

A Guide to Inclusive In-Person Events

A vibrant, successful event, gathering, or meeting welcomes everyone to participate fully without facing any barriers or challenges. To help organizers host in-person events that make everyone feel welcome, seen, and heard, the ACS Office of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Respect offers some suggestions and recommendations to meet the needs of all participants.

The ACS Office of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Respect is grateful to the members of the Chemists with Disabilities committee for their insights that went into creating this guide as well as members of Community Activities for their input. A full list of references and additional recommended resources are provided at the end of the document.



Before the event

If this is a recurring event, consider making a standard operating procedure (SOP) document that outlines your planning steps so future events are just as inclusive.

a. Registration process

- Ask whether someone will need accommodations for full participation (leave the question open-ended rather than providing a limited number of options).
- If accommodations are requested, follow up to get more specific information. Different situations will require different accommodations. For example, an individual in a wheelchair may have manual or battery power for the chair, depending on their upper body mobility.
- Provide a point of contact for questions around accessibility needs prior to and during the event.
- If participation is on a drop-in basis without advance registration, assign one or more individual volunteer aides to work as necessary with participants with vision, hearing, mobility, coordination, or neurodiverse needs. Review the guidelines provided in the “During the event” section with these volunteers. Assign one volunteer (more if necessary) to ensure safety in an emergency for any participant with a disability.
- Ask for, but don't require, personal pronouns as part of registration. Plan to add them (if provided) to name badges.
- *To consider: Provide an accommodations or accessibility statement. Here's an example: ACS is committed to providing reasonable accommodations for this event. This event is wheelchair*

accessible. Real-time transcription services and sign-language interpreters will be available. Please contact (NAME at EMAIL) with any requests or questions.

b. Venue selection and access

- Ensure that the venue has restroom access for all genders and abilities (Are there single-stall restrooms that could be relabeled? Are there family or gender-neutral restrooms with changing tables? Are there bathrooms or stalls that comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)?)
- Confirm that emergency exits, elevators, and so on are clearly labeled and accessible. This includes unlocked elevators where necessary.
- Have clear signage for room locations, elevators, exits and other key areas.
- For half-day or longer events, make sure there are lactation and meditation rooms available. These rooms can also be used as a space for those that need a break from noise and/or crowds.
- *To consider: Ask if the venue can provide Braille signage. If the venue can provide Braille signage, order it.*

c. Date and time

- Check if any major cultural or religious holidays fall on this event date. The website www.timeanddate.com provides a comprehensive list of major holidays celebrated in the U.S. and globally. (For example, is the event during Ramadan?).
- Choose a time of day that can easily accommodate most people. (For example, will people with caregiving responsibilities have difficulties attending?).

d. Room layout and furnishings

- Ensure there is ample space for participants in wheelchairs and scooters to join a table or/and turn around.
- Provide chairs and tables that can accommodate a variety of needs (have at least a few chairs without armrests for people of all sizes).
- Make sure that the room setup avoids blocking visibility of any sign language interpreters.
- *To consider: Have chairs without arms as the standard offering.*
- *To consider: If an event has high-top tables (i.e., reception style event), offer both stools and standard-height table and chairs as well.*

e. Audio/Visual (AV) needs

- Contact the A/V team or venue staff to discuss specific A/V requirements.
- Use automated captions (events less than 20 people).
- Provide Communication Access Real-Time Translation (CART) and/or sign-language interpretation upon request.
- Make sure you have enough microphones for speakers, presenters, and/or Q&A sessions.
- *To consider: Use CART as standard for events with more than 100 people.*
- *To consider: Use both CART and sign language as standard offerings for events with more than 200 people.*

f. Slides, visuals, and presentation activities

- Use sans serif font.
- Use large font size.
- Have sufficient color contrast.
- Include captions on any videos shown during the event.
- Forewarn people of (or better yet, avoid) flashing lights or strobes for the presentation.
- If you are planning engagement activities for audience members, consider whether everyone can participate (i.e., avoid asking audience members to reach under their seat for an item, read from a piece of paper or card if you don't know in advance that all audience members are able to do so). Have back-up plans and options available.
- Refer to the "Accessibility" section of the [ACS Inclusivity Style Guide](#) for even more details on these tips.
- *To consider: Share presentations with attendees prior to the event upon request.*

g. Ordering food

- Ask about any dietary requirements for your attendees and accommodate accordingly.
- Even if no one asks for the accommodation, ensure there is a vegetarian or vegan option with your meals.
- For large events, avoid common allergens, such as nuts and shellfish.
- Provide a variety of beverages, as not everyone can drink carbonated, caffeinated, or alcoholic beverages. Have straws available, if needed.
- Label each dish clearly with information that shares whether it is vegan, vegetarian, contains allergens, etc.
- *To consider: Offer meals that kosher, halal, and/or lactose-free.*

- *To consider: Opt for single-serve, individually packaged, or plated options rather than a buffet. Or make sure that the buffet is staffed to avoid cross contamination of any allergens.*

h. Apparel and giveaways

- For apparel, offer a wide range of sizes to accommodate different body types.
- Have a variety of giveaways (for example, blue light-filtering eyeglasses wouldn't be usable for everyone).
- *To consider: Order youth and 5XL or larger as part of your standard ordering of apparel.*

i. Speaker/panelist considerations

- Ask how the speaker(s) wants to be introduced and referred to during the event.
- Confirm you know the correct spelling, pronunciation of the speaker's full name and their pronouns.
- Share details on the program setup with the speaker(s) in advance. (Will they be using a microphone? What type of microphones are available? Will there be a stage or podium? How is the layout of the room? Are there stools or low chairs?) Ensure they have an opportunity to share any modifications that might be needed.

j. Partnerships and collaborations

- If collaborating with another group (either internal or external to ACS), ensure representation in the group at the planning stage to allow for their input and feedback on factors that might impact their group.
- When selecting speakers or panelists, actively seek out individuals from underrepresented communities in STEM. Pro-tip: Check out [Creating relationships with underrepresented STEM communities](#).
- When inviting the speaker(s), consider the context in which they are attending:
 - Do they typically participate as part of the ACS community or is this a unique invitation for them?
 - If they do not typically participate, consider covering travel costs and/or providing an honorarium. Remember that not all people can travel at their own expense or have means of reimbursement for an ACS event.
- *To consider: If honoraria AND travel costs cannot be covered, consider additional methods of compensation.*



During the event

a. Staffing and volunteers

- Provide a list of tasks that will be needed on the day of the event and ask volunteers to identify tasks they would feel comfortable doing.
- If participation is on a drop-in basis without advance registration, assign one or more individual volunteer aides to work as necessary with participants with vision, hearing, mobility, coordination, or neurodiverse needs.
- Assign one volunteer (more if necessary) to ensure safety in an emergency for any participant with a disability.
- Give volunteers access to refreshments and breaks. This will allow them to stay energized and engaged with attendees throughout the event.
- *To consider: Give volunteers event-branded badges, T-shirts, or other items. This will help individuals easily recognize them for assistance.*

b. Venue and staffing needs

- Announce relevant accessibility information at the start of the event. Mention the location of restrooms, emergency exits, microphone usage, and other protocols in place. You can make the announcement verbally and accompany it with visuals.
- *To consider: Give handouts that detail accessibility information.*

c. Audio/Visual (AV) needs

- If utilizing CART, ensure ample time beforehand to confirm that all technology is working correctly.
- *To consider: Have a dedicated A/V person for any last-minute needs.*

d. Accessibility

- Reserve the front of the room for attendees in need of sign-language interpreters and those that have a hearing or vision disability.
- A participant is allowed under ADA to bring a service dog to the venue, even for laboratory activities. It is acceptable, and can be beneficial, to talk with the participant beforehand to discuss the specific tasks the dog performs. Only two questions may be asked: (1) is the dog a service animal required because of a disability (a yes/no answer only), and (2) what work or task has the dog been trained to perform? No certification or identification is required for a

service dog. (3) If it is a laboratory activity, consider what [personal protective equipment can be made available for the dog](#).

e. Courtesy/inclusive behaviors

- Realize that some individuals are reluctant to establish eye contact for cultural or disability-related reasons. Don't insist upon it.
- Talk directly to the audience or individual with the disability, not to the sign-language interpreter, aide, or other intermediary. Face the audience when speaking and, if possible, use a lapel (or similar) microphone.
- During Q&A sessions, provide a microphone for questions or repeat them into a microphone before answering.
- If masks are required, consider providing masks with a clear or transparent window for all volunteers to aid communication.
- Avoid looming over seated individuals, including those in wheelchairs.
- Do not obstruct the view between the sign language interpreter and the person they are interpreting for.
- Remember that many disabilities and language concerns are invisible and the someone may be reluctant to disclose them.
- If the information is given, use the correct pronouns provided by participants.
- Make sure all individuals receive the appropriate help to participate fully and safely. However, do not assume an individual with a disability requires help. Ask first, and, if help is requested, ask the best way to supply that help.



After the event

- Consider updating your SOP document with any new learnings from your event.

Notes on Accessibility Services

- Communication Access Real-Time Translation (CART): This is real-time, full text transcription for an event. The operator can either be on site or accessing the event remotely (note that the operator must have access to event audio). [Learn more on CART and real-time captioning](#).
- Sign Language: Provide advance details to the interpreters about the event. Provide any slides that are ready in advance, a run of show or program. Discuss any need for technical jargon or

titles. Events that are longer than one hour will require at least 2 interpreters. Be sure to discuss the need in advance.

References

- The University of British Columbia, Equity & Inclusion Office. *Accessible and Inclusive Event Planning*. Accessed from <https://equity.ubc.ca/resources/accessible-and-inclusive-event-planning/> on July 5, 2023.
- University of Michigan. Diversity, Equity & Inclusion. *Accessible & Inclusive Events Resource Guide*. Accessed from <https://diversity.umich.edu/resources/accessible-inclusive-events-resource-guide/> on July 5, 2023.
- University of Arizona. IT Accessibility. *Event Planning Checklist*. Accessed from https://accessibility.asu.edu/sites/default/files/2021-10/event_planning_checklist_v1.pdf on July 5, 2023.
- Holidays and Observances in the United States. Accessed from <https://www.timeanddate.com/holidays/us/2023> on July 5, 2023.
- Journal of Chemical Health and Safety. *Service dogs in the chemistry laboratory*. 2016, 23, 1, 32-34. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jchas.2015.05.002>