

Accessible Events Guide



**Society for
Students with a
Disability**

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Created by: Society for Students with a Disability

Written by: M Gordon

Edited by: SSD Staff, Council, and Community

This is a working document that will continue to change and be re-released; feedback is welcomed, contact info in the “Final Thoughts” section!

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Updates

Version 1.1: language change

- Changed all mention of “able-bodied” to “non-disabled” to better encapsulate the diversity of disability (i.e., someone who is able-bodied may still be disabled through other means).

Glossary

Accessibility

A continuous process of designing events, spaces, and experiences so that as many people as possible can participate. It involves flexibility, planning, and ongoing adaptation, not a one-time checklist.

Accessibility Statement

A plain language, public facing description of an event's access features and limitations, helping participants decide if and how they can attend.

Accessible Promotion

The practice of sharing event information in clear, readable, and inclusive formats, with accessibility details included upfront.

Adaptability

The ability to adjust plans, activities, or environments in response to participants' needs during an event.

Barriers

Physical, social, or systemic obstacles that prevent people from participating fully (e.g., stairs, unclear instructions, rigid rules).

Broad Design

Accessibility features applied proactively to the entire group experience (e.g., relaxed performance, scent-free policies).

Care-Based Approach

An approach rooted in empathy, respect, and collective responsibility, emphasizing support and dignity for all participants.

Content Notes

General notices about potentially sensitive material (e.g., loud sounds, strong language).

Default Participant

The assumed "typical" user an event is designed for, often excluding other unintentionally.

Disability Justice

A framework emphasizing love, collective care, interdependence, and the right of all people to participate fully, beyond legal compliance. Disability Justice was developed in 2005 by queer disabled women of colour, Patty Berne, Mia Mingus, and Stacey Milbern, part of the organization [Sins Invalid](#). They have outlined the 10 principles of disability justice on their [website](#).

Disability as Mismatch

The idea that disability arises when environments fail to meet people's needs, rather than being a problem with the individual.

Inclusion

Experiences and events where everyone belongs and can successfully participate.

Inclusive Design / Universal Design

Designing spaces and experiences that consider diverse needs from the start, rather than adding accommodations later.

Individual Design (One-size-fits-one)

Personalized adjustments that allow individuals to engage in ways that work best for them.

Integrated Solutions

Accessibility features built into the main experience, rather than separated or added as afterthoughts.

Iterative Process

An ongoing cycle of planning, testing, feedback, and improvement.

Intersectionality

Our identities such as race, gender, class, sexuality, and ability all overlap to create unique, compounded experiences of discrimination or privilege.

Lived Experience

Knowledge gained from personal experience, especially by people directly affected by barriers, disability, and other systemic marginalizations.

Stakeholders

People affected by or involved in the event, especially those with relevant lived experience.

Introduction

This guide brings together ideas from multiple accessibility frameworks, lived experiences, and facilitation practices. It is written primarily for facilitators, producers, and anyone responsible for shaping group events and experiences, but the principles can be applied to other settings such as classrooms, meetings, and community spaces.

Inclusion and accessibility are not something you consider at the end of planning. It is a process that begins at the earliest stages of design, continues throughout the event itself, and extends into your reflection afterwards. Planning will not, however, pre-emptively solve all issues, or remove all barriers. Access begins with flexibility, foresight, and understanding. Your planning is predicated on the idea that flexibility is something that you prepare for. Because no single design will work for everyone, accessibility relies heavily on flexibility, transparency, and a willingness to adapt. While access is a big topic that's discussed in many textbooks, memoirs, and guides (much like this one), in truth, there are just a few things which you need to keep close to your heart to steer yourself towards success. Here are six guidelines to get you started:

- **Build accessibility into your main design and planning processes.** It cannot be an afterthought, tacked on, or an otherwise isolating experience.
- **Be very clear and detailed about your event's accessibility successes and limitations in promotion.**
- **Prioritize flexibility and customization.** The more ability that your participants have to meet their individual needs with ease, the wider the variety of people that can participate.
- **Approach with an inquisitive, proactive mind.** Find answers to your questions and consider needs carefully from the perspectives of others.
- **Prioritize grace and understanding.**
- **Involves stakeholder, especially disabled people, early and often.** Do not reinvent the wheel. Do not invent a square "wheel" when someone else knows that it would be more helpful round. Involve disabled people in your planning from the get-go, especially if there's a certain demographic of people who you want to involve in your event.

How do I put this into practice?

Think about accessibility at the same time you think about your goals, audience, and logistics. Instead of asking "how do we accommodate people later," and "who might be excluded by this design right now?" build in options from the beginning, multiple ways to sit, participate, communicate, and take breaks. Allocate time, money, and labour specifically for access, rather than expecting it to fit into leftover capacity, or to fall to disabled people to do. Consult people who have lived experience with the barriers you are trying to address.

Checklist

- ☐ Accessibility considered at first planning meeting
- ☐ Stakeholders consulted or invited into planning
- ☐ Multiple participation option included
- ☐ Accessibility information prepared early

Tips & Tidbits

- Accessibility is easier to build in than retrofit later
- Planning for flexibility reduces stress during facilitation
- You are not aiming for perfection, you are aiming for responsiveness

TLDR: Access is best described as a certain attitude, rather than a catch-all set of instructions. Flexibility, understanding, consultation, and incorporating access into your mainstream design are all foundational skills to facilitate an accessible event.

Disability Justice

Disability Justice is a framework, movement, and set of practices that reimagines how societies understand disability, access, and liberation. It centers those who are most impacted by systemic oppression, particularly disabled people who are also marginalized by race, gender, class, sexuality, and immigration status. Disability justice insists that ableism cannot be separated from other systems of power racism and colonialism, and that true liberation must address all of these forces. The term and framework were developed in the early 2000s by activists of colour, including members of the Sins Invalid, a collective of disabled artists and organizers. Figures such as Patty Berne, Mia Mingus, and Stacey Milbern helped articulate its core principles. Their work emerged from frustration with mainstream disability rights movements, which often prioritized legal access and accommodation while overlooking the lived realities of disabled people of colour and others at the margins. Disability Justice values collective care over individual independence, challenges productivity-based notions and uplifts leadership of those most impacted. ([Head over to the Sins Invalid website for more reading](#)) This framework is important for you to bring into any of your events, workshops, *etc.*, when you are including disabled people.

The framework of disability justice, is further described in *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice* by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha is important reference material for anybody hoping to facilitate events, workshops, classes, *etc.* especially if they want to prioritize access for all to these spaces. This book is available for borrowing at the Society for Students with a Disability's mini library located within the SUB Room B111. [It is also available online through the UVic library.](#) In this collection of essays, like Sins Invalid, Piepzna-Samarasinha speaks about Disability Justice as something that is grounded in love and collective care. It goes beyond legal compliance or institutional requirements and instead focuses on relationships, interdependence, and the belief that everyone deserves meaningful participation. Community care is required from us all to meet the needs not yet met by government, institutions, and policy. The labour of creating an accessible event can be difficult and not always rewarded, but we do it for the belief that all people deserve to participate fully if they want to.

Piepzna-Samarasinha also speaks about non-disabled facilitators who do everything right (make their event accessible, remain informed, share information about their event in all the right ways and in right places) who then get upset when no disabled people come. This disappointment and this circumstance is not unique to non-disabled folks. You can put immense amounts of research and effort into cultivating an accessible space and may not see immediate evidence that it “worked”. Disabled participants may not attend, may not disclose their needs, or may still encounter barriers. It's entirely understandable to feel frustrated, or like your work has gone unvalued or at least under-utilized, but this does not mean the work was unnecessary. Access

doesn't exist only when you think people of certain abilities might want to join your event, your event must always be accessible in case they do. This important distinction is a very good reminder when you feel discouraged. The work is worthwhile even when you think it's not currently being utilized, this just means that your next step likely involves engaging meaningfully with that community.

Another important idea is connecting Disability Justice to our work as facilitators. Disability Justice can be driving someone to the grocery store, understanding when your disabled friend cancels and continuing to invite them out anyway, supporting each other with grace and dignity, especially when it's hard or inconvenient, and reminding yourself to ask for the same. It's people helping each other in places where one person excels in one area but needs help in another and vice-versa. There are a lot of negative stereotypes and attitudes attached to disabled people, such as them being flaky or undependable (often due to having to cancel or make tentative commitments while monitoring their health), or that they're plain difficult to accommodate for. As a facilitator, it's important to approach access from a place of understanding. We mustn't lose touch with our own needs and emotions, but we must also understand that others' behaviours may be motivated by needs or barriers that we may or may not know. Our attitude must be accepting as a default. Disability Justice is an act of care driven by a love for other people, but it stops being justice when we pick and choose. Access isn't just for people who we like, or who behave in ways that we approve of. Truthfully, it's easier to exclude people. It's easier to plan an inaccessible event, but we must centre access because we know that it's important.

How do I put this into practice?

Continue designing for access regardless of turnout or visible need. Build policies that assume variability, people arriving late, leaving early, or changing their level of participation. Avoid framing accessibility as a favour or expectation; instead, treat it as a standard part of your work.

Checklist

- ☐ Access measures implemented consistently
- ☐ No assumptions about who needs access
- ☐ Flexible attendance and participation norms

Tips & Tidbits

- Many disabilities are invisible or undisclosed
- Trust builds slowly, consistency matters
- Care-based approaches can reduce stress, lead with care

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TLDR: Access work is founded on a belief that everybody deserves to participate fully. It may be difficult and may not be rewarding the facilitator, but we prioritize it anyway because of our belief in this right. By facilitating accessible events as a default, we create spaces where anybody can expect to be able to participate.

Inclusive Design and the Six Guidelines in Action

For this guide, it's important to challenge deficiency-based and medicalised models of disability that frame disability as an individual problem to be "cured". Instead, think of disability as a design failing to meet someone's need, what the [Inclusive Design Guide](#) called "disability as mismatch." Creating accessible spaces means recognizing it is the responsibility of the space (and society) to meet people's needs, not the other way around. As the guide explains:

"Inclusive design considers this mismatch to be conditional, solvable through design, and the result of many factors, including: context (e.g. upon waking up in the morning); environment (e.g. a dark room); hardware and software variations (e.g. smartphone vs. desktop); unique personal needs and learning styles (e.g. I prefer to listen rather than read)."

Understanding this is the first step to **incorporating access into your mainstream design**. What is inaccessible, and how can you make it accessible?

In practice, you'll often face limits. If you're renting a venue, you can choose a more accessible one, but you may not be able to modify it. Sometimes accessibility is constrained by the space, resources, or nature of the event. If you were assigned a venue that cannot accommodate wheelchair users, you must reassess priorities, problem-solve, or clearly acknowledge the event's inaccessibility. Not every event will be accessible to every person, and some factors are beyond your control (though we have a duty to try).

For example, in live theatre, expectations like silence can exclude people who tic or need to bring children because they cannot afford childcare. Common "solutions," like asking them to leave if they make noise or watch from a lobby screen, may be well-intentioned, but they are inadequate; they segregate users and make participation conditional. Issues like this stem from a lack of foresight into the needs of these communities and the theatre's ability to meet them. They lack a **proactive, inquisitive mindset**, and they lack **solutions from stakeholders such as disabled community members**. A better prepared and informed theatre will have very different, more proactive solutions.

One such approach in theatre spaces is the "relaxed performance" where house lights stay on and audience noise is accepted. This brings families and disabled people into a space which they would otherwise find very difficult or impossible to enjoy. And most importantly, their experience of the event is still largely within the parameters of how it was meant to be experienced in the first place (the mainstream design). This solution comes from a place of **grace and understanding**.

So, if relaxed performances are a good solution, why is every performance not relaxed? The first answer you may encounter is conflicting with artistic goals. As creatives, theatre artists often

make concessions to hold relaxed performances. The lighting design is less impressive in a lit house; performances can be more difficult and less impactful by frequent disruptions or distractions, and the list goes on. There is a valid argument to be made that pursuing accessibility in this case may weaken the show and devalues the art, and some audience members may agree. We, as event planners/producers/facilitators, have a duty to consider when accessibility initiatives may counter the purposes of the event, and to weigh its pros and cons. Sometimes that means that only one performance out of seven is a relaxed performance. You should however be careful not to hyperbolize the impact of accessibility initiatives on the success of your event. Access should always be our goal. Rather than using perceived drawbacks of accessibility as a reason to dismiss it entirely, see what compromises can be made to preserve the event's integrity for all involved.

Additionally, what is accessible for one person is not accessible for everyone. Looking back at our example all of the things that make a relaxed performance more accessible for some people are inaccessible to others. A relaxed performance may exclude someone sensitive to noise or distraction. Access needs can conflict. Accessibility is not “one-size-fits-all,” but “one-size-fits-one,” system of flexible, customizable, and integrated solutions. **That means that you prioritize flexibility and customization where you can.** Less rigid participation requirements generally increase accessibility.

[The Inclusive Design Guide](#) defines one-size-fits-one as flexible, customizable to the person, and integrated; rather than segregated and specialized. To use the metaphor of a t-shirt, we can plan for flexibility so that each participant can select their own size rather than need to deal with a “one-size-fits-all” shirt that is too small, too big, or just fits awkwardly. And no one wants to be sent to the corner where all the people who need button-ups go. Spread your reach too wide or too rigidly, and you might fail to create an event which appropriately includes anyone. Why should they have to wear shirts at all? Maybe it's important, but if you're going to make that decision, then you should have a good reason why nudists won't be able to participate in your event (this metaphor may be getting away a little bit.). The less rigid the requirements to participate are, the more inherently accessible your event is. The less broadly applied characteristics of your event are (remember our example of the relaxed performance being for everyone, not just individuals), the more people who can access your event simultaneously.

To return to our example of a theatre, perhaps the performance involves some audience participation. The theatre might say that the first two rows are the only audience members that they'll interact with, so anyone who doesn't want to interact with the performers should sit further back. This is an example of integrating flexibility without compromising your event. The show needs audience members to interact with, but some audience members might not be able to or want to engage in that way, and still others might really, really want to be called on. This

solution from the theatre flexibly meets the needs of the event as well as both groups of people by introducing an element of individualized customization.

“But what if two groups have competing needs?” You ask. “You mentioned people who can’t enjoy relaxed performances and then completely stopped talking about them for some reason.” This is true! In the case of one-off events with competing needs, and you’ve tried everything to resolve it, the difficult truth is that only some needs can be met at the same time while others will remain intentionally left out. Unfortunately, it’s better to properly serve one group of people than fail to properly serve two. It’s that saying of “one bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.” However, in events held across time or throughout multiple sessions, you’ve got another tactic available to you.

When a theatre puts on a show, it usually runs for multiple nights. Even with resources for ASL interpretation, VocalEye described performances, relaxed performances, and other access initiatives; theatres may not offer all of them every night, and often can’t combine them effectively into a single performance. Each program is designed for specific supports, so offering each at least once helps serve different audiences well without diluting their impact. This approach avoids trying (and failing) to include everyone at once, while keeping the audience part of the broader experience. The flexibility here isn’t on-the-spot customization but planning across performances so audiences can choose what works best. **They can make these informed choices about when to see the show because you’re very clear about your event’s accessibility successes and limitations in your promotions.**

The flexibility here is the audience member’s ability to pick which performance would best suit their needs, and it comes from the theatre’s ability to hold the performance for multiple nights. That might not always be your reality, in which case it is your responsibility to identify which other factors can be made to be flexible.

Additional note: A wonderful part about integrated solutions is that the things that make an event or space accessible for one group of people might also (and often do) benefit others who you may not even be thinking of. For example, a ramp entrance is essential for wheelchair users, but it’s also very helpful for people carrying large objects, people with bicycles, people pushing buggies, people with low vision, *etc.* Accessibility often improves experience for us all. We can all benefit from solutions which are integrated into the mainstream design— in this case, a ramp at the front entrance rather than a side entrance.

How do I put this into practice?

Identify where your design assumes a “default” participant and challenge those assumptions. Offer multiple ways to engage with content and activities. When possible, integrate access solutions into the main experience rather than separating them.

Checklist

- ☐ Barriers identified in both space and design
- ☐ Multiple engagement options available
- ☐ No segregated or secondary experiences

Tips & Tidbits

- Integrated solutions benefit more people than expected
- Flexibility often improves the experience for everyone
- Being specific about who you’re serving is more effective than trying to serve everyone at once

TLDR: Disability is not an issue with an individual, but an issue with the environment/design which bars an individual from participating. We have varying levels of control over our physical environment as facilitators, but we have much more control over our event’s design. By creatively applying our Six Guidelines (from the introduction), we can address access concerns without compromising the intent/goals/impact of our original design. We can introduce access solutions which don’t compromise the experiences of people making use of the solutions and otherwise. It comes from flexibility of thought and action.

Accessibility Statements

An Accessibility Statement is a key part of planning any event, space, or activity. In a world where not everyone can access every event, space, or activity, because of economic, institutional, and societal barriers, and the reality that not all needs can be met at once, the most important thing we can do as planners is be clear about exactly how our event is and isn't accessible. People understand their own needs better than we ever can. So precise, honest information helps them decide how (or if) to participate.

Accessibility Statements are plain-language, public-facing explanations of an event or space's access features and limitations. Ideally, they're the first, and only, place someone needs to look to determine whether the event will work for them, or to find contact information for specific questions or requests. They should be clearly labelled and easy to navigate, so people can quickly find what they need without digging.

Important things to include (though this is not an exhaustive list) are things like:

- Directions on how/where to access the space, including notes on entry points (*i.e.* are there stairs or a ramp, are the doors button-operated, how wide are the doorways?)
- Description of the physical space, including details that may be immediately pertinent to stakeholders and stimuli that can aggravate conditions or symptoms (*i.e.* is there room for a wheelchair to maneuver around, what kind of lighting is used in the space, what seating options are there, what is the usual noise level, is it well ventilated, are there scents associated with the space?)
- Directions and descriptions of the nearest washrooms, including information on their accessibility/what they're equipped with, and whether they are gendered.
- Policies in the space (*i.e.* is it a scent-free or low-scent zone, is it a mask required or mask encouraged space, is it a quiet zone or are conversations welcome, is it allergen free?)

Important things to include about the event, though this is not an exhaustive list, are things like:

- A brief overview of activities involved in the event (or what to expect).
- The format of the event (such as online, hybrid, in-person, *etc.*)
- Descriptions of physical activity (if any) involved in the event. This includes activities which may not immediately be thought of as difficult or taxing by someone not facing the same barriers, such as needing to get up and move to several different stations, to stand for a period of time, or handwrite.
- Content notes and trigger warnings relevant to the event.

- **Content notes** are notices of content which some audience members/participants may want to know in advance. This includes notices about foul language, violence, sexual content, whether atmospheric haze will be used, and much more. **Trigger warnings** are specifically for potentially triggering material and often include warnings about harsh subject matter that might result in panic attacks, may bring up trauma, or cause other forms of harm in certain demographics of people.

Related to accessibility statements are “visual stories” or “access guides”. These are essentially very detailed accessibility statements that go into precise detail about what to expect from the event/performance and the space, including information on performances that many might consider “spoiler-y”. Theatre [SKAM’s visual story](#) for their 2023 production of *Going All The Way* is available online and provides a good example of one. **Here is an accessibility statements created by SSD Staff for our commonly used spaces that you can borrow from or use as guides:**

Example of CLEA A127:

Room A127 is located on the first floor of the A wing in the Clearihue Building. It is accessible via ramp and an automatic door through an easy-to-press and easily visible button on the east side of the building. There is an additional entrance on the south-east corner of the building also accessed through an automatic door (34” wide) with an easy-to-press and easily visible button. To get to room A127, walk west from the entrance down the hallway of the A wing to find two entrances (32 1/2” wide) on the north-hand side. Neither entrance to the room is automatic and they cannot be propped open. There are metal sills in both entrances creating a small bump.

There is low-pile carpet flooring in the room and about 6 feet into the room across its full width, is a small bump where cables are run beneath the carpet. All furniture in the room can be moved, including a manual adjustable height desk, many wheeled tables with a lot of leg room, and unpadded, wheeled chairs. There is plentiful natural light as well as overhead artificial lighting with a warmer white tone. Zoom participants will be heard over the classroom speakers, the volume of which can be adjusted. Pictures of the room can be found here:

There is an accessible (no lift), gender neutral bathroom next to the eastern entrance of the building at the start of the D wing. There are two gendered bathrooms across from it, only the men’s of which has an accessible (no lift) stall.

We request that participants keep the workshop a scent-free space, but cannot guarantee adherence. All workshop activities can be completed while sitting and will involve some group

discussions with other participants. There will be a short, planned break partway through the workshop though participants can break at any time. To request an accommodation or for further accessibility inquiries please contact uvicssd@uvic.ca.

How do I put this into practice?

Write your accessibility statement in plain language and organize it so readers can quickly find what they need. Include contact information for additional questions or requests, and make sure the statement is included in event materials.

Checklist

- ☐ Clearly labelled accessibility section
- ☐ Detailed space and event descriptions
- ☐ Policies and expectations included
- ☐ Contact info provide

Tips & Tidbits

- Specific details are more useful than general claims
- Transparency builds credibility
- Consider adding photos or walkthroughs

TLDR: Accessibility Statements and Accessibility Guides are plain language resources for prospective participants to reference to know exactly how accessible or inaccessible the space is for them, personally. They describe the physical features of the space, stimuli that can aggravate conditions or symptoms, format of the meeting/event/etc., and if there is the option to join online.

Facilitating Accessible Events

As said before, access comes down to flexibility, adaptability, and foresight from you as a facilitator. These aren't just reactions to surprises; they're things you plan for in advance. That means preparing tools like outlines, alternative activities, and support from co-facilitators so you can adjust smoothly when needed. It also means equipping your space and yourself with options. For example, if you ran a workshop and prefer participants to sit on the floor in a circle, ask yourself whether chairs would actually prevent participation. If it does, consider alternatives to facilitation then ensure you have made the potential inaccessibility of your event public. If it does not prevent participation, even if you don't prefer it, have chairs available and inform folks that it will not affect their participation. Planning for multiple scenarios allow people to choose what works best for them. This concept applies to activities too not just the environment. Think of something like yoga, offering modifications and using language like "to the best of your ability" empowers participants to engage in ways that suit their needs. You don't have to solve every challenge, often it's more effective and empowering to give people the tools to adapt things themselves.

We can think about participant experience in two categories: broad design and individual design. Broad design is what everyone experiences, regardless of ability, like a relaxed performance where the entire audience shares the same conditions. Individual design is about tailoring the experience for one person, like offering a chair or letting participants choose where to sit.

Broad design lets you implement measures that only work at scale and tend to be less flexible, such as banning fragrances, requiring masks, or structuring a workshop with group check-ins or meditative breathing. These choices support accessibility without singling anyone out and create shared norms. The key questions are: how can we design an event that is both effective and accessible at a macro level, and how do we meet individual needs without excluding others? Broad design includes your environment, overall structure, and group activities that can't easily be changed.

Individual design is the flexible, "one-size-fits-one" approach. It focuses on specific participant needs and how to support them, through modified activities, optional seating, or giving people control over how they engage (like a buffet where they choose what works for them). Here, the questions are: how do we build in flexibility, and how do we empower participants to advocate for their needs? Good facilitation relies as much on compassion and care as it does on planning and flexibility. Avoid making assumptions about participants and try not to show frustration if unexpected needs arise. Nothing undermines a workshop faster than making someone feel bad for asking for what they need.

Here are some more general tips on facilitation:

- **Confidence.** Your participants should be confident that you know what you're doing, that you have the event under control, and that you're not burning the candle at both ends, no matter if it's the truth or not. As the facilitator, you are the rock and grounding energy. There is a level of trust that you're requesting from your participants, and it's an important responsibility to meet them trust with steadiness and assuredness. You play the role of the facilitator so that you can hold space for participants. If you clearly aren't doing well, then there's a level of them not being able to take that space for themselves and be supported in it.
- **Breathing.** Use it to regulate yourself and the group. A few shared deep breaths can ground everyone, open the space, and prepare folks to engage. Do the same at the end to "bookend" the experience and bring everyone back to a calm state. **Treat your event like a ladder.** Every request you make of your participants, whether it's listening closely or sharing their own stories, holds an element of risk for the participants. It's an ask on your part. You should not make a big ask at the top of your event expecting anyone to be ready to jump straight up to the fifth rung on a ladder. You need to slowly build up the experience with the first four rungs so that participants feel supported in their ascent.
- **Have a co-facilitator or assistant.** This is especially important when you're planning for flexibility. They can keep things moving while you respond to unexpected needs. Without that support, a single request can stall the entire workshop, something that's stressful for everyone involved.

How do I put this into practice?

Prepare multiple versions of activities and clearly communicate that adaptation is welcome. Bring necessary materials (chairs, water, printed instructions, snacks, *etc.*), and work with a co-facilitator when possible, to manage unexpected situations.

Checklist

- ☐ Flexible participation options
- ☐ Backup activities prepared
- ☐ Support person available
- ☐ Inclusive language used

Tips & Tidbits

- Small adjustments can prevent major disruptions
- Group grounding exercises can stabilize energy

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- Avoid putting participants on the spot

TLDR: Compassion, care, and flexibility are at the core of accessible facilitation. How can you prepare yourself to be flexible in the moment ahead of time? How can you design your event to allow for flexibility? Rigid requirements for how to participate are inherently inaccessible.

Consider if modified ways to participate are possible and find opportunities for participants to take the lead on how they participate.

Accessible Promotions

Promotion is often overlooked as part of accessibility, but it plays a critical role in who feels invited and able to attend. If accessibility information is missing, unclear, or hard to find, many people will simply opt out rather than ask. Your promotion is often the first point of contact with your events, and it sets out expectations about whether access has been meaningfully considered.

Accessible promotion involves both content and format. The information you share should be clear, transparent, and easy to locate, while the way you present it should be usable by a wide range of people. This means thinking beyond just what you say and considering how different people will encounter and interpret that information.

In terms of **content**, include relevant accessibility details up front rather than waiting for people to ask. This might include information about physical access (stairs, seating, washrooms), sensory environment (lighting, sound levels), social expectations (participation level, group size), and any supports available (quiet spaces, flexible seating, breaks). When possible, be specific rather than vague, clear details help folks make informed decisions about whether the event will work for them. It's also helpful to include a clear contact method for additional questions or requests. This context is discussed more in the previous Accessibility Statements section.

In terms of **format**, use **readable fonts, high contrast visuals, and alt text for images**, and ensure materials are compatible with screen readers. Avoid overly complex layouts or highly stylized designs that prioritize aesthetics over clarity (we know how hard this can be!), as these can make information difficult to navigate. If you're sharing across platforms (social media, email, posters), consider how accessibility translates across each format rather than assuming one version works for all. **Timing matters as well.** Sharing information early gives people time to arrange transportation, request accommodations, coordinate support, or assess their own capacity to attend. Last-minute promotion can unintentionally exclude people who need more time to plan.

Finally, accessible promotion is also about tone. The way you describe your event can either invite or discourage participation. Being explicit about flexibility, welcoming a range of needs, and signaling openness to accommodation can make a meaningful difference in whether someone feels comfortable showing up.

How do I put this into practice?

Include accessibility details directly into your promotional materials. Use multiple formats (text, audio, visual) when possible, and ensure your content is readable and easy to navigate.

Checklist

- ☐ Accessibility info included in promotions
- ☐ Alt text and image descriptions added
- ☐ Readable, high-contrast design used
- ☐ Information shared early

Tips & Tidbits

- Don't hide access info behind extra steps
- Clear communication increases attendance
- Simplicity improves accessibility

Planning for Communicable Diseases

Health considerations are a critical part of accessibility, particularly for immunocompromised individuals and communities disproportionately affected by illness. When events don't account for communicable diseases, they can unintentionally exclude people who would otherwise want to participate but cannot safely do so. Thinking about this is not an "extra", it's a core part of who your event is accessible. Planning for health safety involves both **policies and culture**. It's not just about setting rules, but about creating an environment where those rules are clearly communicated, widely understood, and supported.

Practical measures might include **masking policies, encouraging or requiring participants to stay home when sick, improving ventilation** (such as opening windows or using air filtration), and offering **remote or hybrid participation options**. Depending on the context, you might also consider reducing groups sizes, structuring activities to allow for more physical space, or hosting events outdoors when possible. These approaches can be combined and adapted based on the needs of your participants and the nature of the event.

As we have said many times, flexibility is key. Folks should not feel pressured to attend in person if doing so compromises their health or the health of others. This might mean offering asynchronous ways to engage (such as recording events), making it easy to switch to a remote option, or ensuring that participants who miss the event due to illness are not penalized or excluded from future opportunities. It's also important to think about **shared responsibility**. Health safety works best when it's framed as a collective effort rather than an individual responsibility. Simple practices, like normalizing mask use, making hand sanitizer readily available, or explicitly inviting people to prioritize their health, can help create a sense that everyone is contributing to a safer environment.

Clear, proactive communication is essential. Participants need to know what measures are in place and what is expected of them so they can make informed decisions about attending. This includes outlining any policies in advance, being transparent about the level of risk, and avoiding vague or ambiguous language. When expectations are clear, it reduces uncertainty and helps people assess what feels safe for them. Ultimately, planning for communicable diseases is about reducing barriers to participation while respecting the reality that people have different risk levels and needs. Thoughtful planning in this area helps ensure that more people can engage fully, safely, and with confidence.

How do I put this into practice?

Establish and communicate health guidelines in advance. Model those guidelines as a facilitator and provide alternatives for participation when possible.

Checklist

- ☐ Health policies clearly stated
- ☐ Remote or hybrid options considered
- ☐ Masking expectations clarified
- ☐ Flexible attendance encouraged

Tips & Tidbits

- Modeling behaviour increases community participation
- Hybrid events can expand access overall
- Health safety is an accessibility issue, not just logistical one

Failures, burnout, and incorporating feedback

You will fail. You are expected to fail. If you're trying to do something hard, you will fail many times while you learn, and as you keep learning. If accessibility were a solved issue, then we wouldn't be talking about it. You will fail in small ways as well as large ways, and you will have successes that feel like failures in the future when we all know better than what we know now.

It is not a moral failing to do a bad job. The most important first step when receiving feedback is **separating your ego from the work**. That means you must not punish or ridicule yourself for trying. It gets in the way, and nothing is to be gained by talking down to or bad about yourself.

Our workstudy M, once co-directed and co-produced a show called *Cringe* by Connor Runnings. It's a show about neurodivergency and the big idea was that everyone working on the show would be neurodivergent and we'd introduce solutions to accessibility issues that we found to be prevalent in the theatre industry. There were as many successes as failures through this process. Overall, our solutions unfairly overburdened certain team members with an unreasonable amount of work. For M, as someone who believes in the purpose of increasing access in the arts, they had the very difficult task ahead of them to separate their own embarrassment and frustration from the failure and focus on what was actionable moving forward. They can identify the issues with the process and brainstorm potential solutions because they're not wasting time being mean to themselves and are looking objectively at what happened and what could have been done.

This remains true when someone else points out your failures. As a facilitator, your reaction should be to accept the feedback, acknowledge the impact, and leave it until it's time to reflect and plan for the future. You should not wallow and do not over apologize when the matter is settled. There are more important things to be done, and being over apologized to is an honestly overwhelming and tiresome experience itself.

We encourage you to develop avenues for feedback that don't require you to be accessed in person. You'll learn from more folks that way, and it alleviates pressure from you to always be available. An email or feedback form is a great way to organize feedback so that you can access it later when you're ready for it.

When incorporating feedback, it's important to acknowledge that you can't do it all. Take care not to exceed your capacity; you're not helping anyone by overextending yourself. As discussed in *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice*, Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha notes there is a big different between offering help and asking for it. As a facilitator, it's easy to want

to do everything at once, perfectly, the first time. Instead, give yourself the same grace you'd give others and recognize that accessibility is an iterative process that improves over time.

Lean on other people, don't plan or execute everything alone. Many hands make light work. Involved people with disabilities in your process from the beginning, not only because it leads to better outcomes, but also because it reduces unnecessary effort. You don't need to reinvent when others already have the knowledge and solutions to share.

TLDR: You can't do it all, you can't know it all, and you will have many failures and receive all sorts of feedback. Separate your ego from your work and consider what feedback you can act upon to strengthen your event or your skills for the next time you facilitate. Accessibility failures are not personal or moral failures, they are a key part of learning and self improvement. Build systems for how to receive and organize feedback. Approach with a kind attitude towards yourself and others. Don't do it all at once or with little help, you'll burn out that way.

How do I put this into practice?

Create structured ways to receive feedback and set aside time to review it. Prioritize changes based on impact and feasibility and seek support from collaborators throughout the process.

Checklist

- ☐ Feedback system in place
- ☐ Reflection time scheduled
- ☐ Changes prioritized realistically
- ☐ Support network involved

Tips & Tidbits

- Growth requires discomfort, not self-criticism
- Not all feedback can be acted on immediately
- Collaboration reduces burnout

Final Thoughts

Accessible event planning is not about achieving a perfect, barrier-free experience. It is about making intentional choices that expand participation, reduce harm, and demonstrate care. You will not get everything right, and that's okay. What matters is that you continue to try, to listen, and to adapt each time. Accessibility is about practice and the more you engage with it, the more intuitive and impactful your work will become.

This is also a working document. It will continue to evolve as we learn more, receive feedback, and better understand the needs of our community. We recognize that this resource is incomplete and that the people engaging with it are an essential part of improving it. We welcome and encourage ongoing feedback, whether it's suggestions, critiques, or reflection from your own experiences. If something is unclear, missing, or could be done better, we want to know.

To submit your feedback, you can do so using the following link:

<https://forms.office.com/r/dFkPmM9RQ9>

Or email us at uicssd@uvic.ca

Accessibility work is collaborative and iterative by nature. The strength of this document depends on the people who use it, question it, and help shape what it becomes next.

Quick Accessibility Checklist for Events

Before you plan

- ☐ Who might be excluded from this event as currently designed?
- ☐ Have you consulted disabled people or relevant communities?
- ☐ Is accessibility built into your goals, not added later?

Space & Environment

- ☐ Step-free access (ramps, elevators, wide doorways)
- ☐ Accessible, gender-inclusive washrooms nearby
- ☐ Seating options (chairs, floor, space for mobility devices)
- ☐ Lighting (not too hard or too dim)
- ☐ Noise level (quiet space available if possible)
- ☐ Ventilation/air quality considered
- ☐ Scent-reduced or scent-free expectations

Event Design

- ☐ Multiple ways to participate (speaking, writing, observing)
- ☐ Activities can be modified or opted out of
- ☐ Clear schedule with breaks built in
- ☐ No rigid participation requirements
- ☐ Content warning provided when needed

Communication & Promotion

- ☐ Accessibility info clearly included
- ☐ Plain language used (no jargon-heavy text)
- ☐ High contrast, readable visuals
- ☐ Alt text for images
- ☐ Shared early so folks can plan ahead

Accessibility Statement

- ☐ Clear directions to the space
- ☐ What the space is like (lighting, sound, seating)
- ☐ What will happen at the event (format, activities)
- ☐ Policies (masks, scents, food, etc.)

- ☐ Contact info for questions or requests

Health & Safety (Communicable Diseases)

- ☐ Clear policy on masking (required, encourage, optional)
- ☐ Encourage people to stay home if sick (no penalty)
- ☐ Hybrid or remote option is possible
- ☐ Ventilation considered
- ☐ Normalize mask-wearing and personal safety choices

During the Event (Facilitation)

- ☐ Open with a check-in or access needs invitation
- ☐ Use language like “participate how you can”
- ☐ Allow breaks, movement, and flexibility
- ☐ Have backup plans for activities
- ☐ Co-facilitator or helper available

After the Event

- ☐ Provide a way to give feedback
- ☐ Reflect on what worked and what didn't
- ☐ Plan improvements for next time

Mindset Reminders

- ☐ You won't meet every need, and that's okay
- ☐ Be honest about limitations
- ☐ Flexibility matters more than perfection
- ☐ Accessibility benefits everyone, not just disabled people

Extra tips & Tidbits

- If someone asks for something, believe them the first time
- Small changes (chairs, breaks, clear info) go a long way
- Don't make people fight for access, offer it upfront
- Consistency builds trust over time