



Making ISAAC Conferences Accessible

The following tips have been taken from and in some instances, adapted from resources developed by the Ontario's Accessibility Directorate and the ADA. NAACA has added items that are specific for people who use AAC and others who may attend ISAAC conferences.

Venue

Visit the site of a potential venue. Make sure you invite people who have communication, mobility and sensory disabilities to join you in touring the facility.

Accessible transportation

The venue should be close to public transportation, with para- transit vehicles serving that route.

Inform delegates where the passenger drop-off areas are located.

Outdoor and indoor surfaces

Check for any barriers along outdoor and indoor paths that might cause problems for people who use canes, crutches or wheelchairs.

Check that there are ramps where steps exist and that the ramps are at appropriate angles for safe use.

Make sure the edges beside drops in levels are clearly marked for people to see them.

Make sure that things like garbage cans and sandwich boards can be moved so there is at least a one-metre wide path of travel for people using wheelchairs or walkers.

Check if surfaces are level, as well as firm and stable.

Avoid soft, thick pile carpeting or loose mats.

Doors

Check that there are automatic doors. If not, make sure you can prop doors open, or at least make sure there will be volunteers who can help people trying to go through.

Washrooms

Check that the washrooms are accessible.

Check that there are sufficient numbers of washrooms for the number of participants you anticipate.

Make sure there is room on the floor area beyond the swing of the door for a wheelchair or walker.

Check also that there are grab bars, and that a person using a wheelchair can reach the sink, soap and paper towels.

Is there a washroom for people who need changing facilities?

Accessible restrooms should be on the same floor as meeting rooms. If accessible restrooms are not on the same floor, increase break times between sessions.

Are there gender-neutral washrooms?

Lighting

Are lights adjustable so you are able to control the brightness of the room?

In addition, check that you can adjust the amount of natural light for daytime events. Direct natural light can cause shadows and glare, making it difficult for people with low vision to see.

Acoustics

Does the main room have a loud echo? Environments with significant echo create barriers for people who are hard of hearing.

Quiet space / Sensory break rooms

Is there a quiet, low sensory, relaxing space for delegates?

Charging stations

Designate one wall or zone outside meeting rooms for attendees to recharge their batteries and devices.

Communication assistance

Position trained communication assistants at doors of all sessions.

Inform delegates about how to connect with assistants as needed.

Room set up

Make sure there are spaces without chairs at the tables for every person using a wheelchair.

Provide a variety of chairs with and without armrests.

Reserve seating upfront for people who have difficulty hearing or seeing presentations.

Provide seating for those who can't stand for long periods at events where people will be mostly standing.

Offer accessible seating locations throughout the room so individuals with disabilities have choices similar to the choices available to others.

Have event staff or volunteers in attendance at the start of each session to assist with last-minute changes (moving chairs, etc.) that may be needed.

When possible, include both "horizontal" (side to side) and "vertical" (front to back) aisles to improve access and flow.

Make aisles or space around tables wide enough for people using mobility aids such as wheelchairs or walkers to easily move. An aisle width of about one metre or more is recommended.

If possible, leave room at the rear of the meeting space for attendees to stand or stretch.

Circulation space (including aisles) should be at least 36 inches and preferably 60 inches wide so that passing room is available for people using mobility devices. A six-foot width (72 inches) is recommended whenever feasible.

Cover electrical cables or cords that cross over aisles or pathways so everyone can safely get across them.

Signage

Use common words and simple, short sentences and graphics for wayfaring.

Service Animals

Make sure there is a relief area for these animals, and make sure their owners know where it is. Have water bowls available for service dogs.

Accessibility "Go to" area

Assign a volunteer to troubleshoot and resolve accessibility barriers during the conference.

Registration tables

Make sure there are chairs for people who use canes or crutches and find it hard to stand in lines for long periods. Provide volunteers to stand in their place.

Make sure there is enough room for a person using a wheelchair or scooter to approach and maneuver in front of registration tables.

Name badges

Make name badges high contrast and use large print for easy reading.

Registration

At registration, provide delegates with information about the accessibility features provided by the conference.

Give them a contact and date to let you know when/ if they have specific accommodations needs. For example:

- Attendant services (male / female / gender neutral)
- Sign language interpreting (specify presentations)
- Communication support (if they are not bringing someone to assist them)
- Assistance at meals and snacks
- Any food, environmental allergies

Make the event perfume free and inform delegates not to wear perfume, cologne

Food and Refreshments (if appropriate)

Consider the following points when planning to serve food or refreshments:

- If it is a buffet-style event, be sure to place food, drinks and utensils in easy reach of a person using a wheelchair.
- Provide bendable straws as well as some cups with handles.

Accessible Presentations

Moderators

- Explain when participants can ask questions.
- Ensure that all participants, especially those who use AAC are provided with sufficient, uninterrupted time and opportunity to participate using their preferred communication method.

Presenters

- If there is a sign language interpreter, please wait for him/her to be in place before beginning your presentation.
- Always face the audience; this is especially helpful for audience members who are speech readers (lip readers).
- Speak at a normal rate, neither too slowly nor too quickly.
- Caption videos, if possible
- If using slides:
 - Use a sans serif font that is at least 22 point.
 - Use a light-colored background with dark text.
 - Use a PowerPoint theme to structure your presentation, with only short sentences and/or bulleted phrases (about 4 lines of text/40 words per slide).
 - Keep it short - as a rule, one slide for every two minutes of speaking time.
 - Describe all meaningful graphics (such as photos, images, charts, and illustrations).
 - Address all the information shown on your slides.
- Use felt tip markers free of scents and solvents and replace the cap when not in use.

- Use lasers to point only; resist the urge to wiggle the light around the screen (this can be problematic for people with a variety of conditions, including vision disabilities), and turn it off when not in use.
- If you are asked a question by someone not using a microphone, repeat the question into the microphone.
- Always use a microphone.
- Time presentations to give people who use mobility aids to get to the next session.
- Allow sufficient time to receive and answer questions from people who use AAC.

If using AAC to present:

- Inform the organizer of the event about additional accessibility requirements you may need.
- Determine how you want to communicate during the presentation and question /answer period such as:
 - communication device
 - someone to read your prepared presentation
 - using an audio recording of your presentation.
 - using a communication assistant to read your AAC board to answer questions.
- **If using a communication device, consider:**
 - Programming the device ahead of time.
 - Backing up your presentation on a memory card.
 - Timing the presentation.
 - Checking for clarity in terms of rate of communication and pronunciation.
 - Ensuring the device is fully charged.
 - Bringing a second battery, if you have one or having the means to connect your device to power source.
 - Positioning a mic to pick up your speaker and requesting more mics if you choose to also speak and/or use a communication assistant.
 - Accompanying speech out by showing text on slides, using a split screen.
 - Giving a printed copy of your presentation as a handout.
 - Deciding if you want to present from a podium or table.
 - Decide if you will advance slides, if you need an accessible remote control or have an assistant control the slides at your direction.
 - Allowing sufficient time to receive questions from participants who use AAC and to answer their questions.
 - Engaging a communication assistant if using a low-tech method to answer questions.
- **If using a communication assistant:**
 - Ensure your assistant understands that they do not add content to your presentation, unless they are a co-presenter.
 - Tell the audience what the assistant will do. For example, repeat what you have communicated if someone does not understand.
 - Pick an assistant who has a clear speaking voice.
 - Ask participants to direct questions to you, not your assistant.
- **Handling questions:**
 - If possible, defer questions to the end of your presentation.
 - Give the option to answer questions after the session.

Handouts

- Provide options for alternate formats (large print, electronic copy, accessible PDFs, compatible with screen readers etc.,)

Participants

- Avoid interrupting and talking when a participant who uses AAC is communicating a question / comment.