Creating an ADA Accessible Event

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# Introduction

This guide was developed by the Office of Equity and Human Rights (Office of Equity). The guide’s purpose is to assist in the training/event planning process. The bulk of the guide reflects a high degree of accessibility in accordance with Title II of The Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA). Some facilities may not meet all the criteria outlined in this guide. This guide is intended to help you identify accessibility features, as well as guide you in programmatic work arounds that will help you achieve a welcoming environment for people of all ages and abilities. If a bureau has questions about the accessibility of a City facility, it should contact Facilities. If a bureau has questions about the content of this guide that does not relate to the physical access to a facility, it should contact Jonathan Simeone at [Jonathan.Simeone@PortlandOregon.gov](mailto:Jonathan.Simeone@PortlandOregon.gov).

This guide has been designed to give you the information you need to understand how to plan accessible trainings and events. If you are new to planning accessible events, reading the entire guide is suggested. The table of contents has been provided so you can easily refer to specific sections of the document as needed. The section defining some important terms has been added to help make the concepts discussed here easier to understand.

The section on minimum expectations is offered to assist you in getting started in planning more accessible events and trainings. The minimum expectations seek to help us transition away from requiring people with disabilities to request almost every accommodation days ahead of time to an expectation that certain accommodations will be standard in events offered by the City of Portland.

# Important Terms

Throughout this document, you may encounter terms that are new to you. This section hopes to define important terms that can’t easily be defined as a part of the rest of the document without losing the document’s flow.

* A screen reader’s most basic function is to read the contents of the computer screen through synthesized speech. Screen readers read both the text that is displayed and that which is typed.
* A text telephone (TTY) allows people who are hard of hearing, Deaf, or have difficulty speaking to communicate by typing messages back and forth over a telephone line.
* A wheelchair lift, also known as a platform lift, is designed to raise a wheelchair and its occupant over a step or other vertical barrier.
* CART stands for communication access real-time translation. CART is the system behind closed captioning. A person types the words being spoken and they appear on the screen.
* Audio Description is when visual aspects of television, movies, and theater are described. Typically, a person who is blind or low vision will use a headset to listen to the narrations. The narrations are added in spots where there is an absence of dialogue and/or important sounds.
* Braille is not a language; rather, braille is a system of dots that is used to reproduce written languages.
* Large print is a concept that is easy to understand but harder to define. Generally, a font size of at least 18 points should be used. A sans serif bolded font is also a good idea. Good fonts to use include: Verdana; Helvetica, Tahoma; and Arial. If you are regularly working with someone who uses large print, ask them how you can best format documents for them.
* American Sign Language (ASL) is the primary sign language used in the United States. But it is not the only sign language. Different countries have different sign languages and no sign language is a word-for-word interpretation of a country’s spoken language. Sign languages are their own language.

# Legal Requirements

Title II of the Americans With Disabilities Act requires that all programs, services, and activities of the City of Portland be accessible to people with disabilities. General requirements include:

* People with disabilities must not be denied access to programs, services, or activities because of inaccessible facilities.
* Bureaus must ensure communication with people with disabilities is as effective as is communication with people without disabilities.
* Bureaus must be prepared to modify policies, practices, and procedures to accommodate people with disabilities.

# Accessible Event Notices

Event notices should include:

* The [City’s meaningful access statement](https://www.portlandoregon.gov/oehr/71544)
* Accessibility features of the meeting location including the availability of any auxiliary aids and services that will be provided without request (such as ASL interpretation or captioning)
* Information about access barriers at the meeting site (such as a lack of accessible restrooms)
* The email address and phone number for someone assigned to answer requests for accommodations not automatically provided
* A timeframe for requesting accommodations (at least three days prior to the event)
* A reminder that all events put on by the City of Portland are [scent free](https://www.portlandoregon.gov/citycode/article/12199)
* A reminder of which events will offer good physical access as defined in the minimum expectations section of this document
* Public transportation to the site (optional)

## Posting Notices Online

Any event notice posted on the Internet or distributed via email should be accessible to people using screen readers:

* Images should be described.
* PDFs should be tagged for accessibility.
* Row and column headings in tables should be defined for screen readers.
* Forms should be accessible.
* Text should never be provided only in images.
* Notices posted to social media should have their images described and all text contained in images should be typed into the body of your post.
* Information should never be communicated only through the use of color.
* The text of links should clearly describe where clicking on the link will take someone.

## An Example of an Accessible Event Notice

City Hall can be accessed via the MAX Green Line and is accessible to people using wheelchairs or other assistive mobility devices. Real-time captioning of the event will be provided. Large print programs will be available. Other materials are available in alternative formats upon request. Please make your request for alternative formats and/or other accommodations to John Doe at least three business days prior to the event. Call John at 503-823-5555. Or email [John.Doe@PortlandOregon.gov](mailto:John.Doe@PortlandOregon.gov).

It is the policy of the City of Portland that no person shall be excluded from participation in, denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination any City program, service, or activity on the grounds of race, color, national origin, disability, or other protected class status. Adhering to Civil Rights Title VI and ADA Title II civil rights laws, the City of Portland ensures meaningful access to City programs, services, and activities by reasonably providing: translation and interpretation, modifications, accommodations, alternative formats, and auxiliary aids and services. To request these services, contact (503-823-5555, City TTY 503-823-6868, Relay Service: 711.

# Choosing an Accessible Location

During initial event planning, the [ADA Checklist for Existing Facilities](https://adachecklist.org/) should be used to determine site accessibility. The ADA Checklist for Existing Facilities is based on the 2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design (2010 Standards). Full compliance with the 2010 Standards is required only for new construction and alterations. Facilities built or altered prior to March 15, 2012 must only comply with the 1991 ADA Standards for Accessible Design (1991 Standards). This guide is not intended to tell you exactly what must be done to comply with either the 2010 or 1991 Standards; rather, this guide will help you learn what to consider when you are planning an event. If you are concerned that something at a facility may not be accessible, use the ADA Checklist as a guide. A site assessment should include the event space and the facility in general.

## Site Accessibility Considerations for People who are Blind or Low Vision

The following accommodations will help people who are blind or low vision access an event/training:

* Area’s should be well-lit and contain adjustable lighting.
* Paths of travel should be free of obstacles that cannot be detected by the sweeping of a white cane. Generally, obstacles in paths of travel should not be between 27 and 80 inches high; additionally, obstacles should not stick out more than four inches from walls unless they are low enough to be detected by someone using a cane.
* Print signs marking locations for people with low vision should contrast with their background (either light characters on a dark background or dark characters on a light background). Minimum character height depends on the expected viewing distance. If you think there may be an issue, refer to the section on [minimum character height](https://www.ada.gov/regs2010/2010ADAStandards/2010ADAstandards.htm#titleII). It is a chart found at the above link in section 703.5.5.
* Tactile signs (raised letters and/or braille) should at least mark meeting rooms and restrooms. Tactile signage should be between 48 and 60 inches from the ground. Signage for single doors should be on the latched side. For double doors with one active leaf, the sign should be near the inactive leaf. For two active double doors, the sign should be to the right of the right door. Eighteen inches of clearance should exist between the ark of the swinging door and the tactile sign.
* Elevators should have an auditory signal to notify people of the different floors.
* For the benefit of service animals, the facility should offer a relief area. This could be as simple as a tree with dirt around it.

## Site Accessibility Considerations for People who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

The following accommodations will help people who are Deaf or hard of hearing access an event/training:

* Rooms should be equipped with alternative emergency alert systems such as visual alarms and indicators.
* At least one TTY communication device should be available to assist people who may need to call outside of the event.
* Each elevator should have a visual cue system to notify someone who is Deaf or hard of hearing of elevator controls and an emergency communication system that does not require speaking.
* You should check for noise levels coming from ventilation systems or other rooms. Obviously, there may not be much you can do about noise coming from other rooms, but awareness of the problem may help influence your choice of sound system.

## Site Accessibility Considerations for People Using a Wheelchair or Other Assistive Mobility Device

### Exterior Access

The following exterior accommodations will help provide training/event access for people using a wheelchair or another assistive mobility device:

* If the accessible entrance is not the entrance nondisabled participants are using, have signage directing people to the accessible entrance.
* If you know you have several participants using chairs and limited disabled parking spaces, consider designating multiple spaces as disabled or create a drop off area. Ideally, one of every 25 parking spaces would be disabled parking spaces and one of six disabled parking spaces would be wide enough (132 inches) to accommodate a van.
* The accessible parking spaces should be located near the accessible entrance.
* You should check whether there is a curb cut or level access from the accessible parking area to the entrance.
* There should be a barrier-free path of travel from the parking lot, drop off area, and public transit to the event entrance, avoiding stairs, sudden changes in level, slippery or unstable ground, or objects obstructing the path of travel.
* Ramps should be gradual in slope (one inch of rise for 12 inches of run) and have handrails on both sides.
* The site should be accessible by public transit. Notify participants of the number of blocks between public transit and the meeting space. A distance of more than three blocks could be difficult for some participants.

### Interior Access

* An accessible entrance (preferably the main entrance) should be wide enough for a person using a wheelchair or scooter. This means the doorway should be at least 32 inches wide with the door open 90 degrees.
* Accessible entrances should be well-lit and not isolated.
* Clearly notify participants if the accessible entrance is locked or requires someone to ring a bell to enter.
* Check the weight of the door. The ADA specifies the weight of resistance that doors can have. For exterior doors, the specification is eight pounds. For interior doors, it is five pounds. If you cannot open the door with the pinky on your weaker hand, it will likely be a challenge for someone with a mobility limitation.
* Door handles must be easy to open with a closed fist and must not have knobs.
* Provide signage that demonstrates an accessible route from the accessible entrance to the event location.
* Elevators should be near the location of the event and must be large enough to accommodate a power wheelchair or scooter (at least 36 inches wide and 54 inches deep). At those dimensions, a person using a wheelchair cannot turn around. So, larger cabs are preferred.
* Elevator controls should be at a comfortable height for a person using a wheelchair or scooter. If you are seated and the controls are higher than your head, the controls are too high.
* Contact any participants you know are attending and ask them how you can accommodate them. Or stage a volunteer to operate the elevator.
* Where lifts are used instead of elevators, make sure you know how to operate them and that you have a key. When possible, the key should be left by the lift for independent access.
* Each restroom should have one accessible stall.
* There should be at least one accessible restroom on the same floor as the event.
* Major hallways throughout the facility should be wide enough (at least 60 inches) to allow for people using wheelchairs and scooters to pass in both directions.
* Pay attention to floor surface. Some people may have challenges on thick pile carpets.
* All participants should be able to sit in the same area. People using wheelchairs, scooters, those with service animals, or others with mobility aids should not be seated in a segregated area.
* People should not be seated with their backs to one another.
* The reception and/or refreshment areas should be large enough for people using a wheelchair or scooter to circulate. Ideally, an aisle width of 72 inches would be offered. A minimum aisle width of 36 inches is acceptable.
* Stages and speaking areas, including lectern or podium, should be accessible to people using a wheelchair or scooter.
* Cables and wires should be secured and out of the paths of travel.
* Registration and customer service desks should be low enough (no more than 36 inches high) for people using a wheelchair or scooter to see over them.

# Effective Communication During the Event

* Provide anyone who requests it a copy of the agenda in an alternative format (braille, large print, or email) prior to the event.
* Give a copy of the agenda to all service providers (sign language interpreters or CART operators) at least a day before the event begins.
* Request materials from presenters with enough time to make sure they are accessible so they can be forwarded to participants who request them and service providers (like interpreters or CART operators).
* Make sure presenter’s materials are accessible. If materials cannot be made accessible, do not provide the inaccessible materials to anyone (whether they need an accessible version or not).
* Provide by request assistive listening systems for people who are hard of hearing. Assistive listening systems amplify the sound via a transmitter used by the speaker and a receiver used by the participant.
* If available, provide signage offering assistive listening systems. Some rooms, like Council Chambers, have a hearing loop. A hearing loop is used by people waring hearing aids. The hearing loop provides a magnetic, wireless signal that can be picked up by hearing aids.
* Be prepared to offer sign language interpreting and/or CART services upon request. For meetings lasting longer than an hour, two interpreters will be needed. Usually, interpreting services must be requested a few days before the event.
* At the beginning of the meeting, tell participants the location of the restrooms. Make sure to let participants know which restrooms, if the answer is not all of them, have an accessible stall.
* If the gathering is not too large, go through introductions. This will enable people who are blind or low vision to begin to learn the voices of those in attendance.
* If audience participation is possible, introduce yourself to people who are blind or low vision and take down names. When a person who is blind or low vision raises their hand or in some way indicates a desire to participate, call on them by name.
* Remind people to say their name prior to speaking.
* Require speakers to use the microphone.
* Advise participants to minimize interruptions. When more than one person is talking, it is hard for interpreters and captionists to interpret or type everything being said.
* Videos [must be captioned](https://www.portlandoregon.gov/citycode/article/462666) for people who are Deaf or hard of hearing.
* Videos should also be audio described so that people who are blind or low vision can follow the action.
* In written materials and while orally presenting, use plain language. Leaving out jargon will make your presentations more accessible to many. Community and Civic Life has produced an [access tip on using plain language.](https://www.portlandoregon.gov/civic/article/674046)
* Do not use terms like “crazy” and “psycho.”
* When discussing potentially difficult subjects, provide trigger warnings.
* For events running longer than 90 minutes, build in a couple of short breaks.
* At the beginning of the event, let people know they are free to stand up and move around in the back of the room.
* Do not require people to read a document during the meeting to participate. This could be difficult for someone with a disability that makes reading print difficult, or someone with a learning disability.
* Do not make offensive jokes like: “bipolar weather” and “OCD neatness.”
* For events longer than 90 minutes, offer a “quiet room” where participants can go to take a break from the meeting.

# Personal Care Attendants

Personal care attendants (PCAs) typically assist people with disabilities with personal issues and getting to and from events. If someone needs a PCA, they must bring one with them. We do not provide personal services. Registration forms should ask about PCAs. PCAs should be able to attend events free of any registration fees.

# Dietary Considerations

When planning events where meals and/or refreshments will be served, you should:

* Include PCAs and interpreters in the estimated number of participants.
* If beverages are being served, provide bendable straws and lightweight cups.
* Offer sugar-free beverages for people with dietary concerns.
* Buffets may present challenges for people who are blind or low vision and people with mobility disabilities. If catering staff is not provided, make sure staff is available to assist those who may need help navigating the buffet.
* Allow participants to indicate their dietary needs on any registration form. Or let them know how to share their dietary needs in any invitations.

# Emergency Procedures

* Discuss evacuation plans and procedures with the facility’s manager in the early stages of event planning.
* Invite event participants to identify their evacuation needs during the registration and/or invitation process.
* Provide the facility’s manager with a list of those wanting assistance in the case of an evacuation.
* At the beginning of the event, advise participants of the emergency exits near the meeting room and the restrooms.

# Minimum Expectations

As explained in the introduction, this document suggests a high degree of accessibility. This section will help you learn what should be your starting point for planning more accessible events and trainings.

## Physical Access

For our purposes, good physical access is defined as the following:

* There should be several accessible parking spaces located near an accessible entrance.
* The event should be held in a room that can be accessed by someone using a wheelchair or other assistive mobility device. In other words, the meeting room can’t be upstairs unless there is an elevator or lift.
* There should be at least one accessible restroom on the same floor as the event or that can be accessed via elevator or lift.
* Unless you are providing an accessible shuttle, the event should not be more than three blocks from public transportation.
* If you are having at least five events that are similar in nature (budget meetings, opportunities to provide project-specific testimony), at least 60 percent of the similar events should provide good physical access for people who use wheelchairs or other assistive mobility devices.
* When you have between two and five similar events, at least one should offer good physical access.
* For unique events, every effort must be made to achieve good physical access.

## Access for People who are Blind or Low Vision

* Every event that offers print materials to those in attendance should make 10 percent of the available copies large print. This should happen whether anyone requests large print or not.
* Any electronic information about the event (especially registration and promotional materials) should be accessible to people who use screen readers.
* Any online registration forms should be accessible to people who use screen readers.

## Access for people who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

* Visual alarms and alert indicators should be present.
* Elevators should have visual indicators.
* For meetings of at least 75, real-time captioning is recommended.
* For meetings of at least 150, ASL interpreters are recommended.
* For any disability-specific event (focus groups Council ordinance, cultural day), provide either ASL or CART. ASL is preferred.

## Access for People who Have Mental Health Disabilities

* Use plain language in your presentations and materials.
* Do not use terms like “crazy” and “psycho.”
* When potentially difficult subjects will be discussed, provide content warnings.
* Do not require people to read a document during the meeting.
* Do not make offensive jokes like “bipolar weather and “OCD neatness.”

# Acknowledgements

The ADA National Network has an excellent, detailed guide on [planning accessible temporary events](https://adata.org/publication/temporary-events-guide). If you would like to learn more, you should start there.

The [Washington, DC Office of Disability Rights](https://odr.dc.gov/) and [San Francisco’s Mayor’s Office on Disability](https://sfgov.org/mod/) were extremely helpful in the creation of this document. The willingness of both offices to share their resources with OEHR is much appreciated.