

8 Tips To Make Your Event Accessible For All

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After attending a convention recently, I was disconcerted to find accessibility didn't seem to be a priority. It put a damper on my experience and in the case of my friend, prevented him from attending the convention. With that in mind, here are some tips to make your next event accessible to all:

1) Ramps and lifts.

This may seem like a no-brainer, particularly because wheelchair access is the first thing people think of when they hear the word *accessibility*. Nevertheless, it needs to be said. Make sure your event is held in a location that has wheelchair access – preferably through the same door as everyone else. Sketchy back entrances barely count as accessible. I've been through enough of them.

2) Accessible transportation.

If you are offering transportation to and from your event, make sure that it is accessible and safe for wheelchair users. Make sure your [vehicle has a wheelchair lift and tie-down](#)

[straps](#) to secure the wheelchair. Additionally, make sure that the driver of the vehicle is properly trained and knows how to use the lift and tie-downs and how to manually crank the lift if it breaks

3) Getting in the door doesn't mean the job is done.

I have seen so many businesses make this mistake. They think that just because they have a ramp and wheelchair users can get in the door, they've done their accessibility part. Not true. Hallways need to be wide enough for wheelchair users to pass through – and keep in mind that once a lot of people are in the hallway, it's going to be harder, so plan accordingly. Rooms need to be spacious enough for wheelchair users and those with other mobility aids to maneuver easily.

If you're setting up chairs in a room, make sure there's space for someone using a mobility aid to navigate and create spaces specifically for wheelchair users to sit around the room so they're not relegated to the back row. Make sure accessible bathrooms are clearly marked and that the accessible stall isn't being used as storage. While we're on that topic, elevators are not meant for storage either. Even if your custodial staff is "only going to be a minute," leaving trash cans, mops and brooms in the elevator is directly obstructing access.

4) Designate a quiet room.

Many conferences have a designated "Quiet Room" where people who are feeling overwhelmed can go calm down. This is not a party room. This is a specific room where people can get away from the hustle and the bustle – whether due to sensory overload, anxiety, or something else. I'd suggest having couches and other lounge furniture so that people can sit and relax. I'd also suggest implementing a noise policy in the quiet room, where people must wear headphones if they're going to listen to music or watch TV. Having headphones available to borrow might be a good idea. Make sure that you advertise in your materials that there is a quiet room and have clear signage directing people to it.

5) Have materials available in a variety of formats.

Remember that print materials are not accessible to everyone for a variety of reasons. Have your materials available in Braille, audio and digital versions to cover all your bases and have attendees choose which type of material they'd prefer. In addition, be sure that all your signage is in Braille as well as print.

6) Ban flash photography and strobe lights.

This one is increasingly overlooked. Flash photography and strobe lights can trigger seizures and migraines. Most of the time, those lights and flashes are completely unnecessary. If you absolutely *must* have them, limit them to one area or one part of the event and put up signs saying "This area/show has flash photography/strobe lights." so that people who are sensitive to flashing lights know to avoid that part.

7) Make your event fragrance free.

People with certain types of sensory impairments are extremely sensitive to smells. Make your event fragrance free – that means no scented perfumes or deodorant.

8) Have a variety of food options available.

Some people are picky eaters. Others have conditions like diabetes and Celiac Disease that make eating certain foods impossible. Some people have sensory issues that prevent them from eating foods with certain textures. Whatever the reason, make sure your menu has an array of options for everyone. If your venue is serving their own food and only will serve one dish or doesn't have many options, research restaurants nearby where people can get other food.

This is by no means an exhaustive list. There are always things to be done to improve accessibility. But if you start with these tips, you're ahead of the game. With time and effort, you can make your event accessible to all.