

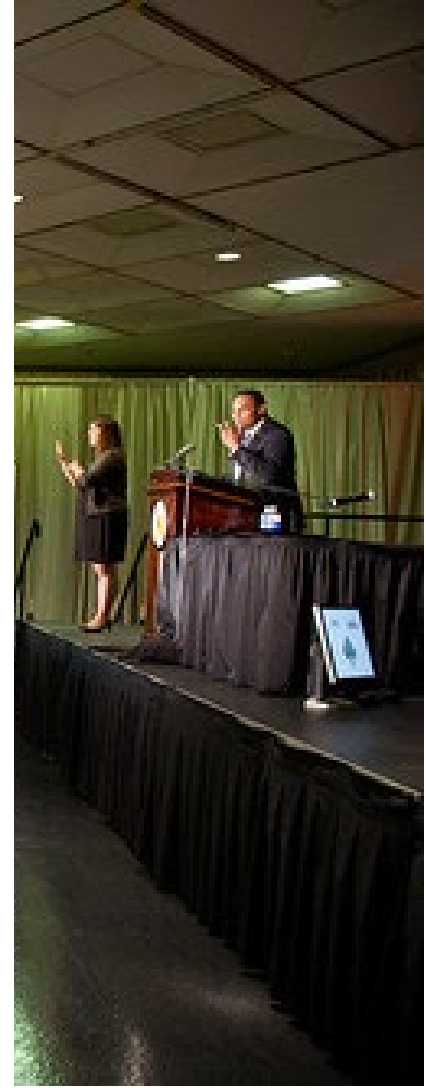


# Planning Accessible Conferences & Other Large-Scale Events

2024

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US International Council on Disabilities  
Eastern Oregon Center on Independent Living



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## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Pre-Event Planning .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>But First, Know the Law.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>The Audience .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Date &amp; Location .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>The Venue .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>The Hotel(s) .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Sponsorship .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Ticketing .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Website &amp; Registration .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Marketing your Event.....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Presentation Types .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Presenters and Keynote Speaker(s) .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>About Plain Language.....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Receptions .....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Exhibition Hall.....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Vendors &amp; Human Rights .....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>International Considerations – United Nations Convention on the Rights of     Persons with Disabilities .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Event Stage.....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Opening - House Keeping .....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Post-Event Planning Phase.....</b>	<b>22</b>
.....	<b>22</b>
<b>Resources .....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Hotel Checklist.....</b>	<b>25</b>

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<b>Conference/Meeting Venue Checklist.....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Appropriate Disability Language .....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Event Phase Checklist .....</b>	<b>31</b>

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# Introduction

Welcome to the *Planning Accessible Conferences & Other Large-Scale Events* toolkit. This toolkit complements and is a resource for the online course that is available on the USICD Learning Hub website: <http://usicdlearninghub.org>

The toolkit and online course apply lessons learned from decades of planning our own events as well as our observations and experiences attending others—conferences designed for a variety of audiences. We have also incorporated the experiences of colleagues with disabilities.

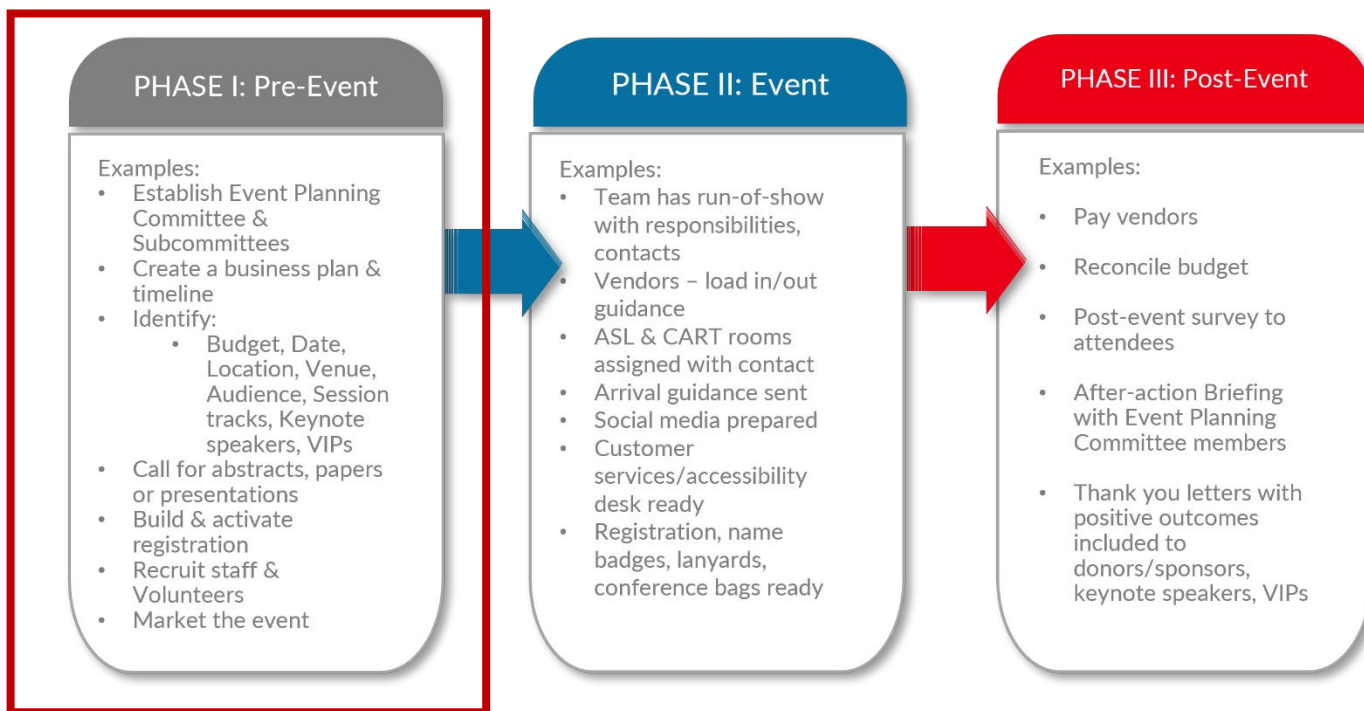
We have provided a wealth of information and recommendations for all conference planning teams and follow the basic conference planning phases: Pre-event, Event, and Post-Event and then we integrate accessibility planning. Remember, conference attendees with disabilities must be able to access and participate in conferences, meetings, and events on an equal basis with others. We recommend that you print the toolkit, place it in a three-ring binder, and include additional information and resources you come across.

This toolkit represents a collaboration between the Eastern Oregon Center on Independent Living (EOCIL) and the United States International Council on Disabilities (USICD) with contributions throughout from staff, patrons, and members.

Isabel Hodge  
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# Pre-Event Planning



**Figure 1: Three Phases of Event Planning**

There are at least three phases used when planning a conference or large-scale event. The first of the three phases is the pre-event planning phase. During this phase, you will identify your conference planning committee team members, how often the team should meet, and prepare your timeline. Your committee members are the ambassadors of the event and have several responsibilities:

- Creating a business plan with risk assessment and timeline for the event
- Identifying the intent or purpose of the event--what's the end goal?
- Identifying the audience, recruiting attendees, presenters, and keynote speaker(s)
- Identifying the budget and engaging potential sponsors or donors
- Identifying and selecting the date, location, and venue
- Developing the call for abstracts, papers, or presentations and peer review process
- Designing the registration and supplemental materials for conference attendees
- Selecting vendors, hiring staff, and recruiting volunteers
- Marketing and evaluating the event

The Committee should consist of at least the following members with these roles:

- Chairperson – Handles the major decision-making. He/she will recruit committee members, develop meeting agendas, and assign tasks to the committee members and to sub-committees, such as sponsor engagement.

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- Program Chair – Manages the call for papers or presentations, the peer review process, the creation of a balanced program that aligns with the purpose and any identified theme.
  - Finance Chair - Sets the event budget and works closely with other committee chairs to identify budget line items and tracks expenses and provides financial updates. This person may also be responsible for insurance coverage, the cost of providing accommodations and accessibility for the event, and any tax write-offs.
  - **Accessibility Chair – a person with a disability involved in all aspects of planning to ensure accessibility and equal participation, whether it is the physical environment, access to information presented or hiring staff and recruitment of volunteers.**
  - Marketing Chair – Handles all media engagement and communicates about the event through various channels.
  - Local Chair – This individual is responsible for the event day(s), handles online or onsite registration, and works closely with vendors (technical, catering, entertainment, décor, etc.)

Establish subcommittees to address specific details, such as planning receptions, off-site events or tours, material development (conference printed program, etc.), and staff and volunteer coordination. Some conferences will have several tracks divided by topics, and the Committee may choose to establish a subcommittee to manage each track. For example, a Conference on Independent Living may have the following tracks: Employment; Housing; Equipment Needs; Advocacy; Social Protection; Home and Community-Based Services, and have several breakout sessions under each track throughout the event. Subcommittee chairs should report to their respective Committee chair.

**Consider contacting disability nonprofit organizations and partnering with them to tap into their expertise. They may have equipment you can borrow for the event or have a list of American Sign Language and International Sign Language Interpreters.**  
**You want to have a welcoming and inclusive event.**  
**Advertise your partnership on your conference website!**

## **But First, Know the Law**

The Accessibility Chair should be familiar with the laws stipulating that public facilities must make reasonable modifications to avoid discrimination in their policies, practices, and procedures. These include ensuring facilities, e.g., hotels and conference centers, are physically accessible to people with disabilities and that information is accessible.

These laws are:

- Sections 501 and 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973
- Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act
- Title III of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA)

- 
- The Architectural Barriers Act (ABA)

According to these laws, no otherwise qualified person with a disability shall, solely by reason of his or her disability, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity of a public entity. This means that conference and meeting activities should be accessible to attendees with disabilities.

The Accessibility Chair must work to ensure equivalent access to both the physical environment and the information being presented. They should understand that the person with a disability could be a conference attendee, a speaker or presenter, or even a vendor or journalist covering the event.

Ensure all staff, volunteers, and conference planning teams receive disability awareness orientation.

### **The Audience**

Conference planners often make assumptions about who the audience will be but fail to take into consideration that one in five attendees may have apparent or nonapparent disabilities. Fifteen percent of the world's population (over 61 million Americans!) has some form of disability. People with disabilities hold all types of jobs and careers and seek to expand and improve their knowledge by attending your conference or event. Conferences focusing on:

- Food Security and Poverty
- Business and Entrepreneurship
- Economic Development
- Women Leaders
- Real Estate
- College Admissions
- Architecture
- Cyber Security... & more!

**...will have people with disabilities attending!!**

### **Date & Location**

Choosing when and where to hold your event is a major decision factor. Choosing somewhere in Minnesota in the winter months or Arizona in the middle of summer may deter people from attending your event. Some older adults, individuals with spinal cord injuries, and other disabilities may have thermoregulation concerns. When their bodies get too cold or hot it may lead to severe symptoms, therefore it is best to choose a time of year and location that works for everyone. It can also be challenging to navigate through snow and ice using a cane, crutches, wheelchair, or scooter. The distance to/from the airport, train, central transportation, and parking lots, and the

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accessibility of each are equally important. The Accessibility Chair should be prepared to defend the non-negotiables.

## **The Venue**

There are several ways to find a conference or event venue. Some Committees will seek the services of a company specializing in helping others find the perfect venue for their event. Others may speak to people in their network and ask for recommendations. Either way, the Committee begins with a discussion, at least 1 year to 6 months beforehand, about the venue budget and a list of “must haves” or non-negotiables for the venue. In your venue budget, include costs such as audio/visual (AV) equipment and support, internet, and in-house catering. When scouting for a venue, make it known at the beginning of the conversation that you plan to meet with 3-5 sales managers from venues in the local area or State. A little competition sometimes helps with acquiring incentives. Here are some important basic questions to ask:

- Is the venue available on or around the dates your committee has chosen?
- Is it large enough for your event?
- How far is the venue from the airport, train station, etc.? How much is a typical cab or ride sharing option to get to/from the airport or train station?
- Is the venue within walking distance of several hotels and restaurants?
- Does the venue have a ballroom, theatre, spacious meeting rooms for breakout sessions, a space for an expo or exhibits? Is there a map with dimensions available?
- Does the venue have permanent or mobile interpretation booths for language translation? (see [ISO 4043:2016](#) and [ISO 2603:2016](#))
- Are there on-site restaurants?
- Does the venue provide AV equipment, computers, wireless internet?
- Is there a business center on-site?
- Is there a cost for parking?
- Are there ATMs on site?
- Is there a preferred caterer and do they provide various dietary options? In addition to meals, do they provide refreshments for breaks between sessions?
- Are banquet servers trained to address food allergy issues including cross-contamination at buffet tables?
- Does the venue provide complimentary services?
- Does the venue have an agreement with hotels nearby where blocked rooms could be provided at a deeper discount?
- Is there a way to ship equipment and store items before and after the event?

The Accessibility Chair’s role here is to provide a list of required accessibility questions, such as:

- Are there elevators to all meeting spaces?



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- Is the signage for the rooms and other areas provided in Braille?
  - Is there space and direct line of sight for sign language interpreters?
  - Do you have a raised stage with a ramp and railing?
  - Is there a way for a person using a wheelchair to get to the podium. Can the podium or a table be raised or lowered with the push of a button for a person using a wheelchair or for a little person?
  - What are the meeting room capacities? *You need space for wheelchairs. Is there enough space to navigate around the room easily using a wheelchair?*
  - Are all routes that attendees and staff use accessible by wheelchairs or scooters and at least 32 inches wide?
  - How much walking is required to get from an accessible parking space to the venue and the most frequently visited areas?
  - Is accessible parking available? How many spaces? Are there height restrictions?
  - Are the restaurants accessible?
  - Is there a pharmacy close to the venue?
  - Are there automatic or power-assisted doors? Or volunteers to hold the door(s) open?
  - How many accessible bathrooms are there in the meeting space areas?
    - Are the sinks and towels accessible? Can standalone soap dispensers be provided?
    - Do they have automatic or power-assisted doors?
    - Grab bars?
  - For attendees who are deaf and hard of hearing -- Are Assistive Listening Devices (ALD) available? Are Loop Systems available? Are microphones compatible?
  - Do you have a list of local resources for American Sign Language Interpreters and CART providers?
  - Do you have a first aid station and does it have an Epi-Pen?
  - Are Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs) stationed around the venue? Have staff been trained in how to use them?
  - Is there a designated service animal relief area and does it have litter bags?
  - Are loaner wheelchairs or scooters (possibly through a third-party vendor who can assume liability) available? If not, do they have a local resource?
  - Is there an emergency evacuation plan in place for attendees with disabilities? *(Get a copy to share with staff and volunteers)*

**Never sign a contract with a venue without conducting a site visit first with your Accessibility Chair.**

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## The Hotel(s)

The Committee should determine how many people will attend and have some idea of the number of rooms required for blocked reservations and if a deposit is required. Also, ask the hotel what the percentage of attrition or slippage is. Consider rooms for Committee members and staff in addition to the attendees. Consider reserving a business room for Committee meetings or other important meetings (drinks and snacks are always appreciated). Pay close attention to the contract and the attrition clause. It should state that if the hotel is sold out then the attrition clause is null and void with no penalties to be paid. [Click here to learn about the different types of attrition.](#)

Some hotels are large enough to host conferences. In this case, you can use the above questions provided when scoping out a hotel with conference rooms. Again, it does not hurt to ask if they have any perks they can offer to secure your business. Vouchers for breakfasts are always appreciated. Check online reviews for the hotel – the hotel website will not tell you if the rooms smell like a weekend fraternity party but reviews on Google or Yelp will! You can also see if there are trending negative reviews for hotel restaurants and even customer service. If you are looking at reviews then so are your conference attendees.

The [American with Disabilities Act Standards for Accessible Design \(Title III, Regulation 28 CFR Part 36 \(1991\)\)](#) provides the standards for Accessible Transient Lodging (9.1).

The hotel's size will determine the number and type of accessible guest rooms. For example, a hotel with 301 to 400 rooms is required to have 4 rooms with roll-in showers, 8 rooms with communication features, and 8 mobility-accessible rooms. For larger hotels with over 501 rooms, the ADA requires 2% of the total number of rooms to be accessible.

Use the following checklist when conducting hotel site visits for accessibility:

- Is there an accessible airport shuttle to the hotel? YES NO
- How can guests with disabilities reserve a shuttle? Details: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
- What is the distance to the airport: \_\_\_\_\_ Train station: \_\_\_\_\_
- Is there a height restriction for parking in the garage? \_\_\_\_\_
- How many accessible parking spaces: \_\_\_\_\_
- Hotel parking cost: \$\_\_\_\_\_/per night
  - In/out parking privileges for guests: YES NO
- Is the hotel lobby/reception desk height accessible? The common areas?
- What is the distance to local restaurants?
- What is the proximity to the subway station with elevator access: \_\_\_\_\_

- Which subway station is closest: \_\_\_\_\_
- Amenities: Swimming pool with a pool lift? YES NO Other details: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**For Sleeping Rooms** (*bring a tape measure*):

- Are there rooms for people with visual, hearing or mobility challenges? YES NO
- Are there accessible rooms with 2 beds (*guest and his/her personal care attendant*)
- Are the doors and entry ways widened to fit a large wheelchair? YES NO
- Is there space to maneuver on both sides of the bed? YES NO
- How tall are the beds? *20 to 23 inches from the floor to the top of the mattress is recommended but not an ADA requirement* \_\_\_\_\_
- Are the floors carpeted, laminated or wood? \_\_\_\_\_
- # of rooms with roll-in showers: \_\_\_\_\_
- # of rooms with accessible bathtubs: \_\_\_\_\_
- Are bath benches fixed to the wall or do guests have to request them? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- How many bath chairs are available? \_\_\_\_\_
- Are there raised toilet seats and grab bars in the accessible rooms? YES NO
- Are light switches and power outlets within reach? YES NO
- Can a fridge and microwave be provided on request if not already available in the room?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- How many deaf kits are available? \_\_\_\_\_ Can kits be obtained from affiliate hotels? YES NO
- Is there a telecommunication device available for guests who are deaf? YES NO
- Is there a visual fire alarm with strobing lights? YES NO
- Is there a doorbell flasher? YES NO
- Phone ringing flasher? YES NO
- Closed caption on the television? YES NO
- Adjustable phone volume? YES NO
- Bed shaker for waking up with clock? YES NO
- Does the hotel have a backup generator in case of a power outage? *This may be important if guests use medical equipment that requires electricity (i.e. oxygen concentrator, CPAP machine, etc.)*
- Do emergency evacuation plans include procedures for guests with disabilities?
- Arrival/ Checkout times: Arrival: \_\_\_\_\_ Checkout: \_\_\_\_\_
- Complimentary WIFI? YES NO
- Does the hotel have loaner wheelchairs or scooters? YES NO If not, do they have a resource: \_\_\_\_\_
- Do cleaning staff use scented or unscented cleaning products? \_\_\_\_\_
- Are emotional support/comfort animals permitted? YES NO

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**Never sign a contract with a hotel without conducting a site visit first. Ask to look at the different features in the accessible rooms.** We recommend the Accessibility Chair invite others from the Planning Committee on their site visit(s) to hotels to expand their knowledge on how to evaluate the accessibility features.

## **Sponsorship**

Not all expenses are covered by the registration income alone. Corporate sponsorship is a great way to cover gaps in revenue and is also a way to attract more conference registrants. An important Committee activity is to create a pipeline of potential sponsors, with their philanthropic focus, any past funding they have provided, and points of contact. Do your market research to find out what similar conference sponsorship levels are. Assign Committee members with outreach responsibilities and include deadlines!

Design an attractive conference sponsorship package that provides details on the event, who the audience is, and what the benefits of sponsorship are. Your event provides them with a level of brand exposure that is invaluable. Provide multiple levels of sponsorship opportunities, e.g. \$50,000- Presenting level sponsorship; \$25,000 -Gold level sponsorship, etc. It is important to ask conference or event sponsors what costs their sponsorship cannot cover. They may also choose to donate goods or services for free instead of providing funding, such as covering the flight and lodging for the keynote speaker(s) or providing conference attendance scholarships to people with disabilities who are unable to afford the registration (include the application on your website!). If sponsors are not reacting positively to your package, talk to them about their marketing and philanthropic focus because, with the Committee's agreement, you should be willing to provide some flexibility and pull together a sponsorship package that meets their needs. Ensure your sponsors know your Committee's commitment to accessibility for conference attendees with disabilities.

Offer sponsors an opportunity to include some of their corporate swag or gift in conference bags provided at check-in. Ask for a high-resolution logo for you to include in the agenda, revolving screens all around the venue (dependent on sponsorship level), the conference app, and other materials. The Committee should ensure there is no conflict of interest involved.

## **Ticketing**

The event budget should determine the cost of attending the conference. An easy way to calculate the conference fee is to divide all the expenses by the lowest number of expected attendees. Think about fixed and variable expenses. The ultimate balancing act is providing an affordable event that caters to both in-person attendees and attendees participating online and provides them with the perceived value they expect. Do your market research and see what similar events are charging attendees.

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Onsite ticketing and registration can make it difficult to plan meals and other events, so plan with the caterer for some last-minute additions. It is acceptable to charge a little more for onsite ticketing and registration. Also, expect some registered people to not attend the conference.

## **Website & Registration**

Your conference website and embedded event registration platform are the central information portals for all things related to your conference. There are all-in-one event platforms, but the big question is whether they are accessible. When researching the best conference platform, ask about their experience(s) with meeting [W3C's and WCAG 2.0](#) accessibility guidelines and how they test their platform for usability. Have some way of testing with a screen reader and screen magnifier. If not, reach out to a non-profit for people who are blind or vision impaired and ask if they provide consultation services (include this service as a budget line item!).

Envision the potential experience that attendees will have – provide an accessible map of the conference space and the exhibit hall that shows the location of stairs, escalators, elevators, accessible restrooms, walking distance, places to sit and rest, quiet areas for people who are deaf or hard of hearing, can talk; a quiet place for an attendee to rest and identify the service animal relief area.

On your website, include the following basic details:

- Date and location of the event.
- Registration, early registration rates, onsite rates, and deadline dates; and:
  - Group registration details.
  - Cancellation and Substitution Policy.
  - Personal care assistant policy (do they have to register? Can the cost of food/beverages for the PA be added to the attendee's registration under "extra options" stage of the registration process.)
- Consent to use photos.
- Hotel(s) with promo code for reduced rates
- Describing special accessibility or dietary needs for event-provided meals and snacks
- Customer service throughout the event and onsite
- Agenda (Full agenda and at-a-glance)
- Sponsor and Exhibitor information.
- Awardees
- Keynote speakers.
- Virtual livestreaming details
- Event social media tags and links
- Point of contact for the event

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- Confirmation – Provide an indication of completion and successful registration. Email confirmations should contain a summary of the event details and other materials for easy reference.

The Accessibility Chair should require the following information to be included on the website:

- Statement on your commitment to accessibility. Consider:
  - Asking attendees to forego perfumes or cologne for those with hyperosmia. Smells can trigger migraines and other medical issues.
  - Providing a quiet room for individuals who get easily overwhelmed.
- Airport (# to call for assistance at the airport)
- Approximate cost of transportation to/from the airport.
- Air quality – pollution
- Contact the city to see if there's travel accessibility information/resource list to link to
- Veterinary contact for service animals
- Closest hospital or clinic to the meeting site
- Average cost for a scooter rental with provider list.
- Rental resources

**The above information should be included in your conference packets and event app.**

The following fields should be included in the registration process:

- Name, address.
- Organization (if applicable)
- Phone & Email
- Emergency Contact
- Dietary restrictions
- Accommodations (Checkboxes: None/Real-time Captioning (CART)/ American Sign Language (ASL)/Personal Care Assistant/Service Animal, Other)

You can also use the registration process to gather demographics and affiliations to your organization or the event and learn how they heard about your conference. Your donors and sponsors would be very interested in race, ethnicity, and disability affiliation information, such as how many individuals, parents, and family members attended. This information helps them in their corporate social responsibility (CSR) reporting and ensuring diversity.

## **Marketing your Event**

Marketing the event is one of the key roles of the conference/event planning committee. If you hired a conference event planner, then ask them to provide you with some recommendations on how best to market your event. Either the committee, its subcommittee, and/or the event planner should have a timeline. Use free social media sources whenever possible (e.g., Facebook, Twitter/X, key messages, Eventbrite, Instagram, TikTok, etc.). Ask

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committee and subcommittee members to share event flyers, invitations, and other marketing materials within their networks. Highlight your keynote speakers, awardees, and other engaging information.

All documents must be available in alternate formats and accessible. If you are using short videos to market your event, then include captioning and visual descriptions (describing action or key visual scenes with details such as the setting, clothing/costumes, and facial expressions).

### **Presentation Types**

There are several ways to optimize the engagement of your audience. You've probably heard of "Fireside Chats" and "Lightening Talks" but have you heard about Campfire Sessions, World Café, Fishbowls, or Ignite Sessions? [Click here to learn more.](#)

### **Presenters and Keynote Speaker(s)**

Provide guidance on your website for presenters to follow when submitting their proposals and speaking at your event. When proposals are accepted, then ask presenters to submit their materials at least four weeks in advance of the event so that they can be reviewed and forwarded to registered individuals who may not be able to see presentations on screen. Offer presentations in advance, for example, to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities who are more successful with advance planning. Also, ask presenters to provide their own accessibility requests in advance. Ask presenters to verbally describe images during their presentation and avoid small font sizes.

One goal of a conference planning team is to create an equitable presentation space for all speakers. One example is podiums that accommodate standing and/or seated speakers.

Regarding how to address people with disabilities and what language to use, we suggest using our enclosed Appropriate Disability Language and providing the list to presenters, keynote speakers, and the event planning team. Remember that language is always evolving and people with disabilities may want to be addressed in their preferred manner.

If session attendees can ask questions during or after your presentation, then have a microphone available for both speakers and those asking questions. Evaluate the lighting in the room and adjust it to increase the contrast and visibility of the screen. Also, have handouts available in large print and include captions on any video shown during their presentations.

If there is a presenter who uses a wheelchair, then ask in advance what their preference is for using microphones. If sign language interpreters are present, then ask presenters to speak slower to allow time for interpretation. Also, ask them to arrive at least 15 minutes early to set up computers and other materials and speak with sign language interpreters, language interpreters,

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the onsite CART providers, and tech support, if needed. Being able to provide presentation material to interpreters before an event is very worthwhile

Presenters using their own computer laptops to display their presentations should be prepared to bring their own HDMI adapter, especially for MAC computers.

Presenters shipping materials directly to the venue will need the address and point-of-contact for the business center or event warehouse.

Have microphones available for use during question-and-answer sessions. Try to have staff available to convey the questions to the presenters via microphone. If attendees are asked in advance to write questions or comments on cards, then have the staff or a volunteer available to assist with writing on the card and submitting the question or comment. Assign staff or volunteers to a presenter(s) and provide guidance (room arrival, room set up, support available, etc.)

### **About Plain Language**

Plain language is easy to read and understand and benefits a wide range of people with disabilities, including those with cognitive, intellectual, mental health, and learning difficulties. Here are a few tips to share with presenters and others:

Writing:

- Use short paragraphs, concise sentences, and bulleted lists.
- Organize content logically with headings and structure.
- Be direct and use active voice.
- Define unfamiliar words, acronyms, and jargon in context.

Use familiar language.

- Fit your language to your audience and context.
- Avoid complex or technical terms unless necessary.
- Provide definitions for any unusual words or abbreviations.

Event Materials:

- Ensure that event materials (such as brochures, schedules, and presentations) are available in accessible formats (e.g., plain text, large print, or screen-readable formats).
- Use a plain font with slightly larger than usual text size (e.g., 14 pt or more) for readability.
- Provide clear instructions and information about the event in plain language.

Communication During the Event:

- Use accessible and plain language during presentations, workshops, and discussions.
- Silence all participants or ask them to mute their microphones to minimize background noise.
- Repeat or paraphrase any questions to ensure everyone can hear and understand them.



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Remember that making conferences accessible benefits not only people with intellectual disabilities but also other attendees. Following these guidelines can create a more inclusive and welcoming environment for everyone.

## **Receptions**

Receptions allow increased networking, allow your company or organization to showcase its work, and recognize industry champions. In addition to your venue and the hotel(s), your reception location must also be accessible.

Provide sign language interpreters and have them wear name tags identifying them as interpreters so that deaf participants can use them to communicate with other attendees. When an interpreter is not readily available, deaf participants may use their own communication apps.

Have volunteers ready to assist someone who uses mobility devices (ask first!) and navigate the buffet line. Have various dietary options available on the buffet and in any passed hors d' oeuvres during the event. Attendees who are blind appreciate someone to guide them through the room and help with introductions. Always ask the individual how you can assist them. Never assume anything. Make sure both high and regular-height tables are available.

## **Exhibition Hall**

Exhibition Halls should be arranged so that the aisles are clear of obstructions and tables are accessible for attendees using wheelchairs and scooters to reach and try their products and materials. Have an accessible map of the exhibition hall available. Design a way for attendees who are blind to know when they are moving from one vendor table to the next, such as using cable strips on the floor between vendors that are typically used to cover wires or cables.

'Human rights' refers to the set of rights and freedom to which all human beings are considered to be entitled to, whatever their nationality, place of residence, sex, sexual orientation, national or ethnic origin, color, religion, language, disability, age, or any other status. These rights are all interrelated, interdependent, and indivisible.

## **Vendors & Human Rights**

As an event organizer, you have legally binding obligations to respect and/or protect human rights. When we think of event vendors, we often think about the products or conference or city swag they are selling but few think about the procurement processes and the supply chain. How would your attendees react if they learned that child labor is being used to produce the goods and services being sold by that vendor? Event organizers also fail to ask if people with disabilities are hired and if they receive equal pay. Human rights violations and human trafficking often occur

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during large events, such as international or national sporting events like the World Cup or Olympic Games. For more information, read [Striving for Excellence: Mega-Sporting Events and Human Rights](#) by the Institute for Human Rights and Business.

### **Worst Case Scenario**

**Within days of the kickoff of the 2023 World Scout Jamboree in South Korea there were serious complaints. There were over 43,000 participants from 153 countries aged 14-18 years old. They experienced a heatwave with over 400 cases of heat exhaustion, a COVID outbreak, a typhoon, food shortages, a lack of accessible facilities for scouts with disabilities, and dietary requirements were not considered.**

### **International Considerations – United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**

The [United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities \(UN CRPD\)](#) is a disability treaty that promotes, protects and ensures the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities, and to promote respect for their inherent dignity. Each State (Country) party to a treaty has an obligation to take steps to ensure that everyone in the State can enjoy the rights set out in the treaty.

The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is the body of independent experts which monitors implementation of the Convention by the States parties. The Committee performs a number of functions in accordance with the provisions of the treaty, but in general, they:

- consider States parties' (Country) reports.
- consider individual complaints.
- conduct country inquiries.
- adopt general comments and organize thematic discussions to interpret the provisions of their treaty or treaties.
- attend the annual meeting of Chairpersons, and
- contribute to the treaty body strengthening process.

**To date, 185 of the 193 UN Member States have ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and 100 have ratified the Optional Protocol. As of April 2024, the United States has signed the UN CRPD but not yet ratified it.**

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## Conferences/Meetings Applicable CRPD Articles:

- Article 5 - Equality and non-discrimination
- Article 9 - Accessibility
- Article 30 - Participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport
- Article 32 - International cooperation

If you are planning a conference or event outside of the United States, work with organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) in that country to identify relevant national disability laws. The [United States International Council on Disabilities](#) can help connect you with OPDs.

**Note:** *In the United Kingdom, the UK Equality Act 2010 requires all events – including conferences and exhibitions – to be accessible and inclusive. Equality Act 2010: guidance - GOV.UK ([www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk))*

# Event Stage

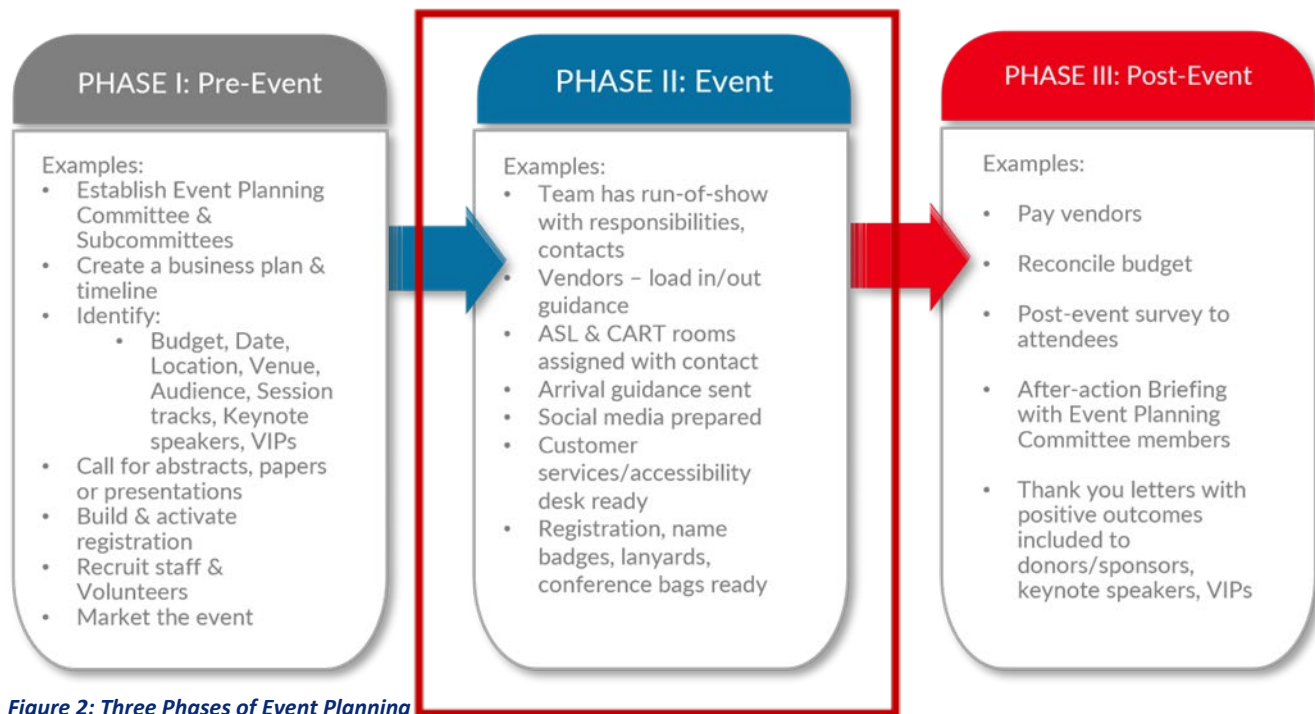


Figure 2: Three Phases of Event Planning

Your conference planning committee should have had several meetings before the conference kick-off. Does everyone have a copy of the run-of-show for each day with their respective responsibilities and contact information? Do they know who to go to if an issue(s) arises and how to reach them? Here are a few items that need to be on your checklists as you near the opening day of your event:

- Contracts with all vendors are in place and they understand the event timing, and load-in and load-out guidance.
- Staff radio connections and channels have been tested.
- All ASL and CART providers know the rooms they are assigned to and who their point-of-contact is throughout the event.
- Final reminders and arrival guidance sent to keynote speakers, presenters, honorees, and VIPs. Key staff are assigned to keynote speakers, honorees, and VIPs.
- Arrival guidance for journalists covering the event is sent and they have the contact information for the media or public affairs representative.
- Arrival guidance/welcome has been sent to attendees two days prior.
- Social media volunteers are prepared with pre-approved posts and guidance for posts with images for during the event (don't forget to provide image descriptions!)
- Customer service with an accessibility assistant is set up beside the registration/check-in.

- 
- Registration/check-in is set up, name badges are printed, lanyards are ready. Rosters are loaded on laptop computers or tablets.
  - Conference bags are filled and have wi-fi access details included (if available), and any conference app details.
  - Mobile language interpretation booths are installed and tested.
  - Presentation rooms have had an audio/visual tested and have reserve seating assigned for ASL interpreters and attendees who need them.
  - Presentation rooms have plenty of pads of paper and pens.
  - Loaner scooters are charged ready for check-out.
  - Ramps and railings have been installed and tested, if needed.
  - Restrooms have been checked to make sure accessible stalls are operable and hand soap and paper towels are within reach.
  - Elevators have been tested and volunteers posted outside to hold elevator doors open for wheelchair or scooter users, if needed.

### **Opening - House Keeping**

At the end of your opening program, you will want to provide some verbal guidance to attendees. You will want to share any emergency evacuation details, e.g. accessible routes, and the operation of elevators. This is also your opportunity to inform attendees that you have strategically placed staff and volunteers outside breakout sessions and in other areas to help guide attendees with and without disabilities. Also, ask attendees and the media to refrain from using flash photography that can trigger attendees with photosensitive epilepsy, and to share details on meditation or quiet rooms for those who are easily overstimulated and need a break.

**Show everyone in attendance that you are committed to ensuring the entire event is safe, welcoming, and inclusive!**

The Accessibility Chair should connect with staff and volunteers throughout the conference to make sure they have the resources required and the conference attendees with disabilities are using available resources. Take time to introduce yourself to attendees during lunches and session breaks; give them your business card and ask them to follow up with any feedback they have about the conference.

# Post-Event Planning Phase

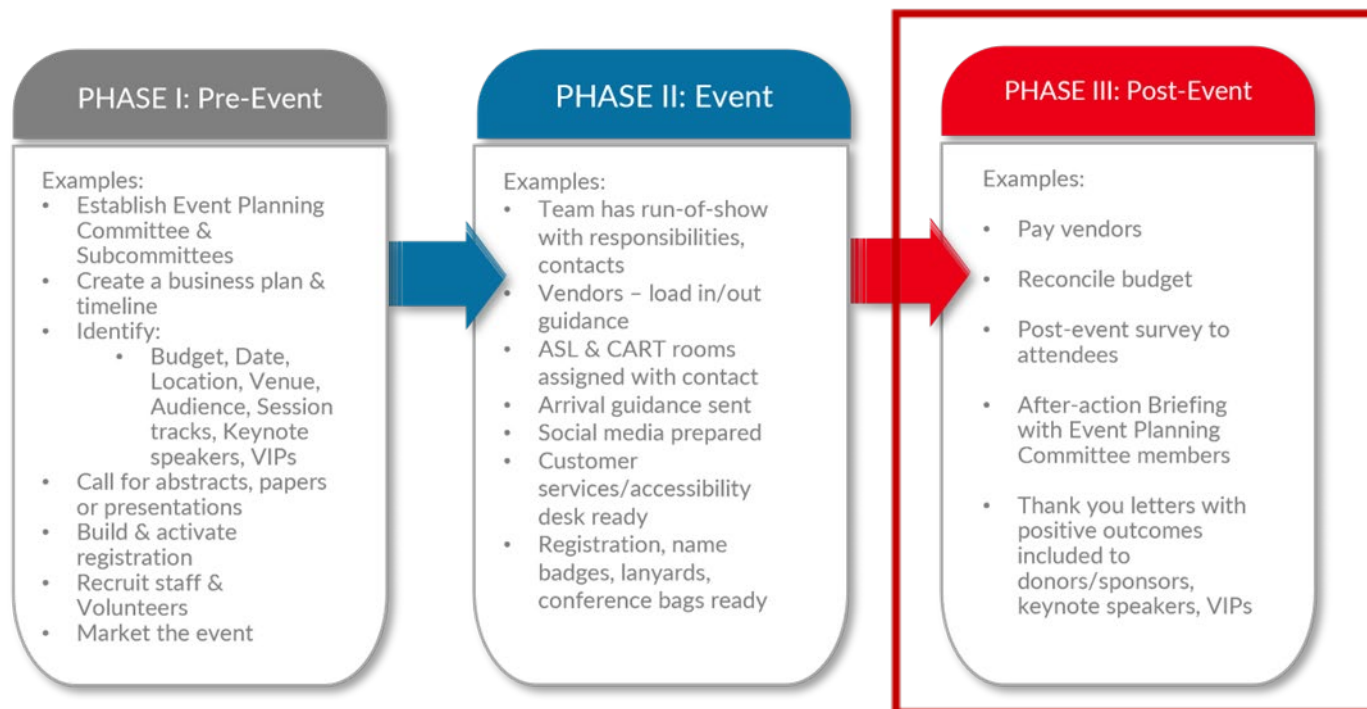


Figure 3: Three Phases of Event Planning

The conference has wrapped up and your team has taken time to celebrate the closing as well as taking stock of all the time and work that went into executing it from start to finish. However, you're not quite finished. Early in the pre-event phase, the Conference Planning Committee will have designed a measurable way to determine if your conference was a success or not. Did the conference meet its goals? Have vendors been paid and the budget been reconciled?

Do you have a strategy in place to gather feedback from all attendees or a group of attendees representing a variety of demographics? Your attendees want to provide feedback and feel that they have been heard and that their input was appreciated. Additionally, your donors and sponsors are eager to know the results of your conference to know their brand had its intended reach.

The [Likert Scale](#) is a reliable tool that can be used to determine an attendees skill and knowledge before and after conference sessions or overall with "1" being the lowest level; "3" being medium; and "5" being the highest level of skill and knowledge. You can capture qualitative data through open ended questions in the survey.

There's a lot of qualitative and quantitative data that can be collected throughout the conference, such as:

- The number of registrants/attendees

- 
- The number of attendees who visited the customer services/accessibility desk
  - Presentations attended and feedback
  - The number of attendees who visited the exhibit hall on each day.

Don't forget to query attendees about their experiences and expectations, the location, the hotel, etc. Here are few examples of questions to include in a post-conference survey to attendees:

- How satisfied were you with the conference/meeting/event?
- Did our event meet your expectations?
- What was your favorite moment during the event? Or, what was the biggest takeaway from the event?
- How likely are you to attend our conference/meeting/event in the future?
- How can we improve our conference/meeting/event?
- Was the staff and volunteers helpful?

You can divide the survey into sections, with skip options, and ask attendees with disabilities some specific questions:

- On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being poor and 5 being excellent) how would you rate the overall accessibility of the conference?
- How did you hear about the event?
- Are there areas we need to improve in the future? Please describe:
- Did you visit the customer service/accessibility desk during the event? YES NO
- Were the sessions you attended accessible? (If not, please describe:)
- How likely are you to attend our event(s) in the future?
- Would you recommend our event(s) to a friend or colleague?

Provide a contact information via the website for all attendees to provide post conference feedback to the Conference Planning Committee.

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# Resources

[Accessible Meeting and Event Checklist](#) (Cornell University)

[Conference Accessibility Resources](#) (World Institute on Disability)

[Create Accessible Documents](#) (GSA Section 508.gov)

[Create Accessible PDFs](#) (GSA Section 508.gov)

[Create Accessible Presentations](#) (GSA Section 508.gov)

[Create Accessible Spreadsheets](#) (GSA Section 508.gov)

Create Accessible [Audio and Video](#), and [Synchronized Media](#) (accessibility standards for live video and pre-recorded video) (GSA Section 508.gov)

[Create Accessible Digital Products](#) (GSA Section 508.gov)

[Guide to the ADA Accessibility Standards](#) US Access Board

[Hospitality and Disability; An ADA Network Initiative: Accessible Meetings, Events & Conferences Guide](#) (ADA National Network)

[How People with Disabilities Used the Web](#) (W3C WCAG)

**[How to Make Your Presentations and Meetings Accessible to All](#) (W3C Web Accessibility Initiative)**

[Making Meetings Accessible](#) (CDC.gov)

[NYC Accessible Virtual Meetings Guide](#) (NYC.gov)

[Plain Language – We Webinar for Government and Non-Profit Agencies](#) (Autistic Self Advocacy Network) (SARTAC)

[Planning Accessible Meeting and Events](#) (Harvard University)

[Planning Accessible Meetings and Events](#) (Disability & Philanthropy Forum)

[The Must-Have WCAG Checklist](#) (level access)

[Universal Design and Accessibility](#) (GSA Section 508.gov)



# Hotel Checklist

Use this checklist when conducting a hotel site visit.

	YES	NO
<b>Transportation to/from Airport</b>		
Is there an accessible airport shuttle to the hotel?		
How can guests with disabilities reserve a shuttle? Details:		
What is the distance to the airport:		
What is the distance to the train station:		
What is the proximity to the subway station with elevator access:		
Which subway station is closest:		
<b>Parking</b>		
Is there a height restriction for parking in the garage? Details:		
How many accessible parking spaces:		
Hotel parking cost: \$_____ /per night		
In/out parking privileges for guests?		
<b>Common Areas</b>		
Is the hotel lobby/reception desk height accessible?		
Are the common areas accessible?		
What is the distance to local restaurants:		

Does the hotel have a backup generator in case of a power outage? <i>This may be important if guests use medical equipment that requires electricity (i.e. oxygen concentrator, CPAP machine, etc.)</i>		
<b>Sleeping Rooms</b> ( <i>bring a tape measure</i> )		
Are there rooms for people with visual, hearing or mobility challenges?		
Are the doors and entry ways widened to fit a large wheelchair?		
Are there accessible rooms with 2 beds ( <i>guest and his/her personal care attendant</i> )		
Is there space to maneuver on both sides of the bed?		
How tall are the beds? <i>20 to 23 inches from the floor to the top of the mattress is recommended but not an ADA requirement</i>		
Bed shaker for waking up with clock?		
Closed caption on the television?		
Adjustable phone volume?		
Phone ringing flasher?		
How many deaf kits are available? Details:		
Can kits be obtained from affiliate hotels?		
Is there a telecommunication device available for guests who are deaf?		
Is there a visual fire alarm with strobing lights?		
Do emergency evacuation plans include procedures for guests with disabilities?		
Is there a doorbell flasher?		
Are there raised toilet seats and grab bars in the accessible rooms?		
Are light switches and power outlets within reach?		
Are the floors carpeted, laminated or wood?		
Can a microwave be provided on request if not already available in the room?		
Are bath benches fixed to the wall or do guests have to request them? Details:		
How many bath chairs are available?		
# of rooms with roll-in showers:		
# of rooms with accessible bathtubs		
Do cleaning staff use scented or unscented cleaning products?		

Complimentary WIFI?		
Does the hotel have loaner wheelchairs or scooters? If not, do they have a resource:		
Are emotional support/comfort animals permitted?		
Swimming pool with a pool lift?		
Check-out time:		
Arrival Time:		

Remember to never sign a contract with a hotel without conducting a site visit first. Ask to look at the different features in the accessible rooms.

## Conference/Meeting Venue Checklist

Use this checklist when conducting a site visit at a conference or meeting venue:

	YES	NO
Is the venue available on or around the dates your committee has chosen?		
Is it large enough for your event? Capacity:		
How far is the venue from the airport, train station, etc.?		
How much is a typical cab or ride sharing option to get to/from the airport or train station?		
Are there on-site restaurants?		
Are on-site restaurants wheelchair accessible?		
Is the venue within walking distance of several hotels and restaurants?		
<b>Meeting &amp; Event Spaces</b>		
Is there a map with dimensions available?		
Ballroom?		
Theatre?		
Spacious meeting rooms for breakout sessions?		
What are the meeting room capacities? (You need space for wheelchairs!) Details:		
An exhibit hall or expo space? Details:		

Does the venue have permanent or mobile interpretation booths for language translation? Details:		
Is there space and direct line of sight for sign language interpreters?		
Is the signage for the rooms and other areas provided in braille?		
Is there a raised stage with ramp and railing option?		
Are there automatic or power-assisted doors?		
Are there elevators to all meeting spaces?		
Are all routes that attendees and staff use accessible by wheelchairs or scooters?		
Can the podium or a table be raised or lowered with the push of a button for a person using a wheelchair or for a little person?		
Is there a way to ship equipment and store items before and after the event? Mailing address for shipping:		
Does the venue have an agreement with hotels nearby where blocked rooms could be provided at a deeper discount? Details:		
Is there is a business center on-site?		
Are there ATMs on site? Location(s):		
<b>Venue Parking</b>		
Is there a cost for parking? ____/day		
How many accessible parking spaces?		
Is accessible parking available?		

Are there parking height restrictions? Details:		
<b>Catering</b>		
Is there a preferred caterer and do they provide various dietary options? Details:		
In addition to meals, do they provide refreshments for breaks between sessions?		
Are banquet servers trained to address food allergy issues including cross-contamination at buffet tables?		
Is there a pharmacy close to the hotel?		
<b>Toilets</b>		
How many accessible restrooms are there in the meeting space areas?		
Are the sinks and towels accessible?		
Can standalone soap dispensers and paper towels be provided?		
Do toilets have automatic or power-assisted door?		
Grab bars?		
<b>Accommodations</b>		
For attendees who are deaf and hard of hearing -- Are Assistive Listening Devices (ALD) available?		
Are Loop Systems available?		
Are microphones compatible?		
Do you have a list of local resources for American Sign Language Interpreters and CART providers? Details:		
Does the venue provide Audio Visual (AV) equipment, computers, wireless internet? Details:		
<b>Emergencies</b>		
Do you have a first aid station?		
Does the first aid station have Epi-Pens?		
Are Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs) stationed around the venue?		
Have staff been trained in how to use AEDs?		
Is there an emergency evacuation plan in place for attendees with disabilities? (Get a copy to share with staff and volunteers)		
Is there a designated service animal relief area and does it have litter bags? Where:		

Are loaner wheelchairs or scooters (possibly through a third-party vendor who can assume liability) available? Local resource details:		
Does the venue provide complimentary services? Details:		

Remember to never sign a contract with a venue without conducting a site visit first.

## Appropriate Disability Language

### Don't use:

- “The” Disabled, handicapped, physically challenged, special needs, differently able, people of determination
- Normal, able-bodied
- Wheelchair bound, confined to a wheelchair, suffers from, unfortunate
- Birth defect, deformity
- Crippled, lame, invalid, gimp, r-word
- Has a speech defect, dumb
- “The” blind
- Invisible disability
- Stupid, r-word, slow, subnormal, mentally challenged
- Has fits, spastic
- Midget
- Crazy, nuts, loony, insane
- Mental illness

### Do use:

- Person who has a disability (person-first)
- Disabled Person/Deaf Person/Autistic Person (identity-first)
- Non-disabled person, person without a disability
- Uses or rides a wheelchair
- Birth, congenital, acquired disability
- Person with a physical disability
- Has a speech disability
- Person who is blind or has low vision/ Blind person
- Apparent and non-Apparent disability

- Person with an intellectual, cognitive or developmental disability
- Person with epilepsy/seizure disability
- Person with a psychiatric disability
- Person with Autism/ Autistic person
- Person who is deaf or hard of hearing/ Deaf person
- Little Person or Dwarf
- Person with a mental health condition

**Other tips:**

- Always ask before touching any equipment. Assistive devices, including wheelchairs and other mobility devices, are often costly and difficult to replace. Damaging them accidentally could be detrimental to the person who relies on them for independence.
- If the person asks for assistance, or looks like they may need help, ask them how you can best assist.
- Do not be afraid to ask for guidance if you are unsure how to help.
- Speak directly to the person and not the person they are with. If their associate speaks on their behalf they always reply to the person with the disability.
- Do not assume that the person they are with is their personal care attendant.
- Having a disability does not change who a person is, rather it changes their interactions with the world.

Always ask the disabled person what terms they prefer.

## Event Phase Checklist

Task	YES	NO
Does everyone have a copy of the run-of-show for each day with their respective responsibilities and contact information?		
Do everyone know who to go to if an issue(s) arises and how to reach them?		
Contracts with all vendors are in place and they understand the event timing, and load-in and load-out guidance.		
Staff radio connections and channels have been tested.		
All ASL and CART providers know the rooms they are assigned to and who their point-of-contact is throughout the event.		
Final reminders and arrival guidance sent to keynote speakers, presenters, honorees, and VIPs.		

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Registration/check-in is set up, name badges are printed, lanyards are ready. Rosters are loaded on laptop computers or tablets.		
Conference bags are filled and have wi-fi access details included (if available), and any conference app details.		
Mobile language interpretation booths are installed and tested.		
Presentation rooms have had an audio/visual tested and have reserve seating assigned for ASL interpreters and attendees who need them.		
Presentation rooms have plenty of pads of paper and pens.		
Loaner scooters are charged ready for check-out.		
Ramps and railings have been installed and tested, if needed.		
Restrooms have been checked to make sure accessible stalls are operable and hand soap and paper towels are within reach.		
Elevators have been tested and volunteers posted outside to hold elevator doors open for wheelchair or scooter users, if needed		

**For more information, contact:**

United States International Council on Disabilities (USICD)

[info@usicd.org](mailto:info@usicd.org)

Learn about USICD membership by visiting <http://usicd.org/membership>



