



Checklist for Conference Accessibility

Studies show that 1 in 5 American adults live with a disability. As disability inclusion in the workplace grows and the population ages, this number will only increase. Like their peers, employees with disabilities also attend conferences. It is therefore of utmost importance that conference centers be able to make ALL conference attendees feel welcome at ease, including those with disabilities.

Basics

- Train all staff in proper disability etiquette and language. Some best practices include:
 - People with disabilities are people first. Treat them as you would treat any other person.
 - Always use person-first language. This puts the person before the disability (i.e. person who is blind). Do not use identity-first language. This puts the disability before the person (i.e. Blind woman).
 - Do not talk down to individuals literally or figuratively. If they use a wheelchair, use a chair to be on their same eye level if you are having a long conversation.
 - Speak directly to a person with a disability, not to their companion.
 - A lack of immediate response does not indicate that the person can't or won't respond.
- Always give clear directions – instructions like “over there” are not helpful to people who can't see where you are pointing!
- It's OK to ask whether you can help, but accept “no” as an answer.
- Do not touch a guest's assistive devices (i.e. wheelchair, crutches, cane, medical equipment, technology) unless you have permission. Many of these devices are fragile and very expensive.
- Be prepared to accommodate service animals. Some things to note:
 - These animals are highly trained and will not act inappropriately. There is no reason to be afraid.
 - Ask questions if you don't understand how or what task the service animal performs.
 - Do not speak directly to or engage with the service animal.
 - Do not touch a service animal without asking permission first.

- Do not offer a service animal food, toys, or distract them with any other object.
- Provide information on relieving areas for service animals. Make sure relieving areas are clean.
- Ask for feedback to identify accessibility gaps.

Registration

- Send out detailed instructions about how to register to all invitees.
- Attendees should be able to register in more than one way – for example, by phone and online. Note: Make sure the online option is accessible.
- Ask prospective attendees whether they need accommodations.
- Send out all available materials well ahead of the conference.

Physical Space

- Provide indoor mapping, ideally virtually or at least in alternative formats such as large or tactile print.
- Make directions and signage easy to read.
- Have Braille signage in place.
- Offer a tour of the lobby and other public spaces to guests who might have difficulty navigating.
- Pay attention to the layout of your public areas – there should be room to maneuver for guests who use wheelchairs or other mobility aids.
- Accessible bathrooms and elevators should be available on every floor (well labelled, of course!). Features of accessible bathrooms include lowered toilets and sinks, enough space to maneuver using mobility aids, and handlebars in appropriate places.
- Avoid blocking pathways – this includes exhibit booths, poster stands, etc.
- Provide accessible seating close to the door in conference rooms. This means no steps and allows room to maneuver using mobility aids.
- Good lighting facilitates navigation.
- Offer a designated quiet room where attendees can unwind and recharge during the event.

Conference Sessions

- Good audiovisual equipment is a must to maximize attendees' ability to follow the presentation.
- Allow conference attendees to submit anticipated questions in a variety of formats ahead of time.

- Remind presenters to speak slowly, clearly, and to use simple language.
- Make regular announcements about the available accessibility features.

Materials

- Send out all available materials ahead of time.
- All materials should be available in alternative formats, such as transcripts or text-only documents.
- Ensure that presenters' slides are uncluttered – not too much text and a minimalistic design.
- Make sure slides have dark text that is easy to read.
- Always describe key concepts for those who cannot see corresponding visuals.
- Caption and audio describe all video and multimedia components.

Safety

- Have a plan for evacuating ALL guests, and make this available in alternative formats.
- Physically show location of stairways and emergency exits.
- Emergency signals should be both visible and audible.
- Run emergency drills.

These are just a few best practices on how you can provide a great conference and event experience for people with disabilities. If you are interested in learning more, please contact the Ablr team at info@Ablr360.com! Our mission is to remove barriers for people with disabilities and we know first-hand the challenges and barriers that people with disabilities face at conferences and events. We want to help you create an experience where everyone feels welcome!