

Guidelines to Increase Accessibility and Belonging at Events

Provided by the Division of Enrollment and Student Services ADEI Action Plan Workgroup and Centers for Student Access, Community, and Intercultural Engagement

These guidelines for event planning and execution promote students' and employees' access and belonging. Some are suitable for any programming, while others are most applicable to larger events.

The information here is not exhaustive and will be improved over time. There are many other aspects to planning a successful event, too!

Scheduling

Avoid significant religious and cultural holidays, especially holidays designated as non-work days for observers.

- Consult the [Council of Presidents calendar](#).
- Departments may also find the [Centers' Holidays, Observances, and Event Scheduling Guidance](#) and Western's [Important Dates & Deadlines](#) calendar helpful.

Location

The location should be accessible to people with various disabilities, gender identities, and access to transportation.

- Surfaces must be traversable by people who use chairs, braces, etc. If a primary area of the location (e.g. where the event is held, nearby restrooms) cannot be accessed without using stairs, it is not accessible.
 - The [campus map shows accessible paths](#) across campus and areas of campus where accessibility is impacted by construction.
- For off-campus events that are not easily accessed by public transportation, ensure that everyone attending has a financially accessible way to get to the event and home after.
- Accessible parking should be available near the event location.
- If there will be seating for the event, select a room that comfortably seats people of diverse body sizes.
- At least one gender-neutral restroom should be available near the event. Helpful information is on the [LGBTQ+ Western site](#).
 - For on-campus events, [you can use these signs](#) to indicate the location of the nearest gender-neutral restroom.

- If there is not a gender-neutral restroom at an off-campus event location, contract negotiation and planning with the event venue should ensure that you can designate a restroom as gender-neutral for your event.

Registration

If you will have advance registration for the event, the registration form should include:

- Space to indicate needed disability accommodations. Collect contact information so event planners can follow up if there are questions.
- The option to indicate how one would like their name to appear when printed (e.g. nametag, table sign). When possible, allow people to just share part of their name (e.g. first name) and that forms are inclusive of mononyms.
- If nametags will be created in advance, the option to include one's pronouns on their nametag. Allow write-in options for pronouns.
- If food will be served, the option to indicate dietary restrictions.

Event planning and set-up

- Grow your understanding and use of [principles of universal design \(UD\)](#). Applying UD principles supports events in being accessed, understood, and engaged with to the greatest extent possible. For example:
 - In designing event activities, consider how the activities will be accessible to people with mobility-related disabilities.
 - People process information best in various ways. Options to write, draw, or talk in a small group, and sharing information both visually and auditorily, can support diverse learning styles.
- Review and apply the [Office of Civil Rights & Title IX Compliance's event accessibility guidance](#).
- [Ensure documents shared or distributed at the event are accessible](#).
- For events with a speaker and very large expected attendance without required registration (for example an event filling Fraser 102 or the PAC Concert Hall or main theater), proactively provide American Sign Language (ASL) interpretation or live captioning services (CART or TypeWell, not automated captions).
 - Preparatory materials, including the names of all speakers, the event agenda, technical terminology that will be used, and any scripts, should be given to the

service providers at least two days prior to the event. This supports service providers in delivering as accurate of services as possible.

- The DAC can be helpful consultant when planning for event accessibility. However, departments are responsible for coordinating accessibility services for their events, including proactive services and services requested by participants when registering for smaller events. (ASL interpretation can be arranged by contacting hnddncr@aol.com. Live captioning services can be arranged by contacting jmitchell@quickcaption.com.)
 - Communication access services such as ASL interpretation or live captioning do not need to be proactively provided for events like information fairs that primarily involve one-on-one interactions. By including an accessibility statement with your event publicity materials, these services can be requested if needed.
- Use the [captioning decision tree](#) to determine if closed captioning is needed for media (e.g. videos) shown at the event. When needed, closed captioning should be at least 99% accurate. Automated captions through YouTube, Vimeo, etc. are not at least 99% accurate.
 - At large events, designate seats at the front for people who will use ASL interpretation.
 - Provide spaces for people who use wheelchairs. If seating is in rows, leave spaces at the ends of some rows. If seating is at tables, leave one or more spaces without a chair.
 - Even if the event is primarily one where people will be standing, include some chairs for people who would like to sit.
 - If there will be a stage, ensure setup of a ramp if you know someone with mobility limitations will be on stage or if you do not know everyone who will come on stage.
 - For events with a main program other than small gatherings, ensure there is amplified sound (microphones and speakers).
 - When possible, event set-up should include a room near the main event room that allows space for sensory breaks, decompression, relaxation, and being away from the stimulation of the main event. It can also be helpful to avoid bright lighting.
 - For large events where there is little or no program and students engage at their own pace, consider designating time at the beginning or end of the event for a sensory-friendly hour.
 - If there is music, it should be quiet. No strong or flashing lighting. Monitor entry to avoid crowds.

- Consider actions that support health. Depending on the event, it may be especially useful to have water, ear plugs, and/or face masks available. For outdoor daytime events in warmer weather, consider shade tents.
- The ADA Coordinator and DAC staff can consult with event organizers who have questions when planning for event accessibility.

Publicity

- All event publicity must follow accessibility requirements, including the [Office of Civil Rights and Title IX Compliance's guidance for publications](#). This includes providing clear information about how to request disability accommodations.
- Adhere to branding/marketing guidance from [University Relations & Marketing](#). This includes [guidance on social media practices](#).
- If there is an option to attend remotely, share that option. Be clear about whether it is a hybrid event, designed for in-person and remote participation, or whether the remote option allows observation but is not equivalent to in-person attendance.

Food and materials

- If food will be served, provide options that avoid [common allergens](#) and a vegetarian option.
- If paper materials are shared, provide an electronic version accessible to a screen reader.

At the event

- In welcoming remarks, include mention of the nearest accessible and gender-neutral restrooms and location of a break room if available.
- Consider providing a [Tribal Lands Statement](#) at the beginning of the event. How can you acknowledge our presence on this land in a way that deepens attendees' sense of place and awareness of how the history of this land is relevant today generally and for this event specifically?
- If photos are being taken or video is being recorded, clearly communicate that to event participants and provide direction re: how people can express concerns about their image being used. Follow [University Relations & Marketing's directions re: permissions and using release forms](#).
- For events other than small meetings, consistently ensure that speakers use microphones. If someone speaks without using the microphone, for example to ask a question, someone should repeat what was said using the microphone.

- Provide alternate text for visual content. When describing visuals, e.g. photos or graphs, include an explanation of how the visual is relevant.
- Encourage people who are speaking to say their name when they talk. This helps people who cannot see the speaker know who is talking.
- Ensure event staff are easy for attendees to locate throughout the event in case there is an urgent issue or concern. At larger events, this could mean staffing a welcome table and staff wearing nametags or lanyards identifying themselves.
- Consider assessing access and sense of belonging for participants using a brief exit survey – findings can help with understanding the participant experience and improving access and belonging for future offerings. Contact the ESS Planning & Assessment Consultant for support.

Virtual and Hybrid Events

The following are additional considerations for events that are hybrid (providing online and in-person options) or entirely virtual. For virtual events, some of the above guidance will not be applicable.

- Provide notice before recording an event. Refer to [Records Management's guidance](#) for additional considerations.
- When using Zoom, Teams, or another online platform, have captions available. When an event is hybrid, show captions in the physical event space. Follow guidance above to determine use of live captioning services.
- When possible, plan activities and engagement mindful of people who are not able or prefer not to have their cameras on.
- To increase readability, use a large font or zoom in when sharing screens.
- In hybrid spaces, invite people online to share when engaging in large group discussion or soliciting questions. This can help online participants be more engaged and included.
- Encourage online participants to share ideas in the chat, not exclusively voice. Designate someone from the event team to monitor the chat and read responses aloud.
- During small group discussions in hybrid events, silence the microphone in the in-person event room so online participants don't hear in-person discussion. Or, send online participants to a virtual breakout room.