

Tips for Organizing Accessible Outdoor Events

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Facilitating an accessible program outdoors requires additional planning and considerations. To ensure that your organization is being as inclusive and welcoming as possible to all guests, plan ahead and anticipate how guests with disabilities will need to access the event (after consulting with some representatives from the community themselves). Don't wait for a request – work with the disability community so that everyone can participate fully and the event occurs seamlessly.

Advance Communication with Guests

- Share as much information up front as early as possible - advance communication is even more important for people with disabilities who have additional considerations to make before committing to attending.
- Include contact information for guests to request accommodations or learn more about the offerings – include a phone number and email address.
- Don't bury your access information in "Plan Your Visit." Show it as clearly as possible that it's an option, and list on main pages and include access symbols
- Share availability of Access Tent availability. Be specific about how guests will receive programs and services day-of.

Accessible Entry

- For large general admission events, having a private accessibility entrance is key, especially for individuals concerned about accessibility and crowds.
 - Be sure to advertise accessible entry in general access area so that others can learn about it (not everyone will have seen website in advance).
 - Have volunteer guides holding access signs who can guide guests who require access to accessible area, but might not have known about or been able to locate the accessible entrance.
 - Train all staff and volunteers so they have basic knowledge about the entrance and accessibility.
- The accessible entrance can be multipurpose, consider including: VIPs, crew, performers, families, etc.
- Ensure it is a well-labeled entrance. Use access symbols.
- Test accessibility of entrance, and ensure surface is level. Walk through the space with a wheelchair-user.
- Clearly communicate entrance on event website and other advance communication, including for the general public.
- Share information with any related entities, including Chicago Police Department, Pace Paratransit, to ensure drop-offs occur at right location. Ensure CPD permits cars to access accessible/drop off location.
- Share with staff and volunteers phone numbers for taxis, Open Taxis, etc. in case guests with disabilities need a way home.

Companions

- If possible, do not place a limit on companions (e.g., avoid a policy where one guest with disability is permitted to bring one companion to sit in accessible seating area). Rather, explain limited seating and let people make decisions about companions.

Guests Self-Identifying

- Give people the benefit of the doubt – if someone identifies as having a disability, take them at their word.
- Using wristbands to identify guests with disabilities is situational; our advice is to err on the side of not having a wristband to avoid stigmatizing.
- Be sure to introduce the idea of invisible disabilities in event staff training.
- At entry points have a dry erase board/ASL interpreters for communication with patrons with hearing loss or who are D/deaf.

Physical Access

- Provide courtesy wheelchairs (accept photo identification as collateral) at accessible entry and other entries just in case. Allot extra space in the accessible seating entrance for parking mobility devices.
- Ensure you provide accessible port-a-potties placed by accessible curb-cuts. Partition off entrance to port-a-potty to ensure accessible entrance is not encroached on by crowd
- Have clear and visible signage for accessible entrance, and include clear signage any reserved seating area.
- Cordon off accessible area with stanchions and be prepared to have additional volunteers/staff to ensure separation from general admission.
 - If possible, do not provide fixed seating in the accessible area. Moveable chairs allow for flexibility.
 - Provide an ample team of ushers available to monitor chairs, and move them as needed.
 - Have wide enough paths to allow navigation, and provide volunteers to maintain that area in the event of large crowds.
 - If area gets crowded, make announcement from stage regarding chairs. Example: "If you do not need to sit, the chairs are reserved for people with disabilities. There is a standing room by section for friends of people with disabilities to stand."
 - Have sections in accessible seating reserved for specific service needs, such as: ASL Interpreters, Open Captioning, Audio Description.
 - Have volunteers with house managing skill, prep, and constant communication during event.
 - Plan your seating charge with flow and order in mind. How are guests going to get to those accessible seats?
 - Advance planning for seating: when you're doing the seating layout, ensure cross-departmental representation and stakeholders to come to an agreement together, including publicist, access person, VIP person, stage manager. Ensure all stakeholders is on the same page in advance.
 - Be mindful of use of signs or guests standing which may block sightlines.
 - It's important to have a leader in charge of the accessible seating area who can advocate and is empowered to make decisions.
- Don't forget to ensure accessibility for performers with disabilities on the stage!

Providing Accessible Services

- Explain in advance communication and communicate to volunteers and staff what the various accessible offerings.
- Vet your companies providing other services; try to tie into existing technology without ad-ins.
- Develop back-up plan in case event runs longer than planned.
- Critical for all stakeholders and stage managers to be clear about visible accommodations to avoid last minute changes and alleviate any fears by colleagues in advance (e.g., concerns about sign language placement or captioning placement).
- Treat access services like any other technology, which includes testing it in advance.

American Sign Language (ASL) Interpretation

- Set up interpreter placement on stage after setting up placement for captioning screen.
- Designate one ASL interpreter as lead interpreter - help coordinate issues and communication, and be point of contact. If any problems with interpreters, go to that point of contact. Set up meeting for interpreters to discuss event in advance.
- Work directly with interpreter team to figure out what's right for your program. When requesting ASL interpreters, request specific interpreters with familiarity with subject matter. Build in extra time for interpreter preparation. (It's not effective communication if you don't know what's happening in advance!)
- Receive approval with all stakeholders and players in advance regarding interpreter placements, with some back up plans if interpreters are not visible from seating area.
- Be sure to ensure line of sight/seating, and make changes if not visible.

Captioning

- Providing captioning for large event is valuable because you may have a questionable PA system, crowd noise, weather concerns. It also creates a record of event. Captioning is also critical for many guests with hearing loss.

- Determine set-up. The ideal is for the entire crowd to be able to see it, but that's not always possible.
- Pick the best display method given the logistical constraints. (Consider impact of sunlight on screen!)
- Put captioner in touch with AV team in advance so they can communicate about technical needs.
- Identify power source and tent set up for captioner including rain plan in event of rain
- Provide as much content info in advance to captioner to ensure accuracy of names, locations, as well as set list, song lyrics and types of music.
- Explore providing remote captions through WiFi or personal devices, but first test reliability of internet connection in large crowd.
- If captioning provided on Jumbotron, advertise placement, and that this service is offered

Assistive Listening Devices and Audio Description Headsets

- Assistive Listening Devices (ALDs) benefit some guests with hearing loss, and audio description is used for guests who are blind or have low vision wherein visual elements of the event are described to them. In both cases, guests will need to borrow receivers and headsets.
- Communicate to attendees to pick up technology at the Access Tent, using photo identification as collateral.
- Assign staff or volunteers at tent who can identify where users are seated so you can ensure a safe return.
- Be sure to test equipment in advance.
- Designate spot for audio describer to have a view of the action. With crowds, helpful to have a steno mask to prevent crowd noise.
- Advance information (similar to what is provided to captioner) is helpful for audio describers.
- Train ushers about how to troubleshoot with devices or who to contact to assist guests.
- If equipment cannot be used in inclement weather, include limitations in advance communication.

Planning and Communication with Service Providers

- Make sure they have all of the information that they need (e.g., where to park, do they have access to food tent? Etc.).
- Assign specific volunteer(s) depending on size to work with them to help with breaks, deal with feedback, anticipate some of the critical changes or moments throughout the program.

Volunteer and Staff Roles

- Provide guides to walk to accessible area.
- Set up times to train volunteers and staff day-of.
- Assign a volunteer or staff person to check on volunteers, have snacks and water, ensure they have breaks
- Assign a volunteer to distribute access information to all volunteers and staff.
- It's important to have one person in charge of volunteers who can make decisions and set up a communication system to find answers if need be.
- Assign an event manager floater who is monitoring overall picture. Similar to a front of house manager role.
- Provide some identifying characteristic of access volunteers such as nametags or vests Nametag vest.
- Send advance email with videos and training information, communicating a welcoming philosophy and polite curiosity.
- Be clear with roles when possible, encouraging flexibility.
- Be selective with recruitment for volunteers – it's not necessary to be experienced with accessibility, but it's most important to have volunteers who are intuitive and have had exposure to access issues

Communication During Event

- If using radio communication, designate an access channel on radio.
- Have one person from access channel be the point of contact to the other channels – this can helpful to be able to communicate with the access staff about changes to the program.

General Training + Safety

- Ensure all volunteers know first aid location and plan. Make sure your emergency plan includes a plan for attendees with various disabilities.
- Train all volunteers about access accommodations, services, and language
- Ensure all volunteers understand key locations of stage, access tent, the location of other important tents or areas.