

INVITE, WELCOME, AND RESPECT:

PLANNING ACCESSIBLE MEETINGS AND EVENTS

From sign language interpretation; to open captions, which translate dialogue and



other sounds into print and are displayed on videotape, movie, and television;

OC



to access to individuals with limited mobility including wheelchair users;



to systems that transmit amplified sound via hearing aids, headsets, or other devices;

to descriptions of visual in performing arts, visual arts, television, video, and film;

AD)))

to providing information, there are numerous ways to increase accessibility.



This document is available in alternative formats upon request.

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Washington State Arts Commission Accessibility Statement: Accessibility is an organizational asset and a civil right. The Washington State Arts Commission (WSAC) complies with all local, state, and federal laws and regulations concerning civil and human rights. Our programs, grants, and employment practices are free of discrimination based on race, color, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, age, gender, or disability. In addition, WSAC is specifically committed to complying with the provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act. The ADA requires that all programs, services and activities, when viewed in their entirety, are readily accessible to and usable by individuals with disabilities. WSAC strives for effective communication with individuals with speech, visual and hearing disabilities. Materials are available in alternative formats upon request. Including people with disabilities in our definition of diversity is an integral part of the Washington State Arts Commission’s strategic plan.

“With approximately 38 million people with disabilities in the U.S., almost one in seven people are potential customers for businesses that are disability-friendly.”¹

The Washington State Arts Commission’s (WSAC) statement on *Accessibility, Diversity, and Nondiscrimination* shows our constituents that we are committed to making all programs, events, and organizations that we fund accessible to people with disabilities.

As a recipient of Federal financial assistance WSAC is subject to compliance with the ADA and other applicable federal and state laws, as are all the grantees that receive our funding. As part of the Commission’ application process and grant contract agreements grantees must give assurances that they will comply with all applicable Federal and State laws, rules, and regulations regarding the use of public funds.

These assurances include but are not limited to Federal statutes relating to nondiscrimination which provide in part that no person in the United States shall on the groups of race, color or national origin, sex, disability or age be excluded from participation in Washington State Arts Commission funded activities. Washington’s Law Against Discrimination (RCW 49.60.040) goes even farther and includes the following additional categories that are protected from discrimination: creed, families with children, marital status, sexual orientation, including gender expression/identity, age (over 40), honorably discharged veteran or military status, the presence of any physical, mental or sensory disability, the use of a trained dog guide or service animal by a person with a disability, retaliation for opposing an unfair practice, filing a whistleblower complaint with the Washington State Auditor, or filing a nursing home abuse complaint.

¹ 2004 American Community Survey, U.S. Department of Justice, “Expanding Your Market: Customers with Disabilities.”

“Accessibility is much more than ramps integrated and dispersed seating, curb cuts, assistive listening devices, large print programs, and sign language interpretation. It goes beyond the tangible to a pervasive awareness and a commitment to diversity by the staff and volunteer leadership of the organization.”²

You cannot know if any of the people attending your event or meeting will be people with disabilities. Therefore, you need to plan **all** meetings and events to be accessible to everyone. Two important areas need to be considered when arranging accessible meetings—1) physical meeting space, and 2) access to the meeting information, contents, and proceedings. Advanced planning can help ensure that the accommodation needs of people with disabilities are anticipated and acted upon ahead of time.

In brief, this means you should:

- Hold meetings in places that are accessible, where people with disabilities can participate easily without assistance or with minimum assistance.
- Advertise and promote your event or meeting to people with disabilities.
- Display access symbols on your promotional materials so everyone knows the event is accessible.
- Have all materials available in alternate formats upon request.
- Provide interpretation as requested.
- Train board, staff, and volunteers to welcome and include people with disabilities.

WHY SHOULD YOUR EVENT OR MEETING BE ACCESSIBLE?

First of all, it's the law. The Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act require that people with disabilities have access to all public events. The *Washington Law Against Discrimination* has the broadest definition of disability in the nation and emphasizes inclusion and participation.

And, secondly, it's just good business. At any given time 15-20% of the population has a disability and this percentage will grow in the next few years as baby boomers age. You need to make sure that this section of the public is welcome and included in your event.

WHAT IS THE DEFINITION OF A DISABILITY?

In Washington, a person with a disability is defined as a person who has, or is perceived as having, the presence of any physical, mental or sensory disability or that uses a trained dog guide or service animal. These disabilities are sometimes visible and sometimes not; they can be permanent or temporary; they can affect people of any age; they can be severe or not. In short, disabilities can affect people in many different ways. You should be prepared to welcome everyone, of all abilities.

² *Beyond the Ramp: Accessibility as An Organizational Asset*, Johanna Misesy Boyer, Association of Performing Arts Presenters, 2005.

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR SEEING THAT MEETINGS AND EVENTS ARE ACCESSIBLE?

The owner of a facility used for public events is responsible for seeing that the facility meets required standards for access. As the planner you are responsible for making sure that your meetings or events are held in accessible places, that promotion of the event is accessible, and that accommodations are offered upon request to people with disabilities. The U.S. Department of Justice has a website *ADA Business Connection* that can offer facility owners assistance. Of particular interest is the *Readily Achievable Checklist for Existing Business Facilities* available at <http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/business.htm>.

HOW DO I PLAN AN ACCESSIBLE EVENT?

Ensure that a member of your staff is responsible for making the event accessible and is knowledgeable in this area. Too often cultural organizations jump into accessibility without understanding the community and individuals for whom they are providing access.

You will need to know who the disability community is, why you want to focus on them as potential patrons, and how access is a positive customer service issue instead of an onerous compliance issue. Here are some brief suggestions:

- Recognize the diversity of the disability market. Do not assume that one size fits all.
- Include people with disabilities in the planning and development for your event.
- Develop simple modifications to make existing facilities, products, and events user-friendly to persons with disabilities.
- Test market your facilities, products and services with the disability community to measure accessibility and/or usability by persons with different types of disabilities. This will benefit all of your patrons.
- Develop promotional strategies that target persons with disabilities and their family members as desired patrons.
- Integrate people with disabilities into your print and television advertising.
- Include disability newspapers, magazines and newsletters in your print advertising budget
- Attend and exhibit at consumer disability-related conferences.
- Become involved with the disability community by sponsoring and/or participating in a national or local event or project.
- Have available and ready to use copies of *Design for Accessibility; A Cultural Administrators Handbook* and *Accessibility Planning and Resource Guide for Cultural Administrators* (See Appendix.)

HINT: Before confirming the date, find out if other disability-related events are taking place in the area during the same timeframe. This may have an impact on your event and availability of service providers.

FORM AN ADVISORY COMMITTEE

When trying to reach the communities of people with disabilities the best thing you can do is have people from those communities working with you. This is true of any community you want to reach. Forming a committee of current or potential patrons or attendees with disabilities will give you access to their knowledge and skills about communicating with others.

HOLD THE EVENT IN AN ACCESSIBLE FACILITY OR SPACE

1. Find an accessible space

- Look for a place that is close to accessible public transportation.
- Check paths of travel between locations that will be used, such as meeting rooms, restaurants, auditoriums, hotels, parking, etc.
- Find a place with accessible restrooms, adequate accessible parking spaces and other public areas such as telephones, water fountains, shelter from sun and rain, etc.
- Plan additional space for users of wheelchairs and their companions.

It is a good idea to check the site yourself with people who have a disability. A person who uses a wheelchair can be especially helpful in catching physical access issues. Often places will say they are accessible, but the reality does not meet standards, temporary repairs might be taking place or other impediments might be in place that can be noted and, perhaps, changed before your event. For specific information about what an accessible facility/building includes see the *Readily Achievable Checklist for Existing Business Facilities* (above) or one of the resources listed in the back of this publication.

Remember that people with disabilities will want to:

- know how to navigate around your site
- receive information and directions while onsite
- move around to attend and participate in all your activities
- select and purchase items at concession stands or from vendors
- have access to first aid, if necessary

You may be able to supply temporary solutions for places that are inaccessible or that are lacking some features. For example, a temporary ramp could provide access over stairs or Braille signage by/in elevators might enhance communications. Both of these items might be possible for you to supply for the duration of your event.

2. Gather information about the facility that can be passed on to your customers.

- Maps of the facility that include the location of handicapped parking, bathrooms, etc.
- Location of services, such as where you can acquire assistive listening devices.
- Assure there is trained staff at the site.

PROMOTE THE EVENT

Because of their past experience, many people with disabilities will assume that your event is NOT accessible. This is especially true of events in temporary or outdoor spaces, such as festivals and fairs. Your responsibility is to make sure that your potential customers know that the event is happening, welcomes them, and is accessible.

1. Find out how your potential customers get their information. This is a great step to take to discover more about all your customers, but may take extra effort when you are trying to reach people with disabilities:
 - Are there reader services for people with vision limitations?
 - Are there online or text newsletters for people who are deaf, people with disabilities, or other segments of your audience?
 - Are there particular organizations whose members would be interested?
 - Are there special places and/or times when these communities gather and share?

Your Advisory Committee can help you to answer these questions and to develop ways to get the word out to these communities.

2. All of your publicity materials should use the appropriate access symbols; these are available online at <http://www.gag.org/resources/das.php>.

If the space has some limitations they should be listed with the symbols. For example if the entrance to a building is accessible but the bathrooms are not you should use the wheelchair symbol with the words "Accessible entrance, no accessible restrooms." Each Washington State Arts Commission grant contract includes a page of accessibility symbols and a brochure about using them effectively.

3. All of your written publicity materials should be available in alternate formats.
4. Your website should have access information clearly available, not buried somewhere deep in the site. A prominent accessibility link will let people know that they are welcome and invited. On the linked page include:
 - information about getting materials in alternate formats,
 - accessible travel to and within the event,
 - the availability of assistive devices and services, and
 - any other useful information

The website itself should be easy to navigate for everyone and include TTY or Relay numbers for easy access and ticket ordering by people with disabilities.

5. Use appropriate language, terminology, and disability etiquette. This will require you to learn about communicating well with people with disabilities.

BEFORE THE EVENT

1. Train your staff and volunteers in appropriate disability etiquette, emergency procedures, and the use of assistive devices.

2. Communicate with all presenters to assure their presentations will be accessible to all. Assure that all stage, dressing room, and backstage areas are accessible to all presenters. Send each presenter information on speaking to audiences where there are people with disabilities.

Give them hints, such as:

- Do not turn away from your audience
- Do not speak to an interpreter but to the person for whom the interpreter is working
- If you write on a blackboard, say what you are writing and do not turn away to write while speaking.
- If you use overheads, read what's in them and, if possible, make printouts of the overheads and put them in alternate formats.
- Speak clearly. If you have to use a microphone, do not put the microphone too close to your mouth – this muffles your speaking voice.
- In the description of your presentation, indicate whether or not there will be any writing or reading activities during the session. This is so those individuals with visual, learning, or motor disabilities can be prepared to participate fully in these activities.
- Allow individuals with visual or learning disabilities to tape meetings or conferences and if you do not want to allow this make arrangements for them to have access to conference materials.
- If you are doing a technical presentation, remember to write unusual words or phrase on a blackboard and spell them for the benefit of anyone who may need such assistance.

3. Create accessible registration materials that ask about access and other special need. Here is a link to an especially complete registration form sample:

<http://www.accessingsafety.org/uploads/File/Registration%20Sheet%20-%20Participants%20-%20FINAL.doc>

4. Create clear signage for all areas of the event that include access information; e.g.

RESTROOMS  

5. Arrange for any interpretation or assistive services.

6. Provide requested materials in alternate formats.

7. If lodging is being provided, assure that the facility has accessible rooms available.

8. Prepare evaluation/survey questionnaires for all participants.

THE DAY OF THE EVENT/DURING THE EVENT

1. Assure that only those needing access use accessible parking spaces.
2. Double check that all routes of travel are clearly marked for easy wayfinding.
3. Double check that all temporary access accommodations and signage are in place and secure.
4. Greet each patron and offer assistance if requested. Your (trained) ushers should offer brief tours of the site, point out accessible paths to services, and guide people to their seats. They can also provide information about assistive devices and services available.
5. Distribute evaluation forms for all participants and collect them.

AFTER THE EVENT

1. Meet with your Advisory Committee to assess how accessibility was provided and explore ways to increase/improve accessibility in the future. Review the evaluation questionnaires.
2. Continue to train volunteers and staff regarding accessibility.
3. Provide primary staff with continued professional development opportunities.
4. Include permanent facility, equipment, and program upgrades for accessibility in annual and capital building budgets.
5. Explore ways to enhance the experiences of people with disabilities with your product – workshops, educational materials, etc.
6. Become aware of the artistic abilities of artists with disabilities and include them in your programming.

APPENDIX

PRIMARY RESOURCES

Two of the most important resources are available online at the National Endowment for the Arts at www.nea.gov, click on Accessibility on the homepage and on Checklists and Publications.

Design for Accessibility; A Cultural Administrators Handbook

www.arts.gov/resources/Accessibility/pubs/DesignAccessibility/DesignAccess.pdf

Accessibility Planning and Resource Guide for Cultural Administrators

www.arts.gov/resources/Accessibility/Planning/index.html

Other resources at the National Endowment for the Arts website include the *Arts and Humanities Accessibility Checklist* self-evaluation and other resources.

Readily Achievable Checklist for Existing Business Facilities, U.S. Department of Justice ADA Business Connection, www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/business.htm

Disability Access Symbols, Graphic Artists Guild, www.gag.org/resources/das.php.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Accessible Temporary Events: A Planning Guide, ATEAPG, Ron Mace, Rex Pace and Leslie Young, 2002. Center for Universal Design, College of Design, North Carolina State University, for the Southeast Disability and Business Technical Assistance Center under a grant from the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research

www.design.ncsu.edu/cud/pubs_p/pfacilities.htm

Beyond the Ramp: Accessibility as An Organizational Asset, Johanna Misesy Boyer, Association of Performing Arts Presenters, 2005

www.arts.gov/resources/Accessibility/Planning/index.html

Guidelines for Accessible Meetings and Events, Disabled People's Network Steering Group Community Network for Manchester (UK), April 2005 (Updated September 2006)

www.dpmsg.org.uk/guidelines-Sept06.doc

NOTE: Particularly good checklists. Some information is specific to the UK, however, and needs to be adapted for US audiences.

Making Accessibility Real: A Guide for Planning Meetings, Conferences and Gatherings, A Publication of the Home and Community-based Services Resource Network, Adapted from Kailes, J.I. and Jones, D. (1993).

A Guide to Planning Accessible Meetings. Houston, TX: Independent Living Research Utilization (ILRU), Research and Training Center on Independent Living.

<http://tcsip.tarjancenter.ucla.edu/docs/HCBSAccessibleMeetings.pdf>

Plan An Accessible Meeting, Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services

www.accesson.ca/mcss/english/how/howto_meeting.htm

Planning Accessible Meetings, Accessing Safety Initiative, a project of the Vera Institute of Justice and the U.S. Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women

www.accessingsafety.org/index.php/main/main_menu/planning_for_change/planning-accessible-meetings

Planning for Accessible Meetings and General Guidelines When Serving Persons with Disabilities, DAWN Ontario Disabled Women's Network Ontario

http://dawn.thot.net/accessible_meetings.html

Removing Barriers, Planning Meetings That Are Accessible to All Participants, North Carolina Office on Disability and Health in collaboration with the Center for Universal Design, 2005

www.fpg.unc.edu/~ncodh/pdfs/rbmeetingguide.pdf

Resources for Planning Accessible Meetings – a list of resources from Mid-Atlantic Disability and Technical Assistance Center (DBTAC), www.adainfo.org/about/, one of ten regional centers established to provide training, information, and technical assistance on the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) to businesses, consumers, schools, and state and local governments

www.adainfo.org/hospitality/planning-accessible-meetings.doc