

Disability Civic Engagement Guide

A guide to event and communication inclusivity and accessibility for People with Disabilities



Southeast  Center

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Disclaimer

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Executive Summary

While people with disabilities are one of the largest minority groups in the United States, they are rarely viewed as a marginalized community. In fact, many initiatives to improve diversity and equity often do not include them, failing to promote involvement of the largest minority group in the United States, equal opportunities can be provided for all individuals. Data from the Centers for Disease Control, CDC, suggests that 26% of Americans have some type of disability. Furthermore, disability occurs across all demographics, including race, ethnicity, age, gender, socioeconomic status, education level, sexual orientation, Etc.

When civic engagement events are not accessible for everyone, this can lead to more exclusion. Ableism and bias against individuals with disabilities are the most common barriers to inclusion in events and movements. Ableism is like racism, sexism, or ageism. It is the view that disabled people are “less than,” or “less capable” than, their non-disabled peers. The issue of inaccessible activities excludes people with disabilities from having their voices heard.

People with disabilities are empowered to make change and demonstrate their right to freedom of speech when participating in civic engagement activities. During the marches and rallies held across the country in 2020, Able South Carolina received calls from people with disabilities who wanted to participate and be heard. We intervened, reaching out to the event organizers who needed resources to make their events accessible. We provided guidance and listened to their desire to include everyone.

As a result of the barriers faced by the disability community, we developed this guide. It will provide resources and assistance for event organizers with making civic engagement activities fully accessible. When creating this guide, Able SC conducted multiple listening sessions with organizers for civic engagement events. We asked a series of questions about strategies used to include people with disabilities; what they feel they are missing; and asked for feedback about how this guide could assist them in making their events welcoming and accessible for people with disabilities. We also conducted surveys with organizations that could not attend these sessions to determine the same information. Finally, as we edited the guide, we sought feedback from many members of the disability community about the aspects of civic engagement and accessible event planning they thought would be important for us to include. The result is a resource that we hope will be valuable to event organizers and members of the disability community.

A Brief History of the Disability Rights Movement

During the 1960s, people of color and women fought for their civil rights. People with disabilities also started to see themselves as a minority group that, like other minority groups, did not receive equal treatment. This shared experience resulted in the creation of “disability pride” as a concept and embracing of disability as identity. This led to the formation of a larger disability community, which moved toward the goals of deinstitutionalization and creation of the Independent Living Movement. The newly formed disability community came to understand they did not need to be “fixed” and instead asked that people and environments adapt to meet their needs.

People with disabilities are some of the strongest activists fighting against injustice. Disability intersects across populations and communities, which is why it is important to involve people with disabilities in all civic engagement events.

Tired of being treated as second, or third-class citizens without any rights, the disability community advocated for, and passed, all early disability rights legislation. They led some of the largest demonstrations, which shows that the community can be involved when planning and accommodations are provided. Listed below are two examples of major disability rights laws the community advocated for and passed.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 prohibits discrimination against qualified people with disabilities by any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance. It was one of the first laws that protected the rights of people with disabilities. Failure to enact this legislation led to a protest where people with disabilities and their allies occupied a federal building in California during a sit-in that lasted more than twenty-five days which made it the longest protest in the history of the United States.

Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was passed in 1990. It was modeled after the Civil Rights Act and borrowed language from the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. The ADA prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in several areas, including employment, transportation, public accommodations, communications, and access to state and local government programs and services. The passing of the ADA was much like the disability community's Independence Day, giving the community the right to equitable participation in the same activities as their non-disabled peers.

The ADA did not happen without participating in civic engagement. A demonstration known as the "Capitol Crawl" occurred on March 13, 1990. Over 1,000 people marched from the White House to the U.S. Capitol to demand equal rights for citizens with disabilities. Once the activists reached the Capitol, many of them got out of their wheelchairs or ditched their mobility aids to crawl up the Capitol steps, a perfect physical demonstration of the barriers disabled people face.

Several pieces of disability rights legislation followed, but not without people with disabilities leading the way. These include the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), National Voter Registration Act of 1993, and the Telecommunications Act of 1996.

What is Civic Engagement?

Civic engagement is either individual or collective actions to be involved with issues that are of public concerns. These activities can range from volunteering to voting to participating in rallies and marches.

In this guide, we focus on civic engagement as it relates to organizational and activism events and campaigns.

Disability Involvement: Intersection and Accessibility

Civic engagement promotes the quality of life in a community through both political and non-political processes. Although twenty-six percent of the American population has some type of disability, civic participation efforts are typically not designed with accessibility in mind. Barriers to meaningful civic engagement create social, health, and economic disparities for people with disabilities. This marginalization leads to generations of exclusion for members of the disability community. Engaging people with disabilities in cross-movement work ensures they have a voice in influencing community priorities. For people with disabilities, civic engagement can strengthen self-esteem and confidence, promote social integration, and develop personal interest.

Broader Audience and Increased Participation

Civic engagement is an important way to deliver power to the community, which takes place in environments made up of diverse people, practices, conditions, and values. We must ensure our civic engagement is more than a collection of meetings, techniques, and tools. Barriers and challenges prevent people with disabilities from accessing civic life. The disability community deserves and has the right to equal access to civic power to meaningfully participate in, be represented by, and contribute to leadership in their communities. Increasing their engagement will help to prevent the historical cycle of disability as a marginalized community which is often experienced.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Best Practices

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal civil rights law that prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in the areas of employment, transportation, access to private businesses, state and local government sites, and telecommunications. Much of the ADA's spirit and language comes from earlier nondiscrimination legislation regarding race, color, gender, national origin, age, and religion.

Definition of Disability under the ADA

The ADA defines a person with a disability in three ways.

1. a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities.
 - a. Examples of major life activities: caring for oneself, performing manual tasks, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, learning, and working.
2. a person with a record of an impairment, even if he or she does not currently have a disability.
 - a. Example: a person who has had breast cancer and is now in remission.
3. a person who does not have a disability but is regarded by others as having a disability is also protected under the ADA.
 - a. Example: a person who has severe facial scarring, which can show the presence of a previous disability.

Types of Disabilities

There are hundreds of types of disabilities. While one person may have multiple disabilities, another may have a single disability with symptoms that fluctuate. There are some disabilities that are less obvious, such as health conditions of the heart or lungs, neurological diseases, or arthritis that may reduce physical stamina, decrease coordination, or cause pain.

Under Titles II and III of the Americans with Disabilities Act, activities of state and local governments and places of public accommodation, such as museums, hotels, restaurants, medical offices, stores, libraries, and childcare or private education entities, are prohibited from discriminating against or withholding access from individuals with disabilities. This means that activities conducted by state and local governments, as well as private businesses and organizations, should be accessible to individuals with disabilities.

Planning Your Event

As a first step, ask about and review the accessibility of buildings and spaces when considering event venues. This includes the parking, pathways, restrooms, and meeting spaces.

Designate a coordinator for accessibility services and disability support. This person should be listed as the point of contact for any requests for accommodations or questions about event accessibility. This coordinator can ensure that the event location, vendors, parking, performance areas, and restroom facilities are compliant with the ADA.

Requests for Accommodations

An accessibility statement should be included in the event announcement and/or registration.

Example of an Accessibility Statement

If you have a disability and require a reasonable accommodation to fully participate in this event, please contact [name] by [deadline date] via email [email address] or telephone [number] or by dialing 711 (Free Relay services) on your phone to discuss your accessibility needs.

Best Practice Tip: Add a field to your registration forms so that a person can request accommodations. This will allow you to prepare in advance for needs that may be present at your event. It will also help you determine the additional support that may be needed. Keep in mind, however, that a lack of accommodation requests does not mean that people with disabilities will not attend your event. Your event's compliance with

the Americans with Disabilities Act is the law and should be done whether or not you receive accommodation requests.

You may require a deadline for requests for accommodation. Most organizations require 24-72 hours in advance, which should give you enough time to secure the needed accommodations.

Event Marketing Materials

When creating an accessible event, it is important to keep in mind the guidance for accessible communications given later in this document. You should also reflect accessibility and representation of the disability community in your event marketing materials. People with disabilities should be seen in any photos you publish as advertising for the event. They should likewise be represented in any photos of the event you may publish afterward. If possible, marketing, and public relations professionals should strive to include representation from a variety of disability communities, such as people with physical disabilities, people with intellectual disabilities, and others, as well as people of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. This communicates to people with disabilities that your event is welcoming and participation is encouraged.

Accessible Venues

Venue or Event Location

Venue selection is an important part of event accessibility. Even partially accessible venues can be improved with planning. If more than one venue is available, accessibility should be a primary consideration in making the final choice.

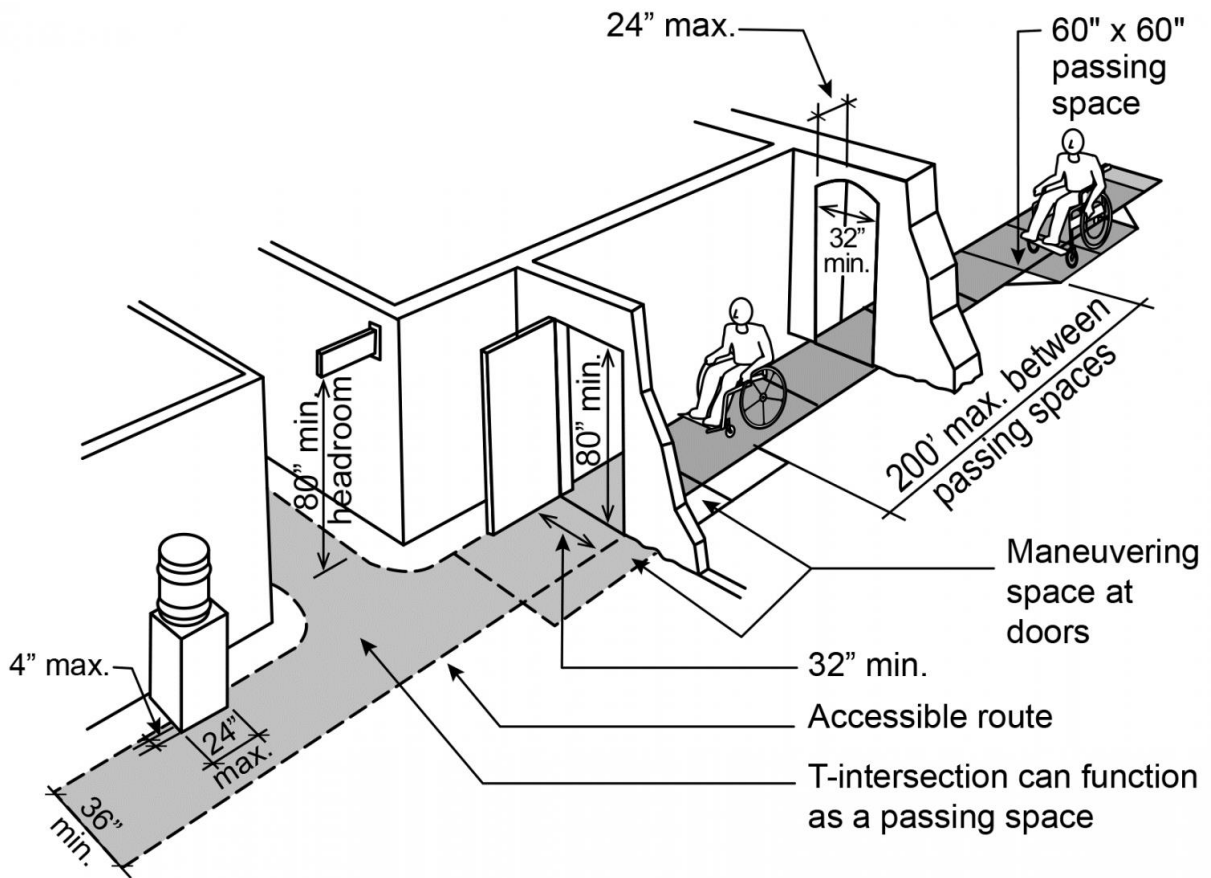
Seating

Reserved seating should be used to provide additional space for participants in wheelchairs or with service animals. Spaces for personal assistants and interpreters should be clearly marked.

Facilities and Architectural Barriers

According to the ADA, you must:

- provide a universally accessible path to event seating and common areas;
- ensure that pathways use accessible routes, curb ramps, and slip-resistant surfaces;
- make sure that entrances are zero level (flat) entry or have stable ramps that are 36" or wider;
- create spaces with a 60 inch turning-radius for wheelchair users to turn easily throughout the event area;
- remove any objects in the event space that would create a stumbling or tripping hazard, such as plants, cords, or chairs in the walking path;
- ensure that pathways are unobstructed
- indicate accessible entrances with signs;
- maintain level flooring that is easy to use with assistive technologies such as canes, walkers, or wheelchairs;
- make sure that all elevators meet ADA specifications (see resource list in appendix)
- use raised letters and Braille on signs so people with all visual disabilities can read them (See appendix for resources)



Basic Features of an Accessible Route

Image 1 Basic Features of an Accessible Route

Image Credit: Adata.org

Table 1

Feature	Dimension
Pathway	At least 36 inches wide
Clearance of an Object	Maximum of 4 inches deep and 24 inches wide
Headroom Clearance	At least 80 inches high
Clearance of a doorway	At least 80 inches high and 32 inches wide and 24 inches deep
Passing Spaces	Maximum of 200 feet
T intersection	Can also function as a passing space
Passing Space	60 inches by 60 inches

Title III of the ADA

ADA Title III regulations were put in place to make sure events are accessible and inclusive for people with disabilities. Public accommodations include privately owned, leased, or operated facilities. Title III of the ADA is regulated and enforced by the U.S. Department of Justice.

When planning your event, keep accessibility features in mind. Title III of the ADA requires organizations to consider the following when planning accessible community events.

- Places of public accommodation are prohibited from discriminating against individuals with disabilities.
- Public accommodations must remove barriers in existing buildings where it is easy to do so without much difficulty or expense.
- Businesses must make "reasonable modifications" or adjustments to their usual ways of doing things when serving people with disabilities.
- Businesses must take steps to provide alternative forms of communication for individuals who have disabilities.

According to Title III of the ADA, people with disabilities must be able to obtain or enjoy the same goods, activities, services, and benefits that are available to other members of the public.

At an event, participants with disabilities must be able to:

- Obtain information and directions in an accessible format prior to or during the event. Accessible formats may include pictures, visual schedules or other supports that may be requested as an accommodation.
- Arrive at the site in the same methods of transportation as other people.
- Find and use accessible parking.
- Navigate from accessible parking to event space entrances.
- Move around the site as needed.
- Attend performances, participate in activities, and enter exhibits.
- Select and purchase items at concessions.
- Use public restrooms, telephones, water fountains, shelters, first aid stations, and other common amenities.

Event Staff and Volunteers

When organizing your event, it is important to prepare your staff and volunteers with basic awareness and information about the ADA and any local laws that may impact attendees with disabilities. Make sure staff are aware that individuals with disabilities should be treated like any other attendee. People with disabilities may prefer to be involved in your event without assistance. If you see someone who appears to need assistance, you may ask if they would like help with the understanding they may say no.

Trauma-Informed Practices and Responses

Many people with psychiatric, developmental, and other disabilities may have difficulty with multi-sensory inputs, stimulation coming from more than one sense at the same time. For example, loud noises or the feeling of a crowd of people tightly packed together). Additionally, people with disabilities may have been traumatized by police or medical involvement. This could be triggered by the presence of ambulances, police cars and first responders. It is important to provide warnings and disclosures about loud noises such as music, chanting, air horns, images, and other triggers, whenever possible. You may want to create quiet spaces for sensory-sensitive individuals wishing to take a

break during the event.

Vendors

An important part of complying with Title III of the ADA includes providing equal access to vendors. All people with disabilities must have equal access to food, drink, merchandise, and other services offered at the event. Vendors must be in an accessible area. To increase accessibility, they should also provide:

- accessible information and services, as requested by the individual with a disability.
- a variety of food options to accommodate people with dietary needs and restrictions.
- a list of ingredients available in multiple formats (Braille, large print, electronic), in case event participants ask to check them.

Portable Restrooms

If you are adding additional outdoor restroom facilities, It is recommended that you provide one wheelchair accessible portable restroom for every ten regular portable restrooms required. These restrooms should be located in areas that are accessible, free of barriers, and marked with appropriate signage.

Stages and Performance Areas

If a stage is used at the event, the performance areas should be accessible as well. Ensure there is an accessible ramp so that participants who use wheelchairs or have other physical disabilities can use the stage.

Podium Accessibility

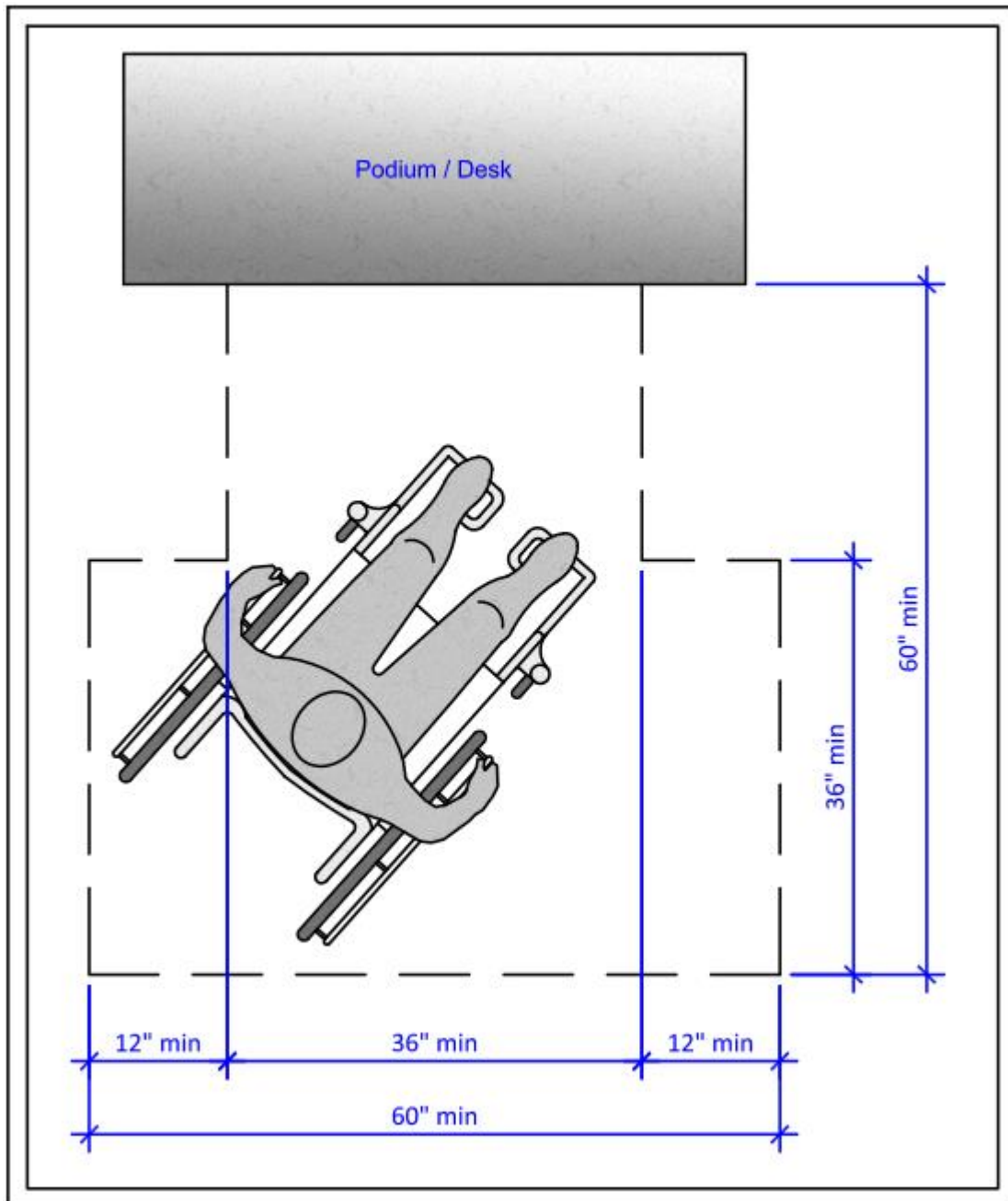


Table 2

Features	Dimensions
Access to controls, peripherals, and ports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 15 inches to 48 inches tall, with 24 inches to 40 inches preferred ● 20 inches to 25 inches to the center
Podium Approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 60 inches between podium and the wall
Forward Approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 30 inches long ● 36 inches from floor MAX
Knee Clearance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 30 inches wide ● Extending 17 inches under counter ● Height of 27 inches above the floor
Toe Clearance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 6 inches beyond knee clearance ● Height of 9 inches above floor
Collapsible table or shelf for non-wheelchair accessible podiums	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Between 28 inches and 34 inches from the floor with MAX of 36 inches. ● 36 inches wide for side approach ● 30 inches wide for front approach
Adjacent Walking Path	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 30 inches by 48 inches

Meals

Food and beverage service may present challenges for individuals with disabilities. Some may have swallowing difficulties, mobility and reach challenges, and food sensitivities.

Tips for Serving Meals at Your Events

- Avoid buffets for meals.
- Make notes about dietary restrictions and provide options.
- Do not serve food on risers.

- Don't stack cups too high.
- Keep all food and equipment close to the edge of the table and within reach.
- Ensure that there are pre-cut meals available (or available upon request).
- Ensure that there are bendable straws at all beverage and meal functions.
- Stick to scheduled mealtimes.

Parking

Designated accessible parking spaces should be provided for each event. These spaces should have an aisle for ease of loading and unloading people from their vehicles. An accessible loading zone must have a vertical clearance of at least 114 inches for personal vans with raised roofs, buses, and paratransit vehicles. If there is not sufficient vertical clearance for raised roof vans or buses to pull underneath, you may need to create temporary loading zones in other locations to accommodate these vehicles.

You should provide, at a minimum, the number of accessible parking spots required by law. The ADA requires one accessible spot for every 25 total spots provided.

Table 3

Total number of parking spaces provided	Minimum number of required accessible parking spaces
1-25	1
26-50	2
51-75	3
76-100	4
101-125	5
126-150	6
151-175	7

One of every six accessible spaces must be van accessible. These spaces provide sufficient room to deploy a lift and should be at least 132 inches wide.

Table 4

Number of spots	Number of van accessible spots
1-6	1
7-12	2
13-18	3
19-24	4
25-30	5
31-36	6
37-42	7

Temporary Accessible Parking Spaces

- When necessary, temporary accessible spaces can be created in permanent paved lots, dirt lots, or fields.
- Traffic cones and temporary signage can be used to indicate accessible parking spaces, or parking attendants can be employed to guide attendees to the proper parking area.

Existing Parking Lots

- Choose spaces that are level, close to an accessible entrance, and near existing curb cuts.
- Mark or block off an existing parking space with cones, barricades, or tape to create a new access aisle and use the accessibility symbol for designating spaces.
- If no existing curb ramps are available and the new parking spaces border the sidewalk, place a portable curb ramp in the temporary access aisle to reach the sidewalk.

Temporary Parking Lots

- When parking in grass fields or dirt lots, accessible spaces must be created and held in reserve for people with disabilities.
- Accessible parking spaces should be located where the surface is firm and stable.
- Dirt should be hard and compact and grassy areas cut to ground level.
- Loose sand, gravel, and overgrown grassy areas are not accessible.
- People using wheelchairs or other devices should not have to travel behind parked cars or cross traffic lanes. If this is unavoidable, the pedestrian route (especially where the route crosses traffic lanes), access aisles, and parking spaces should be clearly defined.
- Methods and materials to use include chalk or spray paint, ropes and stanchions, crowd control fences, and barricades at key points.

Public Transit

- For many people, public buses, subways, trams, and paratransit services are the most convenient means of transportation.
- If a public transit stop is not located on or near the event site, an accessible route with curb cuts and/or ramps should be created.
- In some cases, paratransit services may allow for door-to-door services.

Other Considerations

Specific strategies for rallies and marches at events

- Inform participants about scooter rental availability for marches. You will need to include this information and contact scooter rental companies in advance to confirm they have several types of scooters available. This is especially helpful for rallies and marches where walking or rolling a long distance will be required.
- Provide umbrellas or other shade for individuals with heat sensitivities. If you do not have that in your budget, encourage people to bring their own protection.
- Provide small dowels to tape to poster signs so they are easier to hold. You may also want to include duct tape so people can attach the signs to walking devices or wheelchairs.

- Provide ample seating for individuals who are unable to stand for long periods of time.
- Develop a fragrance-free policy for people with chemical sensitivities. This is especially important if your event is located inside.
- Provide guides for participants who are blind or have low vision and may need assistance to and from transportation drop-offs and as needed throughout the event.

Alternative Ideas to Involve People with Disabilities

If the event is planned as an in-person gathering or march, and you cannot ensure that the route or venue is accessible, consider offering alternative opportunities for involvement. These can include drive-by awareness events, virtual convening, or actions from home such as social media campaigns, email blasts, or contacting a representative, etc.

Communication

Effective communication is essential to any successful engagement event or campaign. Making communication accessible benefits everyone and creates a more inclusive event or campaign for all involved.

Plain Language

Plain language (also called plain writing or plain English) is communication your audience can understand the first time they read or hear it. - [plainlanguage.gov](https://www.plainlanguage.gov)

Using plain language is one of the most effective ways to increase understanding and decrease barriers to communication. Some basic strategies to creating plain language include the following:

- Clearly identify your audience.
- Use everyday language.
- Use personal pronouns like “you.”

- Use an active voice.
- Avoid slang.
- Write short and logical sentences.
- Leave out details that may distract your reader.
- Avoid undefined technical terms.
- Use headings, subheadings, margins, bullet points, and whitespace to organize the information.
- Make information easy to find.
- Use words with fewer syllables.
- Keep wording between third and fifth-grade level.

Person-First and Identity-First Language

Both person-first and identity-first language are used to refer to people with disabilities, or disabled people. People with disabilities often have very strong preferences for either identity-first or person-first language. Non-disabled people need to respect and affirm each person's choice of language they use about themselves. When interacting with a person with a disability who has not shared their preference with you, it is best to start using person-first language. If someone prefers identity-first, they will often share this preference with you. **Also, for event marketing materials and mass communications, person first language is preferred. See the [National Center on Disability Journalism style guide](#). Alternatively, see the Associated Press style book.**

Sound Amplification Use

Use of microphones is best practice at events. Individuals who use assistive hearing devices may not be able to hear or understand what you are saying without the microphone. Raising your voice or using a megaphone may not be clear or loud enough for listeners to hear. If you are asked a question by someone not using a microphone, be sure to repeat the question into the microphone.

Attendees with electrical sensitivities (EHS) may not be able to use or tolerate wireless microphones. You may need to repeat their questions into the microphone. Electromagnetic Hypersensitivity, or EHS, is characterized by a variety of non-specific symptoms, which individuals who are affected attribute to exposure to electromagnetic frequencies, EMF. The symptoms most commonly experienced include redness, tingling, and burning sensations as well as fatigue, tiredness, concentration difficulties,

dizziness, nausea, heart palpitation, and digestive disturbances.

If you have a question and answer session with an audience, pass the microphone around or have multiple microphones available.

Make sure to position the microphone at least one inch from your mouth.

“Refusing to use a microphone is like scheduling a meeting in a room accessible only by stairs. And then when your colleague in a wheelchair shows up and asks for a ramp so she can attend, you stand at the top of the steps and say, “No thanks, I’m good.” - The Chronicles of Higher Education

If other means of voice amplification are used, such as bull-horns or public address systems, it is important to ensure that words are articulated and that other sounds or feedback are limited so that communication is clear and understandable.

Communication Accommodations

Individuals with disabilities may have different needs depending on their type of disability. Below we highlight some of the most common requests for communication.

Assistive Listening Devices

Assistive listening devices pick up the audio feed directly from the source and the listener can adjust the volume. These devices should be available for attendees who need them. Signage throughout the event may be used to designate where these devices can be found.

American Sign Language

American Sign Language (ASL) is a visual language that uses nonverbal communication, including placement and movement of hands, facial expressions, and body motions to communicate. This language is used primarily by those who are Deaf or hard of hearing. Additionally, Individuals with other communication limitations may also use ASL to communicate. (See ASL resources in the appendix.)

Captioning

Captions provide a real-time, on-screen text version of everything that is spoken within a video, as well as any relevant sounds or inflections. Captioning ensures accuracy and completeness of information shared verbally. (See captioning resources in appendix.) While auto captioning may be available, it is not the most accurate way to capture the content being shared.

Relay Services

Telephone relay services are typically a text-based method by which people who are Deaf or hard of hearing communicate with those who are hearing. The most common relay service is 711. The person who is Deaf types out text with a keyboard, and a third-party operator reads the text for the hearing individual over the phone. See Appendix for more resources on 711.

Audio Description

Audio Description is a separate narrative audio track that describes all essential visual information that is necessary to understanding the story and purpose of a video. To simplify, audio description makes it so that if you were to remove the visual component of your video entirely, your story would still make sense solely as an auditory experience. (See example in appendix)

Braille

Braille has been around for over 200 years. It is a touch-based system for reading and writing and has given millions of people with visual disabilities access to education and writing. It has also allowed people who are blind to share the pleasure of reading with their sighted peers.

Transcripts

A transcript is a text version of a video. A transcript should capture all the spoken audio, on-screen text, and descriptions of key visual information that would not otherwise be accessible without seeing the video.

Web-Based Communication

Due to transportation, physical challenges, and architectural barriers, people with disabilities may not be able to participate in events and activities if they are only held in a physical space. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has shown us how much is possible in virtual space. When conducting virtual events with accessibility in mind, here are just a few things to consider for your web and social media content.

The ADA requires that people with disabilities are given equal access to alternative forms of communication, which is widely held to include web-based or digital communication. While it does not set forth a true legal standard for this requirement, section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act does require that all Federal agencies make their electronic and information technology accessible to people with disabilities. The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) are widely held as the accepted standard. For full compliance, it is recommended that organizations create content compliant with level AA of the WCAG version 2.0. The full text of these guidelines will be provided in the appendix. For the purposes of this section, however, we will address some of the most important aspects of the guidelines.

Registration Form

While not specific to the WCAG guidelines, as a reminder, event planning staff should add a section to digital registration forms asking about accessibility needs and requests.

Images

All images, whether they are photos, infographics, gifs, etc should also offer text-based descriptions. These descriptions make sure that people who are blind or have other visual disabilities and use screen reading software such as JAWS for Windows and Voiceover for Mac can understand the images in your content.

The most common way to do this is with alternative, or alt text. Alt text is a short, descriptive text coded into the images on your website or added to a photo on social media. A good example of alt text might look like this:



“The Able South Carolina logo. Black letters spell out ‘Able South Carolina’ with the words ‘independent living for all’ beneath it.”

When a longer, more detailed explanation is needed, it is better practice to use an image description rather than alt text. An image description often appears below the image or in the body of the associated copy. It allows for more detail and is readable by everyone, not just screen reader users. An example of an image description might look like this:



"A large and diverse group of people are shown gathered in front of the South Carolina Statehouse. On the building, a banner reads "Advocacy Day for Access and Independence: Unlocking barriers for South Carolinians with disabilities". People in wheelchairs and with service animals are shown, and black posters with positive and inclusive messages are shown around them."

Links

When adding links to your web or social media content, be sure to give them descriptive and meaningful link text. For example, it is not enough to have "click here" or "read more" link text. Instead, you should use text like "events calendar" or the full title of a news or blog item. Titles are necessary because screen reader users often navigate using the names of links. Multiple "click here" or "read more" links make it unclear to the user where the link will lead. This practice also benefits those without disabilities because with many spam links and cyber threats present today, they will also know exactly where they are going on the web.

Plain Language and Readability

When writing copy for your web or social media content, it is good practice to use plain language to ensure readability. Plain language means that the words and concepts discussed in your copy are simple, clear, and easily understood. Readability refers to the measurement of the reading level needed for someone to easily read and understand your document; this helps people with intellectual disabilities or learning differences to engage with your content. It also benefits those without disabilities, as they can easily scan through and absorb essential information. Ideally, your document should have between a third and fifth grade reading level. You can check readability within Microsoft Word or use the links provided in the appendix. If complex directions are used, it could also be useful to add visuals that explain these directions as a non-text alternative. More information about plain language can be found in the communication section of this document, and a plain language guide can be found in the appendix.

Colors and Fonts

Color contrast and font usage are necessary considerations for accessibility. Color contrast refers to the ability to easily differentiate the colors of text from the background colors of webpages or other digital content. Contrast is expressed as a ratio, and to maintain compliance with WCAG 2.0 or higher, contrast must have a ratio of 4.5 to 1 for typically sized text and 3 to 1 for larger text. An example of low contrast would be using a light blue font on a dark blue background. An example of higher contrast would be black text on a white background. Links to automated tools for evaluating color contrast can be found in the appendix.

Fonts should also be considered. Font size should be no smaller than eleven points, and fonts should be clear and easily read. Good examples of this are Calibri or Arial. Avoid fonts that are italicized or use serifs. While fonts and color contrast are important for accessibility, they are ultimately beneficial for everyone and make content easy to see, read, and understand.

Headings

Headings in web pages or documents serve to organize content. Like links, headings are similar to links. Headings are the primary way that screen readers navigate web pages and documents. When creating headings, it is not enough to make changes to font color, style, or size, they must be created using the styles pane in Microsoft Word or coded into a webpage. More detailed instructions for creating headings can be found in the appendix. The correct hierarchy must also be used when working with headings. The most used heading levels are 1 to 3. Each heading level serves a different purpose. For example, a level one heading is typically used for the main title of a document. Headings at level two are used for section titles within the document, and headings at level three are used for subsection titles within each document section.

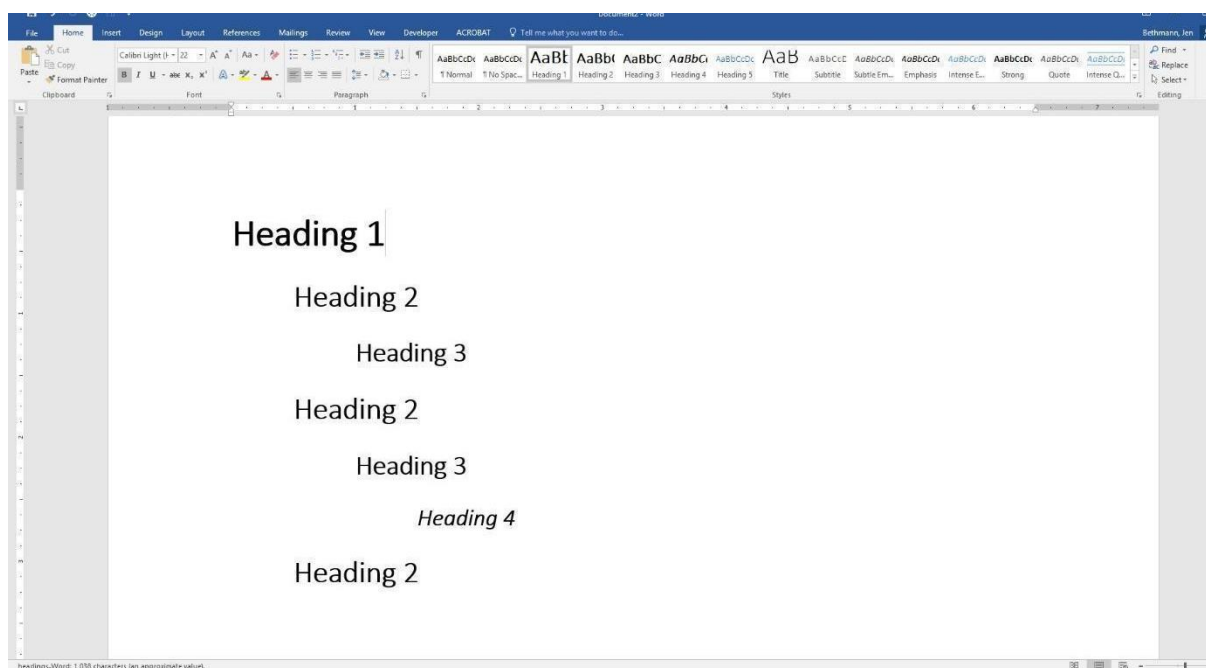


Image 2: Example of heading levels

Testing for Accessibility

The most important part of creating accessible digital content is testing it for accessibility. Several automated testing tools exist and are an acceptable place to start the testing process. Links to some of these tools can be found in the appendix. However, these automated tools are not a catch-all for accessibility testing and do not find all issues. It is best practice to have someone who is familiar with both your content and accessibility principles perform manual tests. It is also strongly encouraged that organizations employ people with disabilities who use a variety of assistive technologies such as screen readers or Braille displays, etc., to test the content. Able Access, a program of Able South Carolina, is available to perform accessibility testing for your digital content. We employ web developers or designers and assistive technology users with disabilities who work together to produce a detailed report for your website or social media. This report includes recommendations on improving content accessibility. To learn more, contact us at advocacy@able-sc.org.

After the Event

In many ways, the things you do after the event can be just as important as those done during the planning process. Feedback should be collected after the event to make your next event even better. It is always a great idea to include people with disabilities when asking for feedback. They can inform you about improvements that can be made to accommodations and accessibility. This section will cover a few simple ways to ask for feedback.

Surveys

An event survey is a great way to learn participants' thoughts. It is important to craft a survey that is accessible and inclusive and that allows for open and honest feedback. The survey should also be anonymous and available online via an accessible survey site or Google form. The survey should also be available in print, large print, or Braille, upon request. If you obtained email addresses from event participants during the registration process, send emails asking if they will take your survey. Often, it is good practice to offer a small incentive to encourage participation. You can also share surveys on all social media channels and have hard copies available at your office location. Depending on your target audience, it may also be useful to mail out surveys. However, mailing surveys can be an extremely costly and time intensive process.

Focus Groups

Focus groups are a useful way of obtaining feedback if you wish to interact with your event participants. A focus group will give you the opportunity to ask more targeted questions and adjust questions depending on the answers. Focus groups can be conducted by phone, in person, or using video conference platforms such as Zoom. No matter how you choose to conduct your focus group, make sure your method is accessible. Like surveys, it is important to offer an incentive for focus group participation.

Appendix

Civic Engagement Resources

[What is Civic Engagement](#) This link offers a detailed definition and explanation of civic engagement.

[Disability Impacts All of Us Infographic](#) is a detailed infographic from the CDC explaining the percentage of people who have disabilities in the United States.

Web link: <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/infographic-disability-impacts-all.html>

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

ADA Best Practices Resources

[A Planning Guide for Making Temporary Events Accessible to People with Disabilities](#) is a detailed guide from the ADA National Network with requirements and suggestions for making events accessible.

Web link: adata.org/guide/planning-guide-making-temporary-events-accessible-people-disabilities

Source: ADA National Network

[Making Temporary Events Accessible](#) is this checklist gives guidance for accessible events and event planning.

Web link: <https://www.adachecklist.org/doc/fullchecklist/ada-checklist.pdf>

Source: ADA National Network

[Accessible Technology: Learning Spaces Accessibility Guidelines](#): This link gives the information on accessible podiums listed in this guide.

[ADA Toolkit for Title II and III](#) This link offers a tool kit to assist state and local governments in complying with titles II and III of the ADA.

Web Link: <https://www.ada.gov/pcatoolkit/toolkitmain.htm>

Source: United States Department of Justice Civil Rights Division

Parking Checklist

- Accessible parking spaces need to be at least 8 feet wide.
- Access aisle-5 feet overall
- Accessible parking should be clearly marked with clear signage 5 feet above the parking space. One sign per space.
- Parking space/aisle should be drawn with paint that contrasts pavement and is easy to see.
- 98 inches of vehicle clearing in covered parking spaces
- The space should be flat and slip resistant.
- Standard curb ramp attached to the access aisle
- Access aisle extends the whole length of space
- Close to shortest path into the building

Communications Resources

Communication Best Practice Checklist

This checklist was developed with input from a cross-disability committee of professionals and consumers and gives guidance on multiple things to consider when communicating across disabilities:

- Check to see if there are assistive listening systems or devices available at the event facility
- Check to see how the meeting room is wired and equipped for sound amplification
- Use Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) services if available
- Have accommodations such as tactile sign language interpreters, braille materials, and tactile signage available
- Using registration information, send preferred alternative format materials to your participants prior to the event
- For streamed videos, and live-streamed events, be sure to provide live captioning and/or American Sign Language interpretation.
- For performances, provide audio descriptions of visuals
- Use text that is high contrast in a large, legible font such as Arial or Calibri
- Avoid the use of italics and decorative fonts
- Ensure that visual materials are also available in Braille and/or large print
- Describe all images used in presentations and be sure to read the relevant text from the screen
- Avoid adding too much text and unnecessary images
- Offer different ways to access video conferences by phone line or transcript provided after the event

Braille

For Braille, an easy and helpful tool is to purchase a Braille Labeler. This can be used to print and apply a Braille label to a sign or other materials. These can be purchased through disability aid websites. Additionally, this tool can be used to apply Braille to more permanent signs within your building or for items that are reused at multiple events.

For accuracy, you should have a person who reads Braille to check your message to ensure that it is correct before posting.

[American Sign Language Resources from the National Association of the Deaf](#) is a source of information on ASL and how to find resources.

Source: National Association of the Deaf

Web link: nad.org/resources/american-sign-language/

[South Carolina Interpreting Services for the Deaf \(SCISD\)](#) is a South Carolina resource for locating and contracting with ASL interpreters.

Source: South Carolina Interpreting Services for the Deaf

Web link: scinterpretingsvs.wixsite.com/scisd

Email: scinterpretingservices@gmail.com

Phone: 803-223-4916

Captioning

[Captions Unlimited](#) is a captioning service for live or recorded videos.

Email: scheduling@captionsunlimited.com

Phone: 775-746-3534 | 775-544-2535

Translation Resources

[Language Line Solutions:](#) is a company that offers live translations for a variety of languages.

Web link: languageline.com/interpreting

Source: Language Line Solutions

Assistive Listening

[SC Assistive Technology Program](#) is a South Carolina service that provides Assistive Technology training and devices to the community.

Web Link:

https://sc.edu/study/colleges_schools/medicine/centers_and_institutes_new/center_for_disability_resources/assistive_technology/index.php

Source: SC Assistive Technology Program

Plain Language and Readable Resources

Below are several resources that give guidance on plain language, readability and easy read documents:

Plain Language and Easy Read

- [Autistic Self Advocacy Network](#) – plain language and easy to read documents
- [Public Health Communications \(PDF\)](#) – plain language using words about health

- [Getting Your Message Across](#) – A PDF guide written by Green Mountain
- [Self Advocacy | Intellectual Disability and Health](#)
- [Mencap's guidelines for accessible writing](#) – A PDF guide to making easy read information
- [A guide to making Easy Read information](#) This is People First's guide to making information available in Easy Read format.
- [Plain Writing Act of 2010](#) is a resource for plain language guidance, examples, laws and training
Web Link: plainlanguage.gov
Source: PlainLanguage.gov

Readability

- <https://readabilityformulas.com> offers a wide variety of resources on readability, including readability formulas, guidance on writing, and automated testing tools.
- <https://datayze.com/readability-analyzer.php> is an automated testing tool for checking document readability.
- <https://hemingwayapp.com> highlights lengthy, complex sentences and common writing errors so that writers can make content more readable

Person-First and Identity-First Language Resources

Below are several resources that share examples and experiences on using person first and identity first language

- [ASAN Identity-First Language](#)
- [I am Disabled: On Identity-First Versus People-First Language](#)
- [Identity-first vs. person-first language is an important distinction](#)
- [Person-first and Identity-first Language Choices | NADTC](#)
- [Identity-first vs person-first language – People with Disability Australia](#)

Audio Description Resources

Below are two examples of Audio Descriptions in videos

- [Clip of Frozen with audio description](#)
- [Why digital accessibility matters, audio described](#)

Digital Accessibility Resources

Online Resources

WCAG resources

- [Full text of WCAG 2.0](#)
- [WCAG 2.0 checklist for html documents](#)

Contrast Checkers

- [Color contrast analyzer](#)
- [Headings in Word](#)

Social Media Resources

- [Facebook instructions for adding alternative text](#)
- [Twitter instructions for adding alternative text](#)
 - Note: this help article uses the term “image description” incorrectly. These instructions are for adding alternative text. Remember that image descriptions are longer and should be added into body copy
- [Instagram instructions for adding alternative text](#)
- [Wave Accessibility Evaluation](#)
 - Note: This tool is primarily meant for the automated testing of websites but is not meant to be a substitute for manual testing
- [Overview of Able Access services](#)

Additional Disability and Civic Engagement Resources

- [Civic Engagement and Disability Report - Brandeis \(PDF\)](#)

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