

# Meeting the Needs of People with disAbilities

## Community Guide to Accessible Events & Meetings

Recommendations from Age Friendly Seattle,  
an initiative to make Seattle a great place  
to grow up AND grow old.



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## Why We Produced This Guide

Disability is a fact of life for tens of thousands of Seattle residents. In every part of our city, people live, work, and play with a range of abilities, including people who are blind or have low vision, deaf or hard of hearing, or challenged by learning disabilities, speech limitations, or mobility barriers.

Age Friendly Seattle produced this guide as part of their commitment to developing a city that is accessible and inclusive of all ages and abilities. By planning and implementing accessible events, meetings, and activities, and effective communications, we help to ensure that all Seattle residents can participate in events and contribute wisdom and talent to their communities with independence, equity, and dignity.

The City of Seattle encourages everyone to participate in its programs and activities, regardless of ability. For accommodations, materials in alternate formats, or accessibility information, contact Age Friendly Seattle ([agefriendly@seattle.gov](mailto:agefriendly@seattle.gov) or 206-684-0662 or Relay 711) or visit [www.seattle.gov/americans-with-disabilities-act](http://www.seattle.gov/americans-with-disabilities-act) at your earliest opportunity.

## Chapter 1: Accessible Events & Meetings

The chapter provides event coordinators, and program planners with information and tools with which to make communications and events accessible to individuals with disabilities. Tools are provided in several ways—embedded links to online resources as well as checklists and supporting documents found in the [Appendix](#).

Planning accessible events does not need to be daunting. The key is to remember your audience:

- Twenty-three percent of King County adults age 18+ self-identify as having a disability.<sup>1</sup>
- Thirty-eight percent of King County residents age 60 and older self-identify as having disabilities.<sup>2</sup>
- At every age, racial and ethnic minorities experience even higher rates of disability.<sup>3</sup>

If your event is truly inclusive of all members of the community, providing accommodations for individuals with disabilities must be a key step in the planning process.

An accessible event will have higher attendance and a broader audience. If your event or meeting is participatory, you will benefit from the perspectives of a broader ranges of ages and abilities.

Good planning can eliminate the need for individual accommodations later. Consider accessibility from the very early stages of your planning process.

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*Age Friendly Seattle believes that our community is strengthened by providing additional support to ensure that individuals with disabilities and without disabilities have meaningful experiences.*

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### Who is required to provide accommodations to individuals with disabilities?

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires state and local governments (Title II) and many businesses and organizations that provide public accommodations and commercial facilities (Title III) to provide reasonable accommodations for individuals with disabilities.

For detailed information, ADA technical assistance manuals are available online:

- Title II: [www.ada.gov/taman2.html](http://www.ada.gov/taman2.html)
- Title III: [www.ada.gov/taman3.html](http://www.ada.gov/taman3.html)

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<sup>1</sup> Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey, King County and United States, 2011–2013

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> American Community Survey (2009–2013 five-year estimates)

## Starting Premise

Age Friendly Seattle believes that our community is strengthened by providing additional support to ensure that individuals with disabilities and without disabilities have meaningful experiences.

Age Friendly Seattle subscribes to the seven principles of Universal Design<sup>4</sup>, which can be applied to any type of process, including event planning:

1. **Equitable Use**—The event is useful and marketable to people with diverse abilities.
2. **Flexibility in Use**—The event accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities.
3. **Simple and Intuitive Use**—The event is easy to understand, regardless of the participant’s experience, knowledge, language skills, or current concentration level.
4. **Perceptible Information**—The event communicates necessary information effectively to the user, regardless of ambient conditions or the user’s sensory abilities.
5. **Tolerance for Error**—The event minimizes hazards and the adverse consequences of accidental or unintended actions.
6. **Low Physical Effort**—The event can be used efficiently and comfortably and with a minimum of fatigue.
7. **Size and Space for Approach and Use**—Appropriate size and space is provided for approach, reach, manipulation, and use, regardless of the user’s body size, posture, or mobility.

## Event Roles & Responsibilities

One aspect of event planning that is often overlooked is assignment of roles and responsibilities, and requisite staff and/or volunteer training. Since event staff are the “face” of your organization, everyone involved should know how to create a welcoming and enjoyable atmosphere.

When events have co-sponsors, each co-sponsor is equally responsible for ADA compliance. If your organization is co-sponsoring but not leading the planning, be sure to determine in advance who is responsible for receiving request for accommodations and who will pay for auxiliary services, if needed. See the [Co-Sponsored Events Checklist](#) and related tools in the Appendix.

Staffing considerations include:

- **Accommodation requests:** It is essential that everyone who takes calls, processes registrations, or receives inquiries from the public knows how to respond to a request for accommodation (see [Providing Appropriate Notice](#) later in this chapter).
- **Budget:** Many accommodation requests will involve some expense to your organization. Since the ADA requires that reasonable accommodation be provided, be prepared to take this into consideration when developing the budget for your events.
- **Event setup:** Assign someone to be responsible for assuring that all accommodations (e.g., ASL interpreters, assistive listening devices, large print, or Braille materials) requested in advance are available at the event site before participants begin to arrive. Assistive listening devices should be tested before participants arrive.

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<sup>4</sup> Universal Design refers to broad-spectrum ideas meant to produce buildings, products, and environments that are inherently accessible to older people, people without disabilities, and people with disabilities. For local information, visit the Northwest Universal Design Council website at [www.environmentforall.org](http://www.environmentforall.org).

- **Equipment:** Test any special equipment (e.g., assistive listening devices or systems) in advance.
- **Sign-in Table:** Have a person near or at the registration or sign-in table to assist anyone needing help in completing necessary paperwork, or in reading event/meeting materials not available in an alternative format. This person should also watch the entrance lines for signs of someone who may need a chair while waiting.
- **All staff:** Alert all staff and volunteers as to where accessible restrooms and accessibility features are located as well as anything that generally requires a visual cue (e.g., location handout or refreshment table, if photos will be taken).

Serious thought should be given to offering “awareness training” for staff and volunteers so they can assist participants effectively. At minimum, all persons involved on the day of the event/meeting should be provided copies of the [Etiquette When Working with Individuals who Experience Communication Barriers](#) found in the Appendix.

## Site Selection

Typically, we think of public events taking place in large venues, such as school auditoriums, local government facilities, or rented halls. These venues are likely to be accessible for individuals with mobility challenges but may have other accessibility challenges, which this guide will discuss.

Sometimes neighborhood gatherings take place in private homes, condo recreation rooms, or small business venues that may not be accessible. Event planners are strongly encouraged to move to an accessible location. If the event sponsor or any co-sponsor is subject to ADA regulations, an accessible venue is mandatory.

Following are four basic accessibility considerations:

1. **Transit:** Can the venue be reached by transit as well as by car? A reasonable distance is two blocks to a bus stop, if level; less, if the venue is situated on a hill.
2. **Accessible parking:** “Accessible parking” refers to a space that has been properly striped and displays the international symbol of accessibility.
3. **Drop-off and pick-up points:** An accessible facility should have a designated (preferably covered) drop-off and pick-up area (preferably covered) that is clearly marked and readily identifiable by paratransit drivers, personal drivers, and waiting passengers.
4. **Accessible restrooms:** Are restrooms ADA-compliant, with wheelchair-accessible stalls and sink control and paper products within easy reach?
5. **Communication access:** A public address (PA) system is available, along with compatible assistive listening devices, and the room can be set up with clear sight lines for participants who have hard of hearing.

It is always easier to choose a venue that is fully accessible than to hire services and install equipment for a special event. If your venue does not meet the basic requirements above, you should consider moving to a different venue.

For a longer list of accessibility considerations, see Site Visit, below, as well as the [Site Accessibility Checklist](#) in the Appendix.

## Site Visit

Unless you have visited the site recently to review accessibility, you are encouraged to inspect any proposed event sites prior to scheduling to determine suitability, and then plan for potential accommodations.

Be sure to review the following:

- Ambient noise
- Building access
- Building corridors
- Elevators or ramps between levels
- Entrances
- Lighting
- Outlets
- Pathways
- Restrooms
- Resting places and entrance line seating
- Room setup
- Signage/wayfinding
- Sound system and hearing aid compatible assistive listening devices (e.g., head sets, neck loops)
- Stage or riser
- Water fountains

Additional issues you should consider if your event will take place at an outdoor venue (e.g., public park, stadium, or other open area) include:

- Accessible parking
- Concession areas and stands
- Event access, including wayfinding to event
- Park or stadium entrances
- Pathway slope and surface
- Restrooms (nearby buildings or portable)
- Seating
- Signage at event
- Surface conditions (e.g., muddy or slippery)
- Utilities (e.g., electrical power)

Review the [Site Accessibility Checklist](#) found in the Appendix. Make a photocopy to take with on the site visit.

## Unique Venues

If your venue is unique and no alternative is available (e.g., dedication of a historic site or remote outdoor area), you can contact the Northwest ADA Center to brainstorm and craft creative solutions. If the City of Seattle is a co-sponsor of your event, you can request an e-mail or phone consultation with the department's ADA coordinator. See also [Creating a More Accessible Venue](#) in the Appendix.

## Remote Participation

Remote participation is a valuable option, not only for people who may not be physically able to attend the meeting but also people with busy schedules. While using technology during the meeting and finding a meeting space with phone and/or Internet connection may feel like a hassle, the benefits outweigh the costs. Some organizations choose to hold all-remote events (e.g., a telephone town hall meeting or a Twitter or Facebook chat).

Skype is a common service for remote participation—on screen, if a camera is available, or off, like a conference call. If you are not familiar with Skype, help is available via Lynda.com (e.g., “Up and Running with Skype for Business”). Other services are also available—look for services that provide a closed captioning option.



## Scheduling & Inviting Participation

Once you have ensured that your event is physically accessible, you can schedule and invite people to participate.

### Timing

Organizations tend to offer programs and events at certain times and days. Stay flexible, and consider availability of accessible public transit options, personal assistants' schedules, and other barriers that make it difficult for individuals with disabilities to get to locations before mid-morning or stay beyond mid-afternoon. People of all abilities can find it difficult to attend during traditional work hours.

To accommodate the constraints of varied daily schedules, it is ideal to host repeat sessions on a range of different days and times so people have choices of when they can attend.

### Providing Appropriate Notice

Your event notice should inform your audience—and anyone who wishes to attend—that reasonable accommodations are available upon request. The following language must be printed at the bottom of all information disseminated to publicize your event/meeting, including registration materials:

- **Standard:** “[organization name] encourages everyone to participate. For accommodations or accessibility information, contact [name | phone | e-mail ] or visit [URL].”
- **Where space is limited:** “For accommodations or accessibility information, contact [name | phone | e-mail ] or visit [URL].”
- **Where space is not a concern (e.g., reports and other documents):** “[organization name] encourages everyone to participate in its programs and activities, regardless of ability. For accommodations, materials in alternate formats, or accessibility information, contact [name | phone | e-mail ] or visit [URL] at your earliest opportunity.”

Hearing communication access is important. Many people who have hearing loss are reluctant to request an accommodation and avoid public events. If they know the event already provides hearing access, they are more likely to attend. If you have arranged for CART captioning or offer assisted listening devices, use the international symbol for hearing access. If your event is held in a looped venue, use the international symbol for hearing access that includes a “T” (for T-coil) in the lower right corner.



Many people experience unpleasant physical effects from scented products and fragrances that attach to clothing and skin—reactions that can be strong and disabling. Consider adopting a fragrance policy that event notice. Following is a draft policy similar to one adopted by the U.S. Access Board:

- Event notices shall include: “Persons attending [organization] events are requested to refrain from using perfume, cologne, and other fragrances for the comfort of other participants.”
- Signs will be posted outside meeting rooms reminding persons attending the meeting to refrain from using fragrances.
- Facilities where [organization]-sponsored events will be held will be requested to remove or disconnect any fragrance-emitting devices from the meeting rooms and adjoining restrooms, and not to schedule any remodeling activities (e.g., painting, wallpapering) or shampoo carpets or apply pesticides prior to [organization] meetings.

## Registration

If your event requires completion of a registration form in advance, space should be provided on the form to allow participants to request their desired accommodation. Remember to make the registration form itself—whether print, digital, or online—accessible to individuals who are blind or have low vision. Use accessibility checkers available with your software. To check PDF accessibility, use Adobe Acrobat DC Pro.

Online applications such as [Survey Monkey](#) and [Eventbrite](#) appear to be accessible by digital screen reader when you follow the company's guidelines. If you use these or other programs to create an online registration form, ask someone who uses a screen reader or voice-activated software to test it for you.

When participants arrive at a public event, they are usually invited to sign in, which can be challenging for people who cannot hold a pen or see well. If you asked for pre-registration, you can print names of people you expect to attend. Participants can initial the list to indicate their attendance. This is easier and faster for people of all abilities. See additional tips for registration table staff under [Event Roles & Responsibilities](#), above.

## Outreach

Keep in mind that most residents with disabilities do not receive services related to disability and may not be affiliated with a disability advocacy organization. When you include notice that indicates you will provide accommodations and can answer questions about accessibility, you are indicating your interest in serving all Seattle residents, regardless of ability.

## Program Planning

A fully accessible event or meeting requires advance planning and may require training.

## Program Activities

Some events include activities such as breakout sessions, tabling, wall voting, question-and-answer sessions, and short events (indoors or outdoors) that may not be fully accessible. Consider whether guests with mobility challenges will be able to be able to participate. Also consider the needs of guests who have hearing challenges (e.g., small groups sessions may not use a PA system, and captioning is usually available only in one activity area). Plan activities accordingly.

## Presenters

Provide your presenters with two handouts from the Appendix:

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*Most residents with disabilities do not receive services related to disability and may not be affiliated with a disability advocacy organization. Your accommodations/ accessibility notice indicates your interest in serving all residents, regardless of ability.*

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- [Tips for Presenters](#)
- [Etiquette When Working with Individuals who Experience Communication Barriers](#)

If you have not worked with your presenter before, inquire whether they need an accommodation in order to participate (e.g., a ramp, if there is a riser or stage).

Additional tips are available via the [Commission for People with disAbilities](#) (Seattle Office for Civil Rights).

### ***Script Preparation***

When preparing speaking points—for yourself or someone else—remember that a good oral presentation using PowerPoint includes “captioned” photos and images—words that reflect the visual elements for audience members who cannot see the content of the screen. Those images and their descriptions should be meaningful. In other words, don’t just decorate a PowerPoint presentation—includes photos and images that support the presentation in a meaningful way, and explain the relevance in the spoken word.

## **Event setup**

### ***Entrance Lines***

If long lines are anticipated, consider alternate ways to register and/or provide seating to individuals with mobility barriers or other conditions that make standing difficult.

### ***Room Setup***

It is important to consider the line of sight for participants who are deaf or hard of hearing. Whenever possible, participants should receive priority seating where they can see the speaker’s face, the presentation screen, and the ASL interpreter and/or CART<sup>5</sup> caption screen, as appropriate.

If the room has windows, consider whether it is necessary to provide a dark screen behind the ASL interpreters and/or CART caption screen (or re-position to avoid glare or light saturation).

If there are break-out sessions or table discussions, individuals who require assistive listening devices or services should be accommodated in their choice of room or table. It is preferable if accessible seating is not limited to one area. Individuals with disabilities prefer to have choice in seating, like everyone else.

### ***Seating***

A variety of seating options may be needed for full accessibility. Considerations include larger chairs (e.g., extra-wide chairs, chairs with backs and/or arm rests)

Individuals who depend on speech reading (aka “lip reading”) require seating near the presenter, with sufficient light on the presenter’s face.

For additional room setup ideas, visit [Creating a More Accessible Venue](#) in the Appendix.

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<sup>5</sup> CART—Communication Access Real Time translation—is described in more detail in the [Accommodations](#) portion of this document.

## Public Meeting Accommodations

Following is a list of commonly requested auxiliary aids and services:

- Accessible digital communications
- Assistive listening devices
- Assistive listening systems
- Audio recordings
- Braille materials
- Captioning
- Computer-aided transcription services
- Large print materials
- Notetakers
- Qualified ASL interpreters
- Qualified readers
- Qualified tactile interpreters
- Telecommunications relay service (711)
- Written materials

### *ASL & Tactile Interpretation*

American Sign Language (ASL) and tactile interpretation is available through a number of local vendors. Lists of interpreters are available online via a search engine and are also listed on the [Washington State Department of Social and Health Services](#) website. The [Northwest ADA Center](#) may have lists, too.

ASL and tactile interpreters are in a high demand and need to be retained as early as possible. Even two weeks' lead time may be insufficient. Be sure you know at least two different vendors for ASL and tactile interpretation services prior to receiving a request.

Note that two interpreters are usually required for any meeting. Also, remember to request additional pairs of interpreters for breakout sessions or small group discussions.

Event coordinators should consider requesting interpretation services as soon as an event date, time, and place is determined.

If promotional materials state that ASL interpretation is available, coordinators do not need to receive additional requests for ASL accommodation; however, you may wish to continue receiving requests in order to arrange preferred seating. In general, there is no limit to the number of audience members that ASL interpreters can accommodate.

### *Assistive Listening Systems & Devices*

Assistive listening technology is designed to improve communication access for people who have diminished hearing. Assistive Listening Systems (ALSs) should be made available for any participant upon request. An ALS is the gateway through which people with hearing loss access sound that is transmitted through a public address (PA) system. An ALS brings the sound close, eliminates reverberation, and helps to separate the sounds people want to hear from competing noise.

[Large area systems](#) include hearing loop, FM and Infrared. Each system requires a transmitter and a receiver. Telecoil (or T-coil) equipped hearing aids and Cochlear implants double as receivers. Participants with these devices do not need an additional receiver in a venue equipped with a hearing loop. Those without a T-coil equipped hearing device can use a loop receiver and headset.

- **Hearing Loop**—For more information, visit the Hearing Loss Association of America's [Hearing Help webpage](#). A growing number of event spaces have been equipped with hearing loops. For rental locations, visit Let's Loop Seattle's Washington Loops [webpage](#).

- FM and Infrared systems require receivers for every participant requiring accommodation. Coupling accessories to accommodate the spectrum of hearing loss should be provided—headsets and, for participants with telecoil equipped hearing devices, neck loops.

Remember to test all equipment well in advance of using them at an event, and then test them again in the event space. Noise and magnetic interference can render ALDs useless.

Small area systems include counter loops (sometimes called “privacy loops”) that have a limited range of two to three feet. Counter loops are used in areas like information tables, banks, reception desks, pharmacy counters, or check out points where people are transient (moving through an area). They are very useful for interview or intake situations. Because of their limited range, counter loops are not appropriate for most events and meetings.

Personal technologies can help people hear better and communicate in one-to-one conversations but are not suitable for events and meetings. [Pocketalker](#) is one example of a handheld amplifier with a microphone that can bring sound closer and may filter some background noise.

### **Braille**

Individuals who read Braille may request promotional materials (e.g., the event flyer), agendas and/or handouts in Braille.

Short documents can be translated to Braille by the [Seattle Public Library Equal Access Program—LEAP](#) (206-615-1380 or [leap@spl.org](mailto:leap@spl.org)) at no cost. Longer documents can be translated to Braille by one of the following organizations (there may be a charge):

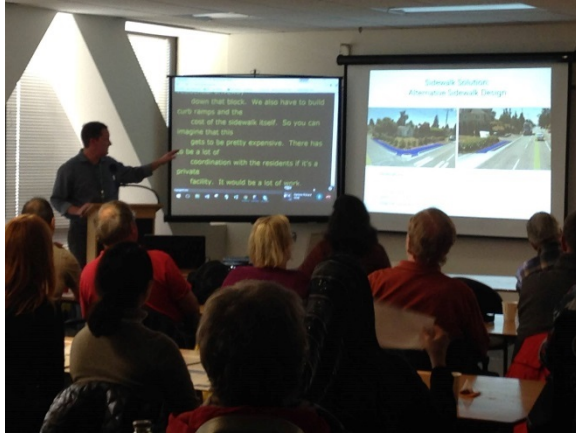
- [Washington Talking Book & Braille Library](#) (206-615-0400 or [wttbbl@wttbbl.org](mailto:wttbbl@wttbbl.org))
- [Washington State School for the Blind](#) (Vancouver, WA)—contact the [Braille Services Team](#) at 360-947-3340 or 360-947-3344.

### **CART Captioning**

CART is an acronym for Communication Access Real-time Transcription (sometimes the T stands for Translation). It is sometimes referred to as real-time captioning or live captioning (as opposed to recorded or broadcast captioning). A trained court reporter, using a steno machine and specialized software, listens to an event or meeting and creates an instant transcript of what is said. This can be done onsite with a live CART writer (captioner) or remotely with a conference phone or other audio connection for the CART writer to hear the event, and an internet connection for the user to receive the captions. Typically, a separate laptop, projector, and slide screen are needed.







CART caption screens should be portable (e.g., manual tripod or pull-up projection screens, not fixed mount), allowing flexible and optimal placement. The CART caption screen should be as close to the presenter as possible so that lip-readers can watch and read without much head and neck movement. Neither screen should not be placed behind the presenter.



Ask presenters to provide PowerPoint or other slidedecks in advance and make those available in advance to your CART caption writer.

Remember to schedule additional CART writers for breakout sessions or small group discussions.

New technology allows captions to appear on the same screen as the PowerPoint presentation similar to the way it appears in closed captioning on TV. This technology simplifies setup (reducing the number of projectors and screens you need to use). It also reduces head and neck movement for participants who are reading the screen. One example is [1CapApp](#) with [1Fuzion](#), which also streams to smart phones.

<b>Communication Access for Individuals Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing</b> No "one-size-fits-all" accommodation at events and meetings						
Accommodation	American Sign Language (ASL) Interpretation	Tactile Interpretation	CART Captioning	Assistive Listening Systems	Hearing Loop	Other Considerations
What is it?	Manual communication (visual)	Manual communication (touch)	Communication Access Realtime Translation (speech-to-text interpreting service)	System that transmits sound from a PA system to receivers via headsets, earbuds, neck loops, or telecoil-enabled hearing aids and Cochlear implants.	Audio induction loop that transmits sound to T-coil equipped hearing aids and devices.	Microphone/PA system; reserved seating; and good lighting.
Who uses it?	Deaf	Deaf-Blind	Hard of Hearing and Late Deafened (who cannot read ASL)	Hard of Hearing and those with auditory processing disorders.	Hard of Hearing and those with auditory processing disorders.	Beneficial for all but insufficient to accommodate hearing loss alone.
Where?	Via an interpreter, in person or remote using webcam & internet	Via an interpreter, in person.	Onsite or remote caption writer, text appears on screen.	Onsite, where there is a sound system.	Wire installed in looped zone or grid, connected to sound system	Hearing loss and acoustics should be considered everywhere.
Other	ASL is a "native language" for many people who are deaf. There is no substitute.	Several variations—often arranged via ASL interpreter service agencies.	Also aids English language learners, those with comprehension difficulties, and anyone in a noisy environment.	Personal amplification devices usually not suitable for large meetings.	Permanent or temporary installations. Also works with T-coil equipped Assisted Listening Devices.	Many people rely on a combination of line of sight, speech reading, assistive listening, and CART captioning.
More Info*	<a href="http://bit.ly/2yaGfYL">bit.ly/2yaGfYL</a>	<a href="http://bit.ly/2yaGfYL">bit.ly/2yaGfYL</a>	<a href="http://bit.ly/2yi7MOI">bit.ly/2yi7MOI</a>	<a href="http://bit.ly/2a3SLEn">bit.ly/2a3SLEn</a>	<a href="http://hearingloop.org">hearingloop.org</a>	<a href="http://hearingloss-wa.org">hearingloss-wa.org</a>
Symbol (variations available online)			 <small>(Use any screen image with CART at center, not a closed captioning symbol.)</small>			

Always include an accommodation statement on event and meeting notices. Here's one example: "For accessibility information or to request an accommodation, contact NAME at E-MAIL or PHONE#." Promote your event or meeting early enough to make necessary arrangements (i.e., a minimum of two weeks in advance and longer is much better).

\*Several URLs are specific to Washington state. A good national resource is [www.hearingloss.org](http://www.hearingloss.org). For interpreter referrals, contact your organization's ADA coordinator.

Matrix developed for public use by Age Friendly Seattle 11/9/18 [www.seattle.gov/agefriendly](http://www.seattle.gov/agefriendly)

### Communication Access for Individuals Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

Click on the image above to open this easy reference guide to Communication Access for Individuals Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing (<https://bit.ly/2FdrYlK>). The PDF can be printed on 8.5"x14" paper.



### ***Microphones and Sound Systems***

Use of a sound system is a fundamental accommodation for people who struggle to hear. Whenever possible, use amplification. Ensure that every presenter is comfortable holding the mic close to his or her mouth for the best sound quality. Schedule early arrival so that presenters can become familiar with the microphone(s) they will use.

Ensure that audience questions are also spoken into a microphone. Ask audience members to wait for the mic before speaking.

Effective microphone use includes pausing when turning one's head (e.g., to view a PowerPoint slide or something happening off to the side). If wearing a lavalier (lapel) mic, remind presenters not to turn away.

### ***Exclusions***

If an attendee with a disability needs assistance, provide help but remember that staff and volunteers are not required to do personal chores (e.g., feeding, toileting).

### **Service Animals**

Service animals are permitted to accompany their handlers anywhere members of the public have been invited. Two basic rules to remember:

- You *may* ask a service animal owner what service their animal is trained to provide.
- You may *not* ask, "What is your disability?"

Although not required by the ADA, at larger and/or longer events, event planners may wish to identify a source of drinking water for service animals and an outdoor relief area with nearby trashcan as a customer service measure.

For more information about service animals, visit the following sites:

- [www.ada.gov/service\\_animals\\_2010.htm](http://www.ada.gov/service_animals_2010.htm)
- [www.nwadacenter.org/toolkit/service-animals](http://www.nwadacenter.org/toolkit/service-animals)

## Chapter 2: Effective Communications

It is important to ensure that the materials you develop are accessible by individuals with communication barriers. The ADA requires that we take steps to ensure that our communications with people with disabilities are as effective and meaningful as communications with people without disabilities.

### Accessible digital communications

The University of Washington ([www.washington.edu/accessibility/documents/](http://www.washington.edu/accessibility/documents/)) provides clear instructions for creation of accessible digital communications—including information that can be accessed by electronic screen readers—including:

- E-mail messages
- Word documents
- PDFs
- Fixing inaccessible PDFs

Per the U.S. Department of Justice, to meet ADA requirements, all digital communications must comply with the [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\) 2.0 AA](#) standards.

### Age- and disability-friendly print communications

The best rule of thumb for print communications is “keep it simple.” In print communications, less means more.

- Use matte (non-reflective) paper to reduce glare.
- Use 12 point type or larger (18-point for people with vision impairment).
- Use easy-to-read sans serif fonts such as Arial, Verdana, Tahoma, or Tw Cen MT.
- Limit fonts to one or two.
- Use wide margins and ample space between lines.
- Left-justify text.
- Use simple sentence case for general text.
- Reserve Title Case for headlines.
- Avoid *italics*, **bold**, ALL CAPS, and underlining—all are difficult for older readers to see.
- Include commonly-understood symbols and illustrations.
- Ensure high contrast between paper and ink color. If in doubt, check contrast and get suggestions for improvements using a free online using [Contrast Checker](#).
- Use a spiral or ring binder for booklets, making it easier to turn pages.

### Alternative formats

You may receive requests to provide promotional materials, agendas, presentations and/or handouts in a different format. This may include:

- Braille
- Large print
- Audio recording
- Digital version



When an event is expected to attract a large number of people, there is greater likelihood that large print materials will be need. Prepare several sets of materials in large print (18-point or larger type size).

## **Plain language**

Several years ago, the federal government developed plain language guidelines that work. Among many recommendations available at [PlainLanguage.gov](https://www.plainlanguage.gov/):

- Write for your audience.
- Write useful headings.
- Write short sentences.
- Use active verbs.
- Use short, simple words.
- Avoid acronyms and both bureaucratic and trendy jargon. If you must use acronyms or jargon, provide an easy reference sheet.

## **Accommodations**

See [Public Meeting Accommodations](#) in the Appendix for information about auxiliary aids and devices.

## Conclusion

Our intent in preparing this guide has been to provide information and tools you need to ensure that community members with disabilities receive the consideration and support they need to enjoy meaningful participation in events, meetings, or processes.

While this document does not respond to every situation that may arise, an effort has been made to address the most common issues and situations.

## Contact

Age Friendly Seattle

[agefriendly@seattle.gov](mailto:agefriendly@seattle.gov)

[www.seattle.gov/agefriendly](http://www.seattle.gov/agefriendly)



# Appendix

## Site Accessibility Checklist

Use this checklist to evaluate basic accessibility in an unfamiliar venue. Take a photocopy with you on your site visit.

Venue: \_\_\_\_\_

Event: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Room: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Have you taken photos for future reference? Exterior  Yes  No Interior  Yes  No

### Venue/Facility Access

Have you considered?	Yes	No
Are parking spaces near main facility/venue entrance?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is there one accessible/disabled parking space for every 25 parking spaces?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is there a "drop off" zone at facility/venue entrance?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is there a step-free route from the parking lot to the building entrance?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is the venue/facility entrance doorway at least 32" wide?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is the slope from parking to building entrance 1:12 or less?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If the wheelchair accessible entrance is not the primary entrance, is there a sign on the primary entrance directing persons to the accessible entrance?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do doors have lever handles or pressure plates?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is the door easy to open? Or should staff be assigned to open and close doors?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are other than revolving doors available?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is path of travel free of obstruction and wide enough for a wheelchair (36"+)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is floor surface hard and not slippery?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If the floor is carpeted, is it firm (not heavily cushioned)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do obstacles (e.g., phones, fountains) protrude no more than four inches?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are elevator controls low enough to be reached from a wheelchair?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are elevator markings in Braille for the blind?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does elevator provide audible signals for the blind?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does elevator interior provide a turning area 51" deep for wheelchairs?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are restrooms near facility/venue entrance?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are restrooms identified in Braille?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do conference room doors have Braille signs?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do doors have lever handles?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are doors at least 32" wide?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Have you considered?	Yes	No
Are grab bars provided in toilet stalls?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are sinks at least 30" high with room for a wheelchair to roll under?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are sink handles easily reached and used?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are soap and towel dispensers, no more than 48" from floor?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are drinking water accessible?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Creating a More Accessible Venue

It is always easier to choose a venue that is fully accessible than to hire services and install equipment for a special event; however, some non-traditional venues may be worth considering. And even in fully accessible venues, some of the following ideas may allow for greater participation.

Have you considered?	Yes	No
Providing an accessible shuttle service to a venue, if there is no accessible public transit?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Providing wheelchairs for loan to allow mobility for people who become fatigued?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Renting a portable ramp, so people who use mobility aids can enter and move around the venue?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Renting an accessible toilet if the venue does not provide one?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Allowing clear pathways around tables and display boards?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Allowing adequate spaces throughout the seating area to allow for wheelchair seating and use of other mobility aids?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Especially for large events, developing an accessibility or mobility map that indicates accessible parking, toilets, paths, and attractions?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Providing signage in large print and high-contrast colors to identify rest rooms, exits, and activity areas?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rest areas where participants can retreat from noise and/or extreme weather?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Providing a range of food and drink options?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Providing water for service animals?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Co-Sponsored Events Checklist

Organizations that are committed to developing an accessible and inclusive community that welcomes individuals with disabilities and ensures that they can participate in a meaningful way are encouraged to consider the following questions early in the planning process.

<b>Accessibility Considerations</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Have you discussed responsibility for ADA accommodations with the lead event planner or planning team?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does every member of the planning team know who is responsible, and how to contact that person?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does the person responsible for ADA accommodations know how to make arrangements for auxiliary aids and services?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you know which organization is responsible for paying for auxiliary services such as ASL interpretation and CART captioning?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
What accommodation statement will appear on promotional materials (e.g., event flyer, poster, webpage)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Will promotional materials include a statement about maintaining a fragrance-free environment?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Whose name and contact information will be used in the accommodation statements?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If breakout sessions or table discussions will take place, how will individuals with disabilities receive accommodations?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have you provided the Site Accessibility Checklist (available in the Appendix) to the lead event organizer?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have you provided Tips for Presenters (available in the Appendix) to the lead event organizer?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Event Logistics Worksheet

Name of event: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Time: \_\_\_\_\_

### Sponsors

Lead sponsor: \_\_\_\_\_

Co-sponsors: \_\_\_\_\_

### Location

Venue Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Time booked for event: from \_\_\_\_\_ AM/PM to \_\_\_\_\_ AM/PM

Venue contact: \_\_\_\_\_

Rental Fees—amount: \_\_\_\_\_ due by: \_\_\_\_\_ paid by: \_\_\_\_\_

Is this location ADA accessible?  Yes  No

If no, what steps will be taken to make the location accessible? \_\_\_\_\_

### Accommodations

Who is responsible for accommodations? \_\_\_\_\_

Do all sponsors and planners know?  Yes  No

American Sign Language (provider: \_\_\_\_\_)

Assistive listening devices (detail: \_\_\_\_\_)

CART captioning—live  remote  (provider: \_\_\_\_\_)

Materials in alternative formats (produced by: \_\_\_\_\_)

Reserved seating (signs produced by: \_\_\_\_\_)

Other—specify: \_\_\_\_\_

### IT Needs

Projector

Sound system

Screen

No. of mics: \_\_\_\_\_ Handheld: \_\_\_\_\_ Lavalier/lapel \_\_\_\_\_

Timer

Mic stands: \_\_\_\_\_ Amplifiers: \_\_\_\_\_ Speakers: \_\_\_\_\_

Video

Skype/sound system connection—cord/jack: \_\_\_\_\_ mic: \_\_\_\_\_

CART laptop,  
projector & screen

### Staffing Roles & Responsibilities

Emcee: \_\_\_\_\_

Staff sign-in table: \_\_\_\_\_

Assist guests with interpreters: \_\_\_\_\_

Assist guests with assistive listening devices: \_\_\_\_\_

Time keeper: \_\_\_\_\_



## Presentation or Program

Agenda created:  Yes  No  Not applicable

Other materials created:  Yes  No  Not applicable

Are materials accessible?  Yes  No

If no, what steps will be taken to make materials accessible? \_\_\_\_\_

Presenters received Tips for Presenters and Etiquette handouts

Powerpoint created or received from presenters

Script includes descriptions of visible elements

## Communications & Outreach

Advertising—date: \_\_\_\_\_ responsibility: \_\_\_\_\_)

Calendars—date: \_\_\_\_\_ responsibility: \_\_\_\_\_)

Co-sponsor communications—date: \_\_\_\_\_ responsibility: \_\_\_\_\_)

Listservs and other e-mail—date: \_\_\_\_\_ responsibility: \_\_\_\_\_)

Media advisory—date: \_\_\_\_\_ responsibility: \_\_\_\_\_)

Promotional flyer—date: \_\_\_\_\_ responsibility: \_\_\_\_\_)

Seattle Channel advisory—date: \_\_\_\_\_ responsibility: \_\_\_\_\_)

Social media—date: \_\_\_\_\_ responsibility: \_\_\_\_\_)

Website—date: \_\_\_\_\_ responsibility: \_\_\_\_\_)

All promotional information includes accommodations information:  Yes  No

## Supplies

Easels—quantity: \_\_\_\_\_

Markers—quantity: \_\_\_\_\_

Materials for exhibit table—quantity: \_\_\_\_\_

Name tags for staff—quantity: \_\_\_\_\_

Notepads—quantity: \_\_\_\_\_

Pens—quantity: \_\_\_\_\_

Sign-in sheets: \_\_\_\_\_ RSVPs \_\_\_\_\_ Blank

Signs:

Directions/arrows—quantity: \_\_\_\_\_

Interpreter—quantity: \_\_\_\_\_

"Sign in here"

Table tents for presenters

Assistive listening devices

Table tents for tables

Bathroom—quantity: \_\_\_\_\_

Tables—quantity: \_\_\_\_\_

Chairs—quantity: \_\_\_\_\_

## Refreshments

Type of refreshments: \_\_\_\_\_

Vendor: \_\_\_\_\_

Requested delivery time: \_\_\_\_\_

Projected cost: \_\_\_\_\_

Payment needed by: \_\_\_\_\_

## Tips for Presenters

Scan or photocopy these two pages to send to each presenter in advance.  
Provide a copy to each presenter at the event.

Our organization is committed to developing an accessible and inclusive community that welcomes individuals with disabilities. Effective communications at events and meetings helps to ensure that all residents can participate in a meaningful way. Following are speaking tips for your consideration.

### Speaking Voice

- Slow your rate of speech, for three reasons:
  1. Interpreters and caption writers can capture all your words
  2. Lip-readers have time to absorb all the information, especially if they need to turn their heads to see a screen, too.
  3. People absorb information at different rates.
- Rather than shouting for emphasis, use variations in pitch, tone, and expression.

### Microphone Use

- Always use a microphone if one is available. Don't ask, "Can you hear me without the microphone?" Many people who can't hear well won't speak up to tell you so. Instead, build your skill and confidence in using any style of microphone.
- Whenever possible, do a sound check in advance of your presentation. Make sure you know how the mic operates. Ask someone to listen from the farthest distances in the room.
- There are three types of microphones. They pick up sound in different ways.
  1. **Non-directional mic:** The ideal handheld or fixed microphone picks up sound from any direction. The Adult Loss of Hearing Association (ALOHA) suggests a "2x2 rule"—hold the mic 2" below your mouth and 2" away from your chin. This allows people to see your mouth when you speak. It also reduces the chance of feedback or popping sounds.
  2. **Directional mic:** If you are using a handheld microphone and cannot be heard following the previous instructions, you may be holding a directional mic. In that case, hold the mic close to your mouth, just under your nose, and parallel to the floor. People who depend on lip-reading may need to sit to one side (not directly in front of you) to see your mouth.
  3. **Lavalier (or lapel) mic:** Generally, sound is amplified well using this type of microphone. The microphone should be clipped to the *outside* of the presenter's clothing, in the closest reasonable proximity to their mouth (e.g., lapel, tie, collar).
- If you turn your head to view slides, respond to questions, or walk, maintain your microphone in the same place.
- Don't point the mic toward the audience or toward sound speakers or amplifiers.
- Require that audience members speak into a microphone when asking questions. Remind them as often as necessary to wait for the mic.

### Movement

- Avoid gesturing to illustrate a point such as visual points of reference (e.g., "If you'll notice over here ..." or "If you compare this figure with that one...")
- Avoid unnecessary pacing (movement across your "stage" area).

- Avoid speaking while writing on a board or flipchart, or when turning to check a visual aid such as a Powerpoint screen. Face your audience as much as possible.
- Avoid covering your mouth with your hand. This is more common when seated and in casual conversation than in presentations but it sometimes happens.

## Presentation & Script

- Describe all visual material in detail for people who are blind or have low vision. If working from a script, add visual descriptions in advance.
- If you use sound elements, be sure to describe the sounds for people who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- During question-and-answer sessions, allow for both voice and movement response—not everyone can raise their hands.

## Accessible Slide Decks

- If your PowerPoint or PDF slide deck is meant to be projected before a live audience, the minimum font size should be 24-point. At smaller sizes, the text becomes illegible on a screen, even for audience members with perfect vision. Larger is better. Make two slides out of one, if necessary.
- Headers and subheaders should be much larger, between 40–60 points, depending on the slide layout.
- Your presentation slide deck may be requested by someone who is blind or has low vision. In that case, it must be accessible to electronic screen readers:
  1. Use Alt+Text on all images and objects. For more information, visit [www.washington.edu/accessibility/documents/](http://www.washington.edu/accessibility/documents/). For Powerpoint, follow the directions for MS Word.
  2. If you have access to Adobe Acrobat DC Pro, run an [Accessibility](#) test on your PDF. Right-click on each accessibility issue identified to learn how to resolve it.

## For future presentations:

- Provide new vocabulary in advance—in print, on a flipchart, or projected on a screen. This helps someone who depends on speech reading to follow the presentation.
- Consider bringing non-fragile objects that the blind can pick up, hold, and touch.
- Consider using background music, film, diagrams, and posters to set a tone and/or help describe a visual element, if it is appropriate to the presentation topic.

## Etiquette Regarding Specific Communication Challenges

The most important thing to remember in any conversation with someone with a disability is “assume nothing!” If you have a question about what to do, what language or terminology to use, what assistance, if any, they might need, the person with the disability should be your first and best resource. Do not be afraid to ask.

Be patient, not only with the person with the disability, but with yourself. Frustration may come from both sides of the conversation and needs to be understood and dealt with by both parties.

The most important thing to focus on during conversation with persons with disabilities is the overall goal. It is simply communication between two individuals. Ultimately, it is what is communicated, not how it is communicated.

The following summary contains many true statements, but no absolute truths. Every person with a disability is an individual. Remember that you are not working with disabilities, you are working with individuals who may have a disability.

### Blind or Low Vision

#### Things to Know:

- Most persons who are legally blind have some sight.
- Most persons who are blind are mobile and independent.
- While many persons who are blind can use Braille, the majority of persons who are blind do not.

#### Things to Do:

- Introduce yourself. Identify who you are and what your job or role is. Give the person verbal information that is visually obvious to those who can see.
- Be descriptive when giving directions. For instance, saying, "Over there," has little meaning to someone who cannot see you point. Saying "Four doors after turning right from the elevator" would be more helpful.
- Always ask someone if they need your assistance and how you can assist them.
- Lead someone who is blind only after they have accepted your offer to do so. Allow them to hold your arm rather than you holding theirs. It is important that they control their own movements.
- Many techniques are used as tools for independence. Some persons who are blind use a "clock" reference for things directly in front of them such as a meal. For example, something could be positioned at three o'clock (to their right) or six o'clock (directly in front and close). Before using this technique, ask the person if this is useful.
- Remember to describe things from their perspective, not yours.

#### Things to Avoid:

- DO NOT move any items (i.e., furniture, personal items) without informing the person who is blind. Doing so can be frustrating and, in some cases, dangerous for the person.
- DO NOT use references that are visually-oriented, such as: “Over there near the green plant.”
- DO NOT interact with a service animal while it is working (in harness), without permission.

## Deaf or Hard-Of-Hearing

### Things to Know:

- Most persons who are deaf or hard-of-hearing have some hearing.
- Sign language is not another form of English. It is a language with its own grammar, context, and rules.
- The majority of people who have hearing loss do NOT use American Sign Language.
- Lip-reading, while helpful without sound clues, is only about 30 percent effective.
- Long conversations with persons who lip-read can be very fatiguing.
- Not all persons who are deaf can lip-read.
- Persons who are deaf may choose not to speak, or may not be able to speak.
- Do not be surprised to receive a non-verbal communication (e.g., a question or statement in writing or voice via a computer app).
- An ASL interpreter, if present, can voice questions or comments for an individual who uses sign language.

### Things to Do:

- Determine how the person prefers to communicate.
- If the person uses an interpreter, address the person directly, not the interpreter.
- If the person reads lips, speak in a normal not exaggerated way. Short, simple sentences are best.
- If the person reads lips, avoid blocking their view of your face. Even facial hair can make speech reading difficult.
- Make sure the lighting is good.
- Gain their attention before starting a conversation.
- If you believe you may have been misunderstood, ask if they understand you.
- Be aware of situations where a person may be waiting for assistance (i.e., transportation, a table, the start of an activity), where the common method of communication is by announcement or the calling of the person's name. Develop an alternative method for notifying the deaf and/or hard-of-hearing person.
- Have a notepad, flipchart, or whiteboard (and markers) available.

### Things to Avoid:

- DO NOT become impatient or exasperated with the person if it takes additional time to communicate.
- Make sure there are no physical barriers to effective communication.
- If the person is using hearing aids, avoid conversations in large, open and/or noisy surroundings.

## Mobility Challenges

### Things to Know:

- There are many reasons (not just paralysis) why someone uses a wheelchair, scooters, canes, leg braces, walkers, or other assistive devices.
- There is a wide range of physical abilities among those who use mobility devices. Persons using them may require different degrees of assistance or no assistance at all.
- Some people do not use one type of device exclusively, but may walk or use other devices for short periods.

- All wheelchairs are not the same. Some are manually operated and others are motorized. Different sizes and shapes meet different needs.

**Things to Do:**

- If you are requested to fold, carry, or store a wheelchair, treat it with care. They can break, and are difficult to repair on short notice. It is extremely disruptive to the user if their wheelchair is unavailable.
- When speaking to someone who uses a wheelchair, give the person a comfortable viewing angle of your face. Get down on their level whenever possible (e.g., sit in a chair). Having to look straight up is not a comfortable viewing angle.

**Things to Avoid:**

- DO NOT push someone using a wheelchair without permission.
- When communicating, do not stand too close to the person in the wheelchair. Give him/her some space.

## Speech Limitations

**Things to Know:**

- There are many causes for persons having speech limitations. Deafness, cerebral palsy, stroke, head injury, and general speech impairment are just a few.
- It is not unusual in stressful situations for a person's speech to become harder to understand.

**Things to Do:**

- If you do not understand what the person is saying, bring it to his/her attention immediately and ask how the two of you may better communicate.
- If the situation is stressful, try to stay calm.
- If you are in a public area with many distractions, move to a quiet or private location.
- Consider writing as an alternative means of communication.
- Double-check that there is two-way understanding.

**Things to Avoid:**

- DO NOT pretend to understand them if you do not.
- DO NOT become impatient with the communication difficulty.
- DO NOT finish the person's sentences or interrupt.

