Disability Smart Events:

Welcoming... Not Simply Accommodating

Learning Takeaway Resource

View the webinar at DisabilityInclusionPgh.org.

5 Steps to Proactively Address Barriers

Step 1: Selecting an Accessible Venue

- Consider the venue entrance, parking and approach (stepless entry, accessible parking options, pullover area for vans, public transportation access)
- Visit common areas to check for accessibility (lobbies, reception areas, refreshments area, restrooms)
- Review restrooms for accessibility (location, stall size, handrail positioning, sink height)
- Ensure access to all goods and services is inclusive (tours, social activities, recreational opportunities)
- Pay close attention to your senses during the site visit (strong odors, noise control, lighting)
- Ask about emergency preparedness and evacuation plans
- If an online event, select a platform that is accessible (skype for business, zoom)

Step 2: Create Accessible Event Materials

- Ensure invitations are not just an image & that registration forms are accessible
- Create accessible event documents and slide decks
  - When appropriate, provide digital copies of presentations in advance of the event
  - Create standard and large print copies of materials
  - Additional options for document accessibility could include; braille, audio file, text-only
- Include captioning for any videos to be played for the event
- Announce directions for making donations, as well as strategically placing printed copies of instructions
  - When selecting an electronic donation platform, ensure it is accessible (Salesforce)
- If ordering materials or services, ensure sufficient time is provided to process the request prior to the event

Step 3: Make Requesting Accommodations Easy

- Include an accessibility statement in all pre-event materials
- During registration, provide a list of potential accommodations available and encourage participant to request in advance
  - Alternate format for event materials; sign language interpreter; ramp access or stepless entry; accompanied by personal assistant (request name); live audio description; pre-event venue tour
- Disclose any plans to use flash photography, strobe lights, loud/amplified noise or music, theatrical fog, or fireworks
- Don't forget to determine if presenters or speakers need an accommodation for the event
  - Ensure accommodations for travel are understood if bringing a speaker in from another location

Step 4: Train Event Staff

- General disability etiquette
- Service animal awareness
- Tips for assisting someone who is blind with directions (offering an elbow/arm, non-sight related indicators)
- How to communicate when a third party is involved (interpreter, personal assistant, family member, friend)
- Assistance for access to food and beverages (help with getting a plate if a buffet is set up, or having a server at each food station, providing straws)
- Plan for last minute seating adjustments

Accommodations Examples

Provide by Request

- Sign Language interpreters for breakout sessions or individual Sign Language interpreters
- Live audio description
- Braille print materials
- Materials made available in advance of event
- Facility tours of the event space prior to the event

Provide at All Events

- Live or remote captioning for general sessions
- Sign Language interpreters for general session speakers
  - Reserved seating (for those needing captioning or ASL interpretation) available at the front of the room
- Reserved spaces for people using mobility devices, ensure some spaces have access to electrical outlets.
- Stepless entry

Local Resources Available at DisabilityInclusionPGH.org

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5 Steps to Proactively Address Barriers

Prep Presenters and Moderators

- Do not begin presentation until the interpreter or captioner is positioned
  - The presenter/moderator should not alter their normal speaking habits, not faster or slower than they would normally speak
- Presenter should always face the audience
- Announce who is speaking
- Ensure all elements are addressed in presentations, including graphics
- Put a plan in place for doing an accommodation check and thank accommodation providers
- Use a microphone for a live presentation or headset for virtual event
- When engaging the audience:
  - Explain how the audience should engage
  - Use 'floating microphones' or repeat the question/comment for all to hear before responding
  - Do not respond to audience members against the protocol, instead remind of protocol

Ensure the Presentation Platform is Accessible

- Determine what accommodations presenters will need
- Presenters with disabilities may have very specific preferences for microphone type, podium or lectern use, and panel table set-up
  - When possible, offer the presenter a choice of microphone type
  - Ensure presenters with disabilities are offered similar options to a standing podium, such as a microphone on a boom stand or a lowered podium
- Ensure enough space is available for all presenters on the platform; account for mobility devices
  - Typically, a wheelchair user will need space equivalent to two chairs at the panel table
  - A presenter with a mobility device should never be asked to present from the floor while others present on a platform
- Provide space for a sign language interpreter

Step 5: Ensure Accessible Event Layout

- Provide enough space between tables or booths
  - If 10% of participants are expected to use mobility aids, plan for 30% additional space
  - Circulation space should be a minimum width of 36", preferably 60", 72" recommended whenever feasible
  - When possible, create both horizontal and vertical aisles to improve access and flow
  - Provide low-tack tape on carpeted floors to mark pathways that should remain unblocked
  - Provide instruction in introductory remarks to keep those areas clear of barriers
- Offer accessible seating locations throughout the room, to provide choice
- Don't assume that people who use a scooter or wheelchair will want to remain in the chair during the presentation or dinner
- Plan extra space for personal assistants, mobility devices, and service animals
- If possible, leave room at the rear of the room for attendees to stand or stretch
- Prop meeting space doors open at the start and end of each session or when welcoming attendees in and at the end of the event
- Whenever possible, have restrooms on the same floor of the event
  - If that is not a possibility, allow extra time between sessions for people to navigate to the restrooms
- Ensure seating includes table options available at a height that all guests can reach
- Ensure registration and buffet table are at a height that can be reached by all guests
- Create a layout that gives all participants a view of the stage and presentation screens are easily viewed from all areas of the room
  - Consider how centerpieces may impact the visibility of the stage and other guests seated at a table

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Creating an Inclusive Experience: Accommodations for Specific Event Types

Galas

- Equip registration desk with a tablet if there is access to wi-fi or a phone to be able to share electronic information (table number, list of silent auction items, presentation in digital format, how to make a donation)
- Equip registration desk with navigation instructions to refer to for someone who is blind or has low vision
- Equip staff members with pen & paper
- Have extra event staff members available to act as floaters (help with getting food, finding table, navigating room)
- Review contingency plans with event and venue staff members prior to event regarding movement of chairs, early admittance into the room, etc.
- Determine if the venue provides assistive audio devices and have a few available if someone makes a request

Workshops

- Ensure accessibility of documents and presentations, including captioned videos
- Make electronic copies of documents and presentations available
- Determine microphone access ahead of time
- Avoid use of flashing lights in presentations
- Request a podium with an adjustable height
- Make sure speakers announce themselves
- Limit conversation to one speaker at a time
- Keep pen and paper handy
- Request seating be inclusive of everybody
- Share your accommodations if you are the guest speaker ahead of time

Staff Meetings

- Consider how the size of the meeting may impact accommodations
- Provide an electronic agenda and all meeting materials ahead of time
- Be aware of technology options that can be used as last-minute accommodations (automated captioning, speech-to-text)
- Announce speaker and only allow one speaker at a time
- Ensure plan is in place regarding food allergies
- Ensure easy access to outlets

Conferences & Job Fairs

- Use a booth table that is a standard height
- Make chairs available for representatives to put them at eye level with someone using a wheelchair or scooter or if someone is feeling fatigued
- If wi-fi is available, keep a tablet or laptop handy to email electronic version of the files; if not, devise a way to take names to provide electronic versions
- Offer giveaways to everyone and let them choose what they want
- Keep a few large print versions of materials available for if they are requested
- Find out in advance if there is a quiet space you can have one of your representatives go to, if a participant requests this as an accommodation
- Find out in advance if there will be interpreters available and plan what to do if there are not (remote video interpreting, speech to text, etc.)
- Keep pen and paper handy

Team Building Activities & Informal Staff Gatherings

- Evaluate activity accessibility
- Provide a list of activities available ahead of the event and a link to the venue if appropriate
- Don't assume that people can't or won't want to do something without getting their input
- Many people with disabilities enjoy going to the movies, concerts, arcades, and sports

Virtual Events

- Ensure platform and platform features are accessible
- Include an accessibility statement and provide instructions for how to gain assistance if there is a technology problem that needs to be addressed
- Provide live captioning or interpreting, including videos
- Speakers should announce themselves
- For webinars, offer a call-in number & the ability to join via the computer
- Don't assume, that if a person is taking a long time to respond in a chat function, that they aren't trying to respond quickly
- Make sure attachments are accessible

New and Emerging Trends in Disability Smart Events

Technology Zone

- Designate one wall or zone outside meeting rooms for all attendees to recharge their batteries and devices
- Eliminates tripping hazards from charging cords and aisle blockage from backpacks and other technology covers
- Protects attendees with electrical sensitivities

Sensory Experiences

- Designate a space that is fluorescent light-free and cell phone-free space.
- Instead, provide lighting through hand floor lamps or table lamps with incandescent light bulbs
- The purpose of these spaces is to provide a calm environment where overwhelmed guests can go to relax
- These spaces help lower anxiety and stress levels for participants
- In some instances, sensory objects can be provided such as building blocks or slime

Real-Time Captioning Link for All

- Providing a real-time captioning link for all registered guests allows everyone to access this resource
- Allows guests who are deaf, hard of hearing, or struggling to focus around a noisy audience, the opportunity to follow what the presenter is sharing
- Announce the link and provide it in written format for all guests

Disability Inclusion & Access: Moving Forward

FISA Foundation and The Heinz Endowments convened nearly 250 nonprofit and foundation leaders on November 21st 2019 to launch Disability Inclusion & Access, a new initiative to support nonprofits, foundations, and community organizations to be more welcoming and inclusive of people with disabilities. We believe that our community is at its best when everyone is included.

About Bender Consulting Services

With 25 years of experience in supporting corporate and federal recruitment, workplace mentoring, and technology accessibility initiatives, Bender Consulting Services, Inc. is the leading national expert in disability employment solutions for private and public sector employers. To learn more about how to start your career with Bender Consulting Services, Inc., please visit our website at www.benderconsult.com.

Additional Resources

- Bender Consulting Services
- iDisability: Civil Rights of Americans with Disabilities Free eLearning Module
- FISA Foundation
- Heinz Endowments
- Disability Inclusion & Access
- Job Accommodation Network
- Caption First
- 3Play Media
- We Will Slaughter Stigma Campaign
- How to Assess a Venue's Emergency Preparedness and Evacuation Plan: Tips from Microsoft and the Office of Disability Employment Policy
- PEAT Works Guide for Purchasing Accessibility Technology

- AudioEye
- WCAG
- Section 508.GOV
- Color Contrast Analyzer
- American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD)
- National Center on Disability and Journalism
- Associated Press Stylebook
- Microsoft Reading Age Check Instructions
- YouTube
- Approved Hotels and Motels for Federal Travelers
- FISA Foundation Resource List
- Room Layouts and Platform Designs

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