Accessibility Quick Guide

In-Person Meetings and Events

Coordinated Accessibility Strategy
January 2026

Carleton University

How to Use this Quick Guide

Use this Quick Guide alongside the Accessible Meeting and Event Guide when planning accessible in-person meeting and events. Consult the Accessible Meeting and Event Guide for more detailed information.

Planning, Scheduling & Registration

1. Email invitations should include:

    - Clear & brief subject line.

    - Outline of accessible accommodation.

    - Inclusive language.

    - Descriptive hyperlinks.

        o   For example, hyperlink the phrase "more details on our upcoming event."

2. Designate an Access Coordinator on your team for the event or larger meeting to:

1. Receive, confirm, and track all access requests from participants.

    - Manage and implement accommodations.

    - Request interpreters and captioners one month in advance.

    - Communicate accommodation arrangements with participants and staff.

    - Identify assistants who will be available to help with access-related tasks.

    - Coordinate all materials for accessible distribution several days in advance.

    - Develop and implement access training for event staff and volunteers.

2. Schedule events during times that align with public transit availability. Consider preparation needs of individuals who use attendant services when selecting the event start time.

3. Keep the duration manageable with 5–10-minute breaks between activities.

4. Share the schedule with participants at least 1 week in advance.

Accommodations and Access Requests

1. Ask about accessibility needs during registration/invitation (e.g., mobility, hearing, dietary) so that these adjustments are managed as part of the event.

   - Carleton suggests using this language to invite access requests: "Should you require accessibility or dietary accommodations, please contact [Event Access Coordinator] by [RSVP date]."

2. If booking interpreters or live captioning (CART), you will need to book at least 3 weeks ahead of the meeting/event.

3. Prepare simple supports: extra chairs, straws, labelled food, sensory/fidget tools, and clear signage.

Venue & Space Setup

1. When choosing a location, do a site check to confirm accessible entrance, washrooms, and clear pathways.

2. When setting up the venue, arrange seating flexibly:

   - Leave wide aisles.

   - Don't group people with disabilities together.

   - Reserve front seating for Deaf, hard-of-hearing, or low-vision participants.

   - See an example of an accessible floor plan in the OMSSA Accessible Floor Plans document.

3. Provide seating options for any event activity where you expect participants to be standing or walking around (e.g., cocktail hour, networking session).

4. Provide a quiet/decompression space, if possible.

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Food & Refreshments

1. Serve food with multiple dietary options (e.g., vegan, gluten-free, dairy-free, Halal) and clearly label ingredients in large print.

2. Provide tables and adapted cutlery/straws if needed.

3. Always keep the floor clear. Food on the floor can distract service dogs and create a tripping hazard.

4. Provide a mini fridge to store medicine.

Staffing & Roles

1. Designate a point person (Access Coordinator) to manage requests and troubleshoot.

2. Equip volunteers/staff with badges or armbands so they are easy to identify.

3. Train staff on respectful communication (e.g., use person-first language: "person who is blind").

4. If attendants or interpreters are present, ensure they are introduced, and attendees are aware of available support.

5. Direct staff to review the following resources, as applicable, prior to the event:

   - Ontario Accessible Events Checklist

   - OMSSA Accessible Floor Plans

   - Event Registration Accessibility Requirements Field Queries

   - Also consider using an Accessible Customer Service training module, such as: AccessForward: Training for an accessible Ontario.

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Communication Practices

1. Introduce all speakers and identify yourself when talking, speak clearly, and avoid jargon.

2. Speakers should wear colours that contrast with their skin tone; otherwise, the lighting can 'wash out' their faces and make reading lips difficult.

3. Ensure visuals are described (read aloud slide content, explain images/charts)

4. Identity-first language places disability first (e.g., "autistic person," or "Deaf community"). Individuals and communities may have preferences of either person-first or identity-first.

   - Which should you use?
     - Person-first is more commonly used, is often recommended by organizations, and is more common in formal writing.
     - Unless you know that the organization and individual(s) you are working with prefer identity-first, it is recommended that you use person-first language. (This guide will reference person-first, but there may still be circumstances in which you use identity-first).

5. Ensure that materials being presented or distributed are formatted for accessibility. Use built-in accessibility checkers (available in MS Word and PowerPoint) and be sure to:

   - Use sans serif fonts (e.g., Arial, Calibri).
   - Use large text.
   - Use strong colour contrast.
   - Ensure images have alt text, or are marked as decorative.
   - Place captions below images. Avoid placing text over images.
   - Avoid charts, tables, or drop-down menus that can be inaccessible for assistive technology.
   - Offer materials in multiple formats (e.g., digital, large print, accessible PDFs).
   - Include accessibility icons to indicate which supports or accommodations are available in specific spaces/activities.

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Emergency Preparedness

2. Appoint an Emergency Response Lead and keep a preparedness kit: first aid, unscented markers, extra wheelchair or mobility aid, snacks, water, and earplugs.

3. Know attendee allergies, medical needs, and evacuation plans.

4. Be sure to compile contact information for:

   - FMP Service Desk (door openers, elevators, etc.)

   - Campus Safety (evacuation plans, etc.)

   - Pharmacies (nearest and 24-hour).

   - Urgent Care, E.R., and crisis hotline.

   - Accessible transportation.

   - Veterinary office, emergency vet, and pet stores.