

# Guide to Planning Accessible Public Events

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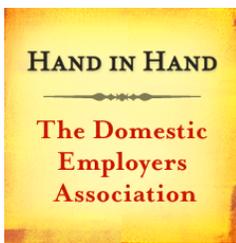
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Draft



# Guide to Planning Accessible Public Events

## Introduction:

This guide is intended to support organizers to plan events that allow all people, including disabled people\*, to participate fully and be in leadership of our organizations, movements and campaigns. It takes intention and work to make events accessible to everyone-- whether it be interpretation into different languages to allow non-English speakers to participate; scholarships to make events affordable for working class and low-income people; or childcare to allow parents and caregivers to be present.

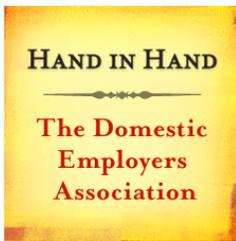
**Though this guide will integrate other aspects of access, it will particularly focus on how to make public events accessible in relation to disability.** Disability is a spectrum that includes people with physical, sensory, auditory, immune, chemical, developmental, intellectual, and psychiatric disabilities. This means you may not always be able to tell if someone has a disability just by looking or interacting with them since many disabilities, such as Diabetes and Epilepsy, are invisible.

It is important to always ask if someone needs support or an accommodation instead of assuming you know what their needs are. Disabled people are in the best position to say what their needs are and should be consulted whenever possible when making arrangements for accommodations.

Disabled people have been marginalized from many communities for much of history. Given Hand and Hand's work, it is politically imperative that we challenge our internalized ableism and transform our practices to reflect justice for all people and ensure appropriate accommodations and access for all community members. We must fully include all people and benefit from their wisdom, perspectives, experience, and leadership. Simply put, our events, organizations and movements must reflect our belief that disabled people have the same right to respect, dignity, and agency as our non-disabled peers.

Engaging and including disability communities and immigrant communities is critical in fulfilling the mission of Hand in Hand and the goals of the coalitions and campaigns we work with. Disabled people are members of our multiple communities and should be encouraged to participate in our events and become leaders in organizations and movements. If programs do not reflect the value of a community by not being accessible to those community members, it is unlikely they will return to another event and become involved. For information about the common goals of the disability community and domestic workers, please see Hand in Hand's article, Organizing within Disability Communities.

*Disability communities, and Hand in Hand members, use different language to talk about ourselves and our communities. Some of us prefer "people with disabilities," known as people first language and is common in the disability rights movement, though there are diverse preferences. This highlights the person, for whom disability is one characteristic. Others of us prefer "disabled people," which marks disability as a primary part of identity, and the basis for forming community.*



# Guide to Planning Accessible Public Events

## **Things to Consider Before the Event:**

- Form an Access Committee along with a contact person to specifically address access needs such as coordinating language interpreters or childcare. This is helpful especially for finding out beforehand if the building where an event is held meets the accessibility standards determined by your organizers.
- The event is free or has a sliding scale payment system that doesn't require "proof" or public disclosure of class status and should also be decided by the person paying, not the event organizers.
- Childcare.
- Interpreters for non-English speakers.
- Consider hiring attendants to support people with bathroom breaks and otherwise. Coordinate directly with the people who need this support about identifying and paying the attendants.

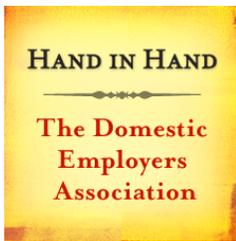
## **Invitations/ Notifying About the Event**

Addressing accessibility on your invitation is a crucial step in including disabled people in your outreach efforts. Often, disabled people encounter physical and attitudinal barriers that make it difficult to participate. By having information about access on your invitation, it shows that disabled people are fully welcome and that there is a plan to ensure everyone can participate fully.

- The invitation should use:
  - Arial or other plain, sans serif fonts
  - At least 14 point
  - Black ink on white non-glossy paper
- Clear and concise alternate text in your online images (<http://webaim.org/techniques/alttext/>)
- Accessible color contrast ([http://www.un.org/webaccessibility/1\\_visual/13\\_colourcontrast.shtml](http://www.un.org/webaccessibility/1_visual/13_colourcontrast.shtml))
- Thoughtful representation in poster images. Are bodies used? How? Which bodies? Why?
- Accessibility information should be easy to find and highlighted. Include an access request form similar to:

"to request disability accommodations, please contact \_name\_\_\_\_\_ at least 3-7 days in advance at \_\_ phone # \_\_, \_\_e-mail address \_\_"

- Include information such as:
  - Wheelchair accessible
  - Disability parking available
  - ASL interpreters provided
  - "Out of consideration for people who are chemically sensitive, please refrain from wearing perfumes and other scented products,"
  - The closest accessible public transit stop
  - If participants will need to show ID to enter the event space since this is a barrier for some to coming
  - Any other relevant accessibility information about the event
- Provide the option of Skyping into the event for those who cannot join in person



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## **Finding an Accessible Space**

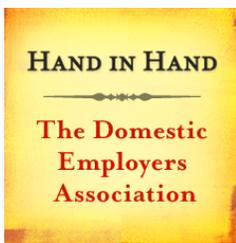
Holding your event in an accessible space is one of the most basic and important steps to including all attendees in your event. Physical barriers like stairs and chemical barriers like scented cleaners and perfumes prevent many disabled people from joining your event. Simply put, if someone cannot enter the building or a meeting room, they cannot participate.

- The only way to guarantee that the meeting space is fully accessible is to verify in person that it has the following:
  - Has a wheelchair accessible entrance
  - Has meeting rooms that are all wheelchair accessible
  - Has gender-neutral and wheelchair accessible bathrooms (don't assume because the building is accessible there are accessible bathrooms)
  - Has a quiet room or quiet area for participants to use if they need a break or become overwhelmed by people and stimulation
  - Isn't visually overwhelming and/or cluttered (can be distracting or overwhelming)
  - Is close to public transportation and has nearby accessible parking
  - Is available for an accessible time of day (not too early in the morning or too late at night, accounting for various routines and transit requirements)
  - Has ramps leading to all areas including stages, and has an adjustable lectern if applicable
  - Has a well-lit space provided for language interpreters
  - Has Skyping capabilities
  - Has non fluorescent light options
  - Has the option of heat and/or turning off heat
  - Can have audio channels available for audio description
  - Has a space for childcare if it is being made available on site, including safe diaper changing stations
- When making arrangements for indoor events, discuss with the event space staff beforehand what chemicals they use to clean bathrooms and rooms and request they use scent-free products the week before the event if at all possible. When this is not possible, provide Skype or video-access for those who are unable to attend.

## **Transportation to Event**

Accessible transportation can be a barrier for many disabled people, especially if they live in suburban or rural areas where public transit is limited. Think about locations that are easy and convenient for people to reach via public transit or how you can arrange for other ways to attend like carpooling or booking an accessible taxi in advance.

- Event should be within close walking distance from accessible public transit routes, with an easy-to-traverse accessible sidewalk
- Supply accessible transportation if it's not on a public transit route, including accessible taxis when needed
- Develop a way for event-goers to organize carpooling arrangements

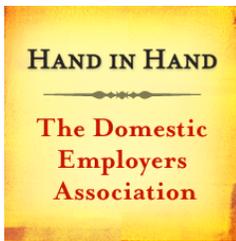


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## **Preparing for the Event & Setting up the Space**

Preparing in advance to make your event accessible is extremely important since access needs must be planned ahead of time (interpreters, etc.). When setting up the event, it is helpful to have multiple volunteers to ensure all access requests are in place for when your participants arrive.

- Plan the event so that it ends on time, especially events that are at night so participants can make arrangements for getting home accordingly
- Account for break times for long events to allow time for self-care
- Have agenda with session times available to participants ahead of time so people can plan for bathroom breaks or other physical and emotional needs
- When a room does not have fixed seats, remove chairs so that wheelchair locations are integrated with other seating areas
- Identify wheelchair accessible seating if there are fixed seats
- Clear aisles for participants to navigate the space comfortably
- Set up Skype for those who cannot join in person
- For indoor events, be mindful of environmental noises like fans, air conditioners, open windows and doors, music, glaring lights etc. that can make it difficult for people with sensory disabilities to fully participate
- Have relevant language interpreters booked (American Sign Language, Spanish, etc)
- Arrange for CART captioning (Communication Access Real-Time Translation is a system that converts speech to text <http://ccacaptioning.org/faqs-cart/>)
- Notify the speaker and/or performers of their role in making the event accessible as soon as they are confirmed participants, such as captioning videos, providing audio descriptions, etc. (see section on materials for specifics)
- Have audio descriptions for visual parts of the program (a recording that describes the images used in a presentation/ performance) so those who are blind/ low vision can fully participate
- Integrate descriptions of photos and visuals into the event so all can participate
- Purchase scent free soaps and other personal care products relevant to the event
- Organizers can model and reinforce to participants that the event is “scent-free” by using scent-free products the week before the event. This may not always be possible, but the most important thing is to explore every avenue to make the event accessible by communicating directly with people about their needs
- Make sure to have scent-free markers for folks to write nametags
- Check that sound equipment is high quality, clear, and at the right volume
- Order nametags with a space to list preferred pronouns for event goers, so that everyone can define for themselves what pronoun feels most comfortable and appropriate for them.



# Guide to Planning Accessible Public Events

## **Food & Catering**

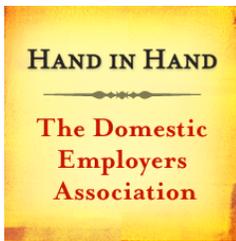
Ensuring that attendees have appropriate food and beverages is necessary for including all participants in your event. Food allergies and conditions such as celiac disease and diabetes can be life-threatening if the right food is not offered or is labeled inaccurately.

- Provide an opportunity for participants to indicate their dietary needs on any registration form or invitation to an event where meals are being served
- Where beverages are being served, bendable straws and lightweight cups should be made available within easy reach of individuals in wheelchairs or scooters
- If catering staff is not present, ensure that someone is assigned to assist those who need help getting food
- Check to make sure that an alternative to pastries and cookies, such as fruits, vegetables and gluten-free choices, are available for people with dietary concerns
- Make sure food is labeled accurately with ingredients.
- Have extra tables available for those who can't eat on their lap
- Place food and utensils near the edge of the table if buffet style

## **Presentations/ Participation/ Materials/ Hand-outs/ Videos**

Having accessible presentations, handouts, and activities ensures all attendees can actively participate in the event. Presentations are what the participants came for, so it is crucial that everyone is able to engage as much as possible.

- Before introducing the speaker or starting the program announce all the relevant accessibility information of the space
- Have accessible materials. The Canadian National Institute for the Blind provides the following guidelines:
  - Incorporate invitation font guidelines
    - 14 point Arial font
    - Black ink on white or pale paper
  - Integrate techniques to accommodate different learning styles
  - Ask presenters to verbally describe contents of videos, or any written materials, including PowerPoint slides and whiteboard notes
  - During video and slide presentations and live performances, offer to have someone sit beside an individual with visual impairment to describe the scene, people and action as it happens without interfering with already existing narrative
- Ask everyone to say their name before speaking
- Speak slowly, clearly, and loudly
- Have written image descriptions in PowerPoints and other presentations
- Use films and video clips with captioning or an available transcript
- Do not shame and/or comment on participants coming in late or leaving early during the event, since physical routines, attendant schedules, transportation, and various disabilities can have an impact on being present
- Let participants at the event know if you are going to discuss potentially triggering topics. Sensitive topics can cause some participants to become uncomfortable, so give participants a moment to leave. Make sure to provide a time estimate of how long the conversation is going to last so they know when it will be okay for them to come back in.



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- Don't put participants on the spot to share; this can potentially induce anxiety if people do not feel comfortable speaking up
- If there are any action strategies being discussed make sure to include strategies that are inclusive for all participants

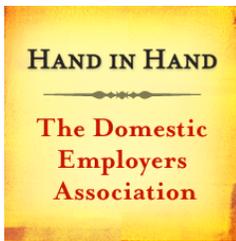
## **Access Staff**

Since we want to ensure everyone's participation, it is important to have 1-3 people at the event who act as support staff to ensure accessibility and to resolve unexpected issues. The support we provide at events must reflect our organization's culture and values.

- Access staff should pay special attention to the "Tips for Event Participants" section below
- All access staff will have demonstrated disability awareness and an ability to problem solve in a fast paced environment
- Access staff should ask if anyone has a reaction to flash photos before any are allowed. If someone does, access staff should not take any nor allow others to.

## **Tips for Event Participants**

- Always address people directly, regardless if they use a communication device, if they are accompanied by an interpreter or personal attendant
- Don't make assumptions about someone's access needs
- Ask people if they need assistance
- Ask permission before moving toward touching anyone
- Don't disclose someone's disability status unless you have their explicit permission
- Be conscious of language and receptive to call-outs about using ableist and other oppressive language
- Do not wear fragrances or essential oils for the week before and on the day of the event
- Dog guides are service dogs so it is important that they stay focused. Do not pet the dog



# Guide to Planning Accessible Public Events

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