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Accessible Event Planning Checklist

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They say that 15% of Canadians suffer with a disability of some kind. Now take into account that many do not declare themselves as disabled and the aging population and we can see that 15% is low and that the number is growing as baby boomers are aging.

When planning an event you want to ensure you have the greatest possible turnout. If you're not considering accessibility in your event plan are you automatically losing 15-25% of the population if you factor in their family members and friends

So let's take a look at some simple things you can do to make your event more accessible. By planning ahead, you can build accessibility into every aspect of the meeting.

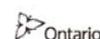
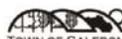
The six main areas we will discuss when planning an accessible meeting or event are:

1. **Pre-Event Notification** and offer to accommodate
2. **Physical Access** - finding the event, and access itself to the building and room
3. **Accessibility Considerations** to the event's contents and proceedings
4. **Accessibility for Product/Service Providers** (exhibitors) and Presenters
5. **Offsite Ability to Join** in a meeting
6. **After Event**

Having a staff member responsible for making the event accessible or using an event planner specializing in accessibility will make things run smoother.

Accessibility needs vary depending on the type of meeting or event, number of attendees, inside or outside, and the length of the event. We'll be discussing the basic accessibility requirements for a one day informational event with speakers on stage and a networking component. To provide full details and to cover various types of events would require a lot more detail or even a workshop of considerable hours.

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1. Pre-Event Notification

Make sure that the invite/flyer is available in accessible formats and the invitation or notice of the event includes information about the accessibility considerations.

The first thing to consider is ensuring that you are providing ample notice on the upcoming event. This will allow people to make arrangements for such things as transportation or attendants which may need to be book well in advance.

We all want our flyers and invites to be, well, inviting. If we are putting flyers up in public places we want to use vivid colours to draw attention to our notice. Ensure that the flyers are legible thus using as large a font as possible in the space you have available and use a font that is easy to read, enough colour contrast to make sure those with low vision can read and provide contact details on your flyer.

The third consideration about your flyer/invite is providing it in accessible formats. This could be as easy as a simple word document using a font size of at least 16 and an easy read font style such as Arial or Calibri. Audio recording, braille, cd disc are also great alternative formats. Whether you can provide any or all of the alternative formats and if can be sent by email is good business practice thus provide the contact information by way of phone and email so the request can be made. Using international accessibility symbols will help convey the basic understanding of services being provided.

Information that should be included is there a cost and if attendants are free, if serving food allow for people to advise you of any dietary needs or restrictions, and if any special accommodations are required. Whether on your invite or registration form provide a contact name, phone number and email for people to connect with concerning any of these issues.

What details would people require and possibly contact you for? Below are some of the more common requests:

- Map (if possible provide driving and transit details and show where accessible parking or accessible drop off points are on the map)
- Website address and telephone number of the event venue
- Accessible washrooms and if they include adult change tables
- Provisions of assistive devices such as hearing/voice amplifiers, hearing loop, sign language interpreters, close, captioning.
- Agenda including when breaks will be provided (for some people breaks are a high consideration)
- Provisions for service animals (water bowls and a place for them to relieve themselves)

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If you are promoting your event via a website, ensure that your website is accessible (accessible websites is a big issue on the rise and most are required, now or relatively soon, to be compliant with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines aka WCAG).

2. Physical Access

The best approach to take determining Physical Access is to take a personal visit at the venue and pay attention to details such as those discussed below.

To begin with if people have trouble finding the venue then this may cause low attendance. So, are the address and the building itself easily identifiable? Is there the availability to put signs out near the street to indicate the event and where to enter? This is very important if the event is being held at a venue with various buildings on the lot or various driveways into the site (there could be a driveway to the main entrance, a separate one for deliverables, another for exhibitors to use special doors to enter, separate driveway for underground parking or a myriad of other reasons). Not only does this help in terms of accessibility but for any exhibitor or attendee not familiar with the area.

There are exterior considerations to be considered before even entering the building:

- If the event will take place, or end, in the evening is there ample lighting to and from the building, in the parking lot and at the entranceway?
- How many accessible parking spots are there and where are they located?
- Is there a barrier free path to the entrance from: transit drop off location, parking lot and drop off spot?
- Is there an accessible ramp or is the entrance door at grade?
- If there is construction going on find out what will the conditions be at the time of your event and discuss any hindrances this may cause. By doing this you may be able to ensure that even if there will be construction happening that you can make alternative accessible plans in advance avoiding issues the day of.
- Is the main entrance door accessible and identifiable as the correct entrance door for your event?
- Is there weather protected waiting area for those who need to be picked up by someone else or an accessible transit service?
- Once inside there are a few questions to ask yourself to determine accessibility: is there accessible signage in large print at acceptable height, giving clear way finding to: the event room(s), washrooms, telephones, elevators and coat check (if provided)? Will there be an attendant/assistant at the door and if so will they be easily identifiable? Will there be an accessible service counter or information table?

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3. Accessible Considerations

- Are there accessible washrooms and within a reasonable distance of the event room (are there separate men, woman and unisex accessible washrooms)?
- Are the washrooms easily identifiable (some places use script writing or very small signs or icons not recognized by all as male/female)
- Is the fire evacuation route accessible and sufficiently marked?
- In the event room there are many issues that should be considered: turning radius in clutter free aisles, no protruding banners, wires that must run on the floor should be taped down and very visible, are there tables that wheelchair/scooters can use, if there is a stage is it raised so visible to all. These are the major issues that can be rectified easily. There are many other issues that could be addressed in greater detail that an accessibility specialists or an event planner experienced in accessibility would deal with.
- Find out if TTY is available and make sure your staff knows how to use it. (A TTY is a device that is used by persons who are Deaf or hard of hearing to communicate by telephone.)
- Make sure there is at least one telephone that can be used by a person who is seated (for example, someone who uses a wheelchair).
- Are staff at the facility and your volunteers trained in providing accessible customer service?
- If food is being provided at a buffet table ensure there is ample space for wheelchairs and scooters, tables are at an accessible height, provide a variety of foods such as sugar-free or soft foods, light weight dishes, bendable straws for drinks and servers available to help people if needed to pick up or bring food to their table. All servers should be trained for serving people with disabilities, even wait staff who should be cognizant of people with little or no vision
- Provide assistive services and technologies such as portable FM Listening devices or Audio Loop, real time captioners, sign language interpreters just to mention a few. Where possible allow for seat reservations for people who are deaf, deafened or hard of hearing.

4. Accessibility for Product/Service Providers and Presenters

- In advance of your event ensure that everyone attending is aware of accessibility concerns
- One major thing they can do is to come prepared with printed handouts and possible alternative formats that could be requested
- If they have booths or tables remind them of the issue of cords, protruding banners, table cloths draping to the floor etc. as any of these could cause safety issues for people with mobility or vision issues

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- The stage should be accessible and well lit, along with access to the stage should have ample lighting.
- The podium and microphone should be adjustable
- If there will be screen presentations, real-time captioning or sign language interpreters then attention to lighting and proper placement to allow for all attendees to see clearly and uninterrupted
- Advise presenters when speaking to speak clear, loud and take pauses. If they are providing a presentation suggest they have video captioning otherwise during the presentation they should describe what is being shown on screen.
- Presenters as well as the event organizer should ensure to stay on a time schedule as attendees could be on a time schedule for many reasons, one of which could be arranged accessible transit pickup.

5. Off-site Availability

Depending on the type of event you are having, if possible, allow that people who cannot attend physically to attend via an internet service.

6. After Event

- At the end of the event provide feedback forms. This is good for the attendees and for you to help you know what worked great and what areas you need to change/improve for future events.
- Allow for attendees to contact you for copies of presenters' materials if not available at the event. Also people may have a request for more information or content in alternative formats.
- Follow up with presenters to thank them for their efforts to accommodate accessible needs and give them feedback on what they did well as well as any suggestions/comments you received.

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