

# NOD Guide to Accessible Meetings

Does your group hold regular meetings? Or events open to the general community? If so, make sure everyone in your community can benefit from them. These guidelines give some basic points to think about when planning meetings so that they can be welcoming to all people: including older adults, people with temporary injuries, and others with physical, sensory and mental disabilities.

## Location of Meeting

1. **Is there a barrier free pathway to the meeting space?** A barrier-free pathway means that a person with a mobility impairment can make it from the street into the meeting room without encountering: (1) stairs, (2) any sudden change in floor height over 1 inch, (3) slippery or unstable ground, (4) doorways less than 32" wide or (5) any objects obstructing walkways. Any elevators in this pathway should be large enough to comfortably fit a wheelchair.
2. **Is there an accessible restroom nearby?** An accessible restroom is one that has a stall with (1) a doorway at least 32" wide, (2) grab bars installed by the toilet and (3) enough space for a wheelchair to maneuver (at least 36" x 69"). Also, at least one sink should have adequate space open beneath it so that a person using a wheelchair can sit with their legs underneath the basin as they wash their hands.
3. **Is there adequate parking nearby?** Are handicapped parking places available and clearly marked? Are these places close to the building entrance?
4. **Is it easy to reach the meeting space from public transportation?** Many people with disabilities rely on public transportation to get around. When possible, meeting rooms should be a short and simple route (without too many turns or complicated directions) from major transportation routes. Too complicated a pathway makes it difficult for anyone to find their way, especially people with visual or cognitive disabilities.

5. **Have someone stand by the main entrance to direct people to the meeting room and help those needing assistance.** This is a courtesy that everyone will appreciate.

### **In the Meeting Room**

1. **Are printed materials available in large print?** At all meetings a few copies of written materials should be available in at least 16 point font size. This helps anyone with difficulty reading small print. Also, all important material that is written should be announced during the meeting. For important or lengthy printed materials, create audiotaped versions or have copies on disk in a generic word processing format for people who are blind.
2. **Is the meeting site free of background noise?** This can greatly help people who are hard of hearing and people using hearing aids.
3. **Is there a good quality sound system?** Make sure to check any audio equipment for loudness and clarity.
4. **Is the speaker well positioned?** Have the speaker located in a position where they are easy to see by everyone in the room. Do not have them located in front of windows as a background (this can be particularly problematic for people with Attention Deficit Disorder and related conditions). If people who use wheelchairs are speaking, avoid using podiums. Have all speakers sit at a table instead.
5. **Are assistive listening devices available?** Rooms with assistive listening devices will make a big difference for those with hearing loss.
6. **For any public meetings, put "Sign-language interpreters available upon request" in advertisements.** Upon request, provide one. Ask deaf participants and interpreters what positions within the room would be best to facilitate communication. For more information on sign language interpreters go to the [Association of Science-Technology Centers' web site](#) or call the National Association of the Deaf at 301-587-1788.

## Other Points

1. **When advertising community meetings, give contact information that anyone can use to request accommodations.** If your meeting is going to be in an accessible location, note that in the ad, or insert a disability symbol somewhere near the text.
2. **Although it is not measurable, a welcoming attitude is an equally important component of preparing an accessible meeting.** Remain open to requests for accommodations and remember that people with disabilities - like all people - should be treated with dignity and respect. Avoid treating people with disabilities as though they are childlike, tragic, sick or pitiable. Be kind, but never patronizing. People with disabilities are first of all people with abilities and have much to offer. Expect them to contribute like anyone else. For more information visit the [Disability Etiquette Tips](#) page on the N.O.D. web site.

## Notes:

For more complete information on making your meetings accessible call The Access Board at 800-872-2253, or consider the following resources:

- [ADA Checklist for Readily Achievable Barrier Removal](#)
- For the most comprehensive guide to meeting accessibility available call the Independent Living Research Utilization program for "A Guide to Planning Accessible Meetings." Tel: 713-520-0232. The cost of the guide is \$25.

Source: National Organization on Disability © Copyright 2007  
[www.nod.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=Feature.showFeature&FeatureID=126](http://www.nod.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=Feature.showFeature&FeatureID=126)

These guidelines are not exhaustive, do not give legal advice and do not cover the legal requirements for meeting space accessibility in public venues under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). They are intended as a first set of pointers for community groups that may not have considered accessibility issues before. N.O.D. does not represent that these guidelines fully meet all requirements of the ADA.