

HOW TO HOST ACCESSIBLE MEETINGS & EVENTS

The location and layout of a room are crucial to the success of your gathering. Here are some best practices for ensuring accessibility for all participants — including those with disabilities — and ease of interaction between Kiwanians and guests.

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

1. If possible, find out how many expected attendees have accommodation needs or requests. This can be done with a few simple questions on a registration form or survey.
2. Get information about how many participants may be accompanied by a personal assistant, so that seating for the assistant can be arranged prior to arrival.
3. Determine who in your audience speaks another language and may need an interpreter.
4. If any of your speakers use speech-assistive devices, ask whether they need a different microphone setup.

CHOOSE AN IDEAL LOCATION

1. Consider all types of mobility devices and your members' and guests' needs.
2. If not meeting on a ground floor, ensure there is an elevator or ramp.
3. For the room location, choose a floor that also has an accessible restroom. If that is not possible, provide longer break times between program sessions.
4. If the event involves presentation screens, the layout should ensure the screens can be easily seen throughout the room.
5. If speakers or a panel will be on stage, ensure easy access with safety tread steps or a ramp with a hand bar or railing.
6. If you have a podium for speakers, offer an alternative for anyone who cannot stand — or a riser to ensure that the podium is accessible.
7. For equitable access, use a platform that allows both in-person and virtual attendance.



CAREFULLY PLAN SEATING

1. Accessible seating should be made available throughout the room to ensure participants with disabilities can select a location of their choice, just like other attendees.
2. Create space for people who use scooters to remain in their scooter seats if they prefer. If an individual prefers to use a regular seat, provide space to keep the scooter nearby.
3. For people with hearing disabilities, include a seating plan with space for the interpreters.

Recommendations for a theater-style event

- When an event does not involve the use of tables or desks, provide sufficient space to improve accessibility. For example, remove aisle seats from the first two rows in the front, back and middle.
- For every wheelchair space, it's best to remove two standard chairs.
- Chairs should not be attached to each other. This allows participants to adjust them as needed.

Recommendation for a classroom-style event

Consider using the chevron set-up — a V-shaped arrangement in which the chairs and tables are positioned for the optimal visibility of participants and speakers.

Recommendations for a roundtable event

- Provide a minimum of three feet between roundtable aisles and six feet for side aisles.
- To accommodate mobility devices such as wheelchairs, reduce the number of

roundtable settings to create additional space. For example, create a maximum of eight seating spaces for a roundtable of five feet and 10 spaces for a roundtable of six feet.

- A half-round table layout is ideal so that every participant can directly face the presentation area.

BE MINDFUL OF SPACING AND AISLES

1. If one in 10 participants is likely to use a mobility aid or a service animal, the meeting room should provide for about one-third extra space.
2. Aisles should be at least three to six feet wide to accommodate people with mobility aids. Both vertical and horizontal aisles should be considered. If all aisles cannot be widened, provide for a wider central aisle to facilitate navigation.
3. Remind the attendees at the beginning of the event to not block the pathways with bags or personal items. Never block emergency exits.
4. Be careful with cords and wiring. Tape everything down to allow ease of walking and safe access.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

1. Test the audio and make sure it can be heard at the back of the room when full and noisy.
2. Practice your presentation — speak slowly and clearly, keeping pace with the allotted time.
3. Follow best practices with visuals and slide deck presentations — use minimal text per slide, as well as large fonts, simple colors and keywords.
4. Turn on auto captions in your presentation software, if available. At least one or more screens should have captions running along with an audio-visual presentation.
5. Always have the speaker use a microphone.
6. Have the speaker or a moderator repeat questions from the audience.
7. Consider posting a link or QR code at the end of your presentation to allow participants to access or download your slide deck, notes or handouts.



SENSORY INFORMATION

Some attendees may have a hidden disability and need sensory input in order to attend comfortably or to remain for the duration of an event. Here are some tips and ideas for assisting those who need special consideration:

1. For those with sensitivity to fluorescent lights, use incandescent lamps in a dedicated section.
2. Avoid flashing lights and strobes. These include blinking buttons and other flashing wearables.
3. To protect participants with sensitivity to electrical charge, provide a separate area outside the conference room to recharge batteries.
4. Some attendees may use devices or other items during the event — but that doesn't mean they're not listening. For instance, some may wear headphones to limit noise and distractions. Some may use fidget devices and chew jewelry to stay calm. Some may have a book or magazine to keep them busy.
5. Ask the person accompanying the attendee what you can do to help them both enjoy the event.
6. If this is a Service Leadership Program event, talk to the student's (or Aktion Club member's) team and/or their family or caregiver to find out what they need for a meaningful and pleasant experience.
7. Reach out to your district leaders for assistance. There are Kiwanians of all abilities ready and willing to lend guidance to help you plan the best environment for your next event.
8. Reach out to Kiwanis International at helpline@kiwanis.org for questions or additional assistance.

GET FEEDBACK

Gather feedback from your audience via survey or comment cards to determine what went well and what could be improved. Kiwanis clubs and districts that focus on preparing their teams as well as their facilities will deliver a more satisfying experience for all attendees.



SOURCE: "Best Practices for Creating an Accessible Conference or Meeting Layout" by Benjamin Roussey, published October 27, 2020, at accessibility.com/blog/best-practices-for-creating-an-accessible-conference-or-meeting-layout.



Kiwanis