

Meeting Access Universal & Co-Design Guidelines

The following information is provided to help event organizers use the principles of universal design for accessibility at Smith meetings, events and functions. There are four essential requirements that should be addressed proactively and additional accessibility guidelines that will make events more accessible, which should be considered in the planning process and incorporated to the greatest extent possible. Each individually requested accommodation should be made, unless there is a specific reason that it cannot be provided or arranged. Contact the [Accessibility Resource Center](#) with questions.

Requirements:

1. Post notice of accessibility: Include a notice on flyers and other means of advertising that allows someone to request accommodations with email, phone number, and a deadline. **Sample: This event is wheelchair accessible. Other accommodations can be requested by calling or emailing (event organizer) by (date necessary to make arrangements).**
2. Hold all events in accessible locations: all events/meetings paid for or sponsored by the college must be held in an accessible location. Entrances, pathways, and bathrooms must be accessible.
3. Informational materials must be accessible: print materials to be read at the meeting or event must be available in large print of at least 16 point font, preferably on 11x17 paper (prepare two copies unless otherwise requested). Any visual PowerPoint or things written on the board must also be read out loud.
4. Assure communication access: all films and videos shown must be captioned. Use spaces that have assisted listening devices readily available. Use amplification whenever possible, needed, or requested.

Suggested Universal and Co-Design Guidelines:

Mobility – make the event/meeting space navigable for a wheelchair or someone using walking aids.

- Flat or ramped entrance with no stairs
- Elevator or first floor location
- Assure that there is accessible parking close by
- Outdoor events should be held on a flat area, the less grass the better
- Space tables and chairs far enough apart so that anyone can pass between them
- Keep aisles clear and passable (32 inches minimum)
- Remove some chairs from table spaces or have someone to assist in removing chairs
- Low podium, keyboard access, table microphone, or handheld mic with stand for speakers
- Clear access to food area, food within reach from sitting height
- Consider activities with an accessibility/ability lens. Are there equally effective and fun alternatives, could we offer different options for varying interests and abilities?

Communication – assure that everyone can give and receive information effectively.

- Allow closer/reserved seating upon request
- Speakers must face the audience and keep hands clear of their face
- Ask participants to raise a hand before speaking
- Control cross talk, ask people to speak one at a time
- Provide a sign language interpreter or C-Print captioning upon request

Visual – assure that information is communicated in clear and non-visual ways and that the space is navigable.

- Ask participants to say their names when they speak to allow for tracking voices.
- Make handouts/information available online prior to meetings in word documents or PowerPoint and let participants know where to access the information.
- Give clear directions to the location, i.e. “Turn right after entering the building, the room is 30 feet away on the left down the central corridor.” Use clear signage to mark functions or give directions. Have someone available to direct/escort participants to the location.
- Allow service dogs. A service dog is trained to provide assistance with certain tasks for blind or disabled individuals. Owners must remove dogs that are not well-behaved. For more information, see the college policy on Service Animals which is available on the ODS website.

Learning/Attention/Cognitive - make information available through different modalities.

- Give clear instructions/directions
- Use multimedia presentations: speak, write, and demonstrate to communicate information
- Allow use of recording devices
- Designate a notetaker and send notes to participants after the meeting
- Make information/handouts available online prior to the meeting in Word or PowerPoint
- Leave time for questions!

Psychological/Emotional – make space for self-care.

- Consider use of content advisories regarding graphic or explicit material
- Encourage participants to take breaks as needed
- Identify quiet spaces for regrouping or downtime during long events

Environmental Sensitivity – to the extent possible, reduce environmental irritants, such as scents, noise, light, extreme temperatures.

- Establish a voluntary no scents policy
- Ask participants to refrain from wearing perfumes, colognes, or other heavily scented products
- Change a meeting location if the area has recently been painted or has new carpets
- Minimize background noise
- If possible, adjust light and heat controls when requested, depending on the situation

Dietary Concerns – provide food options that consider allergies and accessibility.

- Offer multiple food choices, such as gluten free options
- Avoid common allergens such as nuts
- Label all ingredients in food provided
- Indicate ahead of time what food will be available – i.e. dinner, light refreshments, snacks, desert only
- Keep food at table level, keep napkins and utensils within reach, have straws

The Americans with Disabilities Act is a comprehensive civil rights law designed to end discrimination and exclusion of people in our society on the basis of disability. The ADA requires colleges to make all of their programs and activities accessible to individuals with disabilities, but its promise of equal access cannot be fulfilled unless everyone takes ownership and works to make access and full participation a reality. These basic guidelines for universal design may be modified to accommodate individual needs and preferences, as well as environmental limitations. While not every guideline can be followed or is needed in every circumstance, proactively providing the four required basics sends the message that accessibility is an important priority and expected as a shared cultural norm. It becomes a habit that reflects our values and allows disabled people to interact equally and seamlessly without constantly having to ask for assistance. It makes our world more accessible and accepting for everyone.

We are all part of the community at Smith and ultimately we need to talk, think, feel, and problem solve together so that everyone can participate as equals. If you need assistance thinking through a situation or need help providing a requested accommodation, please feel free to contact [The Accessibility Resource Center](#) at arc@smith.edu or call 413-585-2071.