# Guide to Planning and Hosting Accessible and Inclusive Events

## Introduction

The Americans with Disabilities Act, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and other state and federal disability laws and regulations require the university to provide equal access to university sponsored programs and events. This guide assists event sponsors in planning, promoting, and hosting accessible in person and virtual events.

## Why is Accessibility Important?

Hosting accessible and inclusive programs and events is not only a legal requirement, but the right thing to do. In addition, it is consistent with our values and in alignment with our [2030 Strategic Plan](https://strategicplan.msu.edu/strategic-plan/executive-summary) and [Diversity Equity & Inclusion](https://president.msu.edu/initiatives/dei-plan/) initiatives.

## Budget

* Include a budget item for accommodations, e.g., sign language interpreters, Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) providers, assistive listening devices, providing media in an alternate format, food and allergy accommodations, etc.

## Accessible Parking, Entrance and Signage

* Does the event space have accessible parking.
* Does the building entrance have a ramp or other accessible entrance.
* Is there clear signage of accessible entrances. Consider making the accessible entrance the primary entrance to promote inclusive practices.
* Are door(s) easy to open (if not automatic or held open (i.e. lever vs knob handle, limited door pressure)).
* Are power door openers operating.
* Is there a 36” wide path of travel to event space (can reduce to 32” for entry way).
* Is the path of travel free of debris, draped cords, or other obstacles.
* Are elevators functioning.

## Event Location and Space

If possible, tour the location prior to reserving the event space. Consider the following:

* Does the furniture in the space include both stationary chairs and chairs on wheels or chairs without arms to accommodate diverse body types.
* Are pathways, corridors, doorways, and aisles wide enough (at least 36 inches) for a wheelchair user or those who are blind or have low vision, to maneuver. Avoid objects or other items that protrude into a walkway (e.g., cameras on stands, etc.) that may not be observable by a white cane users.
* Avoid spaces with ongoing construction, new carpeting, newly painted walls, and recently used chemicals for those with allergies, asthma, and other scent sensitivities.
* Are restrooms accessible and gender inclusive. Is there clear signage directing participants to those accessible and gender inclusive restrooms.
* Are stage platforms accessible. If not, is an alternate access location is identified.
* Is seating available for sign language interpreters and CART providers.
* Are assistive listening devices available and working. Is information available about how to access these devices. Is there a hearing aid accessible device available.
* Is there floor space available for service dogs.
* Has a toileting space for service dogs been identified.
* Is there ample lighting and acoustics in the event space.
* Is there seating near the front of the event space for participants who are Deaf or hard of hearing.
* If a projector screen is in use, it is easily visible such that presenters or other speakers will not be standing in front of it.
* For overnight events, are hotel rooms or other housing accessible.
* Is there a clear line of sight to the American Sign Language interpreter or CART provider.
* Can dining facilities and catering accommodate dietary restrictions and food allergies.
* Is there a quiet break space for those who may need a quiet space for disability related impacts.
* Are lactation or personal health rooms available for chest feeding and those with disability related needs.

## Promotional Materials and Social Media Postings

* Include an accommodation statement in all promotional materials and social media postings.
* Suggested accommodation statement: We strive to host inclusive, accessible events that enable all individuals, including individuals with disabilities, to engage fully. To request an accommodation or for inquiries about accessibility, please contact (name) at (phone and email).
* Caption all video content.
* Include text description of images and photos.
* Comply with color contrast rules.
* Offer promotional materials in multiple formats (print, digital, etc.)
* Advertise events on several social media platforms.
* Expand the representation of people with disabilities in photos and visual materials.

## Event Registration

* Include an accommodation statement and form for requesting accommodations.
* Suggested accommodation request: I will need the following accommodations to participate in this event:
  + Preferential seating
  + American Sign Language Interpreter
  + Communication Access in Real-Time (CART services)
  + Large print
  + Alternative formats to printed materials
  + Braille
  + Wheelchair access
  + Assistive listening device
  + An Assistant will accompany me
  + Dietary needs
  + Accessible lodging needs
  + Elevator access
  + Other (specify)

## Presentation and Event Materials

* Ask presenters to provide a copy of the presentation materials well in advance to allow for preparation of alternative format versions (large print, Braille, etc.) and to provide to interpreters or captioners.
* Presenters, facilitators, speakers should always face the audience when speaking and use a microphone.
* Presenters and audience participants who have questions, should identify themselves before speaking.
* Presenters should describe any images, photos, or graphs that are relevant to the presentation.
* Videos used during the presentation should be captioned and include audio descriptions.
* If using slides, be sure they are completely legible, with large print and sharp, contrasting colors; the presenter should also allow adequate time for the audience to read the visual aids.
* Provide materials to attendees in advance of the event.
* Presentation materials should have strong color contrast, large font size, utilize styles.
* Presentation and event materials should be made available digitally for individuals using assistive technology.

## In-Person Events

* Provide PowerPoint materials in advance of event. Enable captions in PowerPoints even if no accommodation is requested. Enabling captions is a best practice.
* Provide links to digital versions of event materials.
* Clearly state the meeting agenda up-front.
* Use native format for preparation of digital materials – PowerPoint, Word, etc, and not PDFs!
* Describe images and photos that have subject matter content.

## Virtual Events

* Provide PowerPoints, agenda, and other materials in advance of the event in native format, not PDFs!
* Have speakers or participants asking questions, identify themselves before speaking.
* Enable AI captions for all meetings regardless of request.
* If in webinar setting, limit discussion in the chat as it can be distracting to screen reader user. Use Q&A instead.
* Don’t use screen shots they are not accessible to a screen reader.
* Caption video recordings.
* Clearly state the meeting agenda up-front, including which features of the meeting tool will be used.

## Food and Drink

* Provide a range of food that includes: vegan/vegetarian, gluten-free, healthy, lactose-free and Kosher/Halal options, and ensure that these options and ingredients are clearly labeled in large print and either individually packaged or offered in a way that avoids cross-contamination.
* Provide water and make plastic straws available.
* Have more options to hold beverages other than glass or ceramic.
* Avoid common food allergens (e.g., peanuts).

## During the Event

* Designate a point person to assist and respond to same-day accommodations requests.
* Make volunteers aware of accommodations requested by event participants.
* Inform volunteers of accessible restrooms, parking, and emergency exits.
* Create a plan for responding to “short notice” or last-minute accommodation requests. Whenever possible, honor these “short notice” requests.

## CART and ASL Providers and Assistive Technology Resources

The University is required to provide communication to people with disabilities that is equally effective as that provided to other event participants who do not have disabilities.

Frequently used CART providers, American Sign Language Interpreters, and assistive technology can be located at the following links:

* [CART Providers](https://www.rcpd.msu.edu/services/deaf)
* [American Sign Language Interpreters](https://www.rcpd.msu.edu/services/deaf)
* [Assistive Listening Devices](https://www.rcpd.msu.edu/program/ald)

## Digital Accessibility

The University is committed to providing accessible digital experiences for everyone, including persons with disabilities. The MSU [Digital Accessibility Policy](https://webaccess.msu.edu/policy) defines the accessibility requirements for university websites and digital content. Content that is not fully accessible to individuals with disabilities can be reported to the university through the [inaccessible digital content report form](https://tdx.msu.edu/TDClient/32/Portal/Requests/TicketRequests/NewForm?ID=eswPaqWC--A_&RequestorType=ServiceOffering). The [Digital Accessibility Liaisons program](https://webaccess.msu.edu/liaisons) provides a point of contact for every MSU unit.

Learn more about creating accessible digital content:

* [Accessibility Basics](https://webaccess.msu.edu/tutorials/basics)
* [Document Accessibility](https://webaccess.msu.edu/tutorials/documents)
* [Video Accessibility](https://webaccess.msu.edu/tutorials/video)
* [Website Accessibility](https://webaccess.msu.edu/tutorials/websites)

## Questions and additional information:

* For more information about hosting accessible events, accommodations, assistive technologies or other accessibility concerns, please contact Tracy Leahy, the ADA and Section 504 Coordinator - [ocr.tracyleahy@msu.edu](mailto:ocr.tracyleahy@msu.edu) or (517) 355-3960.