Guidelines for Accessible Conferences

Please send all feedback/suggestions to
disabilityguidance@soton.ac.uk.

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1. General guidance.

1.1 Basic principles.

Ideally, making a conference accessible means making it accessible for all disabled people without their having to disclose their disability to you, so that they can attend without applying to you for treatment as a special case. In some cases, of course, this is not feasible; it is not financially or practically feasible to provide a BSL interpreter or all conference materials in braille just in case somebody needs it, for example. But for the majority of people with disabilities, it is possible to provide in advance the kind of information that will enable them to attend – and, importantly, be confident in advance that their disabilities will be accommodated – without having to disclose them.

Merely asking relevant individuals to volunteer their needs can signal that they are not welcome and/or cause unnecessary embarrassment; it also imposes additional workload on them. Do your best to prevent this by volunteering concrete accessibility details – and for those disabilities that cannot feasibly be automatically accommodated, signal a willingness to do your best to accommodate them.

Bear in mind that disabilities come in diverse forms, and that disabled people are not only wheelchair users and those with sensory impairments, but also those with "invisible" disabilities that may be less obvious, such as fluctuating energy levels, mental health issues, dyslexia, or diabetes.

1.2 Funding.

The accommodation of some disabilities (e.g. provision of sign language interpreters) costs money. Your university, and some funders, have money available for this purpose, but it is normally secured only *after* you know what your specific needs are, and not included when you initially apply for money to run a conference.

Common costs:
    Braille:
    There are two options:
        • Cheaper option: Convert the text using free online software, and then have it printed using a braille embosser at your university or a nearby copy centre. The translation will not be optimal.
        • Best option: Send the files to an online braille transcription service. It should cost around £5/page. The documents can then be posted directly to you. This process normally takes no longer than 8 days in total.

    Sign language:
    This is likely to cost around £300/day, and require something like 2-4 weeks' notice. Use google to find a local interpretation company.

2. Things to do.

The following subsections list the things you need to do to run an accessible conference. They are in chronological order.

2.1 Things to do when inviting speakers and/or in call for papers.

A standard procedure is to release a call for papers before booking a venue, and so before being able to confidently make any claims about accessibility. This is unhelpful for people with disabilities that require accommodation, since they don't know whether writing an abstract/paper will turn out to be a waste of their time. So try to book the venue before releasing a call for papers. You will then be able to provide some information about accessibility at this stage.

The next section lists the information that you should make available before you invite people to register for the conference. Ideally, you would also provide this very same information when inviting speakers or issuing a call for papers. In practice, however, it may be difficult to provide all of this information at this early stage. In that case, at a minimum:
- Make clear whatever information you do have.
- Affirm that you aim to make the conference accessible, in light of these guidelines.
- Warmly encourage people to contact you if there are any specific points on which they need more information.

2.2. Things to do when opening for registration.

2.2.1. The registration process.
- If there is a conference website, do your best to ensure that it is disability accessible. See the links in "Further resources" for help.
- When deciding on the programme, for longer sessions (e.g. 45 minutes or longer) include a short break between each talk and the Q&A period.
- State whether any registration fee is waived or reduced for personal assistants for disabled attendees.
- State whether you can provide sign language interpretation and if so, ask registrants whether it is required.

- State whether you can provide materials in alternative formats (e.g. braille) and if so, ask registrants whether they require this.
- State whether you can provide a hearing loop or similar device and if so, ask registrants whether they require it. (Note: if you use a hearing loop, you **must** require all speakers to use a microphone).
- If you are providing food, ask about specific dietary requirements.
- State whether registrants can bring a service animal.
- Warmly encourage people to contact you if they need more information or have any queries.

2.2.2. The main conference venue.
- State whether the building(s) and room(s) will be wheelchair accessible. Most institutions will be able to tell you. If not, the most obvious issues to consider are:
  - whether the entrance to the building/floor/room has steps;
  - whether the relevant doors are wide enough (the advised width is 80/120cm, depending on whether you approach the door from the front or at a right-angle);
  - whether there is sufficient floor space within the room.
  This information will also be helpful for those with other mobility impairments.
- State whether there are nearby disabled toilets and whether they are accessible from the room. If you are in doubt as to whether they are sufficiently close, give an estimate of distance.
- State whether there is disabled parking nearby; again, give an estimate of distance.
- State whether there will be a nearby quiet room. These can be helpful for people who might need a quiet space, such as some people who have fluctuating energy levels and people who need to give themselves injections. (It can also be used for nursing/breastfeeding.)

2.2.3. Additional venues.
These might include accommodation, restaurants, bars, or anywhere else that is clearly related to the conference:
- Give the same information as above.
- For accommodation, you may need to ask about accessibility so that you can book an appropriate room. If delegates are making

their own accommodation arrangements, try to suggest hotels with accessible bedrooms.
- Check the accessibility of the conference dinner venue before booking; many restaurants are not wheelchair accessible. Also bear in mind that people with hearing difficulties may struggle in noisier restaurants.
- Make clear whether there is seating available if there is a reception: some people cannot stand for long periods of time.
- State how you expect attendees to travel between venues. Is there nearby parking? If you expect them to walk, roughly how far is it, and what would be the alternative? Are wheelchair-accessible taxis easy to find/book?

2.3. Things to do when writing to speakers.

It is not wholly within your control whether the talks and presentations at your conference will themselves be accessible. But when writing to the speakers, in order to maximise the chances that their presentations will be accessible, you could copy the following text:

"We aim to make this conference accessible to all disabled people, in light of [these] guidelines for accessible conferences, and ask you to help us achieve this goal. We would really appreciate it if you could comply with the following three requests:

First, that you be willing to share any presentation material with us (e.g. PowerPoint, handouts) and the other conference participants in advance in order to permit conversion of them into accessible formats (e.g. braille).

Second, that you make your visual aids (if any) as accessible as possible. The following suggestions are not exhaustive but could make a significant difference (for more see http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/common/ckeditor/filemanager/userfiles/About_Us/policies/Dyslexia_Style_Guide.pdf):
- For PowerPoint, use dark colours for text and light (but not bright-white) backgrounds, e.g. light yellow.
- Avoid contrasting red with green: red and green are commonly difficult to distinguish for colour-blind individuals.

- Use a plain, evenly spaced sans serif font such as Arial, Verdana, Tahoma, Century Gothic, or Trebuchet.
- Use 12+ size font and 1.5+ line spacing for handouts and 24+ size font for PowerPoints.
- If you are using a video, and there is a version with subtitles, please use it.

Third, that you make your delivery (in the talk, and the Q&A) as accessible as possible. Most importantly:

- Ideally, everything given visually should also be explained verbally (e.g. pictures).
- During Q&A, summarise all questions before answering them.
- Try not to rely on laser pointers.
- If someone asks you whether they can record your talk, take into account that a recording might be extremely helpful for people with certain disabilities.

If you have any questions about how to make your presentation accessible, please let us know, and we will do our best to help."

2.4. Things to do when sending the conference information pack.

- Upload/email the information pack as soon as you have all the relevant information. Give as much information as you can, repeating information described in 2.2 where it is still relevant, and adding as necessary (e.g. about how to acquire a permit for parking)
- Include information about breaks between talks and Q&As so that chairs remember to do it.
- For the benefit of chairs and delegates, be explicit that written questions are allowed in the Q&A (e.g. for those with anxiety issues or speech impediments).
- Say where the nearest pharmacist is.
- Remember that some delegates find coming to an unfamiliar place difficult, so even information about how to get to the registration desk from the main entrance, or where the nearest place is that they can buy a coffee, will be helpful.

- Include a contact name and phone number in case of emergencies.

2.5 Things to do during the conference.
- Make sure that you know what to do in the event of an emergency (e.g. a fire), including any disability-specific guidance (e.g. regarding wheelchair users during a fire).
- Make sure you know how to operate equipment such as microphones and hearing loops.
- Make clear who to contact if any unexpected issues arise during the conference.

2.6 Things to do after the conference.
Doing all or most of the above is quite a lot of work the first time around. However, you can make things easier by keeping the relevant information for next time, and sharing it with colleagues.

3. Further resources and additional guidance.

http://cswip.ca/images/uploads/CSWIP_Accessibility_Working_Group_Document.pdf
> CSWIP advice on accessibility.

http://www.apaonline.org/?page=diversity_resources
www.apaonline.org/resource/resmgr/docs/Good_Practices_Guide.pdf
> APA advice on accessibility (pp.54-65 of the latter).

https://www.w3.org/WAI/training/accessible
> Information on making presentations accessible.

https://www.DisabledGo.com
> A useful, although incomplete, source of information about wheelchair-accessible conference venues, restaurants, hotels and bars.

http://bdatech.org/what-technology/typefaces-for-dyslexia/
http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/common/ckeditor/filemanager/userfiles/About_Us/policies/Dyslexia_Style_Guide.pdf

Advice on dyslexia-friendly fonts, visual aids, etc.

https://webaccess.berkeley.edu/resources/tips/web-accessibility
https://www.w3.org/WAI/gettingstarted/
Advice on making websites accessible.

http://societyforphilosophyanddisability.org/2017/05/using-qr-codes-to-make-presentation-materials-more-accessible/
Guidance on inserting QR-codes into handouts etc. to make them more accessible.

https://teresablankmeyerburke.net/faqs-for-conference-organizers/
Further guidance on sign language interpretation (US focus).

http://www.adahospitality.org/accessible-meetings-events-conferences-guide/book
A different set of guidelines on making events accessible.

https://mapuk.weebly.com/incusive-event-guidelines.html
And another.

4. Sample text.

The text below is obviously only a sample, and should be modified appropriately for your use.

4.1. Text for information:

"We aim to make this conference as accessible as possible, in line with [this] guidance for accessible conferences. To that end:
- There will / will not be a short break between each session and the Q&A.
- The registration fee will / will not be waived / reduced for personal assistants to disabled people.
- We can provide sign-language interpretation, though we will need to know by <date> if it is required / We cannot provide sign-language interpretation.

- We can provide a hearing loop, though we will need to know by <date> if it is required / We cannot provide a hearing loop or any alternative.
- We can / cannot permit service animals to attend.
- The venue(s) are / are not wheelchair accessible.
- The venue(s) do / do not have nearby disabled toilets.
- The venue(s) do / do not have a nearby quiet room.
- The venue(s) will / will not all have available seating.
- We generally expect attendees to travel between venues by ###. There is / is not nearby parking to all venues. The best alternative method of transport would be ###.
- We will / will not permit questions during Q&A to be written down rather than spoken out loud.

We aim to accommodate all dietary requirements. Please state such needs when you register.

Further, we will ask all speakers to conform with the advice issued in [this] guidance for accessible conferences.

Do please contact us at ### if you have further questions not resolved above."

4.2. Questions for Registration

 "Thank you for registering for this conference on ###. We aim to make this conference as accessible as possible, in line with [this] guidance for accessible conferences. To that end, please tick as appropriate:

I have specific dietary needs.   ☐
I am a bringing a personal assistant.   ☐
I require a sign language interpreter to be present.   ☐
I require conference materials in braille or another format. ☐
I require the use of a hearing loop.   ☐
I am bringing a service animal.   ☐
I use a wheelchair.   ☐
I require a quiet room to be made available.   ☐

Please add further information or other requests, here:
[text box]"