to be raised upon demand.
- Remove chairs from the table at appropriate places so that people using wheelchairs can easily join the proceedings. Provide additional seating for attendants.
- Alert catering staff that some participants with mobility or agility restrictions may require food to be brought to them during meals or refreshment breaks.
- Be prepared to offer other individual accommodations as necessary.

Auditory accessibility

- People with different degrees of hearing loss may require different accommodations in order to participate fully in your meeting. The best approach is to work with individuals to ascertain their needs and their preferences.
- Begin arranging any specialized services related to disability accommodations, i.e. sign language interpreter services. Start early. The Canadian Hearing Society can help with locating interpreters in the region: (<http://www.chs.ca/accessibility-services>)
- Ask presenters to submit meeting documents approximately one month ahead of time in order to ensure sign language interpreters have adequate time to prepare.

Prior to the meeting

- Plan to arrive at meeting venue with lots of extra time to make sure all accessibility requirements are in place. Arriving the day before a big meeting is ideal.
- Arrange tables in a large “U” shape to ensure maximum eye contact for people with hearing loss and hearing interpreters.
- Seat sign language interpreters across the table from persons with hearing loss
- Prepare an evacuation plan with meeting venue staff in case of emergency. Alert

meeting venue staff to any participants who may require assistance in the case of an emergency evacuation. Assign volunteer attendants to help.

Tips for chairpersons

The following tips for chairpersons and presenters have been adapted from the *Guide to Planning Inclusive Meetings* (2009) published by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada. For further detail please consult this and other similar guides listed below.

1. Introduce sign language interpreters and/or captionists at the beginning of the meeting.
2. Advise participants that interpreters will say everything that is signed, and sign everything that is said. Interpreters will not add words, edit or censor a conversation.
3. Ask participants to identify themselves each time they speak for the benefit of participants who have a visual impairment.
4. Inform participants of the nearest emergency exits and accessible restroom facilities, and to speak to the project coordinator or one of the meeting co-chairs if there are any additional disability accommodations required.
5. Encourage all presenters to speak clearly and at a moderate pace to make the information easier to understand and communication easier for interpreters, interveners, note takers and captionists.
6. Some people take longer to express ideas than others; allow time for people to respond at their own speed.
7. Briefly describe the content of the agenda and handout materials.
8. Clearly indicate changes in topics, health breaks and adjournments during the meeting.
9. Advise participants to minimize interruptions. Interpreters, intervenors, captionists and note takers need to concentrate.
10. During question and answer periods, remind people to speak slowly and clearly and that when speaking to people with hearing loss to look directly at the person and so lips may be read.

Tips for presenters

1. Speak clearly and at a moderate pace. Be sure to face the audience during the presentation.
2. Periodically check with the audience to see if the message and presentation material are understood. Clarify as needed.
3. Allow adequate time for people who are deaf, deafened and hard of hearing to process on-screen messages and for the interpreters to communicate the spoken word through sign language.
4. Use plain language and presentation materials that are crisp, to the point and concise. Slide presentations that are too busy can cause information overload.

5. Provide descriptive narration of any charts graphs or pictures on slide presentations for people who are blind or have a visual impairment. Provide closed captioning of any video presentations.
6. During question and answer periods, remind people to speak slowly and clearly.

The last word

Beyond this, the most important principles for ensuring the success of any accessible meeting are communication, caring, and respect. If these things are experienced by participants throughout the planning process and meetings the logistical detail that will inevitably fall through the cracks will be less problematic. Enjoy your meetings and the gifts that individual people with disabilities will bring. Above all, enjoy the sense of satisfaction that comes from creating a more inclusive society where the contributions of all citizens are valued equally.

Additional Resources

Canadian Disability Policy Alliance. 2010. Hotel and Meeting Room Accessibility Checklist. Queen's University, Kingston, ON.

Disabled Women's Network Ontario. 2002. *Planning for Accessible Meetings and General Guidelines When Serving Persons with Disabilities*. Retrieved from http://dawn.thot.net/accessible_meetings.html

Human Resources and Skills Development Canada. 2009. Guide to Planning Inclusive Meetings. Retrieved from http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/disability_issues/doc/gpim/page00.shtml

Regional Municipality of York. 2007. *Policy Statement on Accessible Meetings*. Retrieved from http://www.york.ca/NR/rdonlyres/vbvsianxzkdornaqshdcormtvrs5kvnu54om6fxqv5nd2faggng7oze7zw5xzcimqhwndmlbghqk53o7j6kbxx7n3f/Accessible_Meeting_07.pdf

Queen's University Equity Office. 2011. Accessible Event Planning. Retrieved from <http://www.queensu.ca/equity/content.php?page=AccessibleEventPlanning>