Conference Accessibility Checklist

Venue accessibility:

_____ Is the venue located near public transit and/or have you arranged accessible shuttles from recommended hotels?

- Attendees with disabilities may not have easy access to a personal vehicle (for example, wheelchair ramp-van rentals can be difficult to attain or expensive), or may not be able to get into other attendees' cars. Wheelchair-accessible taxis are also sometimes hard to arrange for, or are expensive. So public transit or accessible shuttles might be the only convenient transit options for many attendees with disabilities.
- It's advisable to double check that public transit is easily accessible and reliable, and communicate with accessible shuttle services to ensure that any shuttles are fully accessible (ideally with multiple designated wheelchair seating spaces).
- Backup options can help guarantee that attendees can make it to the conference reliably. So, for example, you could give the name of a local accessible taxi company to attendees in case there are issues with public transit or hotel shuttles.

_____ Are there parking areas, pathways, and entrances to the building that are wheelchair-accessible and clearly defined?

- Attendees with disabilities may require ADA accessible parking spaces for vehicles with ramps or lifts. Others that have difficulty moving long distances may need to park at accessible parking spots nearby the building. Those with wheelchairs will require ramps to sidewalks, accessible pathways clear of obstacles, and accessible doors (ideally with automatic door openers, or at least without heavy closing springs).
- Nearly all conference spaces have these features, but it's important to double check regardless. Depending on the number of anticipated attendees with disabilities, consider working with your venue to designate extra accessible parking spots (with signs, etc.). It's also important to ensure that there are no obstacles in paths of travel.
- If there are multiple entrances and/or a large parking lot with many accessible parking areas, work with venues to find the best parking area and building entrance for where

your event is located. And if there are areas with more difficult paths of travel or entrances, work with venues to move your event closer to the easily-accessible areas.

_____ Does the accessible entrance provide direct access to the main floor, lobby, or elevator?

- Navigating through a venue can be difficult for attendees with disabilities - it might be easy to get lost (especially for people who are blind), or strenuous to travel long distances.
- Some event spaces' accessible entrances are not near the main floor/lobby and require people to enter from farther away, so it's ideal to ensure that accessible entrances are near main areas. If conference events are on upper floors, attendees will need to use an elevator - and it's important to have those elevators near the entrance and easy to find.
- Work with event spaces to ensure that entrances provide easy access to the main lobby, floor, or elevator.
- If the accessible entrance is far away from these main areas, make sure that directions are clearly labeled (i.e. with pieces of paper with arrows on them) or that staff are available to meet attendees and guide them.
- If you have the option of specific areas in a conference center, try to get rooms that are closer to accessible entrances or elevators.

_____ Are all main areas and session rooms on an accessible path of travel?

- Navigating inside a venue can pose difficulties for attendees with disabilities. Inaccessible pathways will prevent those attendees from reaching conference sessions or events. If accessible pathways are out-of-the-way or down winding hallways, reaching event spaces can be harder to do for those with difficulty going long distances or navigating through buildings.
- Work with venues to secure rooms that are near main paths of travel, and not out-of-the-way. If rooms are out-of-the-way, ensure that there is enough signage to direct attendees and/or that there are staff available to help.
- Pathways themselves must be fully accessible, including being wide enough with wide enough doors and free of stairs or excessive bumpiness. This is especially important if any sessions or activities are done outside (for example, networking on a grass lawn with a gravel pathway will be difficult for somebody who uses a wheelchair).

_____ Are there elevators and/or ramps to all areas of the venue where there are sessions?

- Many people with physical disabilities cannot reach areas that are up stairs unless there is a ramp and/or elevator. It's impossible for people who use wheelchairs, and difficult to impossible for many other types of disabilities.
- While most event spaces are fully accessible, some may have individual rooms that are not reachable by elevator or ramp. Also, some elevators are smaller and difficult to enter for many power wheelchairs, have difficult-to-reach buttons, or are unreliable. This is especially true for older buildings.

- Ensure that the areas where there are sessions/events are fully reachable by elevators and/or ramps and near elevators if they are upstairs. If there is an elevator but it is smaller, unreliable, or difficult to access, request rooms that are downstairs.

_____ Is there at least one restroom (either one for each sex, or unisex) that is fully accessible (includes a wheelchair-accessible restroom stall that has an area of at least 5 feet by 5 feet, clear of the door swing) OR is there a restroom stall that is less accessible but that provides greater access than a typical stall (either 36 by 69 inches or 48 by 69 inches)?

- People with physical disabilities often need a larger restroom or restroom stall to maneuver around. Fully accessible restrooms have a sufficiently large stall (or unisex single bathroom) with an accessible path of travel, and ideally a low-spring-weight door. If these are not available, the largest stall possible is best, although 36" x 69" is generally considered a minimum.
- Work with conference venues to ensure that accessible restrooms are available. If there are limited accessible restrooms, request event spaces that are close to those restrooms or make sure that there is clear signage to them.

_____ Are there wheelchair seating areas in each session room available?

- People that use wheelchairs must be able to sit in a designated open-floor wheelchair seating area with an unobstructed view of presenters. During sessions with non-lecture style seating, they must be able to sit in a way that allows them to fully participate in any discussions.
- For any sessions with fixed seating, ensure that there are designated wheelchair-accessible seating areas with a clear view of the stage.
- If you are setting up movable chairs in rooms, arrange them in a way that allows wheelchair users to see other participants and engage in discussions. This might take extra planning, for example if there is a large table that participants will sit around.

_____ If the venue is very large, can you offer, meet and assist with accommodations?

- Attendees with disabilities may have assorted needs if there is a large venue. These include, for example, help carrying bags long distances or assistance navigating to and between rooms. Many of these may require personal assistance or accommodations.
- It's important to offer a reasonable set of disability-related accommodations, and have a process for attendees to request those accommodations. Ideally, processes should allow attendees to request accommodations ahead-of-time.
- Organizers should ensure that accommodations can be provided reliably and smoothly once the conference takes place. This includes securing necessary materials, designating staff to assist attendees, having a set process for assistance (i.e. designated meeting points), and clearly communicating those processes to attendees.

Technology accessibility:

In general, organizers should always keep a list of local and national disability organizations at hand when seeking resources for accessibility technology. Organizers should also plan as early as possible in order to provide accommodations smoothly and reliably.

_____ Is there a loop system/section available for the hard of hearing?

- People who are hard of hearing may have difficulty processing presentations at normal speaking levels. They may use a hearing loop, which is a wire connected to an electronic sound source (i.e. speaker) that transmits that sound to a hearing aid or cochlear implant - delivering clear sound from inside their ears.
- A loop system is ideal for the hard of hearing, especially when communication access real-time translation (CART) or live captioning services are not available during an event.
- Organizers should list sound loop systems on accommodation request forms or allow attendees to request them through other venues.
- As a note, deaf ASL speaking attendees cannot use a loop system, so different accommodations must be provided to attendees who do not have any hearing (accommodations for deaf ASL speaking attendees are described in a later section).

_____ Are staff members familiar and trained with assisting on the use of assistive technology offered at the conference?

- Any staff member that will be helping with assistive technology should be trained ahead of time to ensure the conference will go smoothly for attendees with disabilities.
- It is also ideal that staff members at the registration table have knowledge of assistive technology and resources offered at the event, so they can advise attendees with specific needs as soon as they arrive. At the least, registration staff should be able to contact staff that handle accommodations when attendees with disabilities arrive.
- For example, a deaf ASL speaking attendee should be able to meet a staff member at the registration table and immediately be connected with an ASL interpreter.

_____ Are there ample high-contrast, large-print directional signs to and throughout the conference venue? Is Braille signage available when appropriate?

- High-contrast and large-print signs on the exterior and interior of an event venue will provide ease of access for attendees with low-vision, with little assistance from event staff.
- High-contrast and large-print signs can disclose event locations, as well as the location of elevators and restrooms. Signs with directional arrows and short amounts of text may be ideal for these situations.
- If conference-specific signs will be posted (i.e. large-print with the name of sessions), organizers should check if Braille signs exist within a venue. If they do not, organizers could consider adding them to their signage, especially if they will have blind attendees and limited designated staff to assist them through the conference.

- Organizers should always check that a venue has proper signage for emergency exits to ensure the safety of attendees with visual impairments.

_____ Are all conference publications available (immediately or in a timely manner) in alternate formats such as Braille, large print, and electronic text? Will this be standard procedure or upon request? (Recommended: during the registration process, have an accommodation section where individuals can request any needed alternative formats.)

- Some people with disabilities will require alternative media, as opposed to regular-size font on paper. For example, people with low vision may need large print, people who are blind will need braille documents or screen reader-friendly electronic formats, and those with dexterity issues may prefer digital documents over paper.
- Alternative media is ideally supplied when an attendee first arrives to a venue. Electronic text should be emailed ahead of time or available on the conference website.
- An accommodation section can be included on the event registration form to ensure conference publications are available in alternative formats for attendees who need them.
- The registration table should hold an extra supply of Braille and large print conference publications (beyond that indicated as a need through the registration form), in the event that attendees who have not pre-registered or who have not submitted accommodations in advance have access to alternative media if needed.
- Electronic texts in the form of word documents, screen reader accessible PDFs, or accessible webpages should be sent to attendees prior to an event.
- The registration table should have a webpage URL or a relevant electronic document at hand to immediately email or upload via a USB drive, for those who did not request an electronic conference publication in advance.
- Organizers should identify whether or not a venue has Wi-Fi available for staff and attendees who need to send, receive, and reference electronic format conference publications. If there is no Wi-Fi available (or if it is paid Wi-Fi), organizers should inform attendees that they must download conference publications before arriving to the venue, or make them available through other methods such as USB sticks.

Event Program accessibility:

_____ Do you have a procedure to ensure a timely response to requests for disability-related accommodations? (Recommended: during the registration process, have an accommodation section where individuals can request any needed accommodations. This can be for the conference in general or for specific presentations/breakout events).

- Attendees with disabilities may need accommodations ranging from alternative media to ASL interpreters. Attendees should be able to request accommodations ahead-of-time and have them provided in a timely manner. Also, some attendees might make requests during the conference, and there should be a way to address those as well.
- Listing an accommodation section on the registration form is a great way to ensure organizers have sufficient time to accommodate attendees' requests, especially those that are less frequently used.

- Organizers must keep in mind that providing certain accommodations (i.e. an ASL interpreter or audio description) requires advanced notice and preparation.
- The registration process itself should be accessible to attendees with disabilities (i.e. on a screen-reader friendly webpage).
- Registration forms should at least have contact info for an accommodations staff person, or a section for attendees to write in any accommodations they may need.
- Ideally, registration forms will have a full list of provided accommodations. A suggested format for an accommodation section on the registration form is:

"Will you need any of the following accommodations in the duration of the event? Please select all that apply.
☐CART services
☐ASL interpreter
☐Loop system
☐Braille print conference publications
☐Large-print conference publications
☐Electronic versions of conference publications (sent via email)
☐Electronic versions of presentations and other conference materials.
☐Will you be attending the event with a personal attendant?
☐Do you need any other accommodations not listed above? Please note:

_____
_____
_____

For questions or concerns regarding the venue accessibility and event accommodations, please call (---) --- ---- or email --------@-----.com"

_____ Are stages and presentation locations wheelchair accessible?

- If people with disabilities are slated to present at a conference, they must be able to access stages or other presentation areas. It's also important to keep in mind that some able-bodied presenters might ask colleagues with disabilities to co-present, and that presenters with disabilities might not tell conference organizers that they need an accessible stage ahead of time.
- Ask event venues if they have fully accessible stages (i.e. with a small elevator in the back or with a ramp). If they do not, explore using different presentation rooms or renting a foldable ramp.
- If some stages/presentation areas aren't accessible (but others are), ask presenters ahead-of-time if they will need an accessible stage and schedule rooms/presentations accordingly. Also consider keeping a ramp on hand in case a stage needs to be made accessible last-minute.

_____ Are sign language interpreters contracted for deaf participants?

- Accommodations can vary, even within the ranges of certain types of disabilities. Generally, those who are deaf (typically defined by complete hearing loss), will use

American Sign Language ("ASL") to communicate with others and watch presentations - while those who have some hearing loss will typically use captioning services or a loop system as a supplement while watching something spoken, such as a presentation (these two are described in other sections).

- The use of sign language interpreters will ensure that attendees who are deaf who speak ASL are not excluded from any portion of an event.
- Interpreters should be available to interpret during spoken presentations and should be available to interpret during conversational portions of events (including roundtable discussions and networking sessions) to ensure deaf attendees can participate in discussion-based events.
- Interpreters can be used on a session-by-session basis or paired up with individual attendees. Conference organizers should look at how many attendees request interpreters and which sessions they will be attending to choose the best allocation of interpreters. Be aware that if there are multiple requests for ASL, large lectures may only need one interpreter for all attendees, but roundtable discussions or networking sessions might need one interpreter per participant.
- Interpreters can become fatigued, so organizers should communicate with ASL contractors to see if they will need multiple interpreters, and if so how many.

_____ Are CART providers contracted for hard of hearing participants?

- "CART" is a live captioning service that stands for Communication Access Real-time Translation. CART services are ideal for attendees who are hard of hearing and CART captioning is usually projected onto a screen or a laptop in a presentation room.
- There should be a space in accessibility requests (i.e. on registration forms) for attendees to request CART services, similarly to ASL requests. ASL and CART services should be clearly differentiated, as individuals may feel comfortable with one but not the other.
- Organizers should reach out to professional CART service agencies, who can provide their own staff or references to individual contractors.
- The CART services professional will need a small amount of time for set-up before captioning, so organizers should coordinate with captioners accordingly.

_____ Is audio description available for blind participants whenever there are video segments or visual displays?

- An audio description is a description of something that is typically prerecorded and input onto an audio replaying device. These are useful for blind or low-vision participants to fully understand all the information presented in video segments and visual displays.
- An audio description describes anything non-verbal such as the movement of objects on-screen, the facial expression of an actor in a video segment, or the colors and composition that exist within an image of a painting.

- Audio description can exist within small-prerecorded headsets that are provided to attendees who need them. They can also be broadcast to all attendees over speakers in a prerecorded format or be described in real-time.
- Organizers can choose to implement audio description across all video segments and visual displays, or on a case-by-case basis as requested. If they use case-by-case, audio description can be an option on accessibility request forms.
- Organizers should work with any presenters showing videos or other visual displays to audio-describe those videos or displays. This should be done ahead of time, in partnership with experienced audio description professionals if needed.
- During sessions, all presenters should be encouraged to describe any visuals they put on PowerPoint presentations or other displays, such as graphs or images.

_____ Are networking sessions organized in a way that maximizes both physical and programmatic accessibility? This should be for a broad range of disabilities (i.e. blind participants that may not easily maneuver conference spaces or identify high-priority attendees)

- Networking is one of the main benefits of conferences, and designated networking sessions are therefore key events. However, people with disabilities are sometimes not fully included in networking sessions because of physical or programmatic barriers. Simple steps can help them navigate floor space and identify other attendees they wish to meet.
- Organizers should provide ASL interpreters for deaf participants during networking sessions. These can be the same interpreters used in presentations. When hiring ASL staff, organizers should note that each deaf participant will need his or her own interpreter during networking sessions.
- Ensure that blind participants are able to interact with the people they want to meet. This can be done a number of ways: for example, have designated areas for certain types of professionals to mingle, or assign a staff person to help blind participants navigate networking sessions and identify other conference-goers.
- Use a large enough space for networking that it will not be too crowded. This will ensure that attendees with physical disabilities are able to move around the networking session and fully participate.
- Consider including networking sessions specifically in accommodations request forms.

_____ Are there staff/volunteers available to assist with meet and greet sessions for participants that request it?

- In order to ensure that attendees with disabilities are not excluded, staff/volunteers should be available to assist attendees when needed.
- For example, a deaf ASL speaking attendee typically requests an ASL interpreter to accompany them so they are able to communicate with other attendees.

- Another example is when a low-vision attendee requires a staff member to assist them during a meet and greet. Attendees who have low-vision cannot read nametags or always successfully direct themselves in the proper direction to speak with a particular person and therefore may require the help of a staff member.

_____ In advance of the conference, will organizers provide presenters with a set of recommendations and online resources for creating fully-accessible presentations? Are these offered as early as possible (i.e. in emails accepting presentation proposals)?

- Creating fully accessible presentations requires specific steps and can take some time (for example, arranging PowerPoint presentations to be screen reader-friendly is nuanced, and converting PowerPoint presentations to Word documents takes reformatting and some retyping). Presenters can most effectively put together accessible presentations with specific recommendations and time to prepare.
- Organizers should provide presenters with guidelines for creating accessible presentations and should hold presenters accountable to accessibility standards. These guidelines can be sent as attached documents or links to websites.
- Recommendations should be offered as early as possible, and organizers should remind presenters to have fully accessible materials as the conference approaches.
- Organizers can also request accessible documents ahead of time, and give feedback if needed. It's advisable to get documents ahead-of-time regardless, in order to send those documents to attendees with disabilities before the conference starts.

_____ If attendees request accessible formats for specific presentations/events when they register, how will organizers work with presenters to ensure those requests are met?

- Some attendees with disabilities will require accessible formats for specific presentations or events, and it can take both time and information for presenters to make sure they have accessible versions. So organizers will need to ensure that attendees make related requests during the registration process, and then work with presenters to guarantee requests are met.
- Organizers should ask for requests for accessible formats to be sent as early as possible in order to give presenters time to create accessible documents. Organizers should make it clear that there is an ideal timeframe for requests, including that they can't guarantee accessible formats after a certain time, if that is the case.
- If an attendee indicates that they need an accessible copy of a presentation or need an event to be implemented in an accessible manner, organizers should communicate with presenters as early as possible.
- Organizers should provide presenters with instructions on how to create accessible materials (outlined above). Organizers should also consider having a designated staff member to help presenters and serve as backup in case presenters don't send fully accessible formats.

_____ Arrange for a brief orientation for all presenters beforehand with tips and techniques on how to be inclusive while presenting.

- A short workshop, which could be incorporated into any general conference orientation, can educate presenters on methods of inclusion. If the schedule doesn't allow for an in-person orientation, organizers can provide recommendations ahead of time through email.
- Organizers can contract with someone with a background in disability inclusion to conduct a workshop if no one on staff is experienced enough to do so.
- The orientation could cover presentation techniques such as describing PowerPoint slides, using proper terminology (i.e. "person with a disability" instead of "handicapped person") and etiquette, and how to fully include attendees who may be uncomfortable with interactive sessions.

_____ How will conference organizers meet all accessibility needs with potentially limited resources? (i.e. pairing individual ASL interpreters with specific attendees, or having them instead lined up on a presentation-by-presentation basis)

- It is important to meet the accessibility needs of all attendees, but budget constraints can complicate logistics for organizers. However, there are some steps organizers can take to get the most bang for their buck and meet as many needs as possible.
- Organizers should identify the most efficient uses of resources while meeting attendees' requests. For example, they could pair ASL interpreters with more than one deaf ASL-speaking attendee if it wouldn't constrict those attendees' full enjoyment of the conference.
- Identifying attendees' needs early will allow organizers to "shop around" and find the lowest-cost accommodations, including by negotiating with service providers. Identifying needs early will also provide time to brainstorm lowest-cost accommodations with attendees.
- There may be funding sources available for accommodations, such as foundations or scholarships. Organizers can also seek out donations from sponsors for designated "accessibility funds."

_____ If an attendee requires a personal attendant during the conference (one that they personally hire and work with), what will be the procedure for their registration, participation, payment (if any), etc.?

- Some attendees that require assistance may need to bring a trained personal attendant with them to the conference. If this happens, it's important to have a process that allows those attendants to be at the conference.
- This process should ideally be unique to personal attendants, as opposed to requiring them to go through the same registration process as other conference participants.
- It's best to have an item in the general registration form asking if a conference participant will be accompanied by a personal attendant, and then have a separate form or other process (i.e. email contact) to finish the attendant's registration.
- Set registration guidelines ahead of time (i.e. whether there will be a full registration fee, a discount, or no fee at all) so that attendees can plan and budget accordingly.

- There may be rules around participation. For example, personal attendants could be required to only attend sessions with conference participant, or asked to stay outside session rooms if the participant doesn't need assistance during sessions. If your conference is concerned about attendants getting "free material," make sure to address the needs of attendees with disabilities first.

Outreach:

_____ Are outreach materials and the registration process accessible to participants with disabilities?

- People with sensory disabilities (blind, hard of hearing, deaf, etc.) often need accessible media for advertisements and other outreach materials.
- Registration processes, including over the web, phone, or by mail, must also be accessible to a range of disabilities.
- Wherever possible, have multiple options for registration and/or multiple ways to contact customer support staff - for example, by email and over the phone, with TTY options for phone calls.
- Ensure that any websites and digital documents (such as registration PDFs with fields, or advertising PDFs) are accessible to screen readers, and can be modified by voice-activated software.
- Any advertising videos should have closed captioning, either automatically or as an option (for example, in YouTube).

_____ How will you ensure that people with disabilities are included and invited to the conference? Does this include reaching out to them as potential presenters?

- There are often disability-related organizations whose missions align with a given conference's goals (at least partially), or that might have interested members. Also, non-disability organizations/agencies/etc. that you reach out to might have members or staff with disabilities that could be encouraged to attend with the right kind of advertising.
- Include disability-related organizations in any mailings or other outreach, and note how the issues in your conference affect people with disabilities, if they do at all.
- Note that your conference will provide accommodations to attendees and presenters on any advertisements and outreach. This will help people with disabilities feel more comfortable about signing up for the conference.
- Ensure that any advertising or conference websites are fully accessible (see the checkmark above for more details).
- Include topics addressing disability in calls for presentations. This can be explicit or included as a part of broader underrepresented/vulnerable populations.

_____ Are people with disabilities represented as presenters at the conference?

- When people with disabilities are presenters at conferences, it has many positive impacts. For example, it can broaden perspectives of attendees, expand the range of presenter

viewpoints, and create "feedback loops" where people with disabilities specifically recognize your conference and choose to attend it in the future.

- Make sure not to discount potential presenters with disabilities or topics addressing disability when choosing which presentations will be accepted.
- Include disability in any efforts at increasing the diversity of presenters, or address disability specifically.
- Expand advertising to bring in more presenters with disabilities. For hints on this, see the checkmark above.

_____ Are attendance and/or travel scholarships available to participants with disabilities?

- Statistics show that people with disabilities have disproportionately lower income and savings than the able-bodied population. They also may have greater expenses when traveling, such as wheelchair-accessible taxis or paying a personal attendant. So scholarships will help more people with disabilities attend a given conference.
- When you set up a disability scholarship, consider which types of disabilities should be included - while respecting privacy on any scholarship applications - and what scholarships will cover. For example, scholarships could be simply for conference fees, or for covering disability-related expenses such as personal attendants.
- Target scholarship advertisements to people with disabilities and include them as widely as possible.