

Eventbrite

The Basics of Event Accessibility: How to Create a More Accessible Event



Event accessibility isn't just a compliance issue. Making your event more accessible widens your reach, makes your attendees feel welcome, and creates an environment of inclusivity, diversity, and positivity. There's a lot more to running accessible events than wheelchair ramps and doorways.

In this guide, we'll give you the information you need to:

- > Make your event listing as accessible as possible
- > Provide comprehensive accessibility information
- > Make online ticket purchasing entirely self-service
- > Plan for on-site accessibility

Please note, this guide is provided as a service to you to highlight issues you may want to consider when it comes to hosting those with disabilities, and not as legal guidance. It is your responsibility to review the ADA, and your state and local regulations, when taking steps to make your event more accessible.

At some point in their lifetime, 70 percent of all Americans will have either a temporary or permanent disability.¹



Q. What's a "disability"?

Disabilities can be obvious (a wheelchair, use of a seeing-eye dog) or not (epilepsy, mental illness, a heart condition, deafness). And they can be permanent (paralysis) or temporary (a broken femur) — although the ADA doesn't always recognize temporary disability under its protections.

A smart rule of thumb: don't assume that any of your attendees don't — or do — have a disability. Your event should do its best to accommodate a wide range of abilities.

There are hundreds of types of disabilities, but in general, the ADA defines a disabled person as:

1. One who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major lifestyle activities — including the ability to walk, see, hear, speak, learn, or work
2. One with a record of impairment, even if he or she isn't currently disabled
3. One who is regarded by others as having a disability — like someone with severe facial scarring

¹ <https://adata.org/publication/temporary-events-guide>

Section 1: Make your event listing as accessible as possible

Creating an accessible event starts at the beginning — with making sure that everyone can find out about your event. Luckily, you can make your event marketing materials available to more people with a few improvements.

Here's how a few simple customizations to your online event listing will make it accessible to more people — so you can attract more attendees to your event.

- > **Add written descriptions for all images.** Use the description field to describe each image in detail. How would you describe the image to someone who couldn't see it? This is what an electronic reader for someone who is visually impaired will be doing. Oh and guess what? This is good for [search engine optimization \(SEO\)](#), too!
- > **Upload a transcript for your videos.** While YouTube does have an automatic captioning feature embedded in its app, we recommend including your own to make sure you are conveying the perfect message. People who are hard of hearing (and people who prefer to read versus watching) appreciate an accurate video transcript they can follow along with as they watch your video. And accurate transcription also helps with SEO and translation!

One more tip here: We recommend not setting your video to autoplay. It can be disruptive for anyone, but especially vision-impaired people using a voiceover navigation system.

- > **Increase text contrast.** If you're using custom CSS or have an image behind text, we suggest making sure the contrast is high enough to be easily readable. [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines](#) suggest a 3:1 contrast ratio for large text and 4.5:1 for small text. This also helps any user viewing your event listing on their phone in sunlight or on an older monitor with a lower resolution.

"I wish event organizers would have subtitled films and seating near the front of events for the hard of hearing."

— Emily, hearing impaired with service dog

- > **Use headings in order to convey semantic meaning.** Using formal HTML headings (H1, H2, H3, etc.) in your event description helps people using screen readers navigate the structure of your content. Keep your headings in order (don't skip from H2 to H5) to help both screen-reader users and your listing's SEO.
- > **Limit your required questions.** Questions in the checkout flow can take any user extra time to fill out, but people with mobility issues or assistive devices are even more likely to get frustrated and give up. Keep extraneous questions to a minimum to help your users purchase tickets faster and with ease.
- > **Add additional time to your purchasing timeouts.** Don't sabotage a purchase by letting it time out before it's time! People who are using assistive devices, have mobility impairments, or just have slow internet connections from their phones benefit from additional time during checkout.



Pro tip: Pro-accessibility content design

The ADA National Network, an educational network funded by the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR), recommends the following type and language tips for making sure that your printed marketing and informational materials are more accessible.²

- > Use basic, clear, non-technical language in the active voice.
- > Keep your sentence short—one thought per sentence, under 25 words.
- > Use bulleted or numbered lists to break up instructions wherever possible (like we're doing here!).
- > Use a sans-serif font like Helvetica, Arial, Calibri, or Futura. Don't mix up your font faces too much.
- > For printed materials without a lot of text, use bold-face type.
- > Make sure type is at least 16-point, and line spacing is 1 ½ or double.
- > Avoid using all caps and underlining text.
- > Left-justify your text.
- > Use opaque, non-glossy colors and materials for both background and text.

² <https://adata.org/publication/temporary-events-guide>

Section 2: Provide detailed accessibility information

“To me, access is about giving as much of this information as possible ahead of time. So even if the access info is ‘No ASL interpreters will be present,’ at least I know how to best interact with this event, rather than having to bug the organizers to ask this question, or going to the event only to find out I don’t have what I need. I always push event organizers to list access info regardless of whether they are providing these things or not. The most inaccessible thing is **not knowing**.”

—Julia S.

Your event listing is where people with accessibility questions will look for information first. You can save everyone time by providing relevant information up front. For example, there’s a big difference between these two FAQ responses:

Example #1:

Is your event accessible?

Yep!

Example #2:

Is your event accessible?

We’ve worked hard to make our event as accessible as possible. There’s an ADA-compliant ramp up to the side entrance and the threshold is 1”. The front entrance has 5 concrete steps with a metal railing.

There aren’t any steps or ledges inside. The dining room tables will be at normal chair height. There are wheelchair spaces available for purchase within the reserved seating area, and as an option, the standard seats have movable armrests. (We’re happy to put your chair aside if you want to sit in the standard seats.) Please arrive 15 minutes before doors open so we can seat you first.

There are 2 single-person bathrooms that are large enough to fit a wheelchair with the door closed. There are 5 handicap parking spots in a paved lot within 50 feet of the entrance. All of them have space for side-ramp loading. There are no steep grades anywhere on the event grounds.

We don’t have ASL interpreters (but if you’d like to volunteer, reach out!). If you have any other questions, please don’t hesitate to reach out to us at support@myevent.com or call 555-555-5555.

The second example is both factual and detailed. It allows people of a variety of different impairments to decide what's manageable for them. Let's break it down even further so you can use it as a guide to writing your own accessibility FAQ.

“Even things like explicitly stating how long the event will last, and giving a rundown of what will happen, are helpful to me — because all of this information helps me make the most informed decision about how I want to interact with the event, what I want to bring with me (personal attendant, snacks, my own seating, etc.).”

—Julia S.

- > This description lets wheelchair users know there's a ramp that won't be too steep (ADA guidelines specify reasonable grades — the steepness of the ramp's incline), but that they may not see it at the main entrance.
- > Folks who can handle a few stairs know how many they'll have to deal with, and that there's a railing to help. Some people, like those who use canes or walkers, can handle a small set of stairs with a railing.
- > Certain wheelchair users have no problem with ledges under a certain height — they can easily navigate a few inches of threshold — while others need completely flat surfaces to get around.
- > Parking — knowing the distance from the car to the venue is helpful. Also, wheelchair users often have a ramp attached to their vehicle and will need open space on the side of their parking spot (no trees, bike parking, or signage blocking the ramp).

“One of the most common issues I come across is non-accessible bathrooms. At large outdoor events, for example, there are often a ton of Porta Potties, but they're way too thin and inaccessible for a wheelchair user to get into. I sometimes have to leave events early just to go to the bathroom.”

—Paul H., wheelchair user

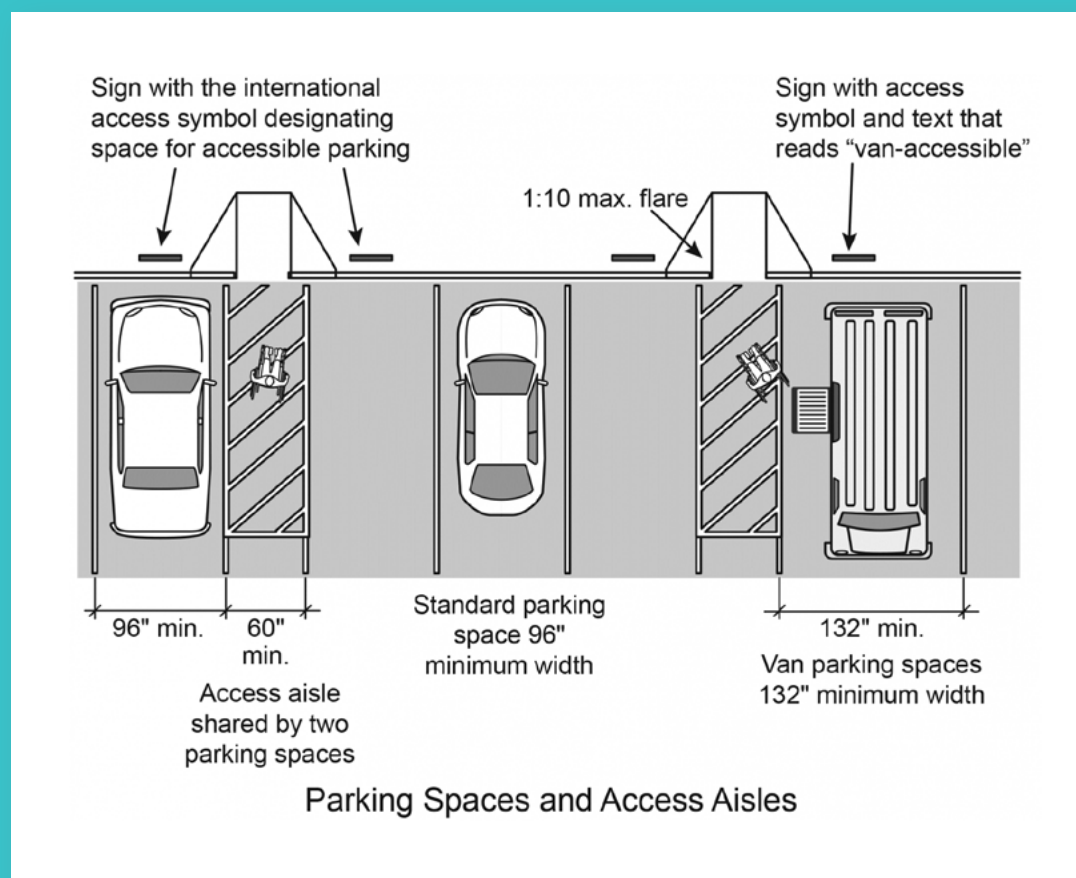




Parking rules

Actual accessible parking rules vary from state to state, so if you're curious, look into your particular state's rules. In general, accessible parking spaces should be as close as possible to the main event site and be connected to the entrance by a smooth, level path without curbs or obstructions. And if your event features multiple parking areas, each one should have accessible parking.

Check out the ADA National Network's [online guide](#)* for a recommendation on how many accessible parking spaces you need to have per total parking spots (and lots of other information about accommodating disabilities with helpful parking options). Note that the ADA National Network's guide recommends that out of every six accessible spaces, one must be van accessible (at least 132 inches wide).



Published by the ADA National Network

*The ADA National Network's online guide should be viewed as a resource to make you aware of certain issues. Please be sure to check your state and local regulations in addition to the specific ADA requirements.

- > Walking folks don't always have to think about small inclines they navigate everyday or what material they're walking on, but a little hill or loose gravel can be a real problem for people using wheeled assistive devices or even strollers. Imagine how you'd navigate your event space if you had to do it in a rolling office chair — this will help you see challenges you might otherwise never notice.
- > Venues don't always describe their version of “accessible seating.” Is it a space for a wheelchair or a standard seat with space for the wheelchair next to it? Some wheelchair users prefer to stay in their own chair, but others like to be at the same height as their event companions. Clarifying the seating options — including if armrests are movable to allow scooting down a row — is incredibly helpful for ticket buyers. And take a tip from the airlines: It's often a lot easier to let people with assistive devices take their seats first, so prep your volunteers to be accommodating and polite.
- > Including a clear contact option makes it easy for people who have more questions about accessibility to get the information they need (and helps you know what to cover next time). Providing a phone number is especially helpful for attendees who might have a disability like dyslexia and need information verbally.

You can also offer an event-map download right on your event listing. This makes it much easier for attendees to map out where they'll go to enjoy the event. It also helps people with accessibility concerns evaluate their route in advance.

“At the best events I've attended, accessibility information was communicated beforehand, so that I could plan out the areas that I wanted to visit and how to get between each location — and areas that weren't accessible were clearly marked.”

— Paul H., wheelchair user



Section 3: Make online ticket purchasing entirely self-service

A lot of ticketers require their guests with accessibility needs call to make a purchase. This is a frustrating experience for those who just want to buy tickets without talking to anyone. If you set up your event properly, you can make purchasing a breeze.

- > **Plan for accessible capacity.** To make sure you have enough inventory, make your accessible spots a separate ticket type. This helps ensure you don't oversell reserved seats. It's important to be clear in your ticket name and description that these tickets are reserved for people with accessibility needs.
- > **Remember companions.** People with accessibility needs have friends (plural) — and sometimes a ton of them want to attend your event together! So when reserving accessible spaces, remember to reserve standard seating in the same area for your attendees with accessibility needs and their posse.
- > **Provide good accessible seats.** Your guests with accessibility needs shouldn't feel merely accommodated — they should feel like they're having the same stellar experience as everyone else at your event. Don't just stick your accessible spots in less desirable areas. Everyone should have an equally great selection of seating.

“I wish event organizers would reserve handicap seating for people who actually need it, with a view of the stage.”

— Tom K., wheelchair user





ADA ticketing requirements

The ADA specifies exactly how accessible seats are categorized and sold for events. These requirements are published [on the ADA's website](#). The rules include the following:

1. Venues have to sell tickets for accessible seats in the exact same way they sell all other tickets. Tickets for all seats must be for sale during the same hours, via the same mechanism (whether it be a website, by phone, or through a third-party vendor).
2. Venues can't charge higher prices for accessible seats than for non-accessible seats in the same seating section.
3. Wherever possible, there have to be accessible seats available in every seating section.
4. When describing seating, venues must use the same level of description for accessible seats as for non-accessible.



Consider the posse!

The ADA requires venues to allow ticket buyers to purchase additional seats for their companions contiguous to the accessible seat. There are exceptions to this rule, however, in the event, for example, a venue ordinarily limits ticket purchases or the contiguous seats happen to already be sold. Please refer to the ADA for specifics on any exceptions.

Similarly, if you're selling a bunch of tickets at a group rate, and the group includes someone who needs accessible seating, the ADA requires that the entire group be seated together in an area that includes accessible seating whenever possible.



What about those unsold tickets?

With all the regulations around offering tickets for accessible seats, you might be wondering what happens if no one buys them. The ADA says you can sell accessible tickets to the general public if all non-accessible seats in that section or price category have been sold. However, it's important to note that venues are not required to release accessible seats when all others seats are sold. The choice is yours.

Section 4: Plan for on-site accessibility

The [day of your event](#) can be a stressful time, but some prep ahead of time will ensure a more accessible experience.

- > **Train great volunteers.** Make sure your event volunteers are ready to help your attendees with accessibility needs enjoy your event just as much as everyone else. This means fighting the “accommodation” mindset — the idea that creating an accessible space is an annoyance rather than something that’s good for everyone. Go the extra mile by seeking out volunteers with special skills, like fluency in American Sign Language (check your local high school or college).
- > **Use your words.** Train your staff and volunteers to never touch someone — regardless of your intentions — without clear consent. There are many ways to help someone without invading their personal space. Even if someone appears to need your help, ask first!
- > **Signage everywhere.** There’s basically no such thing as too much wayfinding signage at an event, and this is especially true for making your event accessible. When you’re creating signs, pay attention to the size and color of the type. If it’s hard for you to read, it’s going to be impossible for those with visual impairments.
- > **Create clear pathways.** When setting up your event, pay attention to things like the width between tables/booths. For instance, can a wheelchair or stroller get between objects as easily as a walking person? Be particularly attentive to things like trash cans blocking a path, uneven or sloped ground, wires running across the floor, and sharp objects that could pop a tire.
- > **Label foods.** Food allergies can be a big issue to plenty of people, whether they identify as having a disability or not. Take the time to label foods with common allergens to help attendees identify what’s okay for them to eat.

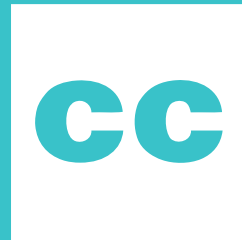
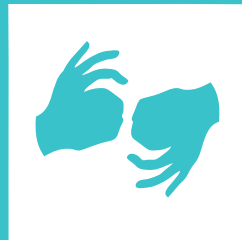
“I wish event organizers would understand food access as a component of accessibility. If you’re going to serve food at your event, it should be labeled and you should have options available for people with common allergies or other dietary restrictions (dairy, gluten, nuts, etc.). It’s both a matter of inclusion and a practical matter - it’s going to be more difficult for me to attend your dinnertime event if I’m not able to eat any of the food.”

— Maddy, chronic illness



Accessibility symbols

Highlight your accessibility efforts on all your informational and marketing materials. These universal symbols let ticket-buyers know exactly what accessibility services you provide, from wheelchair access to the availability of hearing devices to sign language interpretation.



“Educate everyone working the event with the same information, rather than having one person designated and not telling anyone who that is. Also, don’t bury accessibility information in a corner of the website or not provide at all, meaning I have to contact the organizer.”

— **Kerry K.**, wheelchair user, with optional cane/crutches, and endurance athlete

A checklist of barriers

Skim this checklist, created by the ADA National Network, for some options that may make a big difference for your guests with accessibility needs. ³

- ☐ Install ramps
- ☐ Make curb cuts in sidewalks and at entrances
- ☐ Reposition shelves
- ☐ Rearrange tables, chairs, vending machines, display racks, and other furniture
- ☐ Add raised markings on elevator control buttons
- ☐ Install flashing alarm lights
- ☐ Widen doors/install offset hinges to widen doorways
- ☐ Eliminate a turnstile or provide an alternative accessible path
- ☐ Install accessible door hardware
- ☐ Install grab bars in toilet stalls
- ☐ Rearrange toilet partitions to increase maneuvering space
- ☐ Insulate lavatory pipes under sinks to prevent burns
- ☐ Install a raised toilet seat
- ☐ Install a full-length bathroom mirror
- ☐ Reposition the paper towel dispenser in a bathroom
- ☐ Create designated accessible parking spaces
- ☐ Install an accessible paper cup dispenser at an existing inaccessible water fountain
- ☐ Remove carpeting that makes maneuvering wheelchairs difficult (i.e. high pile, low density carpeting)

³ <https://adata.org/publication/temporary-events-guide>



How big is "big enough" for a wheelchair?

For people using wheelchairs, the ADA requires a space to “park” must be at least 30 inches wide and 48 inches deep. To turn around, a wheelchair requires a 60-inch diameter. An accessible pedestrian route such as an aisle or corridor must be at least 36 inches wide, except at doors, where 32 inches is acceptable. And at least every 200 feet, there must be a minimum 60-by-60-inch clear space where two people using wheelchairs could pass.

Note that not all wheelchairs are created equal. A manual wheelchair for a smaller person might fit in a space that’s too narrow for a larger, power wheelchair. Make it easy for your attendees by providing precise specifications on the available space.

“Even though I am able to attend events that are not in wheelchair accessible locations, it’s incredibly frustrating to see organizers decide to hold their events in inaccessible spaces.”

— Maddy, chronic illness

There’s a lot to think about when it comes to accessibility, but using even just one or two of these tips can move your event in the right direction. And sometimes the best route you can take is simply reaching out to your attendees to ask about how you can do a better job making your events accessible.

Ready to go deeper? There are tons of in-depth resources about accessibility you can check out:

- > [ADA ticketing requirements](#)
- > [ADA National Network guide to accessible events](#)
- > [ADA standards for accessible design](#)

“What’s rare but so helpful is collaborating with event organizers. The first step is an able-bodied organizer recognizing that not everyone will experience the event exactly the way they will. But when organizers realize this, they can get overwhelmed trying to figure out all the things they need to fix. The key is figuring it out together—with the people who will have a different event experience. Go out and ask for input outside of your own experience.”

—Courtney M., blind

Eventbrite

Powered three million events in 2017.

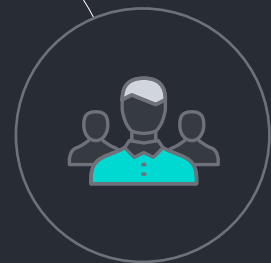
Eventbrite brings the world together through live experiences. More than 700,000 organizers used Eventbrite in 2017 to drive ticket sales, promote and manage events, handle on-site operations, and analyze results across multiple sales channels.



Grow your event
More than 200 million
tickets were issued in
2017.



Simplify your planning
Promote, manage, and
analyze your event
from any device.



Impress your attendees
Delight with ease of
purchase, convenient
ticket access, and
speedier entry.

[Get started](#)

[Set up your next event](#)

[Read more](#)

[Contact Us](#)