Accessible events guidelines and checklist for organisers, chairs, speakers and MCs
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If you would like to receive this publication in another format, please phone 1300 366 731 or contact the National Relay Service 13 36 77 if required.

This document is also available on the Internet at www.dhs.vic.gov.au/ds/disabilityact
The following guide is designed to assist organisers improve the accessibility of events to increase the participation of people with a disability, including those with a vision impairment or hearing loss.

It aims to help you:

- Think about access and participation.
- Identify features that make it impossible or difficult for people with a disability to access or participate in an event.
- Understand what you can do to ensure the best possible access.
- Find further sources of advice, information and assistance.
- Be aware, in advance, of specific requirements people attending a meeting or event may have.
- Consider emergency procedures available at the venue.

Before distributing invitations, it is important to remember that access is not restricted to physical access to buildings; it includes access to written information and public announcements for people with a vision impairment or hearing loss.
The venue

As a starting point, only venues that allow people to enter, exit and move around the building with ease should be considered. The venue should offer accessible toilet facilities and, where possible, the event should be held on one floor only.

It is a good practice to check the venue in person before confirming a booking as many venue managers do not have a clear understanding of access features.

A particular issue for people with a hearing loss is background noise, including music and acoustics. This can be reduced by selecting a room with carpet and acoustic tiles on the ceiling and walls.
Checklist

- Have you visited the venue prior to sending invitations? □ □
- Is the venue accessible by public transport? □ □
- Have the attendees been informed about where the venue is, including any landmarks that may help them find it? □ □
- Have the attendees been informed about the venue itself, for example, the types of doorway entrances, ramps and lifts? □ □
- Are the venue’s emergency procedures accessible? □ □
- Have attendees received written material in a preferred format prior to the event? □ □
- Is the venue a suitable size? □ □
- Is it adequately lit and well ventilated? □ □
- Is the room ‘hearing friendly’? □ □
- Will you let the attendees know where the accessible toilets are? □ □
The invitation

The invitation should always include a section asking if the attendee has any specific requirements, for example, seating, technical aids or hearing loops.

For example, the invitation could state:

‘The venue is accessible for people with a physical disability and all handout materials will be available, where possible, in an accessible electronic format. Please use this form to let us know if you have any other requirements to enable you to participate fully.’

Checklist

- Has the invitation included a section that asks if people have any specific requirements?  
  - Yes  
  - No

- Has a map with the venue location and directions been included with the invitation?  
  - Yes  
  - No
Hearing loop

Also known as an induction loop or audio loop, this system creates an amplified signal that can be picked up by hearing aids, enabling people with a hearing impairment a greater opportunity to hear the speaker more clearly.

Support workers

Always ensure there are sufficient support workers or assistants at the event and let the attendees know someone will be able to assist them, and where they will be. If it is an outdoor event, vision-impaired attendees should be offered a description of the site and the best way to access it.

Checklist

- Are there sufficient support workers in attendance?

- Will you advise attendees there will be people to assist them, and where to find them?
Issues for presenters, speakers and MCs to consider

There are other important points that presenters, speakers and chairs should consider:

- Speakers should always introduce themselves to attendees and when in smaller meetings go around the table and have other participants introduce themselves. The presenter should face the audience and keep their head up when speaking, as this allows the voice the best chance of being heard.

- Slow down speech a little and remember to use pauses between phrases and sentences to allow attendees with hearing loss a chance to process what they have heard and to keep up with what they hear.

- To assist with concentration, include regular short breaks in the agenda.

- Avoid looking up at PowerPoint screens when speaking as you will turn away from the microphone and the audience. Use either a roving microphone, or repeat the question when answering queries from the audience to make sure everyone hears both the question and answer.

- Limit the number of visuals and keep them simple with good colour contrast.
Checklist

- Have you arranged hearing loops?
- Have you arranged amplified microphones and roving microphones?
- Has all electronic equipment been checked to ensure it is in good working order?
- Have you limited visuals?
- Are the visuals easy to understand with good colour contrast?
- Have you scheduled regular short breaks?

Yes  No

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Catering

Some venues have a policy of only providing participants with a self-service buffet at lunchtime. A person with a mobility or vision impairment may find it difficult, or impossible, to carry or hold food from a buffet selection and to eat without having their plate supported on a table.

Flexible drinking straws should be available on request.

Checklist

- Have you considered serving food at a table rather than a buffet?
  - Yes  
  - No

- Are flexible drinking straws available if required?
  - Yes  
  - No

- Will you advise participants that support workers are available to assist with lunch if needed?
  - Yes  
  - No
Other issues to consider

- If a guest speaker has a vision impairment, they may need assistance to face the audience for their presentation.
- Organise for jugs of water and glasses to be placed on speakers’ tables.
- Ask how, or if, you can assist an attendee.
- Ask a vision-impaired attendee their preferred method in guiding.
- Address a vision-impaired attendee by name, and identify yourself.
- Never leave a vision-impaired attendee without telling them.
- For a person with a hearing loss, find out their preferred method of communication.

- If a guide dog is present, always address the guide dog user, not the dog.
- Never pat a guide dog in harness without permission from the guide dog user.
- Advise the guide dog user if there are other guide dogs at the event, and where they are.
- Advise the guide dog user if there is a dog run, and where it is located.
- Arrange for dog water bowls to be refilled throughout the function.