



Cornell University

Guide to Planning an Accessible Event

Inclusion is one of the core values of Cornell University. For persons with disabilities, inclusion means designing an event that is free of barriers so that they can participate fully in any campus events. One important aspect of being a caring community is to think about how a person's disability will affect their attendance and enjoyment of a program or workshop and to plan ahead so that they will feel welcomed and valued.

The purpose of this guide is to provide information for event planners about the elements of disability access that will foster full participation. Planning for access in advance will optimize the opportunity for a well planned accessible event and minimize the need to make last minute change. Cornell is also responsible under federal and state laws to ensure disability access for program participants.

What is the University's Disability Compliance Obligation?

Cornell is obligated by federal and state disability laws to ensure program accessibility to persons with disabilities, to provide reasonable accommodations to afford access, to remove barriers to full participation and to modify policies, practices or procedures as necessary to afford access for an individual. Designing accessible events is also a good business practice because it enhances the ability of all to participate.

It is the obligation of the event planner to ensure accessibility for persons with disabilities. Taking the necessary steps to make an event accessible for all of the participants can be easy when done in the early stages of planning. Pre-planning for accessibility often reduces the need for individual accommodations.

There is no single way to provide accessibility and the type of need may differ among persons with the same condition. It is often necessary to explore access alternatives and to consult with the individual who needs access to determine how best to accommodate for a specific circumstance.

What are disabilities?

Disabilities are physical or mental impairments that limit one or more major life activities, such as walking, seeing or hearing. Disabilities present themselves in many forms. Some are visible but most are not apparent. Non-visible disabilities include partial sensory impairments, such as low vision or hearing loss, chronic medical conditions,

mental health conditions, and learning disabilities. According to the U.S. Census, 20 million of 68 million families in our country have a member with disabilities. People with disabilities are the largest minority of the U.S. population.

What Programs must be Accessible?

Every type of program, meeting, exhibit, tour and event, whether held for the Cornell community or open to the public, must consider the access needs of persons with disabilities. This includes all Cornell sponsored activities held off campus.

There is also an obligation to ensure accessibility to events that are sponsored by an outside person or organization that is held at a Cornell facility. If you are involved with coordinating the use of Cornell facilities with outside groups, you should discuss whose responsibility it will be to ensure accessibility and accommodations. Agreements for using Cornell facilities should clearly specify which party will assume responsibility for these obligations at the event.

Who is responsible for disability access to an event?

Event planners are responsible for planning and providing for the accessibility needs of participants with disabilities at any event sponsored on behalf of the University. Advance planning for accessibility will maximize the opportunity for all to participate and minimize the need for last minute and perhaps costly changes. For instance, if an event requires bus transportation, there is no extra cost for requesting a wheelchair accessible bus in advance. If an accessible bus is not requested but a participant requires a wheelchair accessible bus, alternative transportation options will have to be provided and usually will not result in an equitable experience for the participant with a disability.

Who is responsible for any expenses associated with providing disability access?

The costs associated with disability access are considered part of the overall expense of the event. Event planners should include the expense of any anticipated accommodations as a budget item in the event planning. *Most accommodations can be made at little or no cost*, such as choosing a wheelchair accessible venue for the event. Accommodations such as sign language interpreting will incur a cost. Event planners who think the cost of the accommodations cannot be supported by the event should discuss alternative funding sources with their supervisor or advisor. Before denying any accommodation requests, event planners should consult with a member of the Cornell ADA Coordinator Team (the ADA Coordinator for Facilities, the Director of Student Disability Services of the Associate Vice President for Workforce Diversity and Inclusion).
<http://www.cornell.edu/disability/campus.cfm>

Advice for Accessible Event Planning

The following suggestions will help you plan an accessible event and be prepared for requests for disability accommodations and modifications. The ADA Coordinator Team

is available to answer questions you may have about access or an individual's request for accommodations.

Publicity and Pre-Registration: The key to making events accessible and meeting compliance obligations is to communicate well about access before the event. Include a disability accommodation statement that invites participants with disabilities to ask for accommodations in advance of the event in all pre-event publicity and registration materials. This will enable the event planner to arrange most of the accommodations and services in advance.

The disability accommodation statement should provide an event contact email and phone number. More samples of accommodation statements can be found in the appendix.

Sample statement: If disability accommodations (e.g., communication access, alternate formats) are needed to participate fully in this event, please contact [name] at [phone number and email address].

Longer sample statement: Cornell welcomes participants with disabilities. Please contact [name] at [phone number and email address] to discuss disability accommodations needed to participate fully in this event.

Shorter sample statement: Contact [name, email] for information about disability access.

Sample Registration Question:

I will need the following accommodations in order to participate:

- ASL Interpreter*
- Communication Access in Real Time (CART services)*
- Large print*
- Braille*
- Wheelchair access*
- Assistive Listening Device*
- An Assistant will accompany me*
- Closed captioned videos*

Pre-registration for an event provides an opportunity for event planners to give more detail about their event. A comprehensive description of the event, including location, environmental conditions, services available, etc. will provide for the most effective planning. Information that is helpful to know is the distance to parking areas, the availability of transportation services, whether the venue is air-conditioned, if hearing assistive devices are available, scooter or wheelchair availability, and the availability of food options for persons with food allergies.

If an event includes overnight lodging, the event planner should investigate the accessibility features of the lodging.

Responding to Requests for Accommodations: Focus on the access issue and needed accommodation, not the disability of the participant. When a participant requests an accommodation, respond back as quickly as possible. It may take several communications to work through the details of a particular request. In some circumstances, several options may be available to address an access need. The option preferred by the participant should be given primary consideration. If that option proves difficult to provide or you have a question about whether it is a reasonable accommodation, consult with a member of the ADA Coordinator Team.

Choosing a physically accessible location:

Schedule your event in wheelchair accessible buildings and rooms. Conduct an on-site visit to evaluate the facility. Wheelchair access must be available in all portions of the venue that participants will be using, including the speaker's area. An accessible restroom should be within 200 feet of the event location. Braille and tactile signage should be available for directional assistance.

Survey the location for accessible parking and an accessible path of travel from the parking area. If the event is held in a location with no close available parking, identify a method of transportation that will assist attendees with getting to the event location.

If you must host your meeting in an inaccessible location or one in which access is not easily achievable, communicate the access plan for participants with disabilities in your pre-event publicity. Be sure to include a contact number for questions about access to the venue.

Accessible Room Set-Up:

Once an accessible site is selected, the meeting room furniture must be arranged so that people who use mobility devices (e.g., wheelchairs, scooters, walkers, crutches, canes) can maneuver throughout and use the amenities independently; people who are blind or have low vision can navigate easily and safely; people who are deaf or hard of hearing can use assistive listening systems and see speakers, interpreters, and captioning; and all participants feel comfortable and ready to be engaged in the event.

Accessible Presentation of Meeting Content:

Presenters at your event may also require accommodations. As the Event Planner, you should ask presenters if they have any access needs. You should also request that presenters design their program for a diverse audience.

If a presentation includes visual content (e.g., powerpoint presentation, video, or printed charts and graphics), it will be necessary to have the visual content prepared in an alternate format (electronic format, Braille, large print) for people who are blind or have low vision. If presentation materials are provided to participants in print, the handouts must also be accessible in alternate formats, if requested.

It is also necessary to have the narration of any films or videos captioned or interpreted for guests who are deaf or hard of hearing. If the video is not captioned, sign language interpreters or real-time captionists may be needed for access to video content of the meeting.

Addressing Communication Access Needs:

Attendees who require communication access often cannot use the telephone and are able to convey their needs more effectively by email. Not all persons who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing know sign language and many will prefer to have the event captioned by a CART reporter. Attendees should be asked for their preference of communication access and every attempt should be made to meet that request. Attendees who are Hard of Hearing may benefit by the use of an assistive listening device which amplifies the voice of the speaker. Assistive listening devices are available at many large lecture halls on campus and information of their availability should be on display at the event. Here is a link to lecture halls that are equipped with Assistive Listening systems.

http://sds.cornell.edu/Resources/Assistive_Technology_on_Campus.pdf

- If using the services of a sign language interpreter;
 - Provide reserved seating in the front of the event for the attendee and companions.
 - Sign language interpreters should be situated in the front of the room proximate to the speaker and within the sight line of the Deaf attendee so that both the interpreter and speaker can be viewed simultaneously.
 - A spotlight should be on the interpreter if the lighting in the room is dimmed.
 - Provide an advance copy of presentation so that the interpreter will be well prepared to sign any specialized vocabulary and names.
- If using the services of a CART reporter;
 - CART reporters will require some space for equipment set-up.
 - Reporters using projection equipment should be situated in close proximity to the projection unit.
 - Provide an advance copy of presentation to CART reporter to prepare him/her for any specialized vocabulary and names used in presentation.
- If a visitor is using an Assistive Listening Device, the amplification will only come for the microphone of the speaker. If there is a question/answer session, the speaker should repeat the questions for the audience.

Staff Awareness and Sensitivity

Being prepared can help you handle unexpected requests. Despite all possible efforts to create an accessible event, some participants may request accommodations at the event.

Cornell is obligated to make its best effort to provide access if the request is reasonable and can be readily accomplished. **Staff awareness and sensitivity are essential to successfully complying with this obligation.**

Be conversant with the terms used to convey positive communication with persons with disabilities. Terms such as “wheelchair bound” and “handicapped” are examples of outdated terms that present disability in negative terms. More information about *People First Language* and tips on communicating with and about people with disabilities can be found at <http://www.health.state.ny.us/publications/0951/>

On-site registration

Registration workers should be well-informed about how to provide accommodations and where to obtain services. Staff should know the answers to common questions such as:

“Do I need a Cornell permit to use an accessible parking space?”

(Answer: Yes between 8-5. Accessible day permits are available at Info Booths for a fee. Car owner must have a state accessible permit or obvious temporary disability.)

“Where is the accessible restroom and water fountain?”

“When traveling around campus, how do I find accessible paths of travel?”

“Are there Braille directional signs in the building?”

“Will there be a wheelchair or scooter available to use. If not, where can I rent one locally?”

- **During the event**

Event staff should be apprised of the general obligation to provide accommodation for people with disabilities. Staff should be prepared to offer assistance (directions for drop-off and accessible parking, seating or using the amenities of the building, etc.).

Emergency procedures

Event Planners should meet with building coordinators to get general emergency information about the event venues. (link to building coordinators: <http://registrar.sas.cornell.edu/Sched/roomkeys.html>)

You should consider how the special needs of people with disabilities will be handled in an emergency. All on-site staff should be informed of emergency evacuation procedures. If your event is located on an upper floor of a building, elevators will not be available during an evacuation. If a participant is unable to exit the building, a staff person should

be identified who will inform first responders of the location of the participant who remained in the building.

A well-planned event ensures the participation of all.

Many experienced people are available at the University to help ensure that your events run smoothly and afford the full participation of people with disabilities. Please seek out those resources. Your efforts make a significant contribution to Cornell's commitment to equal access for people with disabilities.

Resources for planning accessible events:

Cornell University ADA Coordinator Team

The ADA Coordinator Team is responsible for guiding the University's efforts in disability compliance. Each member can provide guidance and advice about disability access questions.

Lynette Chappell-Williams, Assistant Vice President for Workforce Diversity and Inclusion, Day Hall 163, 607-255-2350, lc75@cornell.edu,

Kappy Fahey, Director of Student Disability Services, 420 Computing and Communication Center, 607-254-4545, kf75@cornell.edu

Andrea Haenlin-Mott, ADA Coordinator for Facilities, Humphreys Service Center, 607-255-5150, ah45@cornell.edu

Guides to Planning Accessible Events:

U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division; *Accessible Information Exchange, Meeting on a Level Playing Field*, <http://www.ada.gov/business/accessiblemtg.htm>.

New York State Department of Health; People First: How to Plan Events Everyone Can Attend.

Campus Resources:

Commuter and Parking Services (607.255.4600) provides permits for accessible parking on campus.

Permits for visitors are available at the Information Booths on campus. Students, faculty and staff should visit the Commuter and Parking services website for more information about options for transportation around campus

<http://www.transportation.cornell.edu/tms/parki>

Assistive Technology on Campus: Many computer labs and libraries are equipped with assistive technology. A list of locations and the equipment available can be found at http://sds.cornell.edu/Resources/Assistive_Technology_on_Campus.pdf

Assistive Listening Devices in Lecture Halls: Many large lectures halls have FM systems that guests may use. The list of halls can be found at http://sds.cornell.edu/Resources/Assistive_Technology_on_Campus.pdf
Please contact the planner of the event to learn how to check out an FM system for the room you will be visiting.

Access to Cornell Libraries: Bethany Silfer is the Disability Coordinator for the Libraries. She can be reached at bb29@cornell.edu and by phone at 607-255-3758. More information about access at Cornell Libraries can be found at <http://www.library.cornell.edu/svcs/disability#technology>

Employment and Disability Institute Industrial and Labor Relations is the home for DBTAC-Northeast ADA Center which provides quality training, technical assistance and materials on the ADA and accessible information technology throughout all of Federal Region II: New York, New Jersey, Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands. DBTAC-Northeast ADA Center is a neutral resource for employers, businesses, educational entities, disability advocacy organizations and individuals with disabilities. More information can be found at <http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/ped/northeastada/>.

Resources for Communication Access:

Sign Language Interpreting:

Sign Language Solutions, email: signlangsols@aol.com, phone: 607.738.8244

Captioning:

Professional Reporting Services, Inc., email: sally@professionalreporting.com, phone: 315.436.7775, website: www.professionalreportingservices.com

Verbatim Court Reporting Services, Inc., phone: 607.733.1262, website: <http://www.verbatimcourtreportinginc.com/>

Wheelchair and Scooter Resources:

Medical Supply Depot, 402 3rd St
607-272-4727, <http://www.guthrie.org/Services/MedSupplyDepot/>

Lincare, 1301 Trumansburg Rd.
607-277-4027

Finger Lakes Independence Center, 2115 Fifth St. Ithaca
607-272-2433, www.fliconline.org

Professional Home Care, Ithaca Shopping Plaza - Suite 4
222 Elmira Road

607-257-1425, <http://www.uhs.net/?id=521&sid=1>

Wonderful Wheelchairs, 222 Elmira Rd
607-351-1655, <http://wonderfulwheelchairs.org/Home.html>

Student Groups that Support Persons with Disabilities.

Cornell Minds Matter (CMM) is a student organization that works to promote mental health and well-being, decrease the stigma associated with mental illness and seeking out mental health resources. Members of Cornell Minds Matter serve as a liaison between students, faculty, staff and administration at Cornell to guide policy and resources to serve the Cornell community. CMM holds workshops, training sessions, guest lectures and fun stress-reducing events, community services outing and other activities. An annual publication discusses various topics related to mental health through essays, poems and art. For more information visit the Cornell Minds Matter website at <http://mindsmatter.dos.cornell.edu/>

The Disability Services Team (DST) assists students with temporary and permanent disabilities living on campus. Volunteers will assist with tasks such as getting groceries from Max Market or other on-campus stores, pick up or return books to the library, or doing laundry. Other activities may be added as individual needs are addressed. Currently the DST is supported by Student Disability Services, CUDA (Cornell Union for Disabilities Awareness, the Public Service Center, Gannett Health Services, Cornell Tradition and the Student Assembly. <http://disabilitiesserviceteam.blogspot.com/>

Cornell Union for Disabilities Awareness (CUDA) is a union of people with disabilities and allies in the Cornell community dedicated to education, awareness and activism in support of disabilities issues. CUDA is dedicated to encouraging constructive, issued-based conversation and debate and works to achieve this goal through a variety of avenues on campus and beyond. CUDA meets weekly to discuss issues impacting persons with disabilities. Learn more about CUDA at <http://www.rso.cornell.edu/cuda/>

Empathy, Assistance and Referral Service (EARS) is a student-run organization offering counseling, training and outreach programs. It is open to all members of the Cornell community. The drop-in and phone counseling room at 213 Willard Straight is open daily during the academic year. Counseling is free and confidential. Training in communication and counseling skills is offered at three levels each semester. Outreach programs are provided for campus groups. More information about EARS can be found at <http://ears.dos.cornell.edu>.

Facts, Advocacy, and Control of Epileptic Seizures (FACES) is a student organization that assists individuals with seizure disorders with managing their epilepsy and developing positive self esteem in order to build a successful life. This is accomplished through education, services and research. FACES helps youth and their families deal with

the psychological and social impacts involved with seizures to improve how they are perceived and accepted in society.

There are many campus, regional, state and national disability resources. Here is a link from the Human Resources website with a list on a variety of topics.

http://www.hr.cornell.edu/life/support/special_needs_resources.pdf