



Planning Accessible Events

Start Here >>>

The Planning Accessible Events guide is a collaboration between Matan and the Autistic Self Advocacy Network (ASAN). While no single guide can be fully comprehensive, this resource is designed to help event and conference planners expand their approach to inclusive practices.

At its core is the understanding that inclusion should be built into the foundation of a program from the start, not just added later in response to individual accommodation requests. It's also important to recognize that no event will meet every need perfectly. Meaningful progress requires a willingness to move past the fear of "getting it wrong" and take concrete, intentional steps toward greater inclusion and belonging.

The Autistic Self Advocacy Network is run by and for autistic people. ASAN is a national grassroots disability rights organization for the autistic community.

- We fight for disability rights.
- We work to make sure autistic people are included in policy-making, so that laws and policies meet our community's needs.
- We work to support all forms of self-advocacy and to change the way people think about autism.

Nothing About Us, Without Us!

<https://autisticadvocacy.org>

Matan is committed to meeting Jewish communities, organizations and schools where they are on their inclusion journey. We work collaboratively to train, coach and guide Jewish communal professionals, lay leaders and educators towards systemic disability inclusion.

Matan envisions a world in which all Jewish communities are stronger and more vibrant because people with and without disabilities share meaningful, inclusive experiences throughout every life stage.

<https://mataninc.org>

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Purpose

This guide will walk you through organizing accessible events and conferences. By “accessible” we mean that people attending your event can enter buildings and meeting rooms easily and have the tools needed to fully participate in training sessions and group discussions. We will review these aspects of accessible event planning:

- **Universal Design:** the event is accessible to people with all types of disabilities. We will review three types of accessibility that will help you use Universal Design:
 - **Physical Accessibility:** the space you are using for your event is accessible to mobility aid users and people with vision disabilities.
 - **Sensory Accessibility:** the event is safe for people with chemical, sound, and light sensitivities and provides accommodations to attendees who are Blind or who are Deaf or hard-of-hearing.
 - **Cognitive Accessibility:** the event gives clear and detailed information to attendees and presenters about activities and training sessions in plain language and in different formats. Participants know what to expect at your event well in advance.
- Planning for potential conflicting access needs, with examples of solutions for accepting and dealing with access needs that are different from yours.
- Awareness of the needs of Immunocompromised individuals.
- This guide also includes:
 - A one-day event planning timeline.
 - A multi-day conference planning timeline.
 - A site visit accessibility checklist.

Physical Accessibility

Structures (buildings, hallways, entrances, elevators, meeting rooms, public and private bathrooms, and overnight lodging) can be entered and used by event attendees with ease.

Examples of physically accessible structures include:

Doors/Entrances

- Signs with braille clearly indicating location of accessible entrances, building names, elevators and meeting room numbers
- Main entrances have wheelchair accessible ramps
- Entrance buttons for wheelchair users that work
- Wide doors and hallways for wheelchair users
- Clear paths in and around your venue for blind people and wheelchair users
- Buildings have accessible elevators that are easy to get to and are working

Surrounding Areas

- Flat and wide sidewalks with even pavement around all buildings being used for event. Check for curb ramps with flares (raised bumps or reflective materials) that accommodate both wheelchair users and people with vision disabilities
- Pathways to buildings and bus stops should not involve steep hills
- Nearby places to eat (no more than 5 minutes walking distance)
- Weather: depending on your location, snow and ice during winter can prevent participants from attending your event. Try to schedule your events in the spring, summer, or early fall.

Seating

- Wheelchair accessible activity tables with ample room for snacks, medications, and session materials
- Chairs with high backs for attendees with balancing issues or fatigue
- Seating must allow for a full view of the front of the room
- Accessible seating, and spaces left for wheelchair users, should be part of the general room set up
- Attendees who require accessible seating should never be physically separated from the group
- Wheelchair accessible public bathrooms should be next to or near training session rooms
- Leave extra space for service dogs if present

Transportation

- Accessible transportation at walking distance from the venue (no more than five minutes)
- Prepare a list of alternative accessible transportation methods with rates
 - Bus
 - Taxis
 - Subway
 - Local paratransit (businesses that offer wheelchair accessible transportation, including some standard taxi companies - these businesses are sometimes called “non-emergency medical transport”)

Overnight Lodging for Conferences

- Rooms with ADA automatic door opener
- Rooms with enough space for wheelchair users to move around comfortably
- Bathrooms have roll-in showers with a bench
- The beds are high enough for a Hoyer lift but low enough for wheelchair users who can transfer

Sensory Accessibility

There are many types of sensory accessibility practices:

- Hearing and visual aids available to people with hearing or vision disabilities (sometimes overlaps with cognitive accessibility)
- A safe environment for people with chemical, sound, and light sensitivities
- Quiet areas for people who need disability-related sensory breaks
- Areas where it is acceptable to make loud noises (for people who may be experiencing meltdown or other need to make loud sensory input)

Accommodations

Examples of hearing, visual, and tactile (sense of touch) accommodations:

- Image descriptions during presentations and captioning for videos
- Sound amplification devices for hard-of-hearing attendees
- Microphones
- CART and ASL interpretation
- Alternative formats: Braille, digital, easy read (plain language with pictures), large print

Examples of accommodations for chemical, sound, and light sensitivities:

- Fragrance-free policies
- No flash photography policies
- ASL applause (or “flapplause”) instead of clapping
- Noise-cancelling headphones
- Sensory free rooms
- Working air conditioning

Cognitive Accessibility

Participants and event speakers know well in advance what the event is about, what they can expect to learn, when breaks are scheduled (including dining breaks, if applicable), where the venue is located, and what accommodations are available.

Examples of cognitive accessibility include:

Detailed Schedules

- A schedule for your event or conference made available on your webpage or in promotional emails
- Sending detailed schedules to participants and speakers well in advance of your event.
 - Conferences: send schedules that include airport arrival and departure times, training session names, speaker names, and breaks to participants and speakers in advance of your event. Participants who do not use email should receive hard-copy schedules
 - One-day events: send a completed schedule/agenda in advance.

Information Packets (for Overnight Conferences)

- Accommodations form with a full list of available accommodations participants can request, and ways to request accommodations not on the list
- Include two types of event schedules: a schedule for the whole event and daily schedules
- Include information about quiet spaces
- Provide the name, email, and phone number of main contact person for the event
- Provide a list of local medical equipment stores with rental fees (for commodes, Hoyer lifts, and other types of equipment event organizers cannot reserve)
- Add a brief note about expectations for support people

Note: information packets should be sent to confirmed participants well before your conference.

Cognitive Accessibility at the Venue

- Prepare name tags for organizers, participants, speakers, and support staff.
- Offer multiple formats when presenting or reviewing session activities (i.e. written and verbal instructions, visual supports such as photographs, drawings, and charts).
- Schedule multiple breaks throughout the day. Do not schedule sessions that go beyond an hour and a half.
- Allow people to move around to stim or pace.
- Provide and explain [color communication badges](#).
- Make sure presentations are viewable from different angles.

Conflicting Access Needs

An access need is a support or accommodation a person needs to communicate, learn, and participate fully in an activity. Sometimes one person's access needs can interfere with the needs or safety of another person. Below are two examples of conflicting access needs and possible solutions.

Scenario #1: A participant with low vision needs more lighting to view presentation materials and sees better with fluorescent lighting. However, participants with sensory problems can become anxious or develop painful headaches in a room with fluorescent lighting.

Possible Solutions:

- Provide high contrast electronic and hard-copy presentation materials for low vision participants in advance.
- Allow participants with low vision to bring a personal lamp for close-up task.
- Use natural lighting when possible.
- Bring fluorescent light filters ("gels") if natural lighting is not an option.

Scenario #2: A participant has an auditory processing issue and needs verbal repetition to understand what someone is saying. Another participant in the group has a physical disability that makes it very difficult to speak and has a hard time repeating themselves during group discussions.

Possible Solutions:

- Allow participants to use recorders during presentations and groups discussions so they can hear missed information as many times as needed.
- Allow participants with communication disabilities to use text-to-speech devices.
- When appropriate, a participant with a communication disability may ask a support person to repeat what they said to the group.

Accommodations for Immunocompromised Individuals:

- **Mask-Friendly Spaces:** Encourage or require masking (and/or offer masks), especially in indoor spaces.
- **Air Filtration:** Use HEPA filters and CO₂ monitors to ensure good air quality and ventilation.
- **Sanitization:** Provide hand sanitizing stations and regularly disinfect high-touch surfaces.
- **Hybrid Options:** Offer a virtual attendance option that is engaging, with real-time participation, chat, etc.
- **Bring fluorescent light filters (“gels”)** if natural lighting is not an option.
- **Low-Density Areas (or outside space):** Designate areas with more spacing between seats or tables.
- **Let people know ahead of time about safety protocols, ventilation, masking expectations, and virtual options before the event.**

One-Day Events

Before Event	During Event	After Event
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Date that does not conflict with other major events ● Flyers in plain English with details about event (purpose, location, room number, accommodation requests, etc.) ● Promote on website, email, social media ● ADA parking near meeting spaces ● ADA meeting rooms ● ADA entrance near meeting spaces ● ADA bathrooms ● Public transportation nearby ● Media equipment set up ● Agenda available in advance ● Accommodation requests (send out for at least one month in advance) ● Secure CART ● Braille ● Large Print ● No flash photography and fragrance-free policies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sign-in area ● Name tags ● Color communication badges ● Agenda in large font with digital format option ● Presentations and print outs in large font/braille ● Videos with captions ● CART during event (funding permitting) ● ASL interpreters visible ● Video record event (ask people permission to appear on camera first) ● Accessible seating and tables ● Signs for accessible bathrooms and break out rooms ● Reminder: no flash photography ● Remind people materials will be available online ● Clearly label foods with/without allergens 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Prepare surveys asking for feedback on event (hard-copy and email versions) ● Make event materials and video recording available online and through email ● Offer to send hard-copy materials to event goers who do not have emails

Multi-Day Conference Preparation

At Least 12 Months Before	6 Months Before	4 Months before
Develop budget for conference	Confirm speakers	Send information packets to confirmed conference goers
Create list of accessible venues Conduct site visits	Finalize conference schedule	Send agreement form to support staff
Select venue and pay deposit	Send out applications and/or nomination packets	Begin arranging approved accommodations (i.e. CART, ASL, Braille, etc.)
Reserve at least one large meeting room and one sensory free room	Prepare or update information packets with accommodation and travel forms	Continue promoting conference through emails, social media, website posting, and flyers.
Reserve 3 to 4 accessible rooms for overnight stays Submit proof of insurance if required	Create list of medical equipment companies near the venue	
Contact potential speakers	Start promoting conference	

2-3 Months before	1 month before	2 weeks before
Arrange travel for staff and participants (if applicable)	Prepare name tags	Print out training materials
Arrange catering (if applicable)	Assemble training booklets (at least a month is often needed to produce braille booklets)	Assemble folders with agenda, list of accessible transportation options, and list of dining options
Create travel arrival schedules	Begin to finalize all print materials as early as possible	Check in with catering, acquire list of allergens present to share with attendees
Reserve accessible shuttles (to and from venue)	Check in with venue about participant and staff arrivals	Do a run through of event with venue
Send travel pick up schedules (if participants are flying in to conference)	Share dietary restrictions with catering services (if applicable)	Do a final site visit to make sure accessible doors and elevators are working

Site Visit Check List

Name of Venue: _____ Date of Site Visit: _____

Physical Accessibility: Meeting Rooms and Dining Halls

If attendees must travel between multiple rooms or areas, they are close together

Yes No

Wheelchair accessible routes:

No major obstructions on path (like construction or cobblestones)

Yes No

No extremely steep hills for participants with manual wheelchairs

Yes No

Accessible sidewalks within route (if sidewalk crossing required)

Yes No

Wheelchair ramps at entrances with signage

Yes No

Braille signage on doors and other major architectural features

Yes No

Railing on ramps and stairs

Yes No

Doors have functioning ADA-compliant door openers

Yes No

Doors are wide enough for wheelchair users, and easy to open

Yes No

Working elevators on or near accessible routes

Yes No

Wide hallways in classroom buildings (see image below)

Yes No

Wide classroom and dining hall doors (at least 32 inches of clear width, see image below)

Yes No

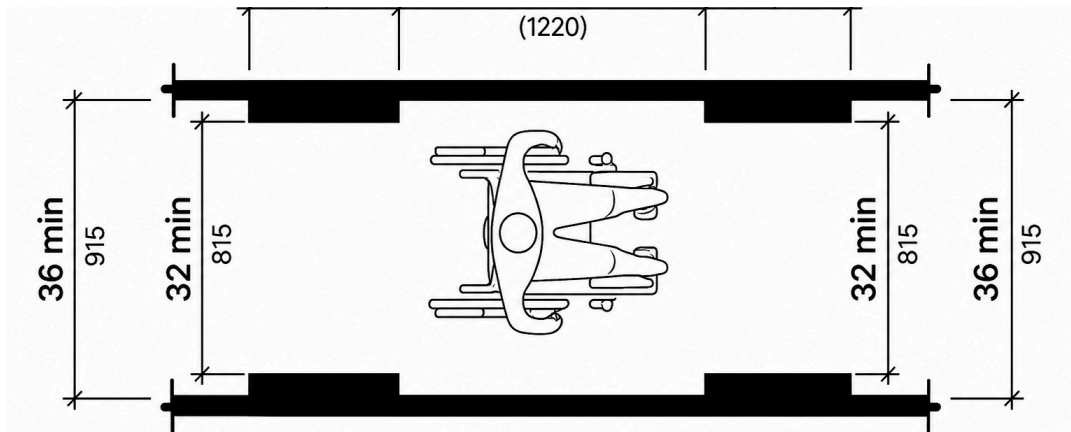


Figure retrieved from access-board.gov

Meeting spaces large enough to accommodate wheelchair users comfortably

Yes No

Clear pathway (at least 36 inches) in the meeting room for wheelchair users

Yes No

Meeting room has moveable seating to create a more accessible space

Yes No

Meeting room can accommodate between 30 and 40 people

Yes No

Wheelchair accessible public restrooms

Yes No

Physical Accessibility: Lodging

ADA guest rooms and bathrooms have sufficient turning space for wheelchairs

Yes No

Clear pathway for a wheelchair (at least 36 inches) at least on one side of the bed

Yes No

Beds are no more than 20 to 23 inches high from the floor to the top of the mattress

Yes No

The space under the bed is at least 7 inches high for hoist lifts

Yes No

Emergency Exit doors at least 32 inches wide

Yes No

Are ADA accessible rooms located on the first floor?

Yes No

Accessible fire alarm for Deaf or DeafBlind individuals present?

Yes No

Heights of sinks and toilets adjusted for wheelchair users

Yes No

Grab bars next to the toilet and in the bathtub/shower stall

Yes No

Bathtub/shower stall includes a bench

Yes No

Does the venue offer rooms with roll-in showers?

Yes No

If yes, how many?

1 2 3+

Public Transportation

Bus stops are near the venue (5 minutes walking distance or less)

Yes No

Bus stops are located on flat areas (NOT on slopes or hills)

Yes No

Public transit buses are wheelchair accessible

Yes No

Public transit buses near the venue provide late night service

Yes No

Does the venue have a shuttle system that runs all year (no interrupted service during summer months, for instance)?

Yes No

If yes, are the shuttles wheelchair accessible?

Yes No

Sensory Concerns

Are there different lighting options, such as natural lighting (no fluorescent lighting - if present, put gel light filter on)

Yes No

Photographers/guests/conference participants have been informed that flash photography is prohibited

Yes No

Made sure there are no flickering or flashing lights in the venue or in presentations?

Yes No

Tested technology ahead of time to avoid audio feedback?

Yes No

Placed a warning in presentations for any planned content that has very loud or sharp sounds?

Yes No

Presenters/conference participants/staff are aware that your event is fragrance-free

Yes No

Placed any necessary content warnings in material for sensitive material (gore, gun violence, sexual assault, incest, abuse, emetophobia etc.)?

Yes No

Provided a break area with low sensory input (quiet and dim)?

Yes No

Provided a break area where making big sensory input (like making loud sounds) are okay?

Yes No

Event Structure Planning

Made sure there are breaks (at least ten minutes) between sessions?

Yes No

Left buffer time at the start of each session to make sure that CART or ASL are working, in case of technical issues?

Yes No

Left enough time after opening a way to request access needs to implement them? (Enough time to get an interpreter or captioner, enough time to get an allergen friendly food option if needed, etc.)

Yes No

Communicating About Your Event

Sent an agenda (including break times) and explanation of the event format (for example, panel, presentation, or Q&A) to all attendees?

Yes No

Told attendees how any changes to the agenda will be communicated (for example, email or text)?

Yes No

Given a way for attendees to send accommodation requests?

Yes No

Communication Access

Informed attendees to speak to Deaf individuals and not their interpreters, if present

Yes No

If AAC users with tablets are attending, make sure internet is working

Yes No

If AAC users presenting, make sure technology present can work with their device? *(This might look like making sure audio from the device can be picked up by a microphone. If they are using a letter board or other low tech device, this might include giving a microphone to the person speaking what they are pointing to.)*

Yes No

(Panel) Confirm if AAC user would like to speak last in order to have time to type?

Yes No

Reminded facilitators to place microphone where it can pick up AAC user device audio if present.

When AAC users are asking a question, make sure everyone can hear their device.

If microphone cannot pick up input, repeat what they said into it manually. "NAME says/asks..."

Yes No

"Tips for Online Meetings with AAC Users, by AAC Users"

<https://communicationfirst.org/best-practices-for-online-meetings/>

CommunicationFIRST is dedicated to protecting and advancing the civil rights of those in the United States who, due to disability or other condition, cannot rely on speech alone to be heard and understood.

Our mission is to protect and advance the rights, autonomy, opportunity, and dignity of people with speech-related disabilities through public engagement, policy and practice reform, and systemic advocacy.