

# Accessibility & Events

Part of being an ethical, inclusive leader is keeping the needs of all in mind. This comes into play when determining how to make your events accessible.

## Make the Space Accessible

A first step is making sure that your programming space is accessible. Some suggestions include:

- Hold events on a first floor near the front door
- Have ramps available for people in wheelchairs
- Be located near accessible bathrooms



Also, when issuing the invitation to this event, have a line at the bottom that says something like, “If you have special needs for this event, please contact \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_ to discuss accommodations.”

## Make Information Accessible

Also consider how you can make the information involved with your event accessible. Some suggestions include:

- Make copies of handouts available in large print for folks with visual impairments
- Have visual cues, such as charts, posters, and flipcharts, available so you’re not just presenting verbally
- Make connections with a sign language interpretation service so you know who to call upon if you need their services for an event

## Keep “Hidden Disabilities” in Mind

Within any group, someone may have a learning disability that isn’t immediately observable. That’s why they’re often called “hidden disabilities.” When you’re conducting programs or meetings, keep the following things in mind:

- Give important information both orally and in written form so members can process it both during and after the event.
- Don’t ask participants to read out loud, unless they offer. Some people get very anxious or are unable to read well in front of others.

- Provide plenty of time for questions and answers.
- Provide information about the meeting or program (such as a schedule of events or an agenda) ahead of time so people can prepare.

## Tap Into Person First Language

Person First Language focuses on the ability rather than the disability and on people instead of conditions. For instance:

- Instead of “the blind,” use “people who have visual impairments.” This emphasizes the importance of the person involved rather than equating him with his condition.
- Instead of saying someone is “wheelchair bound,” refer to her as a “person who uses a wheelchair.” This demonstrates that the wheelchair is not a confining device but a helpful apparatus being used by a capable human being.
- Referring to someone with a disability as a “sufferer” or a “victim” tends to impose value judgments that are often untrue. These terms can be disempowering to a person with a disability who doesn’t want to be considered helpless and at the mercy of uncontrollable forces.

Sources: *Journal of College and University Student Housing*, Vol. 24, No. 1, Summer 1994; [www.disabled-world.com/artman/publish/what-are-disabilities.shtml](http://www.disabled-world.com/artman/publish/what-are-disabilities.shtml)

## A Creative Approach to Inclusive Programming

At the University of Wisconsin at Whitewater, all community members who are interested in putting on an event must complete a programming request form. The form includes a series of questions including, “Have you considered all individuals who might be left out by the location or planned event?”

If they think someone may have difficulty accessing their event or face challenges during a presentation, they are encouraged to put a statement on the bottom of their posters, saying, “Any individual with special needs may contact \_\_\_\_\_ for appropriate accommodations.”