The Big Book of Event Accessibility:

A Blueprint to Planning Events that are Accessible to People with Disabilities

- Include more audiences
- Maximize your impact

ANY EVENT. EVERY EVENT.

cvent

WE'VE GOT YOU COVERED.

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Welcome to the Big Book of Event Accessibility

If you're looking for a single resource to help you plan events that are more accessible to people with disabilities, welcome! You're in the right place. Cvent's Big Book of Event Accessibility is an essential guide to planning accessible events. Tailored for every kind of format—virtual, hybrid, or in-person—it's packed with all the information you need to welcome people with disabilities to your events and enhance experiences for everyone.

Understanding the Power of Accessible Events

Everyone should have access to high-quality events, regardless of their abilities. We've learned first-hand that accessibility is not only a social responsibility in today's business world—it also makes good business sense.

By providing practical guidance and best practices for event accessibility, we hope to make the events industry more inclusive and welcoming for all, especially those with disabilities who are so often excluded. Whether you're a seasoned event planner or just starting out, the *Big Book of Event Accessibility* will give you the guidance and evergreen references to plan accessible events today and into the future.

How Accessible Are Your Events to Attendees with Disabilities?

Take our assessment **How Accessible Is Your Event?** Use it as a place to start making your program more accessible.

Introduction to Accessibility

We wrote this book because we saw a problem: Over 25% of event attendees are likely to have some kind of disability, but many event programs fail to incorporate the needs of attendees with disabilities into their planning and engagement strategies. This creates a problem not only for attendees but also for businesses.

27%

Did You Know?
One out of four of your event attendees is likely to have a disability.[1]

Events that aren't designed with attendees with disabilities in mind exclude a large part of your audience, erode your ROI, and can create compliance issues. Let's start by examining the power of accessible events.

The Power of Accessible Events

Accessible events are effective events. They attract a wider range of attendees, are more engaging, ensure organizational compliance, and drive far more business value. But beyond the many positive business outcomes of accessible events, taking a proactive approach to inclusion at your events is good corporate citizenship. Taking this approach whenever possible ensures that everyone gets the opportunity to participate and that you get to practice your organizational values. The goal of this book is to give you a blueprint to design events that address the needs of the attendees with disabilities, driving value for them and your organization. Before we dive into best practices, let's cover some basics.

What Is a Disability?

A disability is any condition, mental or physical, that impacts a person's ability to interact with the world around them. It can be something as obvious as not being able to walk or something as nuanced as experiencing anxiety in noisy environments or having a hearing impairment that forces the individual to read lips. Your ability to design events that take into account these varied needs and engagement preferences will ensure you're reaching the broadest possible audience, attracting the widest range of members or customers, and doing your part to create a more inclusive world.

[1]https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/infographic-disability-impacts-all.html

What Is Accessibility?

Accessibility refers to environments, products, services, and experiences being easily navigable, usable, understandable, and enjoyable by individuals with diverse disabilities.

This involves several considerations, including physical access to buildings, usability of websites and digital tools, and availability of information in suitable formats for people with various disabilities.

Accessibility is all about eliminating barriers to participation. There are plenty of technical definitions, but the overall goal is to make sure that whatever you're planning is designed to be experienced by the widest range of people possible, regardless of their physical or cognitive abilities.

Why Make Your Event Accessible?

There are three big reasons to put accessibility at the center of your planning rather than adding it as an afterthought. It drives more innovation and inclusion, there's significant ROI, and it helps protect your organization legally.

1. Events Should Be for Everyone

Everyone deserves an opportunity to participate in events. They present opportunities to advance a person's career, network, and grow professionally. Nobody should be left out just because they have a disability. Accessible events allow for more voices to come to the table and for fresh perspectives to be seen and heard. Your events become richer when you allow more people from the disability community to participate in the discussion by making sure events are designed in an inclusive way.

In short, accessible events don't just check a box on the altruism list—they make sure that inaccessible events don't stand in the way of bright minds coming together.

2. Accessibility Drives Big Return-on-Investment

As we previously mentioned, over one in four of your potential attendees likely have some kind of disability. This simple fact is why creating accessible events drives so much return on investment (ROI).

Some of the brightest thinkers, buyers, creators, movers, and shakers in your industry have a disability. Creating events that ensure they're included makes financial sense.

In fact, a 2023 study by Disability:IN and Accenture, "**The Disability Inclusion Imperative**," found that companies that lead in disability inclusion drive more revenue, income, and profit:

1.6x
more revenue

2.6x
more net income

2x
more profit

Beyond broad statistics, we've seen the ROI firsthand at Cvent not only with our own events but also with our customers' events.

CASE STUDY

Improving the Attendee Experience for the National Federation of the Blind

By expanding their event to include both a virtual and an in-person element and incorporating accessibility considerations for both, the National Federation of the Blind was able to increase registrations and engagement at their annual conference. They did this by leveraging accessible solutions within the Cvent platform. **Full case study here**

1,000
Additional virtual attendees

3,500
Total attendees

200+
Sessions managed

"

Accessibility for all people should be innate within any event. At NFB, we're acutely aware of issues related to blindness, but there are so many other disabilities that can have numerous impacts on how someone interacts with your event.

- Karl Belanger, Nonvisual Access Technology Specialist, National Federation of the Blind

Here's how accessibility at events connects to the key performance indicators (KPIs) of interest to most event planners.

- **Attendance and participation:** Building accessibility into the plan ensures you're capturing the biggest possible chunk of your target market.

- **Reputation and branding:** Being known for accessible events is fantastic PR.

- **Word-of-mouth promotion:** You'll earn a reputation for accessibility in the disability community and beyond.

- **Innovative event design:** You can create new opportunities for connection with accessible event designs.

- **Happier, more engaged attendees:** Break down barriers to participation and get more return for your effort.

3. Accessibility Minimizes Legal Risk

Now let's talk about the elephant in the room: Whether or not your organization sees the value in investing in event accessibility.

Legal requirements already exist around what event professionals have to do to ensure their events are accessible to the general public.For example, all businesses open to the public in the United States must adhere to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which provides specific requirements for the accessibility of facilities to people with disabilities.

Another good example of legislation aimed at accessibility is the European Accessibility Act slated to become law in 2025. This piece of legislation will apply to private businesses that do business in Europe and has been referred to as the "GDPR of accessibility."

With every passing year, the global trend continues to be that **accessibility is set to become more than just a value-add for event planning but a firm legal requirement**.

> **Accessibility is more than just a value-add for event planning - it's becoming a firm legal requirement.**

Public Sector and Higher Education Requirements

For public sector and higher education institutions, the requirements for accessibility become even more stringent. There are legal requirements even at the digital level. These rules require organizations that fall into this category to provide essential accessibility features. This includes features like screen reader compatibility, and the ability to navigate a site without the use of a mouse.

For schools, accessibility means that no educational institution can deny a student the right to participate due to a disability. This means that all student spaces, such as libraries, cafeterias, dorm rooms, and even online courses, must follow public accessibility policies.

In the United States, accessibility requirements apply to to digital records and data access. Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 "requires agencies to provide individuals with disabilities equal access to electronic information and data comparable to those who do not have disabilities, unless an undue burden would be imposed on the agency."

With these laws changing every year, it's time to start thinking about accessibility proactively rather than reactively—and too late.

Events should be for everyone

Accessibility drives big ROI

Accessibility minimizes legal risk

Planning Accessible Events

Venue sourcing
Vendor sourcing
Venue diagramming
Room block & travel
Meeting approval & budgeting

Planning
Improve your event planning workflow

Promotion

Day of Event

Post Event
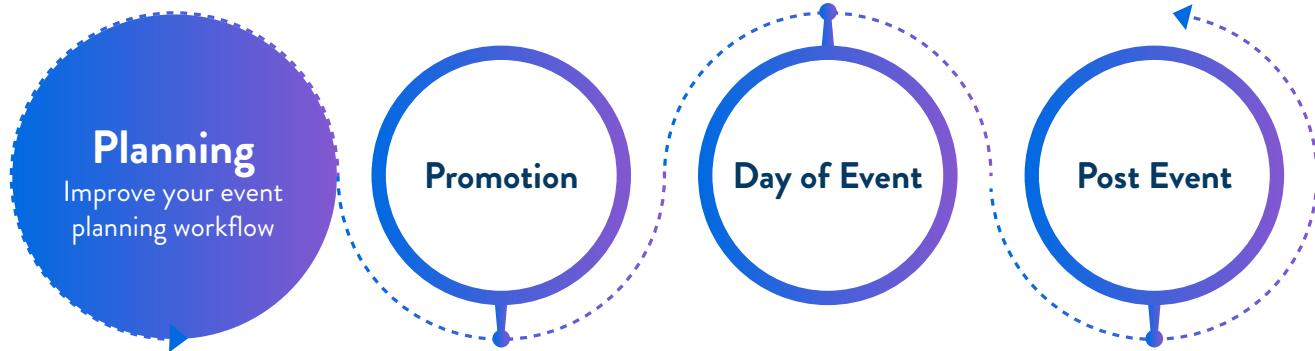
To plan a successful event, you must be able to see the world from your attendees' perspective. Active listening and excellent communication are critical.

In this section, we'll share actionable insights into gathering the information you need to plan an awesome accessible event and how to get it right while sticking to your budget and timeline.

By the end of this section, you'll know how to:

1. Ask key stakeholders the right questions

2. Build a budget for accessibility

3. Advocate for accessible events

4. Act on the information you get when putting together an event

Along the way, we'll include real examples of communications, checklists, and accessibility measures that you may not have considered yet. The first key question to consider? *What event format makes the most sense for your business goals?*

In-Person, Virtual, or Hybrid?

The format of event you choose to plan will ultimately determine where your budget goes and the nature of the event. Accessibility means different things in a virtual environment compared to a physical one, and the type of event you choose to put on will ultimately inform the kind of resources required to make it happen.

As such, you should ask yourself *does this need to be an in-person, virtual, or hybrid event?*

In-Person

Benefits

• More immersive experience.

• Richer networking opportunities.

• Acceleration of the buyer's journey.

• The chance to make a lasting impression.

Challenges

• More accessibility concerns to consider.

• Higher cost to produce than virtual events.

In-person events have all of the accessibility requirements you might expect, such as wheelchair ramps, sign language interpreters, and specialized sound equipment. As with any in-person event planning, start early to coordinate the staff and equipment needed.

You must also consider that accessibility means different things to different people and that you may have to clarify whether ADA-accessible hotel rooms will actually meet your attendees' needs before booking.

In-person events have the obvious benefits of richer engagement opportunities with attendees, so the payoff is there. Additionally, in-person events have less of a digital accessibility component, allowing you to focus more on the venue itself rather than digital portals and streaming.

Real-Life Attendee Story

An event planner asked a very generic accessibility question in the attendee registration form: Do you require ADA accommodations? It seems straightforward, right? Here's why it wasn't thorough enough.

The attendee answered "Yes," so the planner arranged for an ADA-accessible room that included features such as a flashing fire alarm and an accessible shower.

However, the attendee used a device called a Hoyer lift to get into bed. Part of this device rolls underneath the bed, but the room had a bed with a solid base, so the attendee wasn't able to get into bed using their lift. They wound up needing help from multiple people to pick them up and put them into bed. Is this how you want your attendees to remember your event?

⚠ **Details matter when it comes to accessibility. Never be afraid to ask for more information to ensure attendees get what they need.**

Virtual

Benefits

• Cost-effective.

• Only digital accessibility to consider.

• Ability to reach the broadest range of attendees.

Challenges

• Less engaging and easier for attendees to tune out or be distracted.

Virtual events are inherently more widely accessible because they don't require travel. Logistics-wise, they're also far easier to adapt to accessibility requirements. Though there are a number of digital accessibility requirements (discussed in a later chapter), event professionals are free from vetting venues, accommodations, and the physical aspects of the event.

Hybrid

Benefits

• Engaging in-person component with an accessible virtual option.

• Opportunity to stream in-person experiences for virtual engagement.

• Ability to attract the widest range of attendees.

Challenges

• Need to juggle digital *and* physical accessibility concerns.

• Higher costs overall to put on both events.

Hybrid events are two-pronged. They can attract the most diverse attendees but require the most work in accessibility planning. You'll have to consider both digital accessibility and on-site concerns, so make sure you have the necessary bandwidth and resources before deciding to go this route.

Incorporating Accessibility Considerations into Budgeting

Planning an accessible in-person event will add some line items to your budget. Here are a few things to consider:

- ✔ Rental or purchase of assistive technology devices, such as hearing loops or scooters.
- ✔ Fees for sign language interpreters and/or real-time captioning services.
- ✔ Transportation costs for attendees with disabilities, such as accessible transportation options or, in some cases, reimbursement for taxi fares.
- ✔ Printing of materials in multiple formats, including large print and braille.
- ✔ Purchase of accessible seating options or modifications to seating arrangements.
- ✔ Site modifications, such as portable ramps.
- ✔ Staff training on disability etiquette, accessibility protocols, and assistance techniques.

- ✅ Accommodation costs for speakers or presenters with disabilities, such as accessible hotel rooms or travel assistance.
- ✅ Design and printing of signage with accessibility information and directions.
- ✅ Catering expenses for providing various food options to accommodate dietary restrictions and allergies.
- ✅ Health and safety equipment, such as masks, hand sanitizer, and air purifiers.
- ✅ Costs associated with implementing feedback mechanisms to improve accessibility for future events.

For **virtual events**, your list may include:

- ✅ Subscription or licensing fees for accessibly designed virtual event platforms or software.
- ✅ Costs associated with hiring technical support or IT professionals to manage the virtual event platform.
- ✅ Fees for live captioning and/or sign language interpretation services for virtual presentations.
- ✅ Purchase or rental of equipment, such as webcams, microphones, or lighting to improve audio and video quality.
- ✅ Training expenses for speakers or presenters on virtual presentation techniques and accessibility best practices.
- ✅ Translation services for providing multilingual support during virtual events.
- ✅ Accessibility audits to ensure virtual event platforms and materials are accessible to participants with disabilities.

For **hybrid events**, consider all of the above when you make a budget, including any technologies required to stream in-person experiences to your virtual audience.

Educating Decision-Makers on the Value of Accessibility

Where budget approval is required, your internal decision-makers may need you to make a case for designing accessible events. In most cases, these decision-makers would like to put on an accessible event, but still have to account for providing ROI for an increase in the budget.

Advocate for your position by having absolute clarity on leadership's goals and KPIs for your events and then build your case around those.

Here are a few points you can touch on in your pitch:

- **Show them why accessibility matters.** Accessibility isn't just about following the law; It's about valuing diversity and inclusion.

- **Expand your audience reach.** Highlight how accessibility opens up your events to a new group of attendees, boosting participation and engagement numbers.

- **Mention the long-term benefits.** Mention the upfront costs but emphasize the long-term ROI of reaching an audience that represents up to 25% of available attendees.

- **Talk about taking a proactive—rather than reactive—legal approach.** Accessibility is a requirement for any publicly available space or event. The scope and application of this will continue to become more defined, but as a general rule, the legally safest approach will be the most accessible approach.

Precautions for Infectious Diseases (including COVID-19)

Aren't We Done with That?

We get it—after years of headlines and quarantines, the world is tired of thinking about this stuff. But the reality is that COVID-19 has only faded from the news cycle, and it hasn't disappeared from our world. Beyond COVID-19, events put hundreds of people in close proximity to one another, many of whom travel long distances to be there. This can create an elevated risk of illnesses spreading, but it can be mitigated with a few simple steps.

What Does This Have to Do with Accessibility?

In the United States alone, nearly 3% of the population is classified as immunocompromised. In the European Union, it's a full 2%. In total, that's 48.5 million people in those two regions alone who have to consider whether going to an event will be safe enough for them.

When you think about accessibility, it's important to consider this important factor: *Are your events set up to mitigate the spread of disease?*

Precautions to Take

Everyone deserves the opportunity to participate fully in public life without putting their health at risk. With proper planning, event organizers can create a safer and more inclusive environment where everyone feels welcome and valued.

Here are a few ways to make your events safer:

- ✅ **Implement hygiene protocols.** Provide hand sanitizing stations throughout the venue and ensure there are adequate handwashing facilities.

- ✅ **Provide masks.** Make masks available for those who are immunocompromised, ill, or otherwise want one. It's easy to include them at event registration tables as an option.

- ✅ **Maximize ventilation.** Inquire with venues about ventilation systems and the availability of windows. If the venue doesn't have adequate filtration, consider bringing in some commercial equipment rentals, such as air filters and UV sanitizers.

- ✅ **Limit crowding.** Implement crowd management strategies, such as staggered entry times and capacity limits to prevent overcrowding.

- ✅ **Offer touchless or limited touch registration, on-demand badge printing, and digital session check-ins.** Wherever you can, eliminate the need for attendees to touch screens, pick up physical materials, and sign in with pen and paper. For example, Cvent's OnArrival allows attendees to sign in using a QR code from their email.

Venue Sourcing

One of the most important parts of planning an accessible event is making sure you choose the right venue. As you evaluate your candidates, go armed with a checklist to help you qualify them.

Cvent Spotlight

With the **Cvent Supplier Network,** getting accessibility information up-front has never been easier. Global hotels and venues have added accessibility information to the FAQs section to give you the information you need and save you time asking accessibility questions in the RFP.

Venue Accessibility Checklist

As you begin to select potential venues, use this checklist as a baseline to assess the venue's compatibility with a truly accessible event.

- ☐ Can you reserve parking spaces for people who need them most?
- ☐ Is there ample space for mobility aids?
- ☐ Do doors have automatic openers, or can they be propped open for easy access?
- ☐ Are there lips or steps that prevent wheelchair access to key areas?
- ☐ Is the main entrance to the venue accessible?
    - ☐ If not, is there an alternative accessible entrance that's dignified (no back alleys)?
    - ☐ Will it remain unlocked during your event?
- ☐ Is the approach to the venue solid ground, or will you need a temporary pathway? Soft mud and loose gravel can be problematic for many.
- ☐ Does the venue have step-free access throughout?
    - ☐ Can the elevators be accessed without having to ask for a key?
    - ☐ Are ramps of a gentle gradient (1:20), and do they have handrails on either side?
- ☐ What signage does the venue offer?
    - ☐ Is the signage large and in high contrast?
    - ☐ Is it embossed or in braille?
        - ☐ If not, can you put up your own signs?
- ☐ Is there a loop system in your meeting room for hearing aid users?
    - ☐ If so, is it working?
    - ☐ Does anyone know how to switch it on or adjust the volume?
        - ☐ Will that person be there when you hold your event in the building?
- ☐ Does the venue offer accessible toilets and gender-neutral toilets?
- ☐ Are there visual (flashing) fire alarms in private spaces, such as toilets, to alert delegates who are deaf or hard of hearing?
    - ☐ If not, consider what you must do in case of a fire alarm.
- ☐ Is space available for a low-sensory room?
- ☐ Are electrical outlets available in seating areas for attendees to plug in adaptive devices, including laptops?
- ☐ Is there somewhere close by where service animals can drink water and relieve themselves?
- ☐ Do the chair options accommodate all body sizes?

> ### Additional Space Considerations
>
> People with disabilities aren't the only ones to consider in providing inclusive spaces. You may want to provide dedicated areas for lactation and prayer.

Vendor Sourcing

Assessing Vendor Accessibility

For each vendor you work with, it's important to consider how their solutions fit against the requirements of an audience of attendees with disabilities.

For example, are food vendors capable of adhering to strict sanitation protocols for severe food allergies? Are visual designers aware of accessibility best practices?

Understanding your attendees needs well, and vetting vendors against those needs, is the critical first step.

Sourcing Accessibility Vendors

Accessibility vendors are vendors who provide supportive services for event attendees with disabilities. These services might include things like accessible transportation options, ASL interpretation, or even allergy and diet specific caterers.

Your best bet is going to be to work from vendor directories tailored explicitly to these types of businesses, such as Cvent's Vendor Marketplace, rather than trying to educate standard vendors on accessibility requirements.

For example, some captioning services may not be up to par with what's required for attendees with hearing losses. Instead of just looking for a captioning solution, look for one that offers Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) captioning, which makes sure words are accurate and appear in sync with audio.

You can also put out a request for proposal to accessibility vendors, using details from your hotel and venue, to ensure that their offerings are tailored to your specific event's needs.

Communicating Accessibility Expectations to Vendors

For accessible event planning, success will always depend on excellent communication, and this goes double for vendor relationships.

Be sure to communicate accessibility requirements to all vendors clearly and in writing well ahead of the event. You can even make these stipulations part of your vendor agreements.

For video service providers, this can mean ensuring the crew knows to keep an ASL interpreter on screen at all times. For food vendors, it may mean requiring them to list all ingredients prominently on their menus and provide bendable plastic straws.

Room Blocks and Travel

Ensuring Accessible Accommodations for Attendees

Accommodations represent a big piece of in-person event accessibility. Here are a few things to check when you vet potential hotels for room blocks:

- What accessibility features do the rooms have?

- Is there a refrigerator in every room for keeping medications cold?

- Are the elevators working and accessible?

- Are the bathrooms spacious and accommodating?

- Are the showers accessible by a wheelchair? Are there shower benches, handlebars around toilets, and wheelchair-height counters in the bathrooms?

- Are the beds accessible from a wheelchair?

- Is there plenty of accessible parking available on site?

Event Tech Spotlight

Cvent Passkey makes it easy for event professionals to include accessible rooms in their room block. Using Passkey, attendees can book accessible rooms against the block while you seamlessly monitor check-ins and listing accuracy in the hotel's property management system.
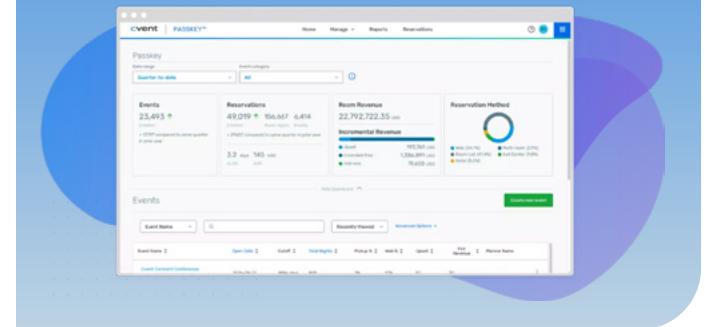
Ensuring Accessible Transport for Attendees

There will be some instances when ensuring accessible travel will be 100% out of your control, such as airports and aircraft. However, you can ensure accessible transportation to and from the event and hotel for your attendees. Here are some ways you can make transportation more accessible for them:

- Offer links to accessible transportation services/shuttles in the area on the event information page.

- If you know you have guests with disabilities that may make transportation difficult, call ahead to the hotel to let them know to plan accordingly to assist with the guest's arrival.

- Pre-arrange for accessible ride shares/shuttle services in the vicinity of the event so that attendees with disabilities can participate in off-site activities, such as lunches and happy hours.

Venue Diagramming

Venue diagramming tools can be an excellent way to coordinate the physical elements of an in-person accessible event. Use these tools to design spaces with specific dimensional requirements and get a birds-eye visual of the proximity to ramps, restrooms, and elevators as you map out the space.

Dedicated Spaces for Accessibility

For people with disabilities such as autism and anxiety, consider providing a dedicated space or two for attendees to ground themselves and decompress.

Quiet rooms can include any of the following features:

- Noise muffling/closing off from the rest of the event space.
- Muted lighting and colors.
- Rules and signage with low noise requirements.
- Soft, compressive seating, such as hammocks.
- Weighted blankets.

- White noise machines.
- Plants and natural light.
- Quiet fidget toys.
- Disposable earplugs for attendees to take with them.

Event Tech Spotlight

Cvent's Event Diagramming tool makes it easy for you to lay out the floor plan of your event. You can even set up a virtual 3D walkthrough of the space!

Accommodations to Think About

Personal Care Assistants

Some attendees with disabilities may be accompanied by a personal care assistant (PCA) to assist them. You'll need to ensure that:

- The PCA is given free entry.
- The attendee and their PCA are always able to sit next to each other.
- You've factored PCAs into the catering numbers and room capacities.

Include a checkbox for PCAs in your registration form. Clearly communicate with your registration booth staff about these attendees so that they're not faced with difficulty when they pick up their badges.

Service Animals

Some visitors with disabilities may be accompanied by a service animal, such as a guide dog. In most places, you are legally required to allow individuals with service animals to attend your event. Laws regarding emotional support animals (ESAs) are more varied, so be sure to check the laws of the location where your event will be hosted in addition to the rules of the venue.

To accommodate attendees with service animals, you must ensure that:

- There's a reserved space for them at the end of an aisle so that their animal can stay close by.
- You provide drinking water stations for the animals and a place where they can relieve themselves.
- Staff, exhibitors, and vendors are made aware of best practices regarding how to interact with service animals.

Floor Planning and Layouts

Here are some basic accessibility requirements to keep in mind when mapping out the venue space:

Wheelchair Accessibility

- Make sure all walkways are at least three feet wide and that thoroughfares and corridors have at least six feet/two meters of space across.
- Have no more than a 0.5-inch (1.27 cm) change in floor elevation.
- Make sure any carpets are low pile. Wheelchairs, crutches, walkers, and canes will struggle on shag carpeting.
- At least one table in each area should be between 30 and 34 inches (76-86 cm) in height and have at least 27 inches (69 cm) of knee clearance.
- Ensure a minimum pivoting turn space of five feet/one and a half meters in diameter.
- Keep tablecloths short with minimal overhang so they don't interfere with wheelchair users.

Other Considerations

- Good lighting and clear signage from any height.
- A well-lit, highly visible space for an interpreter.
- Ample seating along walking routes, registration booths, waiting areas, and speaker panels.

Reserved Seating

When planning an accessible event, make sure to include in your seating estimates enough space for chairs around specific areas, such as:

- • Near CART monitors, interpreters, and speakers.
- • Along aisles and near doors/exits.
- • Close to the Q&A mic.
- • Extra companion seating for wheelchair-accessible seating areas.

Accessible Navigation and Signage

Signage plays a crucial role in ensuring attendees with low vision can navigate with ease. One handy trick is to use high-contrast colors and large, bold fonts to make signage easier to read. Think big, clear letters on a contrasting background to give the text a little extra pop!

For blind attendees, incorporating tactile elements, such as braille or raised lettering, for important signs, including restroom and emergency exit signs, is oftena legal requirement, so make sure your venue is compliant.

Keep signage consistent and strategically placed throughout the venue. This means ensuring they're positioned at key points, such as near entrances, elevators, and important rooms or areas. It's all about creating a clear path for attendees to follow without having to strain their eyes or guess where they're going.

Remember to communicate with attendees ahead of time about the availability of accessible signage. It will ensure everyone feels welcome and included before they even step into your event.

Effective planning makes easy execution

Planning more accessible events increases reach

It's the right thing to do

Promoting Accessible Events

Planning → **Promotion** Optimize your event marketing → Day of Event → Post Event

Registration
Marketing
Event website
Speaker management
Exhibitor management

If you want to maximize attendance and engagement at your event, it's critical to integrate accessibility best practices into your event promotions.

This will make sure you reach the largest possible audience of potential attendees and also that your event promotions are viewable by the disabled community.

Planning accessible event promotions requires careful consideration. You'll need to think about how each aspect of your strategy can be accessed by people with different disabilities.

By the end of this section, you'll know how to:

1. Manage exhibitors and speakers for an accessible event

2. Plan and produce accessible marketing materials

3. Communicate accessibility in your materials

4. Build digital accessibility into your assets

5. Create an accessible registration experience
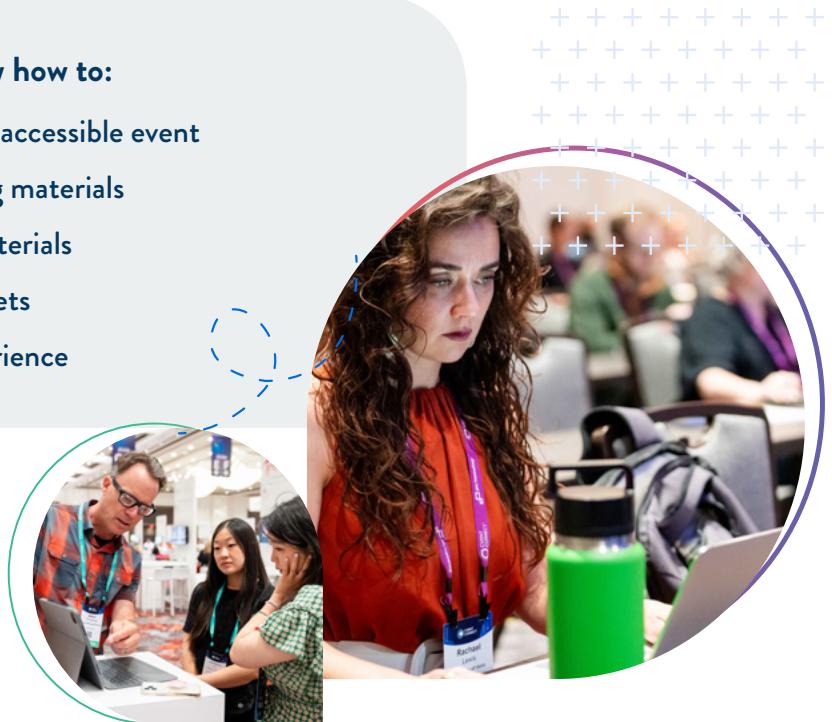
Speaker Management and Breakout Planning

Educating Speakers on Inclusive Presentation Practices

While it can be tempting to hope that speakers will come equipped with an understanding of accessibility best practices, it's safest not to make assumptions. Don't expect speakers to know how to deliver inclusive presentations. Instead, prepare all of the training materials they require to ensure a smooth delivery. We recommend the following:

- **Get speakers to share their materials in advance.** Many attendees with hearing or cognitive disabilities may choose to review the material ahead of the event. Posting your speakers' materials online in advance will allow these attendees to review the material in a format that's most comfortable for them.

- **Advise your speakers on readability best practices.** For example, ensure they use large, clear, simple fonts and high-contrast text on backgrounds. We'll provide a full list of these best practices in the Digital Accessibility section. Additionally, advise them to leave space at the bottom of slides to allow room for captions.

- **Coach speakers on mic etiquette**. Remind your speakers to speak clearly into the mic and to encourage audience members to ask questions into a mic if one is available. It's also a good idea to repeat questions back to the audience after they're asked.

- **Offer an app-based Q&A session as an alternative option.** Some attendees may have disabilities that make speaking into the mic difficult. Offering a Q&A app for your speaker to use during their talk is a great way to ensure maximum participation from the audience.

A Note on Breakouts and Group Activities

When a group activity is on the agenda, it's important to be aware that this may be overwhelming for some attendees. Breakout sessions with small groups offer wonderful opportunities for engagement but can be challenging for people with auditory or social disabilities.

For speakers with breakout sessions scheduled, establish some ground rules to ensure every attendee has a great experience:

- Distance groups as far as possible to minimize overlapping sounds.
- Ensure group areas are wheelchair accessible and at least one table is at a wheelchair-accessible height.
- Use visual and audible cues to signal when it's time for the groups to disband, such as dimming lights and speaking into a mic.
- Include the online audience by monitoring text chats and promptly responding to questions.

Accommodations for Speakers with Disabilities

Planning accessible events will not only help you attract more attendees but also help you attract a broader and richer range of speakers who may be unable to present at an inaccessible event otherwise.

In the same way that you're planning for attendees with disabilities, you should plan to accommodate any speakers who may have disabilities.

Ask your speakers whether they have any accommodation needs early in the conversation so that you can make their experience as enjoyable and productive as possible. Once you have that information, be proactive and ask for any clarification or details you may require. Accommodations may include:

- A portable ramp for the stage.
- A private, quiet area to recharge in between sessions.
- Captioning or an ASL interpreter.

Again, the core skill you can use here is simply listening to and learning from your speakers. While it may not be feasible to accommodate every request, understanding the real-world impact their disability has on their performance at events can help you shape a more enjoyable experience that will keep them coming back every year.

Exhibitor Management

To maximize accessibility at your event, make sure your exhibitors understand your accessibility best practices and standards, particularly concerning booth design and etiquette.

Educating Exhibitors on Inclusive Materials and Booth Design

Provide exhibitors with a one-pager or event guide that includes best practices to integrate into their booths. To ensure an inclusive experience for everyone, emphasize that the event is designed to facilitate attendees with disabilities and that exhibitors are expected to meet certain standards.

Some of these criteria may include:

- At least one table at wheelchair height.
- Print materials in large type for people with low vision.
- Digital assets that follow digital accessibility best practices.

Marketing

Reaching an accessible audience means creating accessible marketing materials. To drive sign-ups, you must apply the same planning lens to your promotional materials as you do to your event.

For example, when you think about advertisements, consider consider how they'll be displayed at high zoom levels, or how they would be conveyed by a screen reader.

In this section, we'll cover each point of your promotional strategy and how to consider it from an accessibility perspective.

Accessible Materials

Let's start with your promotional materials. To reach an audience that will be particularly interested in attending an accessible event, you'll need to ensure they can consume your marketing materials.

For example, imagine the banner ads you're going to run for your event. Do they have sufficient contrast? Are they easy to read? Do they include the metadata required by screen-reading software?

When thinking about your promotional assets' accessibility, you'll want to make sure these four things are covered:

1. The materials are easy to read for people who are colorblind or have other visual impairments.

2. You choose digital platforms that allow you to create content that is keyboard accessible and works with assistive technologies, such as screen readers.

3. Your videos have captions.

4. The information architecture in your materials is neatly organized and simple to navigate for those with cognitive disabilities.

You can do a deep dive into accessibility features specifically related to digital experiences in the *Digital Accessibility* chapter.

Communicating the Event's Accessibility Details

Beyond building accessible marketing materials, you should also ensure you're weaving the message of accessibility into all of your promotions. People might not attend your event because they don't know they CAN! Make them feel included by clearly communicating your accessibility accommodations and considerations.

As you develop your promotional assets, don't forget to:

- Include details on the accessibility of the event. For example, if you're going to have a wheelchair-accessible space or an ASL interpreter, tell people that!
- Use symbology to indicate things such as assistive listening devices or captions.
- Use an outline to ensure ideas flow cohesively, and that the material is easy to follow and navigate for those with cognitive disabilities.

Be sure that as you create your copy and assets, you find ways to highlight the thoughtfulness you've put into making your event more accessible. People with disabilities want to find events like yours, and the more prominent you make that information, the more you'll help them show up.

Event Website

Ensure Your Website Is Accessible

The goal of any great event website is to maximize the number of people who register for the event. The key to this is having a great conversion rate on your site. As with any marketing campaign, usability is a huge part of guaranteeing a great conversion rate.

Make sure your website is accessible so that this particular target audience can get the information they need to attend. Learn about how to optimize an event website for accessibility in the *Digital Accessibility* chapter.

Accessibility Statement and Contact Info

Provide a way for people to get in touch if they have questions or feedback related to accessibility. You can add this contact information to the website's footer or as a dedicated link in your event site menu.

Include multiple contact methods—this is the accessible approach, after all—and make sure someone who can answer knowledgeably and quickly can be contacted.

Here's a sample accessibility statement for an event:

We're dedicated to making our events enjoyable for everyone, regardless of their abilities or circumstances. If you have any questions about access or would like to request accommodations that will facilitate your full participation in this event, please contact:

John Doe, Lead Event Planner
jdoe@company.com
555-555-5555

Engagement during the Event

Be sure to include accessible options for people who may not be able to speak up at events in traditional ways. Chats are a great Q&A option—even for on-site events. You can also include the option to submit questions ahead of the event.

For attendees with social anxiety, consider using prescriptive prompts and tools to help people start conversations. You can set up conversation tables in social areas with signs indicating topics for discussion. Or you can pass out badges with industry info, hobbies, or home states at the registration area to help people find common ground in a crowd.

Registration

Is Your Registration Tool Accessible?

The *Digital Accessibility* chapter covers registration flows in greater detail, but the key point here is that a successful event starts with an accessible registration process.

All of the usual conversion rate optimization rules apply, including a clean and simple user interface, a reasonable length for your questionnaire, and a smooth checkout process.

Beyond that, you should make sure that every field can be completed by accessibility tools and software that your target attendees are likely to use, such as screen readers and mouse alternatives.

Asking Accommodation Questions

Your registration form is the perfect place to gather intel to make final tweaks to your event, as well as to ensure your attendees have everything they need.

If your registration form supports conditional logic, consider adding a checkbox that displays additional questions when marked for your attendees with accommodation needs.

The format of your form and how easy it is to use will be as important as the information you collect. We share a few common modes of questioning here, along with the pros and cons of each.

Option 1: Text Answer

Do you have any access needs or require disability accommodations to fully participate?

While this question is a great start, the reality is that it puts the burden on the registrant to tell their entire story without knowing what you're capable of accommodating. Instead, try a more pointed approach that takes some of the heavy lifting—and typing—off of the end user.

Option 2: Multi-Select

I will need the following accommodations to participate:

- ☐ *Assistive listening device*
- ☐ *Captioning*
- ☐ *Reserved front-row seat*
- ☐ *Large print*
- ☐ *Advance copy of slides to be projected*
- ☐ *Wheelchair access*
- ☐ *Scent-free room*
- ☐ *Lactation room*
- ☐ *Gender-neutral bathroom*
- ☐ *I will be accompanied by a personal care assistant (PCA)*
- ☐ *Dietary restrictions. List: _____*
- ☐ *Other: _____*

Offering registrants the ability to select options from a pre-set list makes it easier to ask for what they require. However, be sure to only list the options you're capableof offering. Use the "Other" field as a way to track what may need to be added. Note that this list is an example and isn't exhaustive of all potential accommodations.

Option 3: In-Depth Questions

Simple accessibility questions will yield simple information. Adding more information fields to your form will allow you to get a more exact picture of the kinds of accommodations your guests need so that you can plan based on real data rather than guesswork.

Below is an example of how in-depth you can go with your accessibility questionnaire. It's from a prominent conference where many attendees have disabilities, sourced from California State University at Northridge's Assistive Technology Conference.

Accommodation Information

Alternative Format

For those who desire their conference program in an alternative format, please select one of the options below. If you do not select an alternative format, you will receive the standard printed conference program.

> *Alternative format options:*
> - ☐ *E-text (text, PDF & HTML) & DAISY USB drive*
> - ☐ *E-text (text, PDF & HTML) & DAISY USB drive with braille map*
> - ☐ *Large print*

Access Services

Please select the appropriate accommodation option for the sessions you will be attending. Please note that transcripts from CART services are not available.

> *Access service options:*
> - ☐ *Assistive listening (ALD)*
> - ☐ *Real-time captioning (CART)*
> - ☐ *Sign language interpreter*
> - ☐ *Assistive listening (ALD) & real-time captioning (CART)*
> - ☐ *Assistive listening (ALD) & sign language interpreter*

Personal Care Assistant

If you will be accompanied by a personal care attendant (PCA), please provide their name so that a badge can be created for them.

PCAs may not attend sessions without the registered participant. If a PCA wishes to attend sessions without the registered participant, they must register separately.

> ** Will you be accompanied by a PCA?*
> - ☐ *No*
> - ☐ *Yes*

Hotel Orientation Tour for First-Time Blind and Low-Vision Attendees

If this is your first time visiting the venue and are an attendee with low or no vision, the Center on Disabilities will arrange a hotel orientation tour. We ask that only those who need the accommodation indicate interest in the tour, as capacity is limited.

* Would you like to be contacted about a hotel orientation tour for first-time blind and low-vision attendees?

☐ *No*

☐ *Yes, please contact me about a hotel orientation tour for first-time blind and low-vision attendees.*

Follow-Up

For some of these questions, you may need to follow up to request additional information. For example, if someone needs a sign language interpreter, you'll have to find out which sign language they use.

You can handle this by either asking conditional sub-questions in your registration form or reaching out to the registrant after their submission. Don't forget to include a field for their contact information.

Deadline

To ensure that all of the accessibility accommodations are adequately prepared, it's a good idea to set a deadline for these requests to provide ample time to coordinate and finalize all necessary arrangements.

Communicate this deadline clearly and in writing to your registrants. For example:

Please communicate any access needs as soon as possible. While we will do our best to accommodate all needs, requests made after <date> may not be possible to accommodate.

Accessible promotions increase attendance

Small considerations can have big impacts

Follow the checklists to maximize your reach

Day of Event

Planning

Promotion

Day of Event
Impress attendees
when it matters most

Post Event

Networking
Event app
Onsite check-in & badging
Virtual experience
Webinar
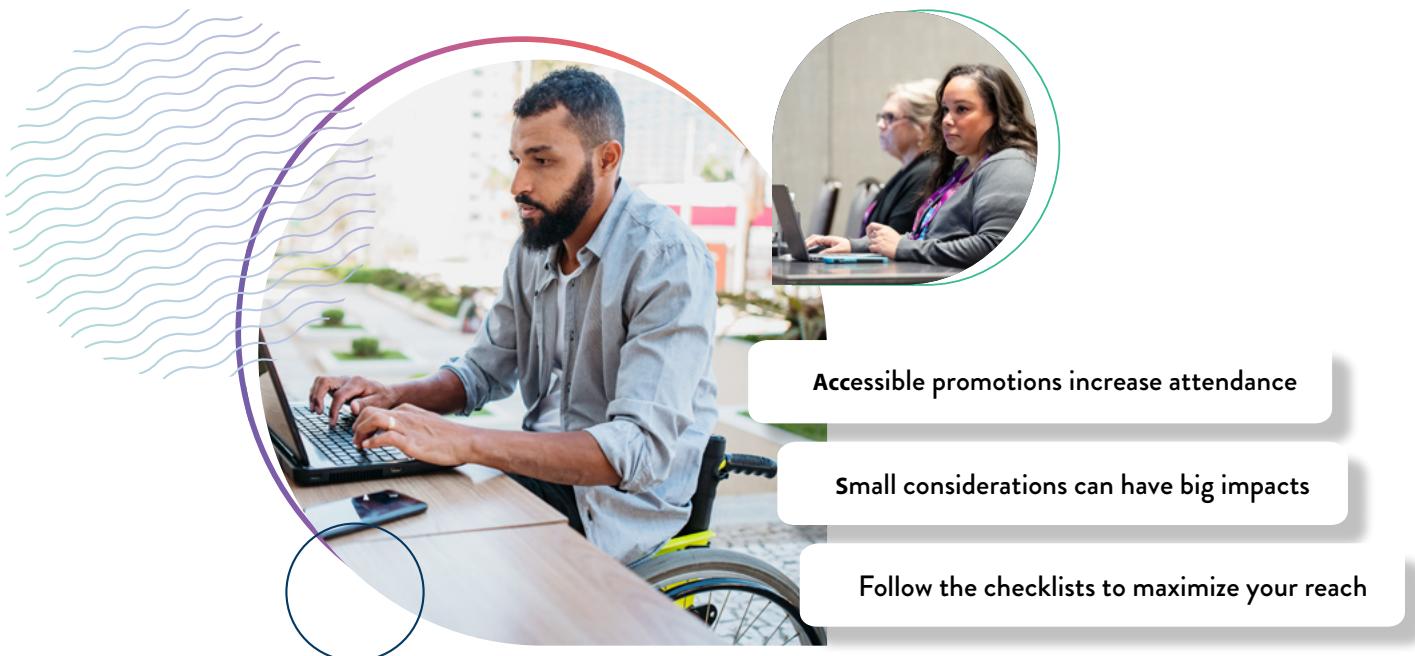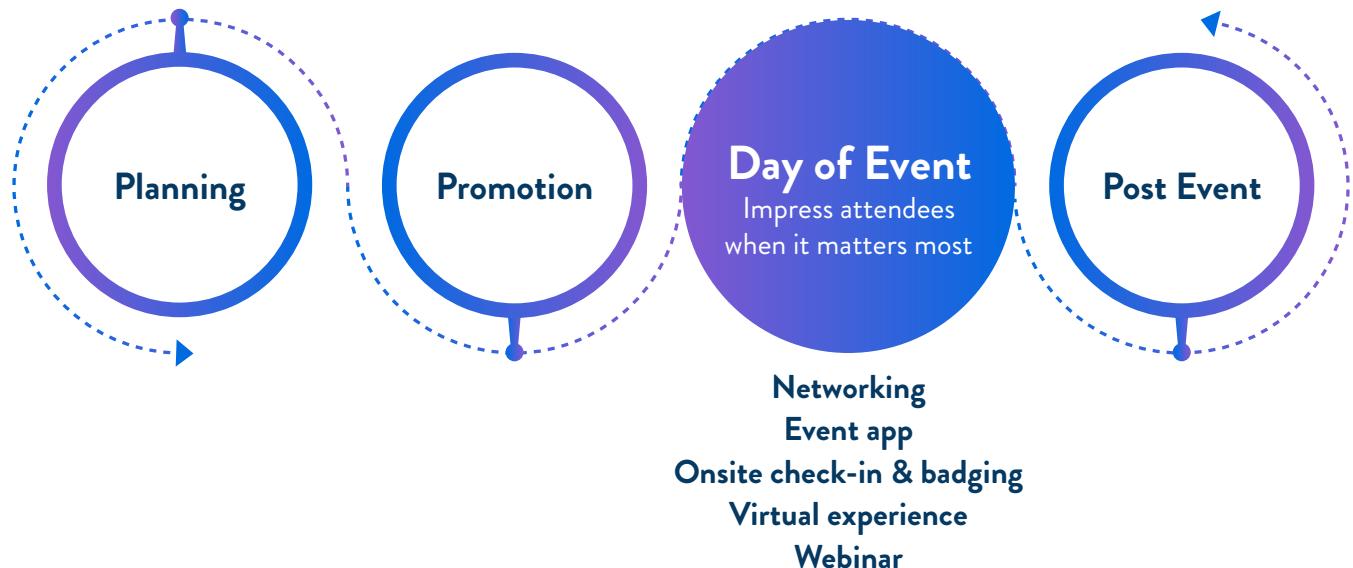
It's finally here — the culmination of all of your hard work, weeks of preparation, and plenty of self-education on accessibility. In this section, we'll cover the nuances of managing an accessible event on the day-of.

By the end of this section, you'll know:

- How to coordinate your vendors on the day of the event

- Things to watch out for during venue setup

- How to facilitate networking for participants with disabilities

- How to ensure seamless virtual experiences for attendees

Setup and vendor coordination

It's the start of a busy day (or few days). Staying on track means kicking things off with early coordination. Plan to be on-site to meet with vendors and direct everyone to their setup areas.

This will mean adding a few extra steps for on-site event coordination. Here are a few people you may need to meet with on the morning of the first day:

- **Interpreters:** Make sure they know where they're going to be, and where to stand so they're visible to cameras.

- **Accessible shuttle drivers:** Even if you've planned this over email, plan to meet with your shuttle crew the day of and show them the loading and unloading areas for your attendees. This will ensure nobody has to move over longer distances to get to the event areas.

- **Technical setup crew:** Be especially thorough in ensuring light, camera, and sound equipment is set according to your requirements. Make sure that cords are safely secured and don't pose a trip hazard, and that equipment does not pose an obstacle for wheelchairs, crutches, or walkers.

- **Venue staff:** Prep venue staff to ensure accessibility features are functioning and ready. For example, make sure hearing loops or venue-owned audio/video equipment works, and accessible lifts and doors stay unlocked.

Onsite check-in & badging

Your check-in table is your event's first opportunity to set expectations for your attendees, and to really wow them with your attention to detail.

Make sure that the space is neatly organized, with clear signage for lines, different entry levels, and any other important directions. For attendees with disabilities, you can go the extra mile by:

- Having lower desks at check-in for people in wheelchairs, little people, etc.

- Offering contactless check-in stations, masks, and hand sanitizer.

- Having a pen and paper on hand as a way to communicate (if technology fails).

- Making braille signage, badges, and registration sheets available.

- Ensuring staff have text-to-speech apps available and are trained in their use (having a sign language interpreter is even better!). We like Microsoft Translator.

- Including maps of the event floor marked with accessibility resources.

More than anything, make sure to reiterate to your check-in staff the importance of providing a comfortable, respectful check-in process for attendees with disabilities. Though check-in times can be busy, it's a good idea to spend a few minutes on the day of your event to brush up on best practices for assisting attendees with disabilities with check-in.

Networking

It's important to understand that for many people with disabilities, networking can present several difficulties. During the event, you can remove barriers to the rich opportunities offered by networking with a little conscious planning:

- **Hold breakout sessions and social hours in accessible spaces.** Make sure there's plenty of room for people with personal care attendants, service dogs, and wheelchairs, and enforce capacity limits.

- **Provide dry options for social events.** Some attendees might be in substance recovery. Dry social events offer these attendees ways to mingle and network, without putting them in a situation that could compromise their sobriety. Better still, there are many artisanal virgin drink options hitting the market right now to make this feel like an elevated "happy hour" experience, sans alcohol.

- **Use ice-breaker tactics to help attendees who struggle with social anxiety.** As mentioned in an earlier chapter, you can use table signs or even badge stickers to give attendees a common interest to discuss with each other. Be sure to communicate these strategies to staff to pass along at the registration table and at social hours throughout the event. **Check out the Cvent blog** for more great icebreaker ideas.

- **Use in-app networking for an inclusive digital option.** There are plenty of reasons attendees may not feel comfortable networking in person. Be sure to highlight this opportunity and make the most of this technical functionality during your event, particularly for attendees who may be immunocompromised or attending virtually.

- **Use Cvent Attendee Hub to engage and interact with your audience when they want, how they want.** Simplify networking and engagement, with technology that was built for it. Cvent Attendee Hub encourages attendees to start interacting with the event the moment they have registered. Create initial engagement points that create buzz and identify attendee expectations before the opening session.

Virtual Experiences

If you're having a virtual or hybrid event, make sure you have staff working to monitor the virtual side of your event experience as well. This will ensure that attendance across your event is as engaging as possible for all.

Here are a few reminders for managing your virtual event components:

- **Monitor A/V setups closely.** Getting the audio/video elements of your event right will be critical to creating a great virtual experience. Make sure speakers are speaking slowly and clearly into mics, that interpreters are clearly on screen at all times, and that captioning software is keeping up with dialogue.

- **Respond in real-time to chat questions.** For virtual attendees with cognitive disabilities, it may prove difficult to get value when questions have to be held until the end of the presentation. Often times, it's helpful to have someone helping the speaker handle chat questions in real-time, either by responding in the chat, or reading off questions to the speaker at preset intervals.

- **Monitor accessibility support channels rigorously.**   Often accessibility issues are time-sensitive. For example, if someone can't hear a presentation as it's being delivered, they may miss out on key parts of the event while they wait for support. Make sure any notifications related to accessibility support go directly to a person, not an unmonitored inbox. Try to address concerns in less than an hour.


- Effective planning makes easy execution

- Planning more accessible events increases reach

- It's the right thing to do

Post Event

Planning — **Promotion** — **Day of Event** — **Post Event**
Measure and improve your ROI

Martech integrations
Event & attendee insights
Surveys
Lead management
Engagement scoring
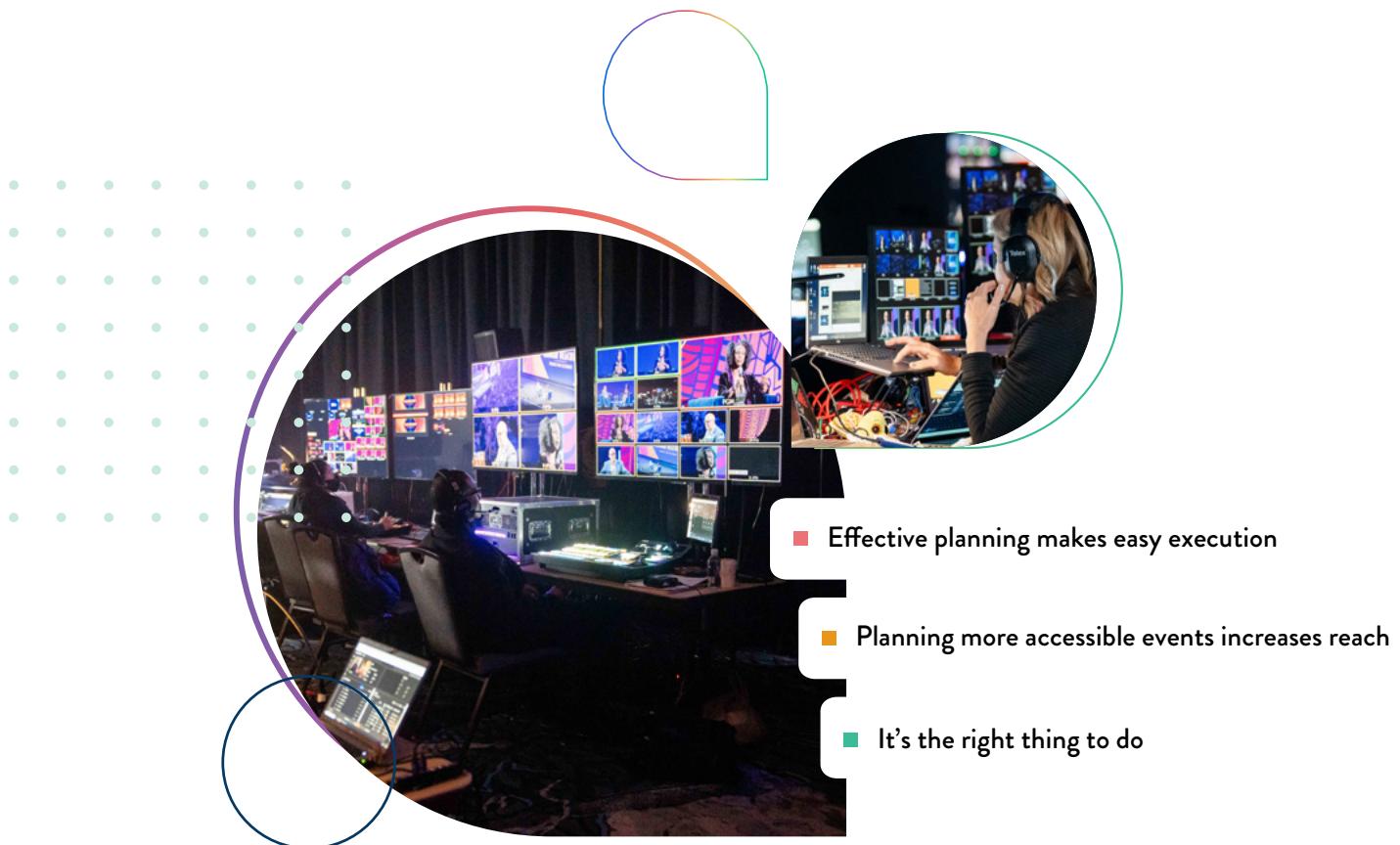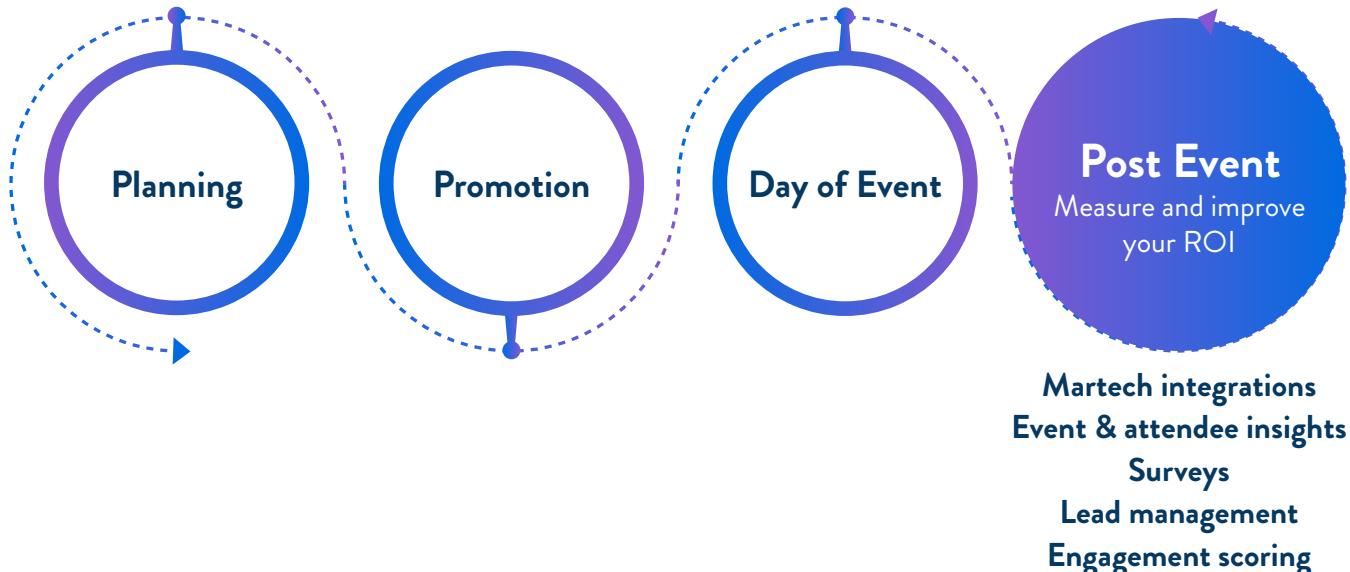
You did it! Now that your event is over, it's time to reset, regroup, and re-engage with on-demand content. Take the time to collect valuable feedback from your attendees, speakers, and vendors, and make the most of the lead data that you were able to collect.

You can do a lot to set yourself up for a seamless accessible event next time around with the information you have now, so don't let it go to waste.

By the end of this section, you'll know how to:

- Ask the right questions to inform even better accessible events

- Manage leads with accessibility info in your CRM

- Evaluate food vendors

Event & attendee insights

First on your list should be reaching out to attendees who marked themselves as needing accessibility accommodations during the registration process. You should be able to export and segment these attendees using your CRM or event management tool. You can also reach out to attendees who didn't specify accessibility accommodations during the event and ask if they used any of these services.

Plan to follow up with attendees after the event to ask for specific feedback from attendees with disabilities.

Here's an example of an email you might send:

New Messages

To : Name Surname ×   cc :   bcc :

Subject :

Hi [first name],

I wanted to take a moment to reach out to you personally and thank you for attending [event name]. I'm thrilled you were able to attend.

I see that on your registration, you noted that you required some accessibility accommodations. Our team worked really hard this year to accommodate more attendees with disabilities, and we'd love to hear from you what your experience was like.

If you have a moment, please fill out this Accessibility Feedback Survey. Feel free to reply to this email with any additional feedback or concerns not addressed on this form.

Thank you again for attending, and we look forward to seeing you again next year!

Send

Survey questions

As with your registration questions, the way you ask things in your post-event accessibility survey will determine the usefulness of the information you get. Remember: make this survey quick and easy to complete, and make sure the options on multiple-choice questions are comprehensive.

Here are a few examples of post-event survey questions you can ask (we recommend asking no more than five):

- *Which of the following accessibility accommodations did you use during the event?*

- *Were there any accessibility accommodations that we didn't have that you would have used?*

- *Overall, how would you rate the accessibility of this event on a scale of 1 to 10?*

- *Were you able to access and understand all the content?*

- *Was there enough accessible seating for you in each area of the event you attended?*

- *Did you use the accessible transportation that was provided? If not, can you tell us why?*

- *If you used it, how would you rate the accessible transportation at this event on a scale of 1 to 10?*

- *Do you have any needs that were not accommodated at this event? If so, please help us do better next time — tell us more:*

- *Were the options from our food vendors sufficient to meet your needs? If not, please tell us why.*

Event Tech Spotlight:
Use Cvent Survey Solutions to simplify post-event feedback

Execute powerful and dynamic surveys with **Cvent Survey Solutions.** Leverage details already configured within the event to streamline setup and pre-schedule survey availability based on event or session start, so that respondents are giving their feedback immediately following the event.
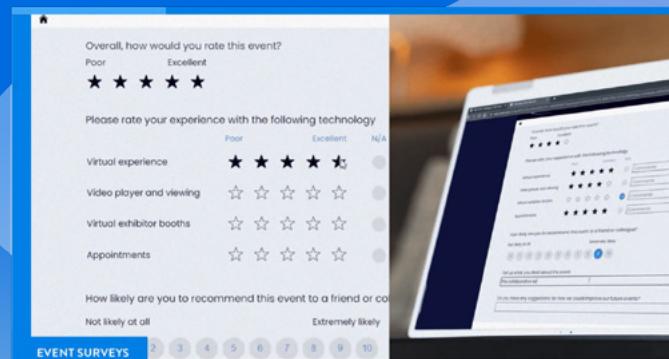
Lead management

Post-event, make sure that you're maintaining proper data hygiene in your CRM for attendees who requested accommodations, as this will help you plan and promote your future accessible events. Label lists with consistent nomenclature, and use contact properties consistently to make it easy to draw insights from attendee information.

The best way to handle leads from an event is to use an events platform that integrates directly with your CRM. Manual imports are possible, but not ideal, and they can lead to chaos in your CRM that you'll need to clean up later.

If you're importing attendees and registrants from a spreadsheet into your CRM, you may need to create a new data property in your CRM for attendees who requested accommodations. This will allow you to:

- Track anonymized stats over time to understand your growth in that area

- Assess utilization of the accessibility features of your event

- Use this data to continue to prove the value of accessible events in your org

- Communicate the stats to the marketing team so they can conscientiously design accessible marketing campaigns

Accessibility vendor lists

If this was your first time focusing on accessibility for an event, chances are you did a lot of research and vetting to assemble your vendors. Don't let all of that hard work go to waste.

Run through your receipts and contracts for any accessibility-related vendors you might have used, and use a tool such as Cvent's Vendor Marketplace to keep track of vendor details and contact information for each. Be sure to note any problems for next year's event so you can plan to highlight them should you choose to work with the vendor again.

Food vendor check-ins

After the event, be sure to connect with the team who handled food for your event. The purpose of this outreach is to get a sense of whether attendees' dietary needs were largely met or if there were some gaps that need to be addressed for next year.

You can ask them questions such as:

- *How many orders did you receive for the dietary-restrictions options on the menu?*

- *Were there any requests you were unable to handle? If so, how many, and what were they?*

- *Did you run into any problems with attendees being able to reach the counter or read the menu?*

Event Tech Spotlight

Source experienced vendors for in-person, virtual, and hybrid events in **Cvent's Vendor Marketplace.** Browse and discover thousands of service providers to accommodate your event requirements and track and manage the status of all of your requests by adding quotes, notes, and documents right in the Cvent platform.
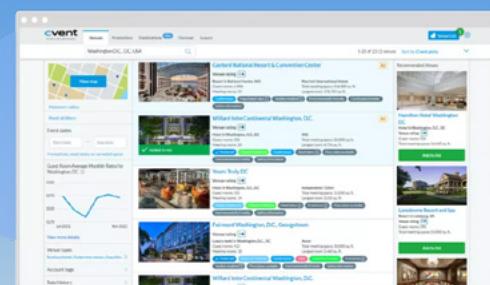
Food allergies and dietary restrictions can create serious obstacles for event attendees. This feedback in particular should be carefully reviewed alongside attendee feedback on food vendors. Use this information to get a complete picture of how good of a fit these vendors were and where to expand or focus menu items for next year.

Digital Accessibility & Vendor Evaluation Best Practices

Digital accessibility is the degree to which digital experiences are functional, accessible, and understandable to people with a wide range of disabilities. In this section, we'll cover what that means in technical terms and how to assess whether event solutions meet the standards set forth by leaders in digital accessibility.

By the end of this section, you'll:

- Understand digital accessibility best practices

- Know how to qualify digital events platforms concerning accessibility features

- Know how to guide creative teams in developing accessible user experiences and assets

Web Content Accessibility Guidelines

Let's start with who decides what the standards are for digital accessibility – what accessibility insiders simply call WCAG.

Did You Know?

Cvent is the only event technology solution that is independently audited for accessibility compliance. We constantly work to include the latest best practices in our solutions so you don't have to be an accessibility expert.

The **Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG)** provide a set of standards for making web content more accessible to people with disabilities. These guidelines are organized into four principles:

- Perceivable
- Operable
- Understandable
- Robust

Each principle includes specific success criteria to ensure digital content is accessible to people who may have a variety of disabilities.

Perceivable best practices

Requirements for perceivability center on creating digital experiences in formats that users with any number of disabilities are able to perceive in some way, whether they have visual, auditory, or other impairments. A few best practices to keep in mind:

1. Provide text alternatives for non-text content (images, videos, audio).
2. Provide captions and transcripts for pre-recorded audio and video content.
3. Ensure all content can be presented in multiple ways without losing meaning or functionality.
4. Use sufficient color contrast between text and background.
5. Ensure images and graphical objects have meaningful alternative text.
6. Provide alternatives for time-based media (audio and video) content.

Operable best practices

The Operable principle takes accessibility to the next level. Instead of simply covering basic best practices such as mobile adaptability, digital designers will need to ensure that the user interface they create is operable for a user who may require assistive devices to access the content. It's also worth noting that covering this area is a huge undertaking, and it may not be realistic for a planner to control these core functions. Ultimately, operable considerations will largely depend on the software chosen. A few key considerations:

1. Make all functionality accessible via keyboard navigation.

2. Provide users enough time to read and use content.

3. Do not use content that causes seizures or physical reactions.

4. Provide mechanisms to pause, stop, or hide moving, blinking, or scrolling content.

5. Ensure that users can easily navigate, find content, and determine their location within the website or application.

6. Ensure that all interactive elements are easily accessible and operable using various input devices.

7. Ensure that users can control time limits on content.

8. Use headings and structure to organize content logically.

Understandable best practices

Making digital content understandable involves both a consistent and easy-to-use UI, and clear concise content. These requirements focus on creating an experience that's cohesive and comprehensible. Make sure to:

1. Use clear and concise language that is easy to understand.

2. Provide consistent navigation and interaction throughout the website or application.

3. Use predictable website or application behavior.

4. Provide contextual help and guidance where necessary.

5. Ensure that users are informed of any changes in content or functionality.

6. Use headings, labels, and instructions to help users understand content and functionality.

7. Ensure that error messages are easy to understand and provide clear instructions for resolution.

8. Provide users the ability to review, correct, and confirm input before finalizing actions.

9. Provide clear and understandable error messages and suggestions for correction.

10. Provide clear and consistent navigation mechanisms.

Robust best practices

The Robust principle reminds user experience designers to develop content based on current technologies and best practices and to continue to innovate as the assistive technology industry does. As with operable requirements, much of your ability to adhere to these best practices will be dependent on the event software you choose.

Best practices include:

1. Ensuring that content is compatible with current and future assistive technologies.

2. Using valid and properly structured code (HTML, CSS, etc.).

3. Ensuring compatibility with a wide range of browsers and devices.

4. Providing fallbacks for content that may not be supported by certain technologies.

5. Using standard and well-supported web technologies to ensure broad compatibility.

6. Avoiding deprecated or obsolete technologies that may hinder accessibility.

7. Ensuring that content is properly labeled and structured for accessibility features, such as screen readers.

8. Testing the website or application with assistive technologies to ensure compatibility and accessibility.

Versions and compliance levels

As technology changes, WCAG changes with it to ensure that digital content remains accessible to everyone who accesses the internet.

As such, WCAG is organized into various versions, with the latest being WCAG 2.2. Each version introduces new guidelines and updates to address emerging technologies and accessibility challenges.

WCAG also provides various conformance levels:

- A (minimum)

- AA (standard)

- AAA (strict)

As an event professional, you should aim for at least AA compliance to ensure that your digital event experiences are meeting the standards needed by attendees with disabilities.

WCAG and the law

WCAG aren't just industry best practices – they're the legal standard in many countries.

Legislation, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in the United States, requires organizations to make their digital content and platforms accessible to individuals with disabilities. Failure to comply with these laws can result in legal consequences and damage to your organization's reputation. It's important to stay up to date on legal requirements and to evolve as these policies do, ensuring your events are compliant to avoid putting your company at legal risk.

Choosing a platform that supports accessibility

Choosing an accessible platform is crucial to ensure inclusivity for all event attendees. If there's any kind of digital component to your event, you'll need to take a hard look at vendors to ensure they're up to the standard set by WCAG.

But shopping for an event platform is challenging enough – how can you fully vet a solution for accessibility? There are a few industry tricks to getting the information you need:

Ask for a VPAT

When considering digital platforms for events, request a Voluntary Product Accessibility Template (VPAT) to get a complete punch list of the accessibility functionality a solution offers. A VPAT provides a clear overview of the accessibility of a product or service and helps event organizers make informed decisions about its suitability for their event.

Assistive technology

Assistive technology can be any equipment or software that helps people with disabilites maintain or enhance their capabilities.

A **screen reader** is a piece of software that translates complex digital content, like a webpage into text which can be read aloud or presented on a braille display. Screen readers help people who are blind or low vision navigate the digital world, along with people who have trouble reading text due to dyslexia or other reasons.

The most widely used screen readers are JAWS and NVDA (for Windows desktop), VoiceOver (for Mac desktop or iOS) and TalkBack (for Android).

Evaluating without a VPAT

What if the platform you're evaluating doesn't offer a VPAT?

You'll need to roll up your sleeves and get a little more creative — prepare yourself for lots of demos and depend on yourself as the expert, not the account executive, when it comes to assessing a solution's accessibility.

There are a few things you can do to evaluate a solution when a VPAT isn't available:

- Use an automated scanning tool such as WAVE to check for accessibility defects. A clean scan isn't a guarantee of a fully accessible product, but it's a good indicator.

- Hire a digital accessibility consultant to help you with testing methodologies or sourcing a solution that meets your requirements.

- Review the product documentation thoroughly, and get a full accounting of the platform's accessibility features in writing.

Accessibility features to look for

In a perfect world, every solution would be perfectly WCAG compliant, and this evaluation process wouldn't be necessary. The reality is that for many platforms, digital accessibility is something of an afterthought in the product roadmap. There are some core features you'll need to proactively seek out as you evaluate your options.

While the capabilities of accessibility technology are constantly changing, there are several key features you should look for in every option you consider:

- **Keyboard navigation:** This feature ensures that your website or application can be navigated without using a mouse.
    - o Make sure all functionality is accessible via keyboard navigation, allowing users to navigate and interact using the tab key and other keyboard shortcuts.
    - o When using a keyboard to navigate a user interface, a focus indicator shows the user where they are in the page. Make sure the platform you're considering provides clear visual indicators for focus states, as this will make it easier for users to navigate using a keyboard.
- **Assistive Technology compatibility:** The platform should be compatible with assistive technologies such as screen readers so users with visual impairments can navigate and interact with the content.
    - o Make sure you can add text alternatives ("alt text") for images and gifs you upload and can mark them as decorative (to be ignored by assistive technologies) as needed.
    - o Ensure that built-in elements are properly labeled and structured for assistive technologies. The name, role, and value of every interactive element should be conveyed semantically using native HTML wherever possible.
- **Color contrast:** The platform should allow you to customize the color theming while still maintaining sufficient color contrast for users with low vision.
- **Accessible text styling options**:
    - o Make sure link styles stand out by having underlines, or a different color (at least 3:1 contrast against the regular text) plus an underline on hover. A different color alone isn't enough.
    - o If you plan on building a highly customized site, ensure you can set heading levels and text styles independently.
- **Captioning, audio description, and transcripts:**
    - o Make sure you can add captions, audio descriptions, and transcripts to video and audio content as appropriate. This will let you provide the alternative formats needed for attendees with visual or hearing impairments.
- **Compatibility**: Ensure that the platform is compatible with your attendee's technologies.
    - o The platform should be compatible with a wide range of browsers, devices, and assistive technologies.
    - o Content should scale to accommodate different viewport sizes and zoom levels.

- **Clear and consistent navigation**: Ensure that the built-in navigation options make it easy for users to navigate, find content, and determine their location within the website or application.
    - Navigation, interaction, and behavior throughout the website or application should be consistent and predictable.
    - Ensure the platform uses buttons for elements that trigger actions within the page or submit forms, and links for elements that bring the user to a new location on the page or a new page/ tab.
    - Icons and symbols should be used consistently and have clear and universally understood meanings. A text label which appears on hover can help clarify the purpose of an icon.
    - A really helpful feature is a skip link at the beginning of the page to allow users who navigate with keyboard to bypass repetitive navigation menus and directly access the main content. This link is usually visually hidden and only accessible via keyboard.
- **Controls for moving content**: Make sure the platform provides mechanisms to pause, stop, or hide moving, blinking, or scrolling content. This gives you full creative freedom to include gifs, videos, and carousels without creating a bad experience for attendees who find motion distracting.
- **Forgiving forms**: Forms which help attendees understand what to do are essential for smooth signups.
    - Ensure that error messages are easy to understand and provide clear instructions for resolution.
    - Ensure users have the ability to review, correct, and confirm important input before finalizing actions.
    - Ensure the platform provides immediate feedback to users when they perform actions or submit forms.
    - Ensure that users can extend or adjust any time limits.
- **Continuous improvement:** Choose a platform that demonstrates a commitment to accessibility by regularly updating and improving its features in response to user feedback and evolving best practices.

How to ensure your design and content are accessible

Digital accessibility plays a huge role in digital experience design, and it's something to keep in mind through the development process. Something as simple as alt text on an image can have a very large impact on a disabled end user's experience, so you'll want to set standards early on as you start building out your creative briefs.

The difficult reality is that not every digital designer is up to date on digital accessibility best practices, so don't assume any of the accessibility guidelines go without saying. In your project briefs for landing pages, event portals, etc., include a standard punch list of accessibility best practices for your digital events team so that they're aware of these requirements before development begins.

The checklist below will help you get your team up to speed quickly and ensure that accessibility is built into your digital experiences from the very beginning. However, we can't emphasize this enough: your ability to adhere to these best practices and feature sets is largely going to depend on the software vendor you choose.

Nonetheless, these checklists can help you determine which software products are the best fit for your accessible event:

Event professionals digital accessibility checklist

☐ **Headings**: Use headings to organize content logically.

    ☐ Organize content using a clear and hierarchical heading structure (e.g., <h1> for the page title, <h2> for main headings, <h3> for subheadings, and so on). This helps attendees understand the relationships between different sections of content.

    ☐ Use heading levels in sequential order without skipping levels.

    ☐ Avoid using heading tags to change the appearance of text (e.g., to make text larger or bold). Style and structure are often related, but need to be addressed independently.

    ☐ Keep headings concise and to the point, focusing on summarizing the content of each section. Aim to convey the main idea or topic of the section in a few words.

    ☐ For more information on headings, see W3C's resource on headings.

☐ **Color**: Make sure text and meaningful graphics are easy to see for people with low vision, and that people with color blindness will be able to understand your content.

    ☐ Ensure sufficient color contrast between text and background, typically 4.5:1.

    ☐ Avoid using color as the sole way to communicate meaning. Use additional visual cues such as text labels, icons, or patterns to ensure comprehension for all users.

    ☐ Use styling to make links stand out such as underlines, or a different color (at least 3:1 contrast against the regular text) plus an underline on hover. A different color alone isn't enough.

    ☐ For more information on color, see W3C's tips on designing for web accessibility.

☐ **Media alternatives**: Provide alternatives for audio and video content for people who are Blind and/or Deaf.

    ☐ Provide alt text for images and gifs.

    ☐ Provide captions, transcripts, and audio description as appropriate for pre-recorded audio and video content.

    ☐ Provide captions for live audio and video content.

    ☐ For more information on media alternatives, see W3C's resource on making video and audio media accessible.

- ☐ **Avoid flashing content**: It could cause seizures or physical reactions.
  - ☐ For details on what content can cause problems, see the [WCAG criteria around seizures and physical reactions](#).

- ☐ **Layout:**
  - ☐ Maintain consistency in design elements and layout throughout the website or application. Use familiar patterns and visual cues to help users predict and understand how to interact with the interface.
  - ☐ Minimize distractions and unnecessary elements that may overwhelm users or detract from the main content.

- ☐ **Content:** Use clear and concise language that is easy to understand.
  - ☐ Use plain language and where possible avoid jargon or complex terminology that may be difficult for some users to understand. Keep sentences and paragraphs short and to the point.
  - ☐ Break down complex information into smaller, more manageable chunks to make it easier for users to process and understand. Use headings, bullet points, and lists to organize content into digestible sections.
  - ☐ Use descriptive and meaningful link text that clearly indicates the purpose or destination of the link. This is particularly helpful for people using screen readers, as they may pull up a list of links on a page and hear them out of context.
  - ☐ Provide contextual help and guidance where necessary.
  - ☐ For more information on content, see [W3C's tips on writing for web accessibility](#).

- ☐ **Check your work:** Test your website or application with an accessibility scanner like [WAVE](#). Check out any errors or warnings and make sure your heading structure accurately reflects your content.

Conclusion

Planning accessible events is a huge competitive advantage for your event programs. After all, with one in four event attendees having a disability, more accessible events mean more attendees, higher engagement, and a larger return on every dollar you invest in events.

Planners who create more accessible events:

- Create better, more inclusive experiences for their guests
- Engage bright minds from a more diverse audience
- Start to build a book of business that makes it easier every time to set up accessible events
- Foster more engagement and connection
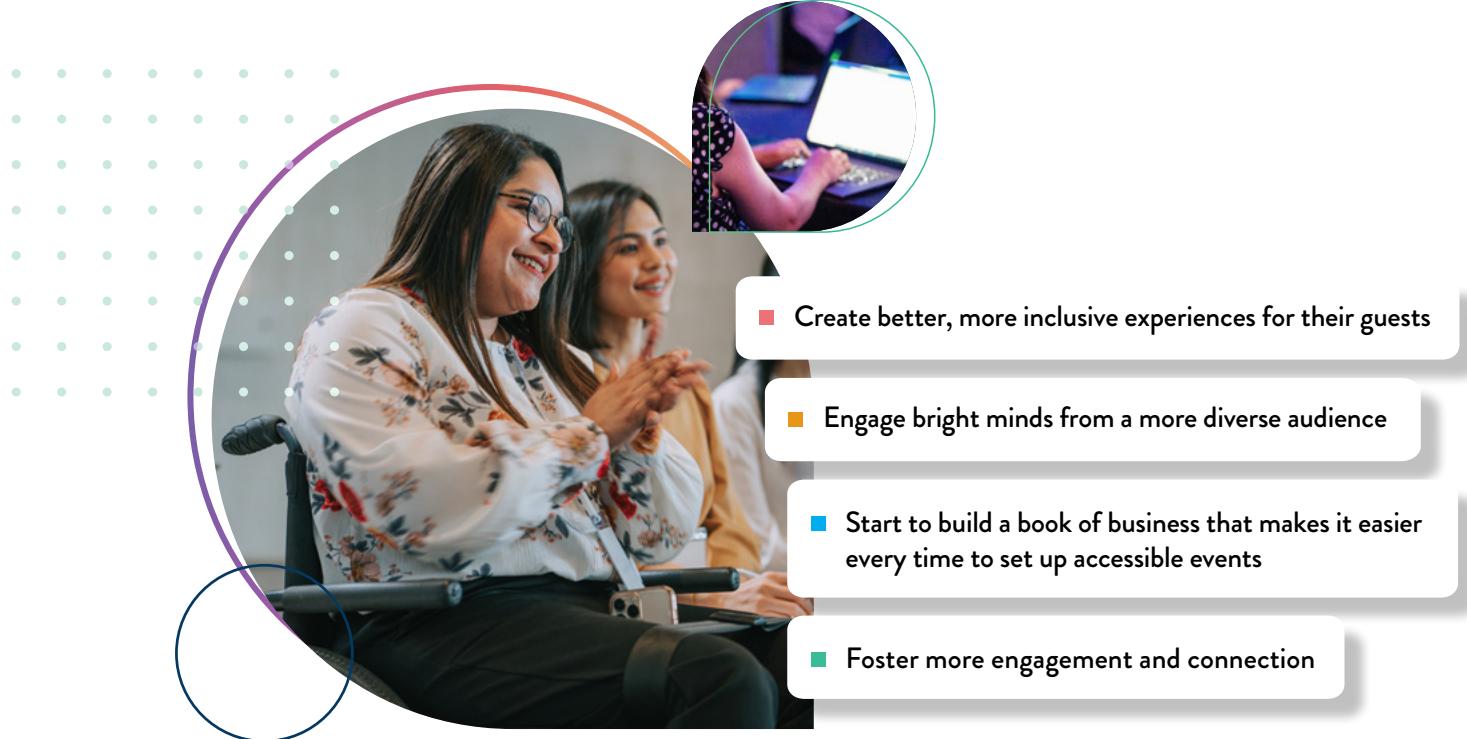
Better yet, while there's a strong business case for more accessible events, there's an even better human case – because everyone deserves the opportunities that come with attending events.

We hope this guide has given you confidence, tools, and knowledge you need to plan, promote, and execute incredible events that open doors for people with a broad range of abilities. From here, your work will go on to positively impact the events experience for attendees with disabilities. Know that what you're learning here is so important, and we commend you for taking the time to make this a priority.

As you go forward armed with this new information, we want to encourage you to lean on our team as a resource. At Cvent, we take an enormous amount of pride in making sure the disabled community is seen and considered, and are here to assist you as you further that mission with us.

Take the next step!
Use our latest assessment to measure how accessible your events are to attendees with disabilities.

Discover The Perfect Event Tech for Your Event

Want to select the perfect (and most accessible) event technology for your next event? Cvent's solutions are designed with accessibility in mind! **Discover your perfect event technology stack with 7 simple questions.**

Use the Builder

Appendices

Appendix A: How accessible is your event?

Want to see where you rank for accessibility at your events?
Use our worksheet to evaluate your events from start to finish – and find out if you're an accessibility explorer, apprentice, trailblazer or maestro.

Appendix B: Disability Etiquette – Dos and Don'ts

The basics

Do	Don't
• Get to know the person! • Act like you would around another person; introduce yourself the way you would with anyone else. • Plan ahead; check for barriers in online spaces. • Include the person in discussions that affect them. • Utilize language that the individual prefers or default to first person language. • Familiarize yourself with industry terms.	• Assume what kind of accommodation people need. • Assume what people can and cannot do. • Use baby talk or infantilize individuals. • Use inappropriate language or slurs. • Ignore the importance of thinking proactively about accessibility. • Be offended if your offer to assist is declined. • Distract service animals.

Blind or low vision

Do	Don't
• Identify yourself by name and role if appropriate when entering a conversion and leaving. • Give specific nonvisual directions. • Provide all materials in accessible digital formats. • Use a large font size. • Ensure videos and recordings have good lighting and video quality.	• Assume someone who is blind has zero vision or that someone who can see has perfect vision. • Assume what information format someone prefers. • Skip details when reading information out loud.

Hearing

Do	Don't
• Gain a person's attention before starting the conversation by waving hand. • Be aware of lighting and camera quality – it can be hard to see your face when you are backlit. • Ask if they have a preferred method of communication. • Let them know if you have trouble understanding them.	• Yell or speak with exaggerated slowness or enunciation. • Assume that a person uses ASL; there are several sign languages, and they may use a spoken language. • Cover your face or turn off your camera while speaking.

Verbal

Do	Don't
• Ask the person to repeat themselves when needed. • Give the person your full attention. • Repeat back information for verification.	• Finish sentences for them. • Assume they can't hear you. • Tease, mock, or laugh at how a person is speaking.

Physical/Mobility

Do	Don't
• Act natural when speaking with them and adjust if asked. • Respect requests to sit in specific positions or turn off their camera; some differences are not visible.	• Ask which type of disorder they have. • Assume a physical difference is not present if you can't see it.

Neurological/Cognitive

Do	Don't
• Respect the person and what they are telling you. • Wait for the person to finish if they have a vocalization, then continue. • Keep pressure to a minimum when possible. • Treat people as individuals and as their age. • Be clear, literal, and concise in your speech; minimize the number of instructions given at one time when needed. • Provide written and oral instructions. • Keep environments clear of distractions when possible. • Remind people of changes and give them time to process. • Make sure that they know they can say "No." • Ask the best way to relay information to them.	• Assume someone is drunk or high. • Use strobe lights or flashing images. • Demand that someone looks you in the eye or turn on their camera. • Change routines or schedules last minute

Appendix C: References

University of Chicago | Accessible Event Resource Guide

Cornell University | Accessible Meetings and Events Checklist

https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/covid19/pulse/long-covid.htm

https://www.w3.org/WAI/WCAG22/quickref/?versions=2.1

Cvent

## Cvent is the global meeting, event, travel, and hospitality technology leader.

Cvent provides easy-to-use, integrated technology solutions to maximize the impact of meetings and events of all sizes. We help organizations plan and market events, execute onsite, engage audiences, and measure and analyze results.
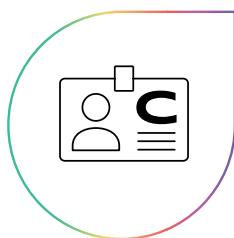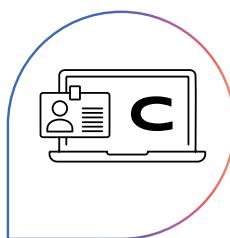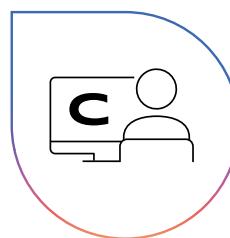
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