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January 2007

# Recommendations for Organizers of Meetings and Conferences

The European Association of Societies of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities

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# Recommendations for Organizers of Meetings and Conferences

**Abstract**
[Excerpt] Planning and organizing a conference, a meeting or any other event is a complex task, often involving numerous different people. The objective should always be to make the event as beneficial as possible for all participants.

Increasingly, also people with intellectual disabilities actively participate in events together with many other participants. This shows the growing inclusion of this group of people in our societies and should be much more promoted. Of course, these participants are often very disappointed when they cannot follow and participate in an event because some basic guidelines for accessibility have not been followed.

As organizer of an event, you are in the critical position to include considerations about its accessibility from the beginning of the planning process. Taking care of these issues from the beginning has proven to be most effective and avoids costly changes to programmes and venues.

**Keywords**
plan, organizing, meeting, conference, participants, information, people, disability, Gladnet, person, right, social, economic, society, system, disabilities

**Comments**
Actual Publication Date Unknown.
http://digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/gladnetcollect/271/

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# Inclusion Europe

The European Association of Societies of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities and their Families
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This paper is available in the **Accessibility Pack for Meetings and Conferences**, together with the paper "Recommendations for speakers", the leaflet "Rules for meetings and conferences" and the accessibility cards.
This Accessibility Pack can be ordered at Inclusion Europe for 45 euros:
self-advocacy@inclusion-europe.org

# Recommendations for organizers of meetings and conferences

## ***Introduction***

Planning and organizing a conference, a meeting or any other event is a complex task, often involving numerous different people. The objective should always be to make the event as beneficial as possible for all participants.

Increasingly, also people with intellectual disabilities actively participate in events together with many other participants. This shows the growing inclusion of this group of people in our societies and should be much more promoted. Of course, these participants are often very disappointed when they cannot follow and participate in an event because some basic guidelines for accessibility have not been followed.

As organizer of an event, you are in the critical position to include considerations about its accessibility from the beginning of the planning process. Taking care of these issues from the beginning has proven to be most effective and avoids costly changes to programmes and venues.

Inclusion Europe supports you in your task by providing you with three key resource materials that will facilitate your work:

1. These "Guidelines for Organizers of Meetings and Conferences" which help you in your planning processes.
2. The "Rules for Speakers" which you can distribute well before the event to all speakers.
3. The "Rules for Meetings" which you should distribute together with the accessibility cards at the event to all participants.

Neither will this material ensure accessibility for all people with intellectual disabilities nor will it always be possible to implement all of the above guidelines. However, people with intellectual disabilities, their families and their organisations very much appreciate if at

least an effort is made to improve accessibility and possibilities for participation for this group of European citizens.

The guidelines below concern accessibility of information. However, organizers have still to consider that people with intellectual disabilities may also have a physical disability and therefore measures to ensure physical accessibility of the venue, etc should also be considered.

## ***Planning the event***

- **The Preparation Meeting:** This meeting takes place before the conference actually starts. All the participants with intellectual disabilities should be invited to participate with their supporters. The aims of this meeting are:
  - Explaining the way the conference will be run and which sessions will be accessible and what measures people can expect in terms of accessibility.
  - Explaining the themes and the contents of the different sessions in easy-to-understand words.
  - Helping the participants with intellectual disabilities to have their own ideas and formulate their questions on the different topics.
  - Reminding participants about the proper use of the accessibility cards and the general rules for meeting.

- **Accessible sessions:** Especially at large events, it might not always be possible to have all sessions accessible for people with intellectual disabilities, for example during scientific presentations. Please make sure that in these cases there is an alternative programme and/or that the inaccessible sessions are equally distributed during a conference day. It is also very important to clearly indicate accessible sessions in the programme and to announce at the start of each session if it will be accessible or not. Inclusion Europe has developed three logos defined by sets of criteria to indicate three different levels of accessibility. You will find the lists of criteria in Annex 1. You are free to use these logos in your conference.

- **Breaks:** Participants with intellectual disabilities may find it difficult to follow a long session without any breaks. Accessible sessions should therefore be not too long. To increase the participation and the understanding of the people with intellectual disabilities, a short break after a presentation and before the questions might be very useful. During the break, supporters have the opportunity to explain once more some ideas developed during the presentation.

- **Working groups:** All participants to the meeting or conference (including participants with intellectual disabilities) might find it interesting to have working groups at some moments. Sharing experience and exchanging information is important for the participants, it is often easier for everyone to do so in small groups than in plenary sessions.

- **Summary of the previous day:** At the beginning of each new conference day, it would be good to provide a summary of the previous day discussions.

- **The Programme:** It is very important to indicate in the Programme those sessions where special measures will be taken to make them accessible for people with intellectual disabilities. This helps participants with intellectual disabilities to concentrate on and prepare for these sessions. Please use the European Easy-to-Read Symbol

and the other symbols developed by Inclusion Europe for indicating these sessions in the programmme. It is also important to indicate which measures will be taken to make sessions accessible.

- **Conference Papers and Materials:** Those materials that are crucial for understanding and following a conference should be translated into easy-to-read language. They should be sent to the participants at least two weeks before the event. A remark: Since those texts are short summaries of the contents of the full papers they help all participants and they are easily translated into other languages.

## ***Preparation of presentations***

- **Interpretation:** In international meeting, it is very important to think about the problem of the language. Usually, people with intellectual disabilities do not speak other languages. However, sometimes, their supporters can translate for them. But that takes time and requires the speaker to speak very slowly.

- **The Rules for Speakers:** It is very important for all speakers to be aware that you are planning an accessible event before they start preparing their presentations. Please send them as early as possible the "Rules for Speakers" and offer them support and advice for preparing their presentations. If it is possible, it is always more efficient to have a preparation meeting with the speakers as well.

- **Presentation summaries:** While it is usually very difficult to get the full text of presentations well before the event, organizers should insist to receive short and simple summaries of all presentations before the event. These then can be made available to all participants.

- **Visual aids:** "One picture is worth more than 1.000 words" and it helps people with intellectual disabilities to follow presentations much better. Please encourage all speakers to prepare support material that also use pictures and communication symbols. Power Point presentations, overhead slides, video, etc. may be of help to support their speech. Make sure that the necessary technical equipment is available.

## ***Running the event***

- **Enforcing the rules:** It is, of course, crucial to ensure that the accessibility rules are followed in an event. Few things are more frustrating than e.g. signaling a speaker to speak slower because you cannot follow and the speaker continuing at the same pace.

- **Preparing moderators and chairpersons:** It is important that all moderators and chairpersons know about the accessibility rules and get some guidelines on how to apply them. If a moderator should have a visual disability, an assistant needs to indicate the use of the accessibility cards. Needs for intervention could be as follows:
    - At the start of each session the chair or moderator should indicate if a session is accessible or not. He/She also should briefly explain the use of the accessibility cards.
    - Speakers need to be reminded to speak slower.
    - Participants with or without intellectual disabilities who do not address the theme of a session need to be reminded.

- If the accessibility cards are clearly misused[1], the chair or moderator should choose to ignore the person abusing the accessibility cards during the session and speak with this person during the following break to make sure the rules are clearly understood.

## ***Evaluation***

- **The Evaluation Form:** Use a simple evaluation form according to the model provided in the Annex 2. While you can ask the questions relevant for your event, please do not omit the questions relating to the accessibility of your event.

[1] In very rare cases there might be an abuse of the yellow and red cards – however, Inclusion Europe have never heard about such an abuse actually taking place.