

Holding Inclusive Events:

A Guide to Planning an Accessible Event

True event accessibility starts before the event—and continues after

Inclusive events begin before a person registers to attend or enters the venue. When planning and inclusive event by keeping all guests in mind during the event preparation you will be better prepared to support requests as they come in rather than scrambling at the last minute.

Accessible Venues

Accessible means people can fully participate in campus events, conferences, webinars, etc.

Who is responsible for event accessibility and accommodations for the event?

The sponsoring department/program is responsible for holding all events in accessible spaces. Not all disabilities are noticeable, you may not be aware that someone with special needs would like to attend your event. By including a line item about accommodations in your invitations and RSVP you are letting your guest know that everyone is welcome. Please keep in mind, if a person with a disability requires accessibility that is not provided, the event may need to be relocated to an accessible space.

If you are considering an off-campus venue, questions to consider include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Is there availability of accessible parking and an accessible drop-off area?
- Is the primary entrance accessible (does it have a ramp or is it leveled? Is there an alternate accessible door?)
- Is there availability of wheelchair seating that allows for companion seating?
- Is clear signage posted to identify accessible features?
- Are restrooms and drinking fountains accessible?
- Is there adequate light for a sign language interpreter?
- Is there adequate space for wheelchair maneuverability, and service animals, etc.?
- Is there accessibility of outdoor space and does the path of travel to the venue provide access for all participants or are there barriers?

Making an event fully accessible will include four areas of planning. Universal design, physical accessibility, sensory accessibility, and cognitive accessibility. Here is what each of these steps means:

- Universal design means everyone can go and take part in an event, however, cognitive, physical, and sensory accessibility, must happen for everyone to take part.
- Physical Accessibility: The space doorway, pathway, room, etc. have full access for wheelchair users and people with vision disabilities.
- Sensory Accessibility: There are accommodations for people who are blind, deafblind, or hard of hearing. The event is safe for people with allergies.
- Cognitive Accessibility: Include detailed schedules. Information about the event is clear and lets people know what to expect in advance.

Physical Accessibility

All physical space used by the University can be used by everyone. This includes elevators and conference rooms. Examples of physical accessibility include doors and entrances:

- Accessible elevators that work
- Clear paths in and around your venue for blind people and wheelchair users
- Main entrances have wheelchair-accessible ramps
- Signs with braille that indicate where accessible entrances and elevators are in addition to the names of buildings and room numbers
- Wide doors and hallways for wheelchair users
- Working entrance buttons for wheelchair users

Sensory Accessibility

Provides a safe place for people with chemical and light allergies and/or sensitivities.

- ASL applause (or “flapplause”) instead of clapping
- Fragrance-free policies
- No flash photography policies
- Noise-canceling ear muffs
- Sensory free rooms

Accommodations

In addition to accessible venues, accessibility requirements include but not limited to:

Providing sign-language interpreters, assistive listening devices, closed-captioned media (TV, videos), large print or Braille materials, or other accommodations if requested in advance by participants.

Access for service dogs is mandatory

Service dogs are working animals. You should not feed, pet, or play with a working service dog. If you distract a service dog, it may reduce his ability to perform his job fully.

Service dogs are trained to assist a person with a disability and are technically considered medical equipment. Public venues are required to allow access for service dogs. The handler provides all of the service dog's care, but the venue will need to designate a relief area for the dog. While policies such as "no pets" do not apply to service dogs, service animals are only allowed where event-goers are allowed. Attendees with a fear of dogs or allergies to dogs are not a reason to turn away a service dog team.

To effectively plan inclusive events, keep all people in mind during coordination, regardless of the accommodation requests received. Consider a designated employee to coordinate accessibility policies and planning, especially for large events. Reach out to the disability Resource Center for planning resources and solutions and invite people with disabilities to weigh in on what changes you should consider. Each event is an opportunity to improve over the last, so welcome (and act on) feedback from attendees.

Prepare Your Staff

It is important to have informed event staff. Therefore, prepare your staff so they will be able to answer questions about access to the campus and/or the event, such as the following:

- Know in advance where the nearest accessible parking is located.
- Know ahead of time where the closest accessible restroom is and how to get to it from your event.
- Familiarize yourself with accessible routes in the vicinity of the event.
- A well-planned event ensures everyone can participate. Many experienced people are available at the University of Northern Colorado to help make sure your event runs smoothly and affords the full participation of people with disabilities. Please seek out those resources. Your efforts make a significant contribution to Disability Resource Centers' commitment to equal access for people with disabilities.