Providing Access for Everyone

Strategies for Community Activities and Events

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires that people with disabilities have equal access to community events or activities. This checklist highlights some of the considerations and strategies to promote effective communication and physical accessibility to ensure access for everyone. Approximately 30% of adults in North Carolina have a disability that can affect mobility, communication, speech, vision, hearing, cognition or mental health. Many disabilities are not visible.

Inclusive Planning

Planning for accessibility from the beginning ensures inclusion and full participation for everyone.

☐ Involve people with lived experience and organizations that work with children and adults with disabilities in all stages of the planning process. It is important to have subject matter experts at the table who understand different types of communication and physical access accommodations.

☐ Providing communication and physical access for activities and events can cost money, so it is important to plan for potential expenses.

☐ Visit the activity or event site in advance to ensure ADA compliance. Newer buildings are more likely than older buildings to be accessible. Find a community partner with ADA expertise or use ADA Checklist for Existing Facilities.

☐ To ensure outreach and marketing materials are provided in accessible formats, print and digital materials should follow accessibility guidelines, found in this checklist.

☐ It is important to remember that in-person American Sign Language (ASL), foreign language interpretation and Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) require advance notice.

Respectful Interactions

Share this checklist with ALL staff and/or volunteers and provide additional training, if necessary, to ensure equitable interaction with people with disabilities. Important things to keep in mind include:

☐ Use person first language. If you are unsure, ask the person how they would like to be described.

☐ Always speak to the individual in an age-appropriate manner.

- ☐ If speaking to an individual who is using an American Sign Language (ASL) Interpreter, speak directly to the person, not to the interpreter.
- ☐ Look directly at a person when speaking so they can see your facial cues and lip-read if needed.
- ☐ Do not help without asking first.
- ☐ Allow extra time for communication or full understanding. Do not rush.
- ☐ If you are speaking to someone using a communication device, speak directly to the individual and allow time for them to respond.
- ☐ Ask permission to assist or guide a person who is blind or has low vision.
- ☐ Allow service animals to accompany individuals and do not touch or distract them.
- ☐ Do not touch or move a person's mobility device or personal items without asking.

Registration Accommodations

Ask about any disability specific accommodations needed during event registration, so you can be prepared and have accommodations in place.

- ☐ Provide an accessibility statement. For example, "We strive to host inclusive, accessible events that enable all attendees to engage fully. To request an accommodation, please contact (name, email, phone) by XX (deadline for requests)." If space is limited, add a shorter statement, such as "Accommodations are available upon request. Please notify by XX (date)"
- ☐ Always provide specifically requested accommodations and seek expert guidance when needed. For example, if an American Sign Language (ASL) Interpreter is requested, provide a licensed interpreter, not just someone who knows some sign language.
- ☐ If you are targeting a specific audience with higher need for a particular accommodation – for example, people over the age of 55 who are likely to have hearing loss – you may want to schedule and advertise the accommodation on promotional materials, e.g., "live captioning provided."
- ☐ These are some of the more common accommodations that may be requested:
  - American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter.
  - Tactile or Close Vision interpreter for DeafBlind individuals.
  - Communication Access Real-Time Translation (CART) captioning on a tablet.
  - Materials in alternate formats, such as large print, electronic formats, braille.
  - Presentation materials in advance, such as Power Point slides.
  - Mobility access.
  - Assistive listening devices.
- ☐ For more information on best practices for working with Deaf, Hard of Hearing and DeafBlind individuals and guidance and resources available on setting up American Sign Language, Tactile and Close Vision interpreters or Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) captioning please contact the nearest NC Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Regional Center.

Facility Access

All sites or facilities must provide the same level of access for everyone, and even temporary sites must remove barriers for people with disabilities.

☐ An accessible route to all areas should be at least 36 in. wide, free of stairs and steep inclines with a stable, smooth and slip resistant surface. Grass and gravel are not accessible surfaces.

☐ Accessible parking, including at least one van accessible space, should be clearly marked, include an access aisle large enough for mobility devices, and level with easy access to curb cuts. Cones can be used to provide temporary spaces. Depending on the audience, extra accessible spaces may be needed.

☐ Accessible sidewalks should have a curb cut or curb ramp that is at least 36 in. wide and not too steep (no greater than 1:12 slope) – a portable ramp is acceptable.

☐ Accessible restrooms should be available and include an accessible toilet stall with at least 60-inch diameter of clear space wide to allow turning radius for wheelchair, higher toilet, and grab bars.

☐ If portable restrooms are used, an accessible portable restroom must be provided.

☐ Permanent signs should be readable, with high contrast colors, bold print, raised letters and braille (Grade 2 or contracted braille), and a non-glare finish.

☐ It is important to also consider the accessibility of meeting rooms and interior spaces. Below are some basic guidelines.

- An accessible route of 36 inches width should be maintained between tables and chairs and/or to different areas of the room.
- Seating should allow space for individuals using mobility devices space to sit where they choose.
- Reserve space, preferably near speaker, for individuals to see interpreters or captioning on a screen. Work with the interpreter for needs related to placement, lighting, and background.

Accessible Communication

Always ask for a person's communication or learning preferences, recognizing that people give and receive information differently.

☐ An in-person American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter is generally the best option for communicating with Deaf individuals that use sign language. If you are unable to secure an in-person ASL interpreter, video remote interpretation (VRI) may be an acceptable alternative in some situations. A list of licensed agencies who may offer VRI can be found here. If you have questions about whether VRI will work for your situation, contact the nearest NC Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Regional Center.

☐ Staff or volunteers receiving calls should review guidance for communicating with individuals with hearing loss (Spanish) on the phone or via relay calls (Spanish).

- Provide items such as white boards, pen and paper, or communication apps on a tablet or phone to assist with communication.
- Offer a quiet space to support individuals who have hearing loss, sensory issues, or difficulties with loud noises or distractions.
- Though not part of the ADA, a language access plan is a critical part of accessible communication. Ensure that information and materials are available in languages other than English.

Readable Print Materials

When creating print materials, it is important to consider the wide range of users that may benefit from the information provided. Designing for accessibility ensures that everyone can use and access the information.

- Use plain language, keeping the messages short and simple without unnecessary or complex words. Avoid using jargon, abbreviations, or acronyms.
- Be concise.
- Choose fonts and point size that are easy to see. Point size should be no smaller than 12 points, but 14 points is better. Sans serif fonts are easiest to read (ex: Arial, Tahoma or Verdana)
- Avoid decorative fonts and limit the use of graphics.
- Ensure the text has strong color contrast by using dark text on a light background or light text on a dark background.
- Offer to make print materials available in alternate formats, such as large print, braille, or electronic formats upon request.

Digital Accessibility

Digital accessibility ensures that websites, online tools, social media posts, or electronic documents are easily navigated and understood by a wide range of users, including those users who have visual, auditory, motor or cognitive disabilities.

- Check that text has a strong contrast against the page background using WebAIM Contrast Checker
- Videos should always have the option to view captions.
- Use accessibility checkers for Microsoft and Adobe PDF files.
- Website accessibility guidance is available from the Web Accessibility Initiative.
- Microsoft and WebAIM provides information on accessible presentations.
- If mobile applications are used, review guidance on accessibility standards.

Resources

- ADA Effective Communication – (Spanish)
- How to Communicate with Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Deaf/Blind Patients – Fact sheet
- Southeast ADA Center – ADA Technical Assistance (Spanish) – call or email with questions about accessibility.
- NC Division of Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing – Communication Access Assistance
- North Carolina Office on Disability and Health – Accessibility Resources
- Mobile apps to aid Communication Access for Individuals who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Deaf/Blind
- A Planning Guide for Making Temporary Events Accessible to People with Disabilities
- Accessible Meetings, Events, & Conferences Guide
- Plain Language Guidelines

This document only highlights some of the more prevalent barriers, it is not a complete list and does not indicate compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.