

# Inclusive Practices Toolkit

For Unifor Councils,  
Conferences and Events



**UNIFOR**

# Introduction

Many people live with disabilities be they visible or not. Some people directly identify with their disability (e.g. “I am a Deaf person”) while others do not (e.g. “I am an individual living with Deafness”). Some use the term “disability” others might prefer “disABILITY” or “differently abled” or a term that is less familiar. It is important to respect the identity labels people choose for themselves. It is equally important to accept a request when someone indicates that they have a disability and/or need for accommodation.

This toolkit includes practical information about assessing the physical environment to accommodate disabilities, creating accessible event materials, booking support services and suggestions for registration forms to gather information that will assist with accommodation-related needs.

# Diversity Through Inclusion

## Scheduling

People are diverse, often identifying themselves in multiple ways. When we fail to recognize intersectionality we create barriers to participation. Workers with disabilities can also be racialized workers, women, LGBTQ+ or have a variety of other facets that form their identity.

One easy way to remove barriers to participation of members in caucuses and meetings is to ensure that they are scheduled at different times so that people are not required to choose between facets of their identity.

## Accommodations for Participants with Physical Disabilities

Wherever budget permits, it is best practice to allow participants with disabilities who need to travel to attend your event to arrive in town a day before the event begins and to depart a day after the event ends. This recognizes that there may be additional and often unexpected demands for those with disabilities when they travel.

Accessible hotel rooms should be reserved. Those rooms should have adequate power supplies for charging disability-related equipment such as wheelchairs, scooters or other mobility aids.

# Venues and Accessibility

Safety, access and universal design are key considerations in choosing a location for your event or places for meetings and events.

## Key Accessibility Features

Accessible parking should be available close to the main entrance of any event venue.

Elevators should have low buttons with Braille markings and be equipped with audio floor indicators.

An accessible washroom or washroom with an adapted stall should be available in each venue for participant use.

Meeting and events spaces should be accessible for individuals who use wheelchairs, walkers, crutches or other mobility aids.

Rest areas with adequate power supplies to charge disability-related equipment should be available.

## DisABILITY Liaison

Every large meeting should have a DisABILITY Liaison assigned to assist those with disability-related needs should such assistance be required.

The Liaison should be trained in CPR and First Aid.

## **Meetings and Accessibility**

- **Reduce or eliminate background noise** such as fans, fountains and piped-in music which can make it difficult to hear and can be distracting for participants.
- **Create a scent-free environment.**
- **Remove harsh lighting.** Fluorescent lighting, flashing lights, and overly bright lights act as barriers and can cause disability-related crisis in certain people. If possible, a venue should be chosen where these lighting issues can be avoided.
- **Regulate temperature and air quality.** The venue should have a good ventilation system and heating/cooling system so that participants are able to breathe easily and remain comfortable during the course of events or meetings.

# Preparing Event Material

## Written Materials

Having written materials available in a variety of print and digital formats creates accessibility for wider audiences and removes barriers to participation.

Using plain language summaries of complex documents means that people with literacy challenges or those whose first language is not the language of the document, can still participate in discussions.

Providing audio recordings of documents is also a method that could be explored.

Offering copies of materials on a memory stick or a website allows people to use their own technology, with whatever adaptations they use, to review the materials. If the material is put on a website, that website must be accessible.

Documents in high contrast (black and white) and in large font (minimum 16 pt. font, but 24 is better) should be made available.

Including access symbols on pre-conference materials will alert people to accessibility and support services available. It may also be useful to print symbols on signage for event activities.

For a list of commonly recognized symbols, see “Appendix B”.

## **Audio-Visual Materials/Presentations**

Providing audio-visual materials such as videos, audio files, music, etc. may also assist with inclusion.

When presenting charts, tables, or diagrams, presenters should describe what is on the screen so that all participants receive the necessary information.

Transcribing of any audio files should be done as a matter of course so that people with hearing impairment or auditory processing difficulty have access to the material being shared.

# Preparing Event Material

## Event Registration

Information collected on event registration forms will allow Unifor to put in place individualized accommodations required by participants. All those attending events and meetings including guest presenters should be asked to register so that Unifor will be better positioned to host an inclusive event.

Registration forms should include questions about accessibility needs. These could be addressed in each council and/or event call letter with a line such as:

**“Unifor works to remove all barriers. If you have a specific Human Rights Code/Act related need, please let us know in advance so that we may take reasonable steps to accommodate”.**

Additionally, through the registration form Unifor should request all attendees avoid wearing perfume or using heavily scented products during the event.



# Interpretation and Intervener Services

Interpretation services allow individuals who are Deaf or hard of hearing to fully participate in the event. These services are in high demand and require advance booking. Interpretation services may include American Sign Language (ASL) interpretation, Langue des Signes Québécoise (LSQ) interpretation, oral interpretation (for individuals who lip-read rather than using sign language), Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART), or FM or infrared systems.

FM and infra-red systems are amplifying units for people who are hard of hearing. The FM system has strong amplification capacity and portability. Note: some assistive listening systems may work only for some hard of hearing people with a T-switch on their hearing aids, while others may need to wear a headset. It is best to ask in advance which of these options are needed.

For any event longer than one hour more than one interpreter will be required.

Deafblind individuals will not benefit from the above interpretation services. They require an intervener which is a specialized attendant trained to communicate with deafblind people via methods such as signing into their hands.

# Preparing Event Material

## Captioning

Deaf and hard of hearing people also benefit immensely from captioning services. Captioning services may be provided remotely (off-site) through an internet connection or on-site through Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART). The advantage of off-site captioning is that captioning can be provided for events taking place online (e.g. web conferences, webinars) or when events are physical gatherings, the interpreters can caption from their office and save travel and accommodation expenses. The advantage of on-site CART services is that if your internet connection fails, or the microphone does not pick up all audio (such as questions from the audience), the interpreter can continue fully captioning.

## Creating an Inclusive Schedule

The pacing and structure of meetings and event are also important to creating an inclusive experience. When creating a schedule the Union should:

- Allow enough time during presentations for questions and discussions because not everyone can respond at a pre-determined pace; and
- Recognize that some individuals will have specific needs. For example, they may need to use medication throughout the day, require periods of rest, or must have scheduled eating times. The union should schedule regular breaks to allow people time to attend to these needs. Failure to do so could result in unnecessary exclusion from parts of the meeting or event.

Individuals who do not have their own vehicle may need to use public transit to get to and from the event venue(s). Starting and ending meeting events while public transit is still running regularly or arranging alternative accessible transportation is desirable.

## **Accessible Transport for Rallies and Marches**

For any events off-site, for example marches or rallies, the union should ensure that there is transportation for those with mobility needs.

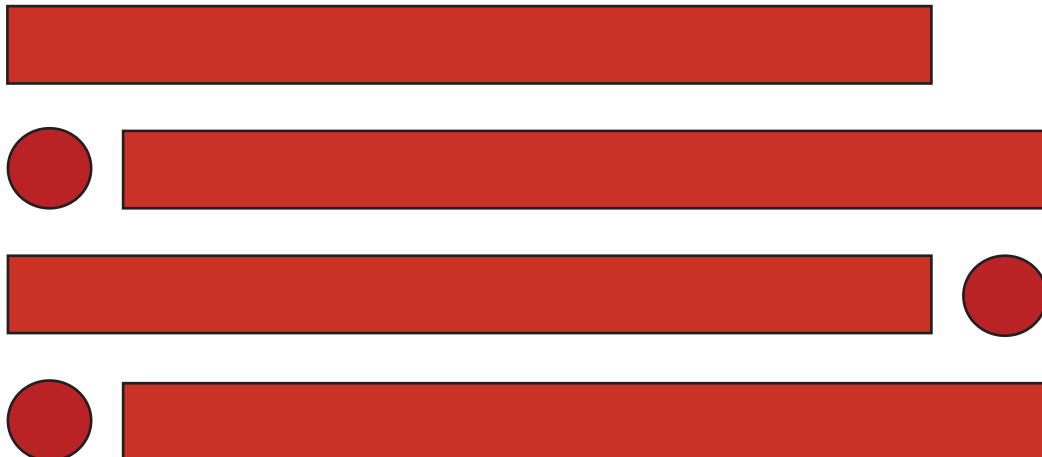
# Preparing Event Material

## Participation in Meetings and Events

Unifor should make available roving, wireless microphones for those with mobility needs who may be unable to get to a floor microphone. Staff should be assigned to take a microphone to a member/delegate/participant in need of one. A bright flash card system can be put in place to signal the need for a wireless microphone.

Floor risers should be removed from all microphones so that workers with mobility needs have equal access. Alternatively, ramped microphones could be placed at various points in the room to create ease of access.

Providing staggered tables with adequate spacing allows people with mobility devices the freedom to choose where to sit and promotes accessibility.



For more helpful accessible seating layouts, please see “Appendix C” attached.

Placing chairs beside each microphone allows those unable to stand the opportunity to rest while they await a turn to speak.

Stages should be accessible and a stage ramp for those with mobility-related needs should always be in place as a best practice and as a visible sign of inclusion.

# Guides for Building Inclusivity

Appendix A - Information for Inclusion Registration Forms

Appendix B - Disability Access Symbol Guide

Appendix C - Guide to Accessible Seating

Appendix D - Accessible Event Planning Checklist

# Appendix A

## Information for Inclusion

To ensure participants are able to fully participate, include a section on the registration form inviting participants to identify accommodations, services and/or supports they require to participate.

The registration form should be accessible for completion on a computer.

## Sample Language

“Unifor works to remove all barriers. If you have a specific Human Rights Code/Act related need, please let us know in advance so that we may take all reasonable steps to accommodate any disability or other related needs that you may have”.

OR

“Unifor seeks to make all union meetings and events accessible and barrier free. If you require accommodations for a human rights related need, we invite you to provide us with relevant information so that we can take all reasonable steps to address any barriers to your participation in your union.”

# Sample Registration Form

**Individual Accommodations and Supports** - please fill out the section below to indicate what accommodations and supports you will need access to during the event.

## Hotel Accommodations

Accessible hotel rooms required. Specify needs:

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## Mobility Needs

I require the above support/service to assist me with:

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# Appendix A

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## Dietary Needs/Requirements

Please provide detail:

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Do you have any other inclusion requests for us?  
(Please specify)

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# Appendix B

## Disability Access Symbols Guide

Disability access symbols can be used to promote and inform people about the accessibility of spaces and events. Use these symbols on registration forms, event schedules and event signage to indicate which services and supports will be available to participants.



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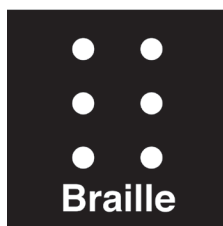
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5



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11



12

1. Information about services and access available
2. Accessible to individuals with limited mobility
3. Live audio description provided for performances and presentations
4. Audio description provided for TV, film and video
5. Printed materials available in large/accessible print
6. Accessible to individuals who are blind or have low vision
7. Printed materials available in Braille
8. Telephone Typewriter (TTY) available for deaf and hearing impaired
9. Sign language interpretation available
10. Assistive listening systems available (headsets, hearing aids, etc.)
11. Telephone with amplified volume control for users with hearing impairments
12. Videos/TV with Closed Captioning

# Appendix C

## Guide to Accessible Seating

To be inclusive, it is always best to find event spaces that are as spacious as possible and have chairs and tables that can be moved around to suit the activity and participant needs.

Traditional theatre-style seating arrangement, in which all chairs are arranged in rows facing the front of a room, is not considered inclusive or accessible.

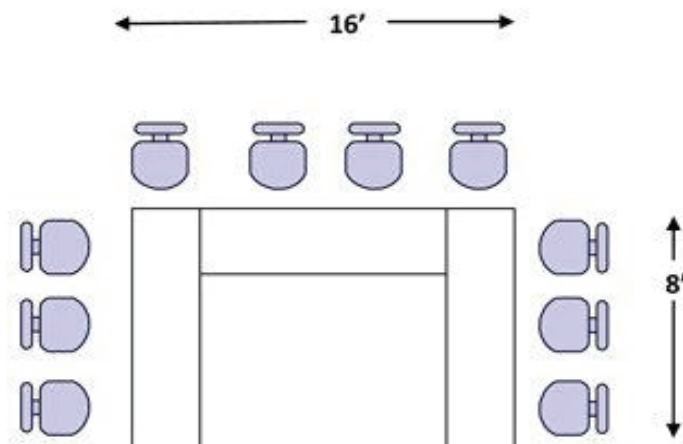
Disability Access Symbols can be used to promote and inform people about the accessibility of spaces and events. Use these symbols on registration forms, event schedules, and event signage to indicate which services and supports will be available to participants.

## Accessible Seating Arrangements

U-shape, hollow circle, and parallel table seating arrangements are desirable for smaller meetings. If using other seating arrangements for large meetings ensure that there is space for people using mobility devices (walkers, wheelchairs, or scooters) to pass freely behind and between seating. Remember that everyone should be able to choose where they would like to sit, rather than being assigned to a place.

# U-Shape

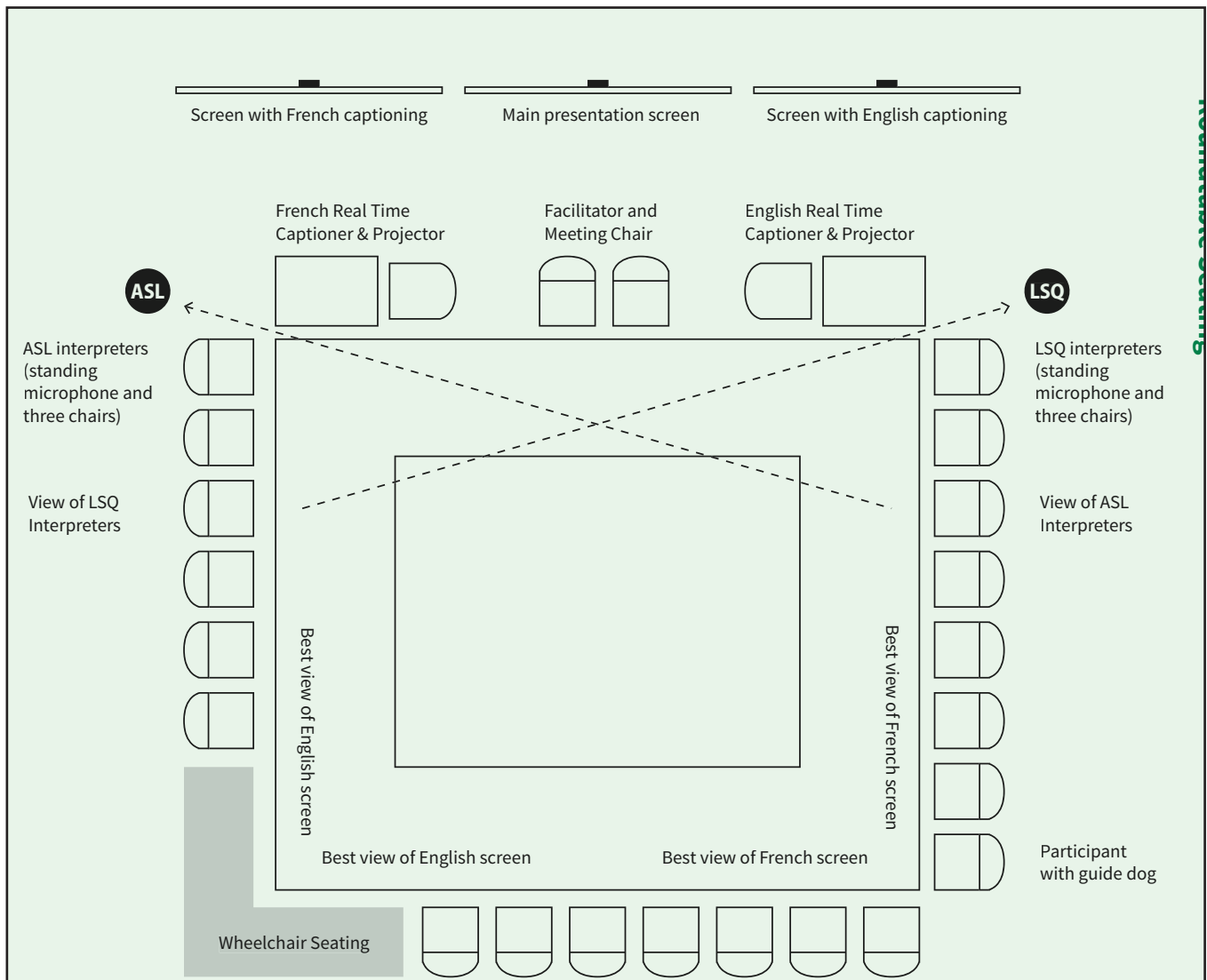
This arrangement is good for relatively small groups where attendees are expected to participate. It is best practice to leave a minimum of 4-6 feet (6-8 feet is ideal) between the presenter's table or podium and tables where participants are seated. This allows individuals with mobility devices to freely navigate between the tables and into the center of the arrangement should they wish to speak with individuals located in hard-to-reach spots, such as the corners.



# Appendix C

## Hollow Circle or Square

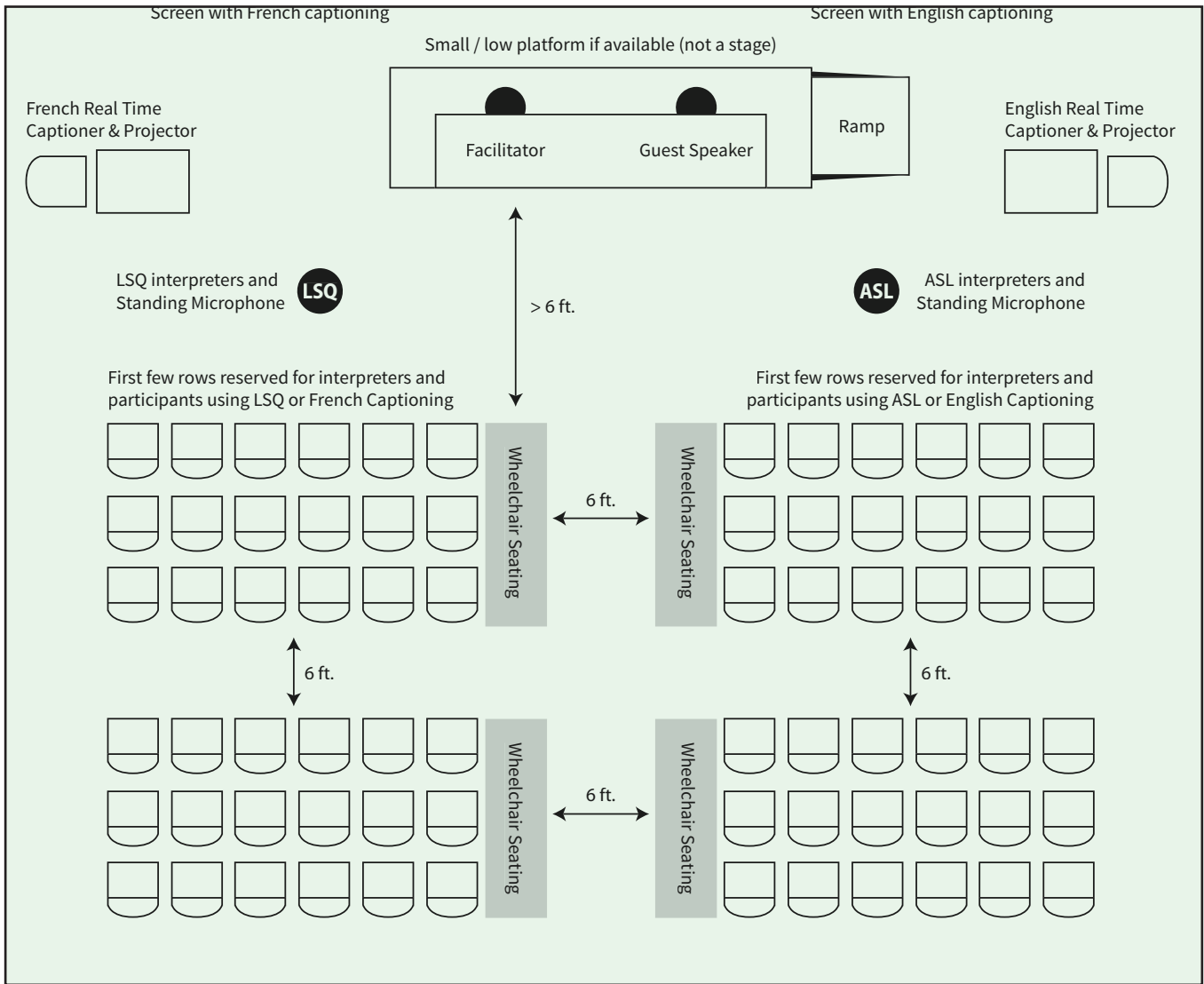
These arrangements are often used when participants are expected to engage in an interactive discussion. Both require a large room, even for relatively small numbers. These arrangements can be accomplished using chairs alone or with chairs behind tables.



# Appendix C

## Parallel Seating

This arrangement can be used for small group meetings and events. It is especially useful for when a presentation is being given or a PowerPoint or video is being projected towards one end of the room. Projectors or teleconference equipment can be placed into the center of the tables preventing anyone's view from being blocked and allowing cords to be run in between the tables to save space and prevent tripping. As always, ensure that there is space around all of the tables and chairs for individuals with mobility devices to freely move around.



## Staggered Tables

This arrangement is appropriate for large group meetings. See diagram on page 12.



# Appendix D

## Accessible Event Planning Checklist

When planning an event, please consider the following to ensure it is accessible to all attending.

### Advertising, Outreach and Registration Forms

- Give ample notice for your upcoming event - this allows people to arrange for transportation, assistants or other supports they may require. Indicate both start and finish times.
- Provide space on your registration form or on the event notice for people to identify their accommodations or accessibility needs. If you are serving food, give participants a chance to indicate dietary restrictions.
- Include contact information (e.g., phone number and email address) so that attendees can contact you with their requirements.
- Follow up with people who request accommodations in a timely fashion to inform them whether or not these will be available.
- Indicate whether there are any fees for admission or materials, note that fees should not

apply to any accompanying support persons.

- On posters or information sheets, include international accessibility symbols indicating accessibility (e.g. wheelchair access, captioning, sign language interpretation).
- Promote a scent-free practice for all events.

## Planning Ahead

- Train event personnel on how to respectfully assist people with disabilities and to respond to any accessibility issues that may arise.
- Make sure that event personnel are easily identified (use name tags and/or other identifiers).

# Appendix D

- Book any access supports being provided in plenty of time to ensure availability. (e.g. Sign Language interpreters, real-time captioning, note-takers, attendants).
- Provide interpreters, captioners and note takers with agendas and presentation outlines in advance of the event.
- At the event, be sure the interpreters and/or captioners are introduced and explain what they will be doing during the event.
- Remind participants as well as volunteers and service providers of the scent-free practice.

## Selecting and Setting up the Room(s) for Your Event

- Allow for easy movement for wheelchair and scooter users (you may need to rearrange furniture). For example, choose a room with wide aisles and plenty of space around tables.
- Include accessible seating areas interspersed throughout the room where possible - front, middle and back.

# Appendix D

- Good lighting (bright, without glare and allows for adjustment).
- If a stage is being used, ensure it and any projection screens are easily visible.
- Good acoustics. If possible, arrange for provision of Assistive Listening Devices (e.g., an FM system).
- Provide for seat reservations for people who are deaf, deafened or hard of hearing.
- Make sure accessible washrooms are available within a reasonable distance.
- Cover electrical cables or cords that cross over aisles or pathways so wheelchair users as well as people who use canes and walkers can traverse easily and safely across them.
- Wherever possible, try to eliminate or reduce background noise during proceedings.
- Ensure that all parts of the event are smoke-free.
- Make sure organizers, presenters and volunteers are aware of emergency evacuation procedures.

# Appendix D

## Helping Participants get to the Meeting or Event Space

- Make sure transportation options for getting to the venue are accessible to people with disabilities.
- Determine the location and approximate distance for nearest accessible parking.
- Make sure that wheelchair access is via the main entrance. Alternatively, post clear, legible signs at the main entrance showing alternative, safe and accessible entrances.
- Make sure people with disabilities can reach all areas used at your event independently or with assistance from your volunteers, e.g., the registration desk, auditorium, breakaway rooms, stage, etc.
- Preferably, elevators should have low buttons for wheelchair users, Braille/raised number markings or audible floor announcements for people who are blind or with low vision, and visual floor indicators for people who are Deaf, deafened or hard of hearing.

- Post clear and easy-to-read signs showing locations of accessible washrooms, elevators, phones, etc.

## **Suggestions for Effective Presenters**

- Remind presenters to end meetings or presentations on schedule (important for people making advance transit arrangements and for pre-booked support people).
- Produce materials in large print (16-point type or larger) and have available electronically in case of a request for such a format.
- It is always good to have a few print copies on hand. Encourage and support presenters to offer copies of their material in different formats and distribute them before their presentation starts.
- Ideally lectern heights and audio visual controls should be adjustable to meet the needs of different speakers.
- During the session, presenters should verbally describe contents of videos, or any written materials, including overheads or chalkboard notes for audience members with vision loss.
- Encourage presenters to use captioned videos.
- Organizers or presenters should check with the audience about the need for breaks.

## **Budgeting for Your Event**

- Set aside funds early in the planning stage for accessibility and in the event of requests for communication supports and accessible formats.

## **Evaluating Your Event**

- Be sure evaluation forms are accessible and include a section about accessibility of the event. This can provide valuable information for use in planning future event plans.

# Unifor Workers with DisABILITIES Committee



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