UUCC Event Organizer Sensitivity Guide

Created by the UUCC Accessibility and Inclusion Committee

Version 1.0 (DRAFT)

Last Updated <DATE HERE>

Overview

This guide is intended to be read by everyone who organizes any sort of activity, large or small, under the auspices of the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Columbia.

It can be a challenge for anyone organizing an event to fully include folks with disabilities and challenges. Each event, whether it's a Sunday service, a celebration, an extended outing, or a small gathering, has its unique pitfalls that might threaten its accessibility. To help organizers, the UUCC Accessibility and Inclusion Committee has compiled this guide as a checklist to make sure you have considered all the ways your event needs to be inclusive.

It is organized into three sections. Section 1 involves sensitivity to the needs of attendees with disabilities and challenges. Section 2 involves cultural sensitivity. Section 3 outlines how to request improvements to this guide.

Section 2 is currently under construction.

Section 1: Sensitivity to attendees with disabilities and challenges

Section 1.1. Choosing a location, day of week, time of day for the event.

As event organizers plan the location, date, and time, they are urged to consider these concerns:
Accessibility of offsite locations: If the event is offsite, understand whether it is accessible to anyone with mobility challenges. Are there wheelchair ramps on all steps between the arrival space and the room(s) where the event occurs and working elevators to move between levels? Is there sufficient space for wheelchair maneuverability? Are there clear markings for the visually impaired? Are there carpet edges that can snag mobility devices? Are there doors that are challenging to open?
Restroom access at offsite locations: If the event is offsite, are restrooms available? Are they handicap accessible? Are they located close enough to the event and are there accessibility barriers between the event and the rest room?
Public transportation availability at offsite locations: If the event is offsite, is it accessible to someone without a car? Would accessing the site from public transportation pose problems to someone with mobility challenges because of distance or lack of wheelchair accommodation?
Scheduling for availability to working people: If the event occurs in the daytime on a weekday, will it impact accessibility by those with employment responsibilities?
Scheduling for availability to those with evening/nighttime travel challenges:
If the event occurs after dark, will it pose accessibility challenges to drivers with night vision impairment and those reliant on public transportation with evening availability limitations.
Availability of accessible parking: Is parking available and is the event accessible from the parking area for those with accessibility challenges. Are there ample spaces with handicap accommodations?

Section 1.2. Informing the community about the event

When preparing promotional materials, verbal or written announcements, or registration procedures, event organizers are urged to include this information:
Challenges for offsite events: If any accessibility challenges for an offsite event were identified during the analyses from the previous section, clearly communicate what they are.
Restroom availability for offsite events: If restrooms are not available or any accessibility challenges have been identified such as distance, barriers, or lack of handicap accommodations, clearly communicate this.
Transportation challenges for offsite events: If any transportation challenges for an offsite event were identified during the analyses in the previous section, clearly communicate what they are. Clearly communicate whether the site is accessible by car or public transportation, whether parking is available, both handicap-accommodating and non-handicap-accommodating,

and any accessibility challenges that have been identified accessing the site from parking or public transportation.
Accommodation of dietary restrictions: If food is to be served, clearly communicate if and how dietary restrictions can be accommodated, which dietary restrictions can be accommodated, and how to let the organizer know about food concerns.
Compulsory social participation: If there is compulsory participation where attendees are discouraged from "passing" if they do not wish to speak or take part in an activity, clearly communicate this
"Conversational" moderation: If moderated discussion will be conversational (as opposed to calling on people who asked to be recognized), clearly communicate this.
Hearing assistance: Let attendees know if hearing assist devices will be available.
Crafts: If attendees will be working with crafting materials, explain which materials will be used and how they can be manipulated so those with motor issues will be aware of whether they will be able to participate;
Seating: Provide information on seating arrangements, such as chairs with arms, chairs without arms, folding chairs, benches/booths, double wide chairs. Consider providing photos whenever possible
Music or noise: Let attendees know if there will be loud music or noises or other intense sensory experiences that might impact neurodiverse individuals.

Section 1.3. Setting up the space

When setting up for the event, organizers are urged to address the following concerns:
Furniture layout accommodates wheelchairs/walkers: Set up furniture so that ample room is provided to maneuver wheelchairs and walkers. Consider how close/far chairs are spaced for physical comfort. Allow accommodation of attendees who need distance to prevent spread of infectious diseases.
Carpet and flooring: Be alert for loose carpeting that might catch an assistive mobility device or flooring that might be uneven or slippery.
Doors: If heavy doors are present that may present a challenge to attendees, find ways to prop them open or otherwise eliminate the challenge they pose.
Verify accessibility: Verify that all entrances to the building are open and that the electronic door opening mechanisms are operating. If attendees will need to travel over multiple levels, verify that elevators are functional. Verify the existence of clear signage directing attendees to elevators, restrooms, and accessible entrances.
Hearing assist devices: Verify that hearing assist devices are available and that everyone in the room can clearly hear the speaker and see any visuals. Verify that the process for requesting and using these devices is indicated visually.
Loudness: If there will be loud music or other noises, have earplugs available for those who might be impacted.

Section 1.4. During the event

Event organizers are urged to follow these accessibility practices as the event progresses:

Nametags: Encourage use of nametags with room for clearly readable names and pronouns. These will facilitate a sense of belonging for those with memory or face recognition impairments and help everyone feel welcome.
Hearing assist devices: Let people know, both aloud and through clear signage, how to access and use a hearing assist device
Encourage and normalize microphone use: Participants and leaders should use mics whenever possible. All attendees should be discouraged from assuming they don't need a mic.
Visual materials: If information will be presented visually on a screen or on graphics, offer visually impaired attendees preferential seating. Paper copies of materials and information about where to find them online is helpful and encouraged.
Clearly communicate the option to "pass": Unless compulsory participation is covenanted in advance, whenever attendees are encouraged to speak or participate in some way, normalize the option to "pass" (decline). Make sure that option is clearly communicated as available .
Avoid freewheeling or conversational facilitation: Whenever possible during facilitated discussion, allow attendees to request to be recognized (for example by raising hands). Don't use more freewheeling or conversational facilitation where participants do not wait to be recognized unless that format was covenanted in advance.
Accommodate mobility challenges during socializing and movement: If the event involves standing or moving around, either during a break or as part of an organized activity, whenever possible offer alternate ways that those with mobility issues can participate.

Section 1.5. If food is served

Alternatives to standing in line: If attendees are expected to stand in line to receive food, provide an alternative way to receive food for those with mobility challenges. Clearly communicate that the alternative is available and how attendees can take advantage of it.
Ingredients: Identify dishes that may have problematic ingredients for those with food restrictions. If possible, have the ingredient list available.
Food concerns: Make it easy for attendees to communicate food concerns. Clearly communicate how attendees can raise food issues or ask questions.
Sufficient quantities of meal food: If the food is intended to serve as a meal, make sure there is enough food for everyone to meet their nutritional needs. If availability is in question, offer priority to those who have a medical need to eat on time and clearly communicate how attendees can request such priority.

Section 1.6. Afterward

Request feedback from attendees so we can always learn about how to be more welcoming. If an issue arises that was not covered in this guide, please report it using the process described in the "Edits to this guide" section below.

Section 2: Cultural sensitivity

This section is beyond the scope of the Accessibility and Inclusion Committee. We strongly urge the UUCC board of trustees to move forward with a process to complete this section and to improve UUCC's cultural sensitivity overall.

Section 3: Edits to this guide

This guide is intended as a living document. Please email accessibility@uucolumbia.net with subject line “Sensitivity Guide Suggestion” if there is something that needs to be added or changed.