Meeting Accessibility Guide

This guide aims to serve as a roadmap on how to ensure the full participation of all individuals – with or without disabilities – during trainings, convenings, and meetings. These steps are divided into before, during, and after the meeting.

Before the meeting

• Send out a questionnaire to those attending the meeting, including questions about access needs.
• Ensure any online registration includes a line for requesting accessibility accommodations.
• Determine who on the team will be responsible for coordinating accessibility accommodations.
• Request language translators, sign language interpreters (SLIs), captioning in real-time (CART) providers, and/or other communication facilitators’ services. Book services early due to limited availability. If requesting an interpreter/provider for a specific individual, ask them if they have a preference for a specific interpreter/provider.
• Secure accessible venues. Verify the accessibility by visiting the venue beforehand.
  o For planning meetings in another country/province, ask a local Disabled Persons Organization (DPO) for recommendations.
• Follow up with the individual on their specific needs and ask if they have any preferences.
• If a meeting requires travel, ensure that hotels and travel arrangements are also accessible. Ask local people with disabilities for recommendations based on their experiences. Be as detailed as possible with needs requests (i.e. first floor for wheelchair users if possible, accessible showers/toilets).
• Share any meeting materials (agenda, documents, attendee list) with SLIs, CART providers, language translators, and communication
facilitators in advance of the meeting. This will enable them to provide quality and accurate support.
  o Support providers may not be familiar with your field’s terminologies and acronyms; share a list with acronyms and terms that will be frequently used during the meeting.

- Ask presenters to provide materials before the meeting to allow for alternative formats to be created such as a USB drive. Brief presenters on speaking to a multi-lingual audience that includes those who use sign language or those who do not speak English as their first language. They should be prepared to speak slowly and describe any images shown during their presentation.

- Send an electronic version to those with visual impairments ahead of the meeting. Also share any PowerPoint presentations ahead of time and have documents available at the meeting on a USB drive.

- Use a PowerPoint (PPT) template that is low-vision friendly such as a dark background (black, dark grey, or navy) and light colors for font. Use large font sizes and limit the amount of text to a few points. Be prepared to have the text within the PPT slide provided in a Word document version to create a large print version.
  o Strike a balance with the amount of information on PPTs as sometimes more is better in a multi-lingual audience where it is helpful to see the words while listening.

- Notify a local Braille company and ask how much time they will need to braille documents. Note, some documents cannot be brailed such as tables, charts, and PDF materials.

- Ask photographers to focus on the person not the disability (i.e. not taking close ups of interpreters, white canes, wheelchairs, and hearing aids).

- Work closely with foreign language translators to assure the translation uses appropriate disability terms.

- Meet with staff and volunteers prior to the meeting to make sure everyone is familiar with how to be inclusive.
Setting up the Meeting Room

- Offer the option of a person with disability arriving early to determine what works best for their needs.
- Reserve seating near speakers for SLIs/CART providers. Allow flexibility if they need to be placed in a different location to provide better facilitation. Where possible, position SLIs where there is a dark, solid background to minimize visual distractions.
- Ensure that wheelchair users and those with visual impairments will be able to navigate around the room. For example, allow for ample room between tables, make sure that there are no wires on the floor or that they are taped down. Remove some chairs from tables to create space for wheelchairs.
- Ensure speakers with disabilities have access to the podium and the panel table.
- Print copies of materials for translators/SLIs/CART available.
- Provide seating area for support persons nearby (usually behind the person with a disability).

During the meeting

- Ask those in the room to introduce themselves. This helps those who are visually impaired as well as for interpreters to be able to identify who is speaking.
  - Do not ask interpreters, CART, sight guides or other communication facilitators to introduce themselves as this disrupts them while they are working. Do acknowledge their presence by thanking them for their time.
  - Also be aware, that some interpreters work in teams and will switch every 20-30 minutes. This is to prevent fatigue and injury.
- Before beginning the meeting, have the moderator outline communication/access rules such as:
  - Wait for the moderator to call on you if you have a question/comment. Prevent overlapping chatter
  - Say your name before stating your comment
  - Allow time for interpretation
• Push chairs in when leaving the room

• Allow ample breaks during the meeting

**After the meeting**

• Debrief with team to discuss what went well and lessons learned.
• Send out survey/questionnaire that includes questions about the accessibility and inclusion of the event. Also ask if any improvements could be made for future events.
Send an accessibility form to those attending the meetings to inquire what type of support they need for their travels, hotel accommodation, and the meeting itself.

Check that venues and facilities accessible for people with a disability. (i.e. ramps, elevators, accessible restrooms)

Request a translator, sign language interpreter or captioning in real-time (CART). (if requested)

- Provide meeting materials ahead of meeting so they may prepare

Prepare alternative formats for meeting documents such as:

- Braille
- Large print
- Digital/electronic