

FOOD WASTE INITIATIVE
RESEARCH BRIEF SERIES



An Overview of Hands-on Resources for
Hosting Accessible Events

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About ELI

The Environmental Law Institute makes law work for people, places, and the planet. Since 1969, ELI has played a pivotal role in shaping the fields of environmental law, policy, and management, domestically and abroad. We are an internationally recognized, non-partisan publishing, research, and education center working to strengthen environmental protection by improving law and governance worldwide.

ELI's Food Waste Initiative & Research Brief Series

ELI's Food Waste Initiative conducts research and works with stakeholders to prevent food waste, increase surplus food donation, and recycle food scraps. The Initiative aims to help stakeholders meet the U.S. food loss and waste goals by designing and implementing public policies and public-private initiatives to address food waste. To learn more about the Initiative's work, visit: <https://www.eli.org/food-waste-initiative/food-waste-prevention-recovery-and-recycling>.

ELI's Food Waste Initiative is publishing a Research Brief Series to present takeaways from the Initiative's research, spanning a range of topics important to food waste prevention, recovery, and recycling. To access other research briefs in the series, visit: <https://www.eli.org/food-waste-initiative/publications>.



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INTRODUCTION

People with disabilities are more likely to be negatively impacted by climate change and environmental degradation. Reasons include lack of accessible information during emergencies, interruptions to ongoing medical care during natural disasters, and higher likelihood of social and economic risk factors.¹ According to the World Health Organization, approximately 15% of the world's population has an intellectual or physical disability.² Yet, despite their stake in effective environmental solutions, people with disabilities are often excluded or not fully considered during planning.³

To obtain necessary input from the disability community, organizations should strive for meaningful involvement with a focus on *accessibility*. Accessibility proactively incorporates equity considerations into the planning process and makes content available to everyone at the same time in equally effective ways.⁴ Above all, early and meaningful consultation with people with disabilities is key to holding events that foster an inclusive space and improve the event experience for all attendees.

Note: The Environmental Law Institute created this resource compilation to help organizations in researching and identifying best practices for accessible events. ELI included direct quotes and succinct summaries of the best practices outlined in the original sources. ELI recommends reading the entire resource before implementing any of the practices highlighted in this compilation.

There are numerous resources that can help organizations anticipate and welcome attendees with disabilities. This Research Brief is intended as a starting point rather than a comprehensive guide and, therefore: 1) highlights resources that may be particularly helpful to organizations with limited staff, time, and funds by focusing on ready-to-use materials, such as checklists and toolkits; and 2) does not cover academic literature, webinars, and policy reports. It includes resources that address: (1) both virtual and in-person events, (2) in-person events specifically, and (3) virtual events specifically. Best practices from each resource are outlined in the appendices.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Key takeaways across resources include:

- Consult directly with people with disabilities throughout the planning process to create an inclusive space—they are the experts on what makes an accessible event;
- Start thinking about accessibility early in the planning process, including during budgeting;
- Explain how attendees can request accommodations and be transparent about plans for the event;
- Train staff and conduct practice sessions to ensure all available accommodations function smoothly the day of the event;
- Keep sessions to 1- 2 hours with sufficient breaks between them;
- Distribute online versions of the agenda and event materials before the event;
- Provide any event materials in a variety of formats (e.g., alt-text, large-print, braille, and/or online); and
- Work interactively with attendees and be flexible in order to find the best solutions for all parties.

OVERVIEW OF RESOURCES

Virtual & In-Person Events									
Author	Date	Title & URL	Description	Key Topics					
				Planning	Invitations and Registration	Event Materials	Meeting Management	Virtual Accessibility	In-Person Logistics
U.S. General Services Administration	n.d.	Create Accessible Meetings	Guidance for hosting virtual, in-person, and recorded meetings that are accessible to attendees with disabilities and in compliance with federal disability rights laws.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Commission on Disability Rights, American Bar Association	n.d.	Planning Accessible Meetings and Events: A Toolkit	Toolkit for hosting accessible virtual and in-person meetings that provides checklists for intentionally incorporating accessibility into meetings and events.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

In-Person Events

Author	Date	Title & URL	Description	Key Topics					
				Planning	Invitations and Registration	Accessible Spaces	Transportation	Food and Lodging	Presentations
Autistic Self Advocacy Network	n.d.	Holding Inclusive Events: A Guide to Accessible Event Planning	Guidance for setting up accessible in-person events and conferences with information on four aspects of equitable planning: universal design, physical accessibility, sensory accessibility, and cognitive accessibility.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Cornell University, Division of Human Resources	Last updated Jan. 2019	Accessible Meeting and Event Checklist	Checklist for hosting an accessible in-person event for all attendees, not only individuals with visible or known disabilities.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Virtual Events

Author	Date	Title & URL	Description	Key Topics					
				Planning	Invitations and Registration	Virtual Accessibility	Platforms	Presentations	Meeting Management
Aliana Leary, Rooted in Rights	April 2020	How to Make Your Virtual Meetings and Events Accessible to the Disability Community	Description of how to make virtual meetings meet accessibility needs, including guidance on what to do in advance, during, and after an event and how to improve access for attendees with different types of disabilities.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
New York City, Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities	n.d.	Accessible Virtual Meetings Guide	Guide for how to improve virtual accessibility, including outlines of the accessibility features for Zoom, Google Meet, Microsoft Teams, and GoTo Meeting.	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓

APPENDIX A: RESOURCES FOR VIRTUAL & IN-PERSON EVENTS

U.S. GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION, [CREATE ACCESSIBLE MEETINGS \(UNDATED\)](#)⁵

Resource Description: Guidance for hosting virtual, in-person, and recorded meetings that are accessible to attendees with disabilities and in compliance with federal disability rights laws. The webpage that hosts the guidance includes best practices for all aspects of hosting a meeting, such as creating agendas, managing meetings, and reviewing presentation materials.

Planning

- Designate a person to handle accommodations for the event.
- Plan for attendees to need unexpected accommodations.
- Consider any interactive features (e.g., video, polling, Q&A, music) and plan how to make them accessible.

Invitations and Registration

- Describe accessible accommodations for all participants.
 - Specify clearly how attendees should request additional accommodation.
- Ask attendees to submit accommodations needs early in the registration process.
- Include details about building access, such as parking and transit availability, in the invitations and registration forms.
- Include details of remote access availability in the invitations and registration forms.
- Indicate the start and end time of the event in the invitations and registration forms so that attendees can plan their schedules and transportation.
- Ensure completed registration forms are followed by a confirmation email with event details.

Event Materials

- Distribute any presentation documents before the meeting so people can read them at their own pace.
- Provide a text version (e.g., open or closed captions) for any audio component.
- Provide an agenda with detailed information on scheduled breaks, how to access accommodations, and how to test accommodative technology.
- Avoid blinking or flashing effects in any event materials.
- Include any information about accommodations in the final event materials.

Meeting Management

- Describe verbally any material that goes up on a screen.
- Ask that attendees share or display their full names for reference by interpreters or transcription services.
- Conduct a practice session with presenters, moderators, and hosts to ensure they know how to use any accessibility features during their presentation.

Virtual Accessibility

- Plan to have at least one attendee who will need to join virtually.

- Familiarize employees with technologies that people with disabilities typically use to access the internet and virtual events (refer to [How People with Disabilities Use the Web](#) for more information).⁶
- Use meeting management strategies to compensate for weaknesses in the accessibility features of online platforms.
- Offer opportunities for attendees to test their equipment using the event’s online platform.
- Use other accessibility services if needed (e.g., third-party screen captioning).
- Ask speakers to turn their cameras on whenever possible to enable lip reading.
- Provide as many ways to attend the meeting as possible, because some interpretation devices require certain types of connection.

COMMISSION ON DISABILITY RIGHTS, AMERICAN BAR ASSOCIATION, [PLANNING ACCESSIBLE MEETINGS AND EVENTS: A TOOLKIT \(UNDATED\)](#)⁷

Resource Description: Toolkit for hosting accessible virtual and in-person meetings that includes useful checklists for intentionally incorporating accessibility into organizational meetings and events. Checklist topics include exterior and interior features of the buildings, virtual events, promotional and presentation materials, website accessibility, and staff training. In addition, the toolkit outlines best practices for etiquette and communication with attendees with various disabilities.

Planning

- Plan to visit potential venues and check accessibility well in advance—do not rely only upon asking a venue representative about accessibility.
- Create an “accessibility statement” affirming that the organization will work to make the event as accessible as possible (see pg. 9 for an example).
- Build 5- to 10-minute breaks into the schedule every hour.
- Allow attendees with disabilities to enter the venue and find seats before the general audience at large events.
- Schedule sufficient time for attendees to travel from session to session.
- Train all staff involved in the event on the available accommodations.
 - Hold a meeting that outlines how best to assist and communicate with people with disabilities (see pgs. 16 – 19 for more details on etiquette for communicating with people with disabilities).

Invitations and Registration

- Provide multiple ways to register (e.g., online, phone call, text, and email).
- Ensure registration materials and invitations are compatible with assistive technologies such as screen readers and magnification software.
- Include a statement asking attendees to submit any accommodations requests by a certain date to give organizers enough time to respond.
- Provide opportunity for attendees to indicate that an aide or service animal will accompany them.

Event Materials

- Provide braille, large print, plain text, and electronic files.
- Alert attendees that alternative formats of materials will be available upon request.
- Send all event materials to participants prior to the event.

- Ensure the layout of event materials is accessible (see pg. 10 for more details). Best practices include:
 - Use 16-point font;
 - “Avoid highly stylized typefaces;”
 - Use easy to read, sans serif fonts for printed and digital text (e.g., Helvetica, Veranda, Arial); and
 - “Avoid lines of text longer than six inches (for persons using magnifiers).”
- Give materials to interpreters in advance.

Meeting Management

- Be prepared for last-minute accommodation requests.
- Describe aloud *and* in print [or using the chat function] how to use accommodations and/or accessibility features.
- Limit event sessions to less than two hours.
- “Avoid flashing or strobing animations in presentation or other materials.”
- Allow only one person to speak at a time to help captioners and American Sign Language interpreters with their jobs.
- “Have each person say their name each time they speak so that attendees, captioners, and interpreters know who is speaking.”
- Repeat questions from the audience before responding.

Virtual Accessibility

- Take time to select the correct platform for your needs.
 - Some examples of accessible platforms are those that “provide real-time captions or otherwise support captions, allow individuals to magnify screen content, can be navigated by a keyboard only and thus provide keyboard shortcuts, and support screen readers and interpreters.”
- Make sure that the host of the meeting is trained in how to use the accessibility features.
- Offer practice sessions before the main event.
- Provide real-time captioning.
- Make sure that any interactive features are accessible.
- Mute speakers and attendees who are not speaking.

In-Person Logistics

- Plan an on-site visit to scope out any barriers to accessibility before booking the venue.
 - Use checklists to ensure the evaluation is thorough (see pgs. 2-4 for examples).
- Ensure the venue is close to airports, train stations, paratransit services, and public transportation routes.
- Ensure there are accessible restaurants, hotels, and shops nearby the venue.

APPENDIX B: RESOURCES SPECIFICALLY FOR IN-PERSON EVENTS

AUTISTIC SELF ADVOCACY NETWORK, HOLDING INCLUSIVE EVENTS: A GUIDE TO ACCESSIBLE EVENT PLANNING (UNDATED)⁸

Resource Description: Document by the Autistic Self Advocacy Network, a non-profit grassroots disability rights organization for the autistic community, about setting up accessible in-person events and conferences. It outlines four aspects of equitable planning: universal design, physical accessibility, sensory accessibility, and cognitive accessibility. It also includes a site visit checklist and a template schedule for incorporating accessibility into event planning. In addition, this guide provides information on how to address situations in which multiple accessibility needs conflict, such as sensitivity to bright lights and low vision requiring bright lights.

Planning

- “Try to schedule events during the spring, summer, and early fall.” Snow and ice can make it difficult for attendees with disabilities to attend events.
- “Use nametags for everyone.”
- Schedule breaks throughout the day.
- Do not schedule sessions longer than 1.5 hours.
- Make hearing and visual aids available to everyone.

Invitations and Registration

- Provide packets with accessibility information three to four months before the event, including:
 - How to request accommodations;
 - Daily and event schedules;
 - Where to access quiet spaces;
 - Contact information for the main organizer of the event;
 - A list of medical equipment stores with rental fees; and
 - Expectations and accommodations for caretakers that attend the event.
- Send schedules to attendees at least one month in advance for multiday events and at least two weeks in advance for single day events.

Accessible Spaces

- Check that doors/entrances to the building have signs in braille that indicate the building name, room numbers, and entrance and elevator locations.
- Ensure the main entrances have wheelchair ramps with working automatic buttons.
- Ensure all doors and hallways are wide enough for wheelchair users.
- Clear all paths in and around the venue.
- Ensure there are accessible, working elevators.
- Set up rooms with accessible seating as part of the group.
- Make sure wheelchair accessible public bathrooms are available near the meeting room.

- Provide space for attendees to move around or pace.
- Consider accommodations to chemical, light, and sound sensitivities such as:
 - Adopting fragrance-free policies;
 - Banning flash photography;
 - Using American Sign Language applause instead of clapping;
 - Providing noise canceling earmuffs and/or sensory-free rooms; and
 - Ensuring there is working air conditioning.

Transportation

- Ensure there is accessible public transportation within 5 minutes walking distance of the venue.
- “Check for curb ramps that accommodate both wheelchair users and people with vision disabilities.”
- Ensure there are no hills around the venue or by transportation drop-offs.

Food and Lodging

- Ensure there are restaurants within 5 minutes walking distance of the venue.
- Make sure overnight lodging has accessible features, including:
 - American with Disabilities Act-compliant automatic door openers;
 - Enough space for wheelchair users to move around comfortably;
 - Roll-in showers with a bench; and
 - Beds “high enough for a Hoyer lift but low enough for wheelchair users.”

Presentations

- “Make sure presentations are viewable from different angles.”
- Include image descriptions and captions for videos.
- Make microphones available to presenters and attendees.

CORNELL UNIVERSITY DIVISION OF HUMAN RESOURCES, [ACCESSIBLE MEETING AND EVENT CHECKLIST](#) (UPDATED JANUARY 2019)⁹

Resource Description: Checklist for hosting an accessible in-person event for all attendees, not only individuals with visible or known disabilities. The document was created for Cornell University events but offers a template for any organization looking to create a concise and standardized accessibility checklist.

Planning

- Remind attendees not to wear strong fragrances to the event.
- Use a checklist in the registration process that allows attendees to indicate the accommodations they need (see pg. 1 for an example).
 - Follow-up on any requests received.
- Designate someone to oversee accessibility at the event.

Invitations and Registration

- Include a message in the invitation and registration to tell potential attendees they can contact the planner to request accommodations.
 - Example message: “We strive to host inclusive, accessible events that enable all individuals, including individuals with disabilities, to engage fully. To be respectful of those with allergies and environmental sensitivities, we ask that you please refrain from wearing strong fragrances. To request an accommodation or for inquiries about accessibility, please contact (name, email, phone).”

Accessible Spaces

- Use clear signage.
- Make sure all meeting spaces are well lit.
- Have a roving microphone available to attendees.
- “Limit unnecessary background music.”
- “Have seating available near presenter for lip reading.”
 - Place accessible seating near electrical outlets to allow for charging of devices.
- Provide seats with extra space or work surfaces.
- Provide a space for service animals.

Transportation

- Make sure there is accessible parking close to the venue.
- Check public transportation routes for a bus stop close to the venue.

Food and Lodging

- Label allergens and gluten-free, vegan, vegetarian, and other options.

Presentations

- Make sure screens are visible from all angles and seating.
- Provide presenters with a checklist before the event asking them to:
 - Submit materials in advance;
 - Verbally describe visual aids;
 - Make available printed copies in large font;
 - Avoid using small print in presentations;
 - Use captions in any video; and
 - Provide a break every hour.
- Repeat any questions from the audience before responding.
- Always ask presenters and attendees to speak into a microphone, even if they insist that they are loud enough without one.

APPENDIX C: RESOURCES SPECIFICALLY FOR VIRTUAL EVENTS

ALAINA LEARY, ROOTED IN RIGHTS, [HOW TO MAKE YOUR VIRTUAL MEETINGS AND EVENTS ACCESSIBLE TO THE DISABILITY COMMUNITY \(APRIL 2020\)](#)¹⁰

Resource Description: Webpage from Rooted in Rights, an organization that produces media centering people with disabilities, describes how to make virtual meetings meet accessibility needs and includes guidance on what to do in advance, during, and after an event. It also breaks down how to improve access for attendees with different types of disabilities.

Planning

- Reach out to people with disabilities to speak at your event.
- “Include people with disabilities at every stage of the planning process.”
- Assume that people with disabilities are going to attend the event.
- Be sure to account for needs around sensory issues, such as playing a video too loudly.
- Plan breaks about every hour.
- “Factor the costs of captioning, sign language interpretation, and other potential accommodations into your budget.”

Invitations and Registration

- Share the types of accessibility features planned for the event.
- Describe how attendees can request other accommodations.
- “Share the format and length of the event (e.g., discussion vs. listening to a presentation, or something else) so attendees can take breaks or [plan] early arrival or departure.”
- “Make it clear to attendees that they will have an opportunity to ask questions so they can prepare.”

Virtual Accessibility

- Provide information on how to access the event for attendees without internet (e.g., by phone).
- “Be willing to share the information offline.”
- Appoint a person to assist with troubleshooting and give attendees their contact information.
- Create a “tip sheet” with clear directions on how to use the platform(s).
- “Offer training sessions about the platform(s) before the event.”

Platforms

- Be willing to experiment with different platforms.
- Make sure the platform works with assistive technology.
- “Ensure the platform allows for computer-based audio listening/speaking AND phone-based audio listening/speaking.”

Presentations

- Give participants event materials before the event.
- Ask speakers to use a headset to improve audio quality.

- Offer multiple ways for attendees to participate in Q&A and interact with each other.
- “Do not use flashing or strobing animations.”
- Include captions on videos shown at the event.

Meeting Management

- Mute all attendees but the people speaking.
- Ask speakers to announce their names every time they speak, so captioners and attendees know who is talking.
- “Make sure the speaker’s face is well-lit and can be clearly seen.”
- “Be patient and do not rush attendees.”
- Describe any gestures, images, or text that appears on the screen.
- Provide attendees with a way to provide feedback about the event.

NEW YORK CITY MAYOR’S OFFICE FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES, [ACCESSIBLE VIRTUAL MEETINGS GUIDE \(UNDATED\)](#)¹¹

Resource Description: Guide by the New York City Mayor’s Office for People with Disabilities providing information on how to improve virtual accessibility, such as how to provide American Sign Language interpretation. Some of the information is specific to New York City (e.g., how to find ASL interpreters) but provides an example of how to standardize accessibility procedures. It also includes specifics of the accessibility features for Zoom, Google Meet, Microsoft Teams, and GoTo Meeting.

Planning

- Provide contact information to request accommodations including both by phone and email.
- Provide a deadline to ask for accommodations.
- Provide accessibility information in any advertisements.

Virtual Accessibility

- Provide at least two methods to join the meeting (e.g., dial-in number and link).

Platforms

- Choose a platform with the needed accessibility features.

Presentations

- Send any event materials to attendees before the event.
- Describe any text or images on the screen.
- Use videos with audio descriptions.

Meeting Management

- Start the meeting with an “access check” that includes:
 - Volume and speed of speaking;

- How and when to mute and unmute;
- How to participate in the meeting; and
- Accessibility features.
- Mute anyone who is not speaking.

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¹ *Climate Change and the Health of People with Disabilities*, ENV'T PROT. AGENCY, <https://www.epa.gov/climateimpacts/climate-change-and-health-people-disabilities> (Last visited May 8, 2023); Valerie Novack & Daphne Frias, *Climate Change, Environmental Activism, and Disability*, STAN. SOCIAL INNOVATION REV. (Winter 2022),

https://ssir.org/articles/entry/climate_change_environmental_activism_and_disability.

² WORLD HEALTH ORG., WORLD REPORT ON DISABILITY SUMMARY 7 (2011), <https://www.who.int/teams/noncommunicable-diseases/sensory-functions-disability-and-rehabilitation/world-report-on-disability>.

³ ENV'T PROT. AGENCY, *supra* note 1; V. Novack & D. Frias, *supra* note 1.

⁴ *Create Accessible Meetings*, GEN. SERVICES ADMIN., <https://www.section508.gov/create/accessible-meetings/> (Last visited May 8, 2023).

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ *How People with Disabilities Use the Web*, WEB ACCESSIBILITY INITIATIVE, <https://www.w3.org/WAI/people-use-web/> (Last visited May 8, 2023).

⁷ COMM'N ON DISABILITY RIGHTS, AMERICAN BAR ASS'N, PLANNING ACCESSIBLE MEETINGS AND EVENTS: A TOOLKIT 1-19,

<https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/commission-disability-rights/accessible-meetings-toolkit.pdf>.

⁸ AUTISTIC SELF ADVOCACY NETWORK, HOLDING INCLUSIVE EVENTS: A GUIDE TO ACCESSIBLE EVENT PLANNING 1-7, <https://autisticadvocacy.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Accessible-Event-Planning.pdf> (Last visited May 8, 2023).

⁹ CORNELL UNIV. DIV. OF HUM. RESOURCES, ACCESSIBLE MEETING AND EVENT CHECKLIST 1-3,

https://hr.cornell.edu/sites/default/files/documents/accessible_meeting_checklist.pdf (Last visited May 8, 2023).

¹⁰ Alaina Leary, *How to Make Your Virtual Meetings and Events Accessible to the Disability Community* (April 13, 2020),

<https://rootedinrights.org/how-to-make-your-virtual-meetings-and-events-accessible-to-the-disability-community/>.

¹¹ NEW YORK CITY MAYOR'S OFF. FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES, *Accessible Virtual Meetings Guide* 1-12,

<https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/mopd/downloads/pdf/virtual-meetings-accessibility-guide.pdf> (Last visited May 8, 2023).