

# Sins Invalid

What makes an event accessible, and who is it accessible to? Free time, money, childcare, transportation, availability of interpreters, wheelchair access, use of fragrances, food options, and so many other things determine who shows up to an event, and who isn't able to.

This guide is intended to help you think through some ways to engage a spectrum of people with and without disabilities in doing a public event. But please note, these suggestions are not comprehensive! Each item will hopefully prompt you to think through the cascade of access barriers in the world and how we can best disrupt them to create "liberated zones" from disability oppression. Many of the suggestions may also be useful within organizational processes as well. We'd love to hear your additions/feedback at [info@sinsinvalid.org](mailto:info@sinsinvalid.org).

## **GENERAL GUIDANCE REGARDING ACCESS**

- Access for all community members takes time as well as commitment. In general, the more lead time the better for making a gathering or event more accessible to more people, so the longer in advance you consider these issues, the more likely you can address them. Improving access is always a process in development and we've got to start where we are! So wherever you are is a great place to start – and please incorporate what you can from these suggestions and next time incorporate a little more This is how we grow together...
- We live in a capitalist ableist world. That means that unfortunately there is often a price tag that goes along with access. Individuals with disabilities should not be responsible for this cost. If you're an organization with a budget, pay attention to what gets prioritized. Know that some access needs may be expensive and have Plan B's to ask for help in securing that service/ agency/etc if your budget can't reflect what you want.
- As with other forms of oppression, we are steeped in ableism and likely are going to reinforce and/or replicate it despite our thinking ahead. And, as with other forms of oppression, we need to be non-defensive when receiving feedback. Defensiveness creates unnecessary barriers to cross movement building. Regrettably, people leave movement building / community building or stop attending events when met with defensiveness, so please be receptive to feedback and give thanks for the gift that it is.

- Remember, everyone has needs to make an environment accessible to them, and people will definitely know best what their specific needs are! So in general, your promotional material should state what access needs have been addressed (i.e. ASL interpretation, wheelchair access, etc) and state that people can write or call to request specific access needs. If you can, ask people what they need to participate – that’s a great place to start!
- Access needs can be shared and talked about without shame. We can’t assume that our friends or colleagues or even our families will know our access needs (that we need to be warm or we’re in pain, that we need information given to us in this way or that, that we’re feeling tired on a given day so we can’t walk far, etc). At Sins Invalid, we try to practice speaking up about what our access needs are, in the hopes that perhaps others can help meet those needs.
- Access support can be shared. Encourage people to think about what access needs they have, and also what access needs they can help meet for others. Some access needs may be specific, and may need a person skilled in a particular field (i.e. an ASL interpreter or certain types of personal care), but other types of access support can be shared (i.e. note-taking or making plates of food).
- Try to hold compassion in the process. Sometimes, even with the best planning, some access needs go unmet. A little humility goes a long way in holding the frustration ableism creates.
- Have an access committee for planning purposes and a person or two from that committee in the role of “access coordinator(s)” on the day of the event if you anticipate the gathering to be more than 15 people. They can handle access planning beforehand and address access related issues on the day, help trouble shoot, and in general be thinking about it and available to respond.

### **SPECIFIC ACCESS ITEMS TO CONSIDER INCLUDE**

- **Different forms of outreach:** Some people respond best to talking, some people to reading, some to face to face interactions. How are you communicating about the gathering? People often use email and Facebook, but perhaps incorporate phone trees, texting and face to face invites if you can!

For written material, try to use Arial or other plain, sans serif fonts, at least 14 point font, black ink on white non-glossy paper, and check out these links for additional suggestions please visit <http://webaim.org/techniques/alttext/> or [http://www.un.org/webaccessibility/1\\_visual/13\\_colourcontrast.shtml](http://www.un.org/webaccessibility/1_visual/13_colourcontrast.shtml)

- **Non-Visual Options:** Audio describers describe action for folks who are visually impaired.

Will this be helpful for participants in your event? Is a trained Audio Describer available for your event? If not, is someone who can see and describe (without commentary) available to do informal audio description? Also, if you are giving directions to the gathering site, can you think through how best to explain it to a person with a visual impairment?

- **Bathrooms:** Folks may well need to use the restroom during your event. There are long histories of trans and genderqueer people being harassed and in danger when they go into bathrooms, and equally long histories of folks with mobility impairments not being able to access bathrooms due to architecture, and still more history of folks with chemical injuries getting ill from the chemicals used in cleaning bathrooms. If possible, it's helpful to actually go to the public site, see the bathroom and speak with the management. Is there a toilet that is in a bigger stall, that is lowered and/or with a grab bar for folks with mobility impairments? If not, make sure to let folks know in advance of the get together so they can take care of business at home! Is there a "gender neutral" bathroom? If not, can you hang a sign on one for the day that says "Gender Neutral"? Does the site use unscented cleaning products? If not, can you provide them with unscented products and ask them to use them, starting a week before the event?

- **Non-auditory options:** It's important to arrange for ASL interpretation at public events, and to announce to folks that there is ASL interpretation in your promotion if you do have it. Sign language interpretation is a skill acquired with many years of training; unless you are close personal friends with someone who's an ASL interpreter who regularly offers to donate their services, DO NOT assume that you can just get someone to do it for free or cheap at the last minute. Book your ASL interpreter well in advance and pay them. If relevant to the event, get them a script of what will be said ahead of time so they can do their job well.

- **Food options:** If food is part of the gathering, it's great to have multiple options – vegetarian, vegan, high protein (including meat), gluten-free, sugar free, etc. Post ingredients somewhere visible and read them outloud before people start serving. If people have food allergies or dietary restrictions, invite them to let others know what they can eat. If possible, let people know in advance if there will/will not be food for the group so people can plan accordingly.

- **Wheelchair and other mobility-related access:** We've all seen the little blue wheelchair symbol, but that doesn't help to break down mobility needs. Good things to consider include: Is there a working elevator? Are there steps or a steep slope in the building so that access may be limited? For folks where distance can be an issue, is Point A far from Point B? Say how many steps there are, whether they are steep, and whether there's a railing. It's also helpful to include

information about the availability of parking. If there are doors to open and close to enter the site, are they heavy? If there is a bell or buzzer, who will or won't be able to reach it? Are there enough chairs for people? Are there wide chairs? There can be a lot of elements to trouble shoot, which is a good reason to have an access coordinator on the day of.

- **Scents and chemicals:** Can participants be encouraged to avoid scented products (commercial detergents, shampoo, soap, perfume) before the event? Is the space free of air fresheners, scented soaps, and other scented products? For outreach materials, consider a phrase like this "In order for beloved community members with chemical injury to attend, please don't use fragranced products." Given the way that scent moves, consider a fragranced area and a scent free area in your event. For guidelines on how to make your event accessible to people with Multiple Chemical Sensitivities (MCS), please visit: <https://eastbaymeditation.org/resources/fragrance-free-at-ebmc/>.

- **Video Conferencing or Live Streaming:** Do folks need to be in the room? Sometimes not, and you can provide the option of Google chat or Skype for meetings, or live stream the event, for those who can't be there in person.

- **Lighting:** Fluorescent lighting can trigger seizures and can make spaces inaccessible for people with sensory issues and/or neurological diversity. Are other options (like lamps) available? Has there been discussion of flash photography? If not, ask for consent from all participants as the flash can trigger seizures in some.

- **Structured schedules and awareness of time:** When organizing, it's always good to be aware of time – it's important that people know the schedule and that you try your best to stick to it (with flexibility) – for lots of reasons! Attention and information processing needs, pre-scheduled transportation, schedules with assistants, childcare schedules and more can be elements that may impact someone's ability to stay for the event. We can never assume people can stay an hour later if we're late on schedule! If there have to be schedule changes, let people know and be as clear about them as possible.

- **Language access:** Everyone communicates in the way most familiar to them. When you are inviting people to the gathering or having the discussion, will everyone know what you are saying? Are you using words most people will know? If not, can you explain those terms? Check in with folks – would it be helpful for people to say their name before they speak? Are interpreters (e.g. ASL, Spanish, Tagalog, etc) possibly available for the event for community members who have a language other than English as their first language?

- **Access to quiet space:** It can often be helpful to have a space where people can go if they need to be alone/with less stimulation. Do you have the space and flexibility so that people can step back if they are getting overstimulated or tired?

- **Transportation:** How are people arriving? Can people rideshare? Is there public transportation that would dovetail with the time of the viewing? Does paratransit need to be called?

- **Identities and experiences:** Are folks aware of people's preferred gender pronouns (not everyone goes by he/she or him/her, and we can't assume based on presentation)? Similarly, remember that not all disabilities are visible, and some people may choose not to disclose a disability.

- **Transparency:** Be upfront about remaining known barriers.

*Some of this guide has been adapted (with permission and gratitude) from Stacey Milbern's writing.*