



photo by Al Fuchs

Cleveland Dancing Wheels, Cleveland, OH: "The Sorcerer's Apprentices" with dancers Jennifer Sikora and Sabatino Verlessa

Meetings, Panels, Lectures and Conferences

Many arts and humanities organizations conduct meetings, lectures, conferences and panels. Making these accessible to people with disabilities must be a priority. Any meetings that are open to the public must comply with the provisions of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act. Public meetings must be held in physically accessible spaces and provide effective communication for people with disabilities and who are older.

The following information is adapted with permission from the ERIC/OSEP Special Project, the ERIC Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education, the Council for Exceptional Children. Download the complete information brief at: www/ericec.org/digests/e735.html

Choosing an Accessible Site

Always make a site visit before committing the organization to a facility. The goal of the site visit is to select a conference setting that allows persons with a disability or older patrons to move about the conference site freely and independently and to participate in the program. Working with a local independent living center or other access group to assist in evaluating the accessibility of the site is highly recommended. The site visit should include inspecting the space and amenities to be used during the conference, meeting or lecture. Consider whether the distance and route between buildings, meeting rooms and amenities will be easy to traverse. Verify the accessibility of any outside entertainment or transportation services that will be used. Make certain the staff of the hotel or conference center are trained to handle issues of accessibility. Consider the following points in selecting a site:

- Is accessible parking and public transportation available?
- Are exterior pathways and main entrances accessible? This means a participant will not encounter stairs, any sudden change of floor height over 1/4 inch, slippery or unstable ground, doorways less than 32 inches wide and objects obstructing walkways.

- Are directions to meeting rooms and amenities clearly posted at entrances? Assigning staff to entrances to provide directions and assistance to meeting participants is also useful.
- Are interior pathways accessible? Take a look at the width of halls, corridors and aisles. Check for level, stable surfaces.
- Are restrooms, public telephones (including a TTY), water fountains and sleeping rooms (if needed) accessible?
- Is there adequate space for wheelchairs in meeting rooms, as well as at conference and banquet tables?
- Are tables and chairs set up to allow integrated and dispersed spaces for people using wheelchairs?
- Is the lighting adjustable and are all areas well lit?
- Is the environment obstacle-free? This means free of protruding objects, objects in the middle of pathways and trip hazards?
- Are there large print, tactile directions for equipment, elevators and restrooms? Check to see that elevator control panels have braille with raised characters.
- Are the emergency egress routes accessible and are there visual/audible alarms?
- Are registration and display tables no higher than 36 inches? Clipboards can be made available as an alternate writing surface for persons of short stature or with limited mobility.
- Is there a tactile/visual map of conference area?

Accessible Transportation

Don't forget about transportation for participants with disabilities. If the organization is providing transportation for participants, it must be prepared also to provide wheelchair accessible transportation. Likewise, if an organization is sponsoring a festival and is operating courtesy shuttle buses from remote parking locations, it must provide accessible shuttles or make other arrangements to accommodate people who have limited mobility, including those who use wheelchairs.

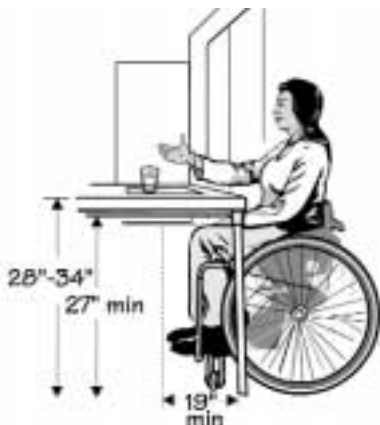


Table Clearance

Promotion and Registration

Conference planners should arrange for all promotional material to be available in alternative formats, such as braille, large print, computer disk, e-mail or through the Internet. Designate someone on staff to handle all issues concerning accommodations for participants during the meeting.

In all conference material, including the registration form and press release, indicate that accommodations can be made for a variety of needs. Here are some examples:

- “If you have a disability and may require accommodation to fully participate in this activity, please check here. Someone from our staff will contact you to discuss your specific needs.”
- “Accommodations for individuals with disabilities will be provided with at least three weeks advance notice. Please check here or notify (conference planner) to request an accommodation at (phone) and (e-mail).”
- “Check here if you require: (insert a checklist of accommodations such as sign language interpreters, wheelchair accessible seating.)”

Social Functions and Meals

When planning social functions and meals, meeting planners should:

- Include personal assistants and interpreters in the estimated number of participants.
- Make adequate provisions for seating, allowing all participants to sit in the same area. Do not place people using wheelchairs, or those who use walkers or guide dogs, on the fringes of the dining area.
- Avoid buffet lines. They can be particularly difficult for persons with mobility or vision loss. If buffet lines can't be avoided then, request the catering service provide additional staff to assist attendees.
- Ensure that buffet/refreshment tables are no higher than 36 inches or have staff available to assist upon request.

Accessible Presentations

The meeting planner should work with invited speakers and presenters to ensure that presentations are accessible to all people. Attention to the following points will enhance the accessibility of conference presentations.



Registration Planning Information

If you need any of the following accommodations, please indicate below and submit this form no later than (date i.e., 3 weeks before event) so that staff will have sufficient time to fulfill your request. Include your phone number and/or e-mail so that we may contact you if more details are needed.

- Wheelchair Accessible Hotel Room
- Assistive Listening System
- Wheelchair Accessible Transportation
- Oral Interpretation
- Sign Interpretation
- Print Material Recorded on Cassette
- Large Print Materials
- Dietary Restrictions (specify)

Other:

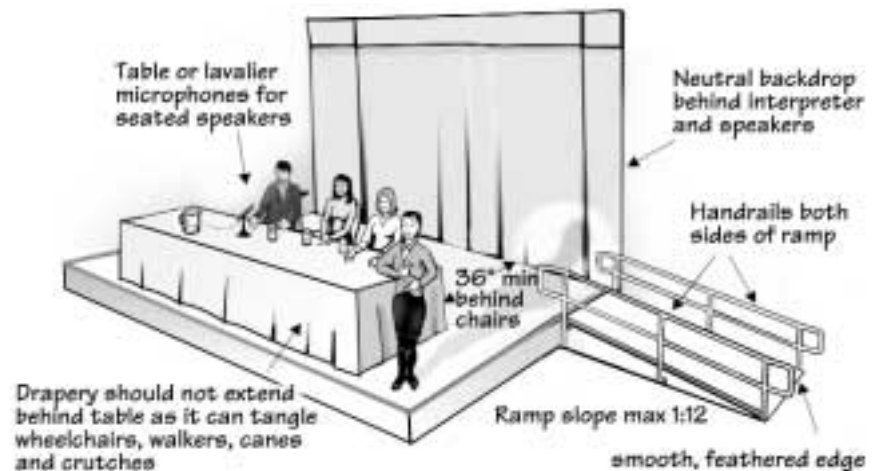
Example of access section of registration form

In General

- Select well lit and easily accessible meeting rooms.
- Control background noise.
- Choose a meeting room with good acoustics and an auxiliary sound system.
- Arrange for multiple types of microphones: table, lapel and floor microphones with horizontal booms or an assistant with a hand-held microphone. Remember that presenters, interpreters and audience members use microphones.
- Establish unobstructed pathways to microphones for audience members' questions and statements.
- Discuss with each presenter, prior to the meeting, the importance of developing a presentation that will be accessible to all participants.
- Find out if a presenter requires an accommodation such as a ramp, accessible podium, chair, interpreter or sighted guide. It is more desirable to seat presenters at a table, but if a podium is being used, it must have a detachable microphone for those who cannot or choose not to use the podium.
- Instruct presenters to speak in well-paced and well-modulated tones. It is particularly important for presenters to monitor their rate of speech and not speak too rapidly.



Floor Mike with Boom



Speakers Platform

For People Who Are Blind or Have Some Vision Loss

Note that the items listed here may also increase accessibility for sighted individuals with reading or learning disabilities.

- Orient participants to the site and layout of the spaces, identify the location of amenities and exits. Provide transparent, raised-line maps of conference area including braille or raised letters with corresponding print layouts underneath. The raised-line, tactile maps should identify meeting rooms, food services, restrooms, exits and other amenities.

- Allow access to front row seats during meeting sessions.
- Have a staff member or volunteer available to sit with participants and describe the presentations, if desired.
- Offer papers, agendas or other print materials in alternative formats such as large print or braille.
- Make available for close examination large print copies of transparencies, PowerPoint presentations or slides.
- Check for adjustable lighting in the meeting room. Dimming the ceiling lights can increase the contrast—and thus the visibility—of audiovisual materials.
- Use sharply contrasting colors and large print for materials, maps, books, signs, menus, forms and displays.
- Have each person state their name before speaking so that participants who are blind or have low vision can track the course of the conversation during question and answer periods and facilitated group discussions.

For People who are Deaf or Hard-of-Hearing

- Allow preferred seating for those who wish it, usually in front of the speaker and interpreter. Preferred seating should be away from heating and air conditioning units, hallways and other noisy areas.
- Keep lights bright in the area where the presenter and interpreter stand. Keep lights on the interpreters during PowerPoint, video or other visual presentations.
- Check that window coverings are adjustable to reduce or remove glare.
- Arrange seats in a circle for small discussion groups.
- Provide captioning, CART (Computer Aided Realtime Translation) or qualified, professional interpreters.
- Set up an assistive listening system and check that it functions properly before the presentation starts.

Several site visits may be necessary prior to an event. Keep in mind that with continued communication and education, organizations will achieve the goal of accessible, barrier-free conferences and meetings for all individuals.

RESOURCES

Independent Living Centers

To find the Independent living center closest to you, contact:
www.ilusa.com/links/ilcenters.htm

Planning Accessible Meetings

“Planning Accessible Conferences and Meetings: An ERIC/OSEP Information Brief for Conference Planners”

The Council for Exceptional Children
ERIC Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education
1110 North Glebe Road
Arlington, VA 22201-5704
(800) 328-0272 voice/TTY
www.ericec.org

“A Guide to Planning Accessible Meetings”

by June Isaacson Kailes and Darrell Jones
ILRU (Independent Living Research Utilization) Program
2323 South Shepherd, Suite 1000
Houston, TX 77019
(713) 520-0232 voice
(713) 520-5136 TTY
www.ILRU.org

“Holding Accessible Meetings”

National Organization on Disabilities
910 Sixteenth Street, NW, Suite 600
Washington, DC 20006
(202) 293-5960 voice
(202) 293-5968 TTY
(202) 293-7999 fax
www.nod.org

Accessible Lodging

“Accommodating All Guests”

by John P.S. Salmen, AIA
The American Hotel & Lodging Association Information Center
P.O. Box 753
Waldorf, MD 20604
(301) 705-7455 voice
(301) 843-0159 fax
www.ahla.com

“Common ADA Problems at Newly Constructed Lodging Facilities”

“Five Steps to Make New Lodging Facilities Comply with the ADA”

“Americans with Disabilities Act Checklist for New Lodging Facilities”

These publications are from the Disability Rights Section at the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) and can be downloaded at the DOJ Web site. They have many more publications on a variety of different accessibility issues.

Disability Rights Section

Civil Rights Division

U.S. Department of Justice

P.O. Box 66738

Washington, DC 20035-6738

(800) 514-0301 voice

(800) 514-0383 TTY

www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/publicat.htm

Producing Braille Materials and Tactile Maps**Braille Institute of America**

741 North Vermont Street

Los Angeles, CA 90029

(800) 272-4553 voice

www.brailleinstitute.org

American Printing House for the Blind

P.O. Box 6085

Louisville, KY 40206-0085

(502) 895-2405 voice

(502) 899-2274 fax

(800) 223-1839 voice

www.aph.org

American Council of the Blind

The American Council of the Blind is the nation's leading membership organization of blind and visually impaired people. They can identify local and national resources.

American Council of the Blind

1155 15th Street, NW, Suite 1004

Washington, DC 20005

(202) 467-5081 voice

(202) 467-5085 fax

(800) 424-8666 voice

www.acb.org