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Event Accessibility Considerations In-Person Events

Food

If serving food at your event, ask attendees about allergies and clearly label the ingredients in each dish with large-print signage.

Ensure buffet tables and drink stations are at a height accessible for people using wheelchairs. Keep paths wide and unobstructed so that they are easy to navigate for people using wheelchairs, guides, service dogs, or other assistive devices.

Seating

When possible, use removable chairs to easily adapt spaces and ensure people who use wheelchairs can sit with family and friends, not in separate or isolated areas.

Plan accessible seating so that people in wheelchairs have unobstructed views of the stage, screen, pulpit, or center of activity. Be careful to avoid blocking exits, pathways, or emergency evacuation routes.

Carpooling

Offering transportation through carpooling can ensure access, safety, and trust for people with disabilities. Coordinate carpools among community members, including those with wheelchair-accessible vans, to ensure all attendees have access and feel a sense of belonging.

Public Transportation

Provide information about nearby public transportation, including the type of vehicle (such as bus, elevated train, or streetcar), identifying number or letter, and whether the stop nearest to the event is physically accessible.

If your event is located in a shared-ride demand-responsive area, paratransit services may be available. Paratransit is a demand-responsive mode of transportation for disabled and aging people who, because of their disabilities or age, cannot use fixed-route public transit services to get from point A to point B. Provide links to your local transportation authority, which often has maps, route guides, and notes on system accessibility.

Parking

Accessible parking spots must be designated with signage and blue stripes. Vehicles without an accessible placard or designated license plates must never be permitted to park in accessible spots or on the adjacent diagonal stripes, known as access aisles. This includes motorcycles, bicycles, and golf carts.

Outdoor Events

- Choose an easy-to-reach location with accessible parking nearby.
- Ensure the venue has paved, level access, avoiding obstacles such as divots, bumps, gravel, dirt paths, sand, or sudden drop-offs.
- Provide covered seating to offer sun protection and designate spaces for mobility devices, like wheelchairs.
- Make drinking water available for attendees.
- Always have alternative plans in place in case of inclement weather.

Events at Community Members' Homes

Many homes are not physically accessible to people who use mobility devices. If a home is not accessible or cannot be retrofitted to be so, choose a different accessible location.

Characteristics of an accessible home:

- Availability of public transportation and nearby parking
- Access to an elevator (if there are multiple floors)
- A ramp or lift to access locations with stairs
- Paved paths to and from the home
- Doorways that are wide enough for wheelchairs to pass through
- Adequate room in hallways and around seating to allow movement for those with mobility devices
- Bathrooms with enough room for wheelchair movement and accessible soap dispensers, towels, and grab bars
- Free of fragrances from cleaning supplies and perfumes

Service Animals

It is best to plan your event as pet-free, except for service animals, since some pets can trigger severe allergies. Consider displaying signage that states, "No pets allowed. Service animals are welcome." If pets will be present, inform attendees about the types of animals and keep them away from guests.

The responsibility of caring for service animals lies entirely with their owners. You are not obligated to provide care, food, or designated areas for these animals.

Note that emotional support animals (ESAs) do not qualify as service animals under the law, as they are not task-trained. These animals do not have public access rights.

Remember, service animals are not pets. Do not pet, feed, or interact with service animals while they are working or without the owner's permission.

Scent-Free Environments

Maintain a low-scent or scent-free environment in consideration of people with allergies, migraines, and chemical sensitivities. When publicizing the event remind people to not wear perfume, scented lotions, and other fragrances.

Scents can severely affect a person's health, causing headaches, upper respiratory symptoms, shortness of breath, and difficulty with concentration. Certain odors can still cause severe allergic reactions, even in small amounts. Avoid using scented cleaning supplies as these odors will linger.

Avoid a "scent-free zone" in your space. It is akin to a "no-smoking section" on an airplane. Scents carry, and the practice segregates people with sensitivities.

Hybrid Events

To make your event as accessible as possible, allow both virtual and in-person attendance. Use features like chat boxes to ensure both audiences can participate fully, and provide materials like invitations and handouts in both printed and digital formats.

Other Considerations

- Provide ASL interpreters and/or CART captioning.
- Offer accessible materials in Braille or large print if available.
- Share safety measures for COVID-19 and other airborne diseases.
- Rent temporary ramps for access and budget for this. Ensure elevators are working and their locations are well-marked.
- Pathways should be wide and free from obstructions. Keep floors clean and dry to prevent slips.