



EVENTS

“When everyone is included, everyone wins.” – Rev. Jesse Jackson

Purpose

The purpose of this section is to ensure that events are accessible and inclusive of all prospective participants. The intent of the recommended practices is to optimize the full participation and engagement of event participants.

Identification of best practices

Inclusively planned events aim to not only meet the diverse needs and perspectives of participants, but also seek to optimize participation in a way that individuals can engage their authentic selves. Essential to creating a fully equitable, inclusive, welcoming, and engaging event experience is the application of user-centered design (UCD) and universal design (UD) methods that focus on “designing for people with differing native languages, genders, racial/ethnic backgrounds, abilities, and disabilities.”¹ Establishing a baseline understanding of the concepts of user-centered, universal design is the first step in determining best practices for equitable and inclusive engagement.²

The following guidelines provide best practices in the application of UCD and UD to create fully accessible conference venues, sessions, housing/lodging, exhibits and displays, transportation, and registration.

- **Event preplanning considerations** – during the event planning phase, consider how to ensure the event and ancillary activities are equitable and inclusive for all prospective participants.
- **Behavior expectations** – communicate and enforce the expectation that all participants (attendees, speakers, staff, etc.) are to demonstrate fair treatment, mutual respect, and dignity toward themselves and all others.
- **Presentations and speaker considerations** – ensure that speakers represent diverse identities, perspectives, and experiences and that the content is fully accessible to all participants.
- **On-site venue considerations** – ensure event venues and hotels are accessible to and inclusive of all prospective participants.

¹Burgstahler, S. (2017). “Equal Access: Universal Design of Professional Organizations.” Center for Universal Design in Education. <https://www.washington.edu/doit/equal-access-universal-design-professional-organizations>

²Pearson, Y. E. (January/February 2019). “To Improve Engineering Design, Ask Your Users.” *PE Magazine*. <https://www.nspe.org/resources/pe-magazine/january-2019/improve-engineering-design-ask-your-users>





Summary of best practices

Event planning considerations

During the event planning phase, consider how to ensure the event and ancillary activities are equitable and inclusive for all prospective participants.

- Engage people from diverse and intersectional backgrounds and identities in all aspects of event planning to ensure a wide range of perspectives is included.
- Identify national, international, and/or religious holidays that could preclude participation if overlapped with the event schedule.
- Ensure event registration is equitable and inclusive by providing a process for requesting accommodations or services. On the registration form, provide a space for individuals to indicate the need for accessibility-related or other accommodations. Organizations like the Society of Women Engineers (SWE) and the American Society for Engineering Education (ASEE) ask that these requests be made at least 45 days in advance to allow sufficient time to secure services.
- When scheduling technical tours, excursions, and other ancillary activities, ask venues/hosts probing questions about accessibility and work with event sponsors/guides/hosts to maximize accessibility. Communicate accessibility when promoting the activity and provide contact information for prospective participants to follow up and get more information.
- Provide the option for participants to share their pronouns as they deem appropriate. This can be verbally – before a presentation (for speakers) – and/or during the registration process so they appear on nametags.
- Use the Communication section of *ASCE DEI Best Practices Resource Guide* and the [American Psychological Association's guidelines](#) for bias-free language to ensure appropriate wording is used on registration forms and websites.³
- Make sure that “facilities, activities, materials, and equipment are physically accessible to and usable by all”⁴ participants.
- Implement hybrid and/or virtual event models to accommodate participants who cannot travel to attend in person.
- Work with local vendors who provide services to ensure the full engagement of participants with a wide range of needs. Examples include, but are not limited to:
 - Provide childcare services for event participants. The Society of Women Engineers (SWE) provides a list of resources to support participants attending its annual conference. Most notable are that several caregiver rooms and childcare are provided at the conference site.⁵
 - Provide accommodations for people with disabilities. The American Society for Engineering Education (ASEE) provides a number of services such as an onsite vendor at its annual conference in the event that participants need to borrow or rent mobility scooters.⁶ Ensure these accommodations

³American Psychological Association. (2019). “Bias-Free Language.” <https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/bias-free-language>.

⁴Burgstahler, S. (2017). “Equal Access: Universal Design of Professional Organizations.” Center for Universal Design in Education, <https://www.washington.edu/doit/equal-access-universal-design-professional-organizations>

⁵“Additional Onsite Services.” *SWE21*, 21-23 October 2021. <https://we21.swe.org/about/additional-onsite-services/>

⁶Registration American Society for Engineering Education. www.asee.org/annual-conference/2020/registration

are not limited to mobility-related disabilities; include the needs of people with a wide range of invisible and visible disabilities.

- Additional considerations include, but are not limited to:
 - Provide simultaneous translation equipment for events with audiences who speak different languages.
 - Provide induction loops upon request.
 - Provide sign language interpreters, computerized notetakers, or real-time captioning upon request.⁷
 - Provide palantypist upon request.
 - Provide assistive listening devices upon request.
 - Reserve seating near the front of the meeting room for individuals who need to be close to the screen, access to sign language interpreters, space where there are minimized distractions, etc.⁸ Be careful not to limit seating options for these individuals; participants with disabilities should have choices in seating just as other attendees.
- Provide contact information for accommodation and/or service inquiries.



Behavior expectations

Communicate and enforce the expectation that all participants (attendees, speakers, staff, etc.) are to demonstrate fair treatment, mutual respect, and dignity toward themselves and all others.

- Require participants and speakers to agree to a code of conduct⁹ during the registration process. MOSAIC is in the process of drafting an ASCE Behavior Code of Conduct for Meetings and Events.
- Train event staff to appropriately identify and address the needs of **all** participants.¹⁰
- Provide moderators with strategies for managing and/or responding to Code of Conduct violations.
- Use signage and symbols that indicate diversity is valued and diverse identities are respected. Some examples might include rainbow flags for LGBTQ+ support and Black Lives Matter banners for racial solidarity.

⁷"Conferences and Convention Centres' Accessibility to People with Disabilities." *Journal of Rehabilitation Medicine - Abstract - Conferences and Convention Centres' Accessibility to People with Disabilities.* www.medicaljournals.se/jrm/content/abstract/10.2340/16501977-1841

⁸"Conferences and Convention Centres' Accessibility to People with Disabilities." *Journal of Rehabilitation Medicine - Abstract - Conferences and Convention Centres' Accessibility to People with Disabilities.* www.medicaljournals.se/jrm/content/abstract/10.2340/16501977-1841

⁹Policies: Registration Terms & Conditions." ASCE 2021 Convention Virtual, 6-8 October 2021, <https://convention.asce.org/about/policies>

¹⁰"Conferences and Convention Centres' Accessibility to People with Disabilities." *Journal of Rehabilitation Medicine - Abstract - Conferences and Convention Centres' Accessibility to People with Disabilities.* www.medicaljournals.se/jrm/content/abstract/10.2340/16501977-1841

Presentations and speaker considerations

Ensure that speakers represent diverse identities, perspectives, and experiences and that the content is fully accessible to all participants.

- **Do not** limit the selection of speakers from traditionally marginalized identities (e.g., historically underrepresented racial/ethnic minorities, women, persons with disabilities) to diversity-related topics. Respect them as experts in their technical disciplines.
- Include proposal/paper reviewers and event planning committee members who are demographically, geographically, and professionally diverse.
- Include language in the call for papers/proposals to establish that diverse points of view are valued and sought.
- Include principles of justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion (JEDI) as criteria for selecting papers/presenters to bolster the visibility of JEDI in the context of research and practice, rather than limit them to standalone “diversity” sessions.
- Anonymize paper/proposal submissions to reduce bias in the review process.
- Share calls for papers/proposals and invite speakers from organizations that advance people from traditionally marginalized identities. Examples include Society of Women Engineers, National Society of Black Engineers, American Indian Science and Engineering Society, Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers, American Association for People with Disabilities, and Out in STEM.
- Provide guidance to session presenters/moderators on how to foster an equitable and inclusive session. For example:
 - Host “run of show” meetings with speakers prior to the event (at least 30 days beforehand is recommended) and ensure all of their needs are met (e.g., wheelchair accessibility, hands-free microphone, sign language interpreters).
 - Ensure all speakers utilize microphones.
 - Use gender-neutral language (such as “colleagues”) instead of gender-binary language (such as “ladies and gentlemen”).
 - Use gender-neutral sorting (for example, by birthday) instead of separating men from women when audience groupings are desired.
- Provide instructions for presenters/speakers on how to create and deliver equitable and inclusive presentations. Some example considerations include, but are not limited to (refer to the Communication section of ASCE’s Best Practices Resource Guide for additional information):
 - Provide material in Braille and/or large print.¹¹
 - Make sure electronic documents are assistive-technology friendly, which requires, at a bare minimum, appropriate use of alt text for images and graphics.
 - Add audio description to videos.¹²

¹¹“Conferences and Convention Centres’ Accessibility to People with Disabilities.” *Journal of Rehabilitation Medicine - Abstract - Conferences and Convention Centres’ Accessibility to People with Disabilities.* www.medicaljournals.se/jrm/content/abstract/10.2340/16501977-1841

¹²“Conferences and Convention Centres’ Accessibility to People with Disabilities.” *Journal of Rehabilitation Medicine - Abstract - Conferences and Convention Centres’ Accessibility to People with Disabilities.* www.medicaljournals.se/jrm/content/abstract/10.2340/16501977-1841



- Include closed captioning or sign language overlays for on-site and virtual video presentations.
- Use high contrast between text and backgrounds.
- Use color combinations and graphic representations that are accessible for people who are colorblind.
- Ensure that audience members use microphones when asking questions.
- Use gender-neutral language (such as “colleagues”) instead of gender-binary language (such as “ladies and gentlemen”).
- Avoid the use of quick-flashing/strobing lights and/or video elements.

Onsite venue considerations

Ensure event venues and hotels are accessible to and inclusive of all participants.

- Ensure the venue has accessible “parking areas, pathways, and entrances to the building”¹³ for wheelchair users. Accessibility considerations include but are not limited to:
 - Providing transportation options to the venue for people with disabilities.
 - Providing a location and approximate distance for accessible parking.¹⁴
 - Providing access at the main entrance from a seated position.
 - Posting visible signage that directs people to accessible entrances to the venue.¹⁵
- Ensure the venue includes accessibility to all areas of the event, including but not limited to the registration desk, auditorium, and meeting rooms. Ensure that the service or registration desk is at a height accessible from a seated position.¹⁶
 - Make sure meeting rooms have wide aisles that are clear of obstructions to ensure the safety of all participants.
 - Include multiple accessible areas in the front, middle, and back of the meeting rooms to ensure that wheelchair users have a wide range of seating options and can navigate the space freely, even after people are seated.
 - Provide sufficiently bright, reduced-glare, adjustable lighting options.

¹³Burgstahler, S. (2017). “Equal Access: Universal Design of Professional Organizations.” Center for Universal Design in Education. <https://www.washington.edu/doiit/equal-access-universal-design-professional-organizations>

¹⁴“Conferences and Convention Centres’ Accessibility to People with Disabilities.” *Journal of Rehabilitation Medicine - Abstract - Conferences and Convention Centres’ Accessibility to People with Disabilities.* www.medicaljournals.se/jrm/content/abstract/10.2340/16501977-1841

¹⁵“Conferences and Convention Centres’ Accessibility to People with Disabilities.” *Journal of Rehabilitation Medicine - Abstract - Conferences and Convention Centres’ Accessibility to People with Disabilities.* www.medicaljournals.se/jrm/content/abstract/10.2340/16501977-1841

¹⁶Burgstahler, S. (2017). “Equal Access: Universal Design of Professional Organizations.” Center for Universal Design in Education. <https://www.washington.edu/doiit/equal-access-universal-design-professional-organizations>

- Provide gender-neutral restrooms and/or provide clear signage to single-use/family-style/accessible restroom facilities.
- Ensure all elevators are accessible, with buttons that can be reached from a seated position for wheelchair users, Braille/raised number markings and/or audible floor announcements for people who are blind or have low vision, and visual floor indicators for people who are deaf or hard of hearing.¹⁷
- Post directional and informational signs at different heights (for example, 1.50 m, 2.30 m)¹⁸ and make sure that the signs are high-contrast and in large print throughout the venue.¹⁹
- Elevate speaker platforms in meeting rooms to increase speaker visibility for all participants and add ramps to ensure accessibility for speakers with limited mobility.
- Provide speaker podiums with knee space for wheelchair users and adjustable-height speaker podiums for access by speakers who are seated or who are a range of heights.
- Provide alternatives to hand-held microphones for speakers.
- Request the venue's policy on service animal accommodations. Refer to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)²⁰ guidelines for requests related to use of service animals. Accommodations may include providing accessible rest and relief areas for the animals.
- Engage planning committee members with expertise and/or firsthand perspectives on various aspects of accessibility to be part of the team that visits and vets the event venue and hotels.
- Make sure that there is strong contrast between glass doors and the door frames²¹ for people with low vision.
- Make sure there are accessible restrooms within a reasonable distance and signage to direct people toward those restrooms.²²
- Tape down or cover all exposed electrical cables or cords that cross aisles or pathways to ensure the safety of all participants.²³



¹⁷"Conferences and Convention Centres' Accessibility to People with Disabilities." *Journal of Rehabilitation Medicine - Abstract - Conferences and Convention Centres' Accessibility to People with Disabilities*. www.medicaljournals.se/jrm/content/abstract/10.2340/16501977-1841

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¹⁹"Conferences and Convention Centres' Accessibility to People with Disabilities." *Journal of Rehabilitation Medicine - Abstract - Conferences and Convention Centres' Accessibility to People with Disabilities*. www.medicaljournals.se/jrm/content/abstract/10.2340/16501977-1841

²⁰Brown, S. E. (2019). "Legal Brief: Service Animals and Individuals with Disabilities Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)." ADA Knowledge Translation Center Legal Brief No. 2.1. ADA National Network https://adata.org/legal_brief/legal-brief-service-animals-and-individuals-disabilities-under-americans-disabilities

²¹"Conferences and Convention Centres' Accessibility to People with Disabilities." *Journal of Rehabilitation Medicine - Abstract - Conferences and Convention Centres' Accessibility to People with Disabilities*. www.medicaljournals.se/jrm/content/abstract/10.2340/16501977-1841

²²"Conferences and Convention Centres' Accessibility to People with Disabilities." *Journal of Rehabilitation Medicine - Abstract - Conferences and Convention Centres' Accessibility to People with Disabilities*. www.medicaljournals.se/jrm/content/abstract/10.2340/16501977-1841

²³"Conferences and Convention Centres' Accessibility to People with Disabilities." *Journal of Rehabilitation Medicine - Abstract - Conferences and Convention Centres' Accessibility to People with Disabilities*. www.medicaljournals.se/jrm/content/abstract/10.2340/16501977-1841



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