



6 Tips for Leading a Disability Inclusive Meeting

"Build it and they shall come. Don't build it when they come," cautioned Robin Jones, project director at Great Lakes ADA Center and speaker at the Disability Inclusion Lunch & Learn held at Rush last month.

The greatest takeaway from the event is that when leading a meeting, the goal should not be perfection, but respect for all. Furthermore, a meeting is most inclusive when it is accessible to all, not just to people with disabilities.

One in five people have a disability, and the majority of disabilities are invisible. The most important step in making meetings accessible is preparation. Creating the most accessible event possible allows all who attend to participate fully. To ensure every voice is heard and all feel comfortable sharing their ideas, it is essential that meetings are welcoming and accessible to all people.

The following are six ways Jones recommended to increase inclusivity so that all meeting participants are fully engaged and have equal opportunities to contribute:

1. Prepare With Your Audience in Mind

- Consider the potential audience (ask during preregistration about audience needs and accommodations to anticipate what additional resources are needed).
- Give thought to transportation issues (distance from airport, access to public transportation or shuttle services) and housing (hotels nearby with accessible rooms, path of travel from hotel to meeting site).

2. Make Presentation Materials Accessible

- Provide materials in accessible formats, such as large print, electronic and Braille upon request.
- Proactively arrange accommodations (sign language interpreters, real-time captioning) and only cancel if not requested.
- Ensure that messages are accessible when using social media (including alt tags on images, using camel case #LikeThis for hashtags).
 - Read more about [Content Comprehension Levels / Readability](#)
 - Read more about [Web Accessibility](#) and how to [Evaluate Web Accessibility](#)
 - Additional [Web Accessibility Resources](#)

3. Present Clearly and Effectively

- Always face the audience. It's especially helpful for audience members who are speech readers (lip readers).
- Cover all content projected on a screen in presentation remarks.
- Describe anything that is being demonstrated visually.
- Repeat all questions posed by the audience, regardless of "amplification" available.

4. Make Your PowerPoint Presentation Accessible

- Use a sans serif font that is at least 22 point; use a plain, light-colored background with dark text; and embed "Alt Text" descriptions with images and other graphic elements, which cannot be read by screen readers.
- Use [this guide](#) to create an accessible PowerPoint presentation

5. Use Communication Services to Assist the Hearing/Vision Impaired

- Sign language interpreters: Identify a location in the room for positioning of the sign language interpreter and ensure adequate lighting. If possible, provide the interpreter with a copy of the presentation materials in advance.

- Real-time captioning: Provide the caption professional with a copy of the presentation materials in advance, if possible, and arrange for placement of captioning service depending on number of users to allow participants a view of the speaker/podium.
- Amplification: Request that speakers repeat all questions asked by the audience, and provide table microphones with stands and/or lavalier microphones for speakers with disabilities.

6. Ensure Access for Everyone

- Identify “quiet” areas where individuals who experience anxiety and/or become overloaded by the stimuli can go to “decompress.”
- Establish “reserved” seating areas in meeting rooms, banquet rooms, etc. for individuals who may be using sign language interpreters or real-time captioning.
- Conduct disability awareness training with venue staff (front desk, maintenance, catering, etc.).
- Use a specific layout for meetings where roughly 10 percent of attendees use mobility devices (wheelchairs, scooters, crutches, etc.) or have a service animal.

You can also consult the [American Disability Association Guide for Accessible Meetings, Events, and Conferences](#) for more information.

At the lunch and learn, Jones also reminded us of another aspect to keep in mind: “Creating accessible meetings should become the norm, **not** an exception.”

Get Involved

Join the Rush Disabilities Employee Resource Group at our [next meeting on Aug. 1](#), to share ideas and explore initiatives to make Rush an even better place to work.