**Event Planning Guide**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this guide is to assist event planners in understanding the college’s obligation and commitment to take into account the needs of individuals with disabilities in connection with events sponsored by the college. Teachers College is committed to facilitating the equal participation of individuals with disabilities through the provision of reasonable accommodations in all of its academic programs and special events, including conferences, meetings, lectures, and other activities. A common sense approach should guide event planners. The goal is to facilitate the participation of individuals with disabilities. While the answer to every question and situation may not be cut-and-dried, the key is to remain respectful, responsive, and flexible.

The following guidelines and suggestions serve as a starting point for the inclusion of individuals with disabilities.

### **EVENTS TO BE CONSIDERED**

The college’s obligation to consider the needs of participants with disabilities extends to any event sponsored by Teachers College, whether held on- or off-site and whether or not members of the public are invited to attend. In a very few circumstances, such as a private social function or an employee-only meeting where the participants are known and no accommodations are expected to be required, it may not be necessary to plan for the needs of participants with disabilities.

In most situations, it is necessary to plan for the possibility that someone will need accommodation. For example, services for individuals with disabilities must be considered in connection with a week-long arts festival, a speech by a visiting scholar or celebrity, or a conference. The event planner’s responsibility is to plan for and provide services for participants with disabilities at any event sponsored by the college or members of the college community.

There are also obligations that extend to events that are sponsored by an individual or organization from outside of the college but held within Teachers College facilities. If the event planners are involved in making Teachers College’s facilities available to outside groups, they should discuss accessibility and accommodation obligations with the organization using the space. The arrangement should clearly specify which party will assume responsibility for these obligations at the event.

### **GENERAL OBLIGATIONS**

In general, event planners must consider how individuals with disabilities will attend and participate in the event. To facilitate this process consideration of potential architectural and communication barriers will be necessary. Requests for accommodations must be analyzed on a case-by-case basis, which means that event planners must consider a variety of options. Full access remains a goal and may not necessarily be achieved all at once. Where full and independent access is not readily achievable event planners are still obligated to consider and develop a variety of options for individuals with disabilities. Through advanced planning and utilization of college resources participation can most often be accomplished with reasonable effort and expense.

### **RECOGNIZED DISABILITIES**

Individuals with disabilities include those with mobility impairments (e.g., wheelchair users), sensory (e.g., visual and hearing) impairments, and “hidden” disabilities (e.g., those with learning disabilities, mental health disorders, chronic illnesses, or environmental illnesses). A disability may vary in severity and may be manifested either permanently or temporarily.

### **PRE-EVENT CONSIDERATIONS**

Event planners are encouraged to communicate as much as possible with participants prior to the event. This may be facilitated by including an invitation in pre-event publicity to request accommodations in advance of the event. Requests for accommodations should be responded to expeditiously. Early consultation with OASID will help in developing an appropriate accommodation plan and in clarifying responsibilities before responding to a specific request.

#### **Using publicity and pre-registration for planning**

A key to making events accessible is communication prior to the event. Pre-event publicity and pre-registration materials should invite potential participants to request reasonable accommodations with sufficient lead time. This will enable the event planner to arrange for many, if not most, services and accommodations in advance.

Pre-event publicity should include the name and telephone number of a person to contact for more information.

All pre-event publicity should include the following note:

*Individuals with disabilities are encouraged to contact OASID at oasid@tc.edu , (212) 678-3689, (212) 678-3854 video phone, as early as possible to request reasonable accommodations, such as ASL interpreters, alternate format materials, and a campus map of accessible features.*

It is best practice to require registration for all events to allow participants to request accommodations prior to your event. This will ensure that OASID has sufficient time to coordinate services for your event. Please see the sample registration below.

**Sample Registration Statement**

If you have a disability and may require accommodations in order to fully participate, please indicate here\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

How would you like to be contacted to discuss your needs?\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

I will need the following accommodations in order to participate:

\_\_ ASL Interpreter

\_\_ Communication Access in Real Time (CART services)

\_\_ Large print

\_\_ Braille

\_\_ Wheelchair access

\_\_ Assistive Listening Device

\_\_ An Assistant will accompany me

\_\_ Closed captioned videos

Additionally, electronic publicity should avoid the following:

* text on a colored backdrop with insufficient contrast
* text embedded in a graphic
* animated graphics
* relying on color alone to convey meaning
* highly stylized fonts

Avoiding such formatting makes your publicity more accessible to individuals using adaptive technology, such as screen readers, as well as to individuals without disabilities using non-standard browsers, viewing information in less than ideal lighting conditions, or accessing the internet over slow connections.

Pre-registration for an event provides an opportunity for event planners to describe the event in more detail. This allows a potential participant with disabilities to consider what accommodations he or she might need. The fullest description possible, such as location and accessibility, will provide for the most effective planning.

For events involving overnight lodging, the event planner may want to investigate what accessibility features and accommodations local lodging options provide. Please see the **Accessibility Checklist** below for further assistance.

Presenters at the event may also require accommodations. The event planners should communicate with all presenters to be informed in advance about any particular requirements that they may have.

#### **Using the TC eBoard**

The TC electronic board (eBoard) is a means by which TC offices can advertise special announcements and events that they are sponsoring. The content of the eBoard is for internal educational purposes and follows all fair use and copyright guidelines. Announcements can be submitted to the eBoard at www.tc.edu/eboard.

Two eBoards have been installed: one near the main entrance in the Zankel Building and one in the Thorndike Hall lobby. An audio version of the eBoard can be heard using headphones near the security desk at the main entrance in the Zankel Building.

### **ARCHITECTURAL ACCESS**

Whenever possible, the event should be held in a place that is wheelchair accessible. This includes ensuring that the location is barrier-free or can be reached through an accessible route and that the event space is sufficiently accessible for participants and presenters with disabilities. A [map of the accessibility features](https://www.tc.columbia.edu/oasid/maps/) at Teachers College is included here. Hard copies of visual, tactile, and combination visual/tactile maps can be obtained from OASID. Tactile campus maps have also been installed in the following locations:

* Zankel Building, next to the security desk at the main entrance
* Zankel Building, ground floor across from the Facilities (28 Zankel Building)
* Thorndike Hall, to the left of the first floor lobby elevators
* Whittier Hall lobby, near the security desk in the first floor lobby

In the event that the space is not completely barrier-free an effort should be made to keep barriers to a minimum. The **Accessibility Checklist** below may be helpful in minimizing barriers.

#### **Wheelchair lifts**

Wheelchair lifts are located in Milbank Chapel and at the stairway connecting the Zankel Building to Macy Hall. The security desk at the main entrance to the Zankel Building has the keys needed to operate the lifts.

#### **Parking**

The entrance to a parking lot specifically designated for disability access is located between the Zankel Building and Thompson Hall and just in front of Thorndike Hall. This facility can accommodate between six and ten vehicles based upon the utilization of a monitoring management system and based upon the size of vehicles parked. The college is committed to the provision of no less than three parking spaces for use by authorized individuals with disabilities at any one time.

**This parking facility is for authorized use only and is available on a first come, first served basis.** Teachers College is not responsible for any damage to personal property, including automobiles, as a result of theft, vandalism, or misuse through the use of this lot.

### **COMMUNICATION ACCESS**

When given sufficient lead time, the college can often provide auxiliary communication aids and services to enable individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, blind, or visually impaired to participate in the event. The cost of providing these auxiliary aids and services should be anticipated in the event budget. Participants may not be charged a fee for them.

#### **Sign language interpreters**

Due to the shortage of qualified sign language interpreters in the New York City area and the fact that there is a very large deaf community that utilizes the services of those interpreters, sign language interpreters are often booked weeks in advance. Event planners should use pre-event communication and publicity to invite individuals who may need interpreting services to make their need known by a specific date in order to allow enough time to secure interpreters.

Due to both the physical and cognitive demands of interpreting, interpreters typically work in teams of two, replacing each other every twenty minutes. If the event is longer than forty-five minutes, two interpreters will likely be assigned.

#### **Speech-to-text services**

Some deaf and hard of hearing individuals, especially those who do not use American Sign Language as their primary mode of communication, may request what is called Communication Access Real-Time Transcription (CART). CART provides a verbatim transcript of all spoken communication using a stenotype machine (similar to what court reporters use) that is connected to a laptop computer equipped with CART software.

As with sign language interpreters, the demand for CART services outstrips the supply. Participants needing CART should be encouraged to make requests as early as possible in order to allow enough time to secure services.

#### **Assistive listening devices**

Some individuals have sufficient residual hearing that allows them to utilize assistive listening devices often in tandem with their own personal hearing aids. These systems consist of a receiver that is worn by the participant and a transmitter that sends a signal from a microphone to the receiver.

For most spaces at Teachers College, portable assistive listening systems will be needed and are available to borrow from OASID’s Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services. In these instances the transmitter consists of a microphone that the speaker wears or can sometimes be wired into a microphone being used for the general audience.

If the event is being held in the Cowin Center, Milbank Chapel, or 179 Grace Dodge Hall, an assistive listening device transmitter is in place already. Contact Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services to obtain the necessary receivers.

Regardless of how the assistive listening device is configured, it is important to remember that the transmitter may not be able to pick up what an audience member says. In such cases every effort should be made to repeat any comments or questions coming from the audience.

The number of assistive listening devices available for loan from Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services is limited. Again, pre-event communication and publicity should encourage individuals to make requests for accommodations as early as possible in order to determine the availability of such equipment here at TC or to make a referral to an alternate provider.

#### **Captioned media**

Captions are text versions of the spoken word presented within multimedia. Captions allow the content of web audio and video to be accessible to those who do not have access to audio. Captioning not only supports Teachers Colleges commitment to inclusion and makes your content available to a wider audience, it also makes the dialogue in your content more easily understood by everyone.

If no one has requested captioning, you are still responsible for providing captioning for your event if it will be publicly posted. Please note, videos should not be posted until they have been properly captioned. If you have media at your event, you will need to have it captioned or choose media that has already been captioned. For large, very public events, we encourage real-time captioning of your event, even in the absence of a direct request.

##### **Option 1 - Request Human Captioning**

There is a fee associated with Human Captioning, so you will need to allocate funds in your budget when planning your event. Keep in mind that the human captioning service takes up to 2-4 days to process.

Follow these steps:

* [Upload your recorded event into TC Digital Media](https://teacherscollege.screenstepslive.com/s/14864/m/82576/l/1228679-upload-a-video).
* Open a [Service Desk Ticket](https://tc.service-now.com/service_management/) or email servicedesk@tc.edu
* Include Name, Department, and Index Number
* Include name of the video and where it is saved within TC Digital Media

##### **Option 2 - Request Auto Captioning**

Auto Captioning is generated quickly and is free of cost. However, automatically-generated captions do not meet the needs of deaf or hard of hearing individuals or accessibility requirements, unless they are confirmed to be fully accurate. If you choose this option, you will need to review the captions and manually edit for errors before posting your video.

Follow these steps:

* [Upload your recorded event into TC Digital Media](https://teacherscollege.screenstepslive.com/s/14864/m/82576/l/1228679-upload-a-video).
* Click Manage Captions
* Select Auto Caption option
* Resources: How to [upload a video and request the auto-captioning](https://teacherscollege.screenstepslive.com/s/14864/m/72448/l/1035315-upload-a-zoom-recording-to-tc-digital-media-in-canvas-with-auto-captioning) and also [how to auto-captioning a video that is already in TC Digital Media](https://teacherscollege.screenstepslive.com/s/14864/m/82576/l/1237474-add-auto-captions-to-a-video-in-tc-digital-media).

##### **How Do I Caption my Live Online Event?**

For live presentations, interpreters or [CART](https://www.nad.org/issues/technology/captioning/cart) may be required to ensure effective communication with individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing in those settings. If you receive a request for this type of accommodation, please reach out to oasid@tc.edu.

However, TC promotes captioning of public events as a best practice that benefits all individuals, including English Language Learners, individuals with learning disabilities, those who wish to see the spelling of technical terms, and those who need to search for specific content in a set of videos. You can reach out to TCIT at servicedesk@tc.columbia.edu for information about how you can add live captioning to your event.

#### **Transcripts of speeches**

For events which include speakers, event planners might ask the speakers to prepare transcripts of their speeches in advance and to make them available in advance to assist with accessibility. In particular, transcripts can often be helpful to individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing. When these transcripts are provided prior to the event they will help sign language interpreters and CART providers prepare. If it is not possible to get a complete transcript of a particular speech, another helpful aid could be a handout, which includes a list of proper names, geographic locations, and technical terminology that will be included in the speech.

A transcript should not be considered an appropriate accommodation in lieu of interpreters or CART.

#### **Alternative format materials**

Large print, Braille, audio recording, and electronic versions of speeches, lectures, and general emergency information prepared in advance of the event can be useful for participants with visual impairments or learning disabilities. Tactile versions of graphic illustrations may also facilitate participation. An alternative strategy of providing access to printed materials can be obtained through the use of the on-site readers. OASID may be contacted for assistance in providing alternative format materials.

### **MODIFYING POLICIES, PRACTICES, AND PROCEDURES**

Event planners should also be aware that policies, practices, and procedures may need to be modified in order to accommodate an individual with a disability. It may not always be easy to anticipate such accommodations in advance, but when an unexpected request for accommodation arises during an event it will be helpful to remain responsive and flexible.

For example, a policy prohibiting animals at an event would have to be modified to allow an individual who is blind to bring a guide dog. Likewise, the practice of individuals serving themselves at a buffet meal might have to be modified by having a staff person available to offer assistance to individuals who may have difficulty in serving themselves. There may be instances where modifying a policy, practice, or procedure is not required, but if a request to change a rule or practice on account of a disability is received, the event planners should consider every alternative before denying the request. Event planners are welcome to consult with OASID prior to the event in anticipation of such situations.

### **STAFF AWARENESS AND SENSITIVITY**

Even with the most diligent efforts to communicate prior to the event, there will be times when unanticipated accommodations for participants with disabilities will have to be considered during the event. Staff awareness and sensitivity are essential.

#### **On-site registration**

Registration staff should be well-informed about how to provide accommodations and where to obtain services. Staff should know the answers to common questions such as:

“Where is an accessible bathroom?”

“Is there parking which is accessible for wheelchair users?”

“Is there a video phone nearby?”

#### **During the event**

Event staff should be apprised of the need to provide reasonable accommodations for individuals with disabilities. Staff should be prepared to offer assistance, such as with seating or using the amenities of the building. Staff training may be arranged in these matters with OASID.

#### **Emergency procedures**

Before your event please refer to the [Special Event Services Request](https://www.tc.columbia.edu/publicsafety/special-event-services-request/) to request event security. Not all events will need this. In the event of an emergency: **On-campus Emergency phone number: X 3333. (From a cell phone dial 212.678.3333).** Public Safety will contact Police, Fire, and/or EMS if needed.

An integrated emergency plan for the event which considers disability-related concerns may be developed. For example, you may designate staff members to respond to the needs of individuals with disabilities under such conditions.

### **CONCLUSION**

Many experienced people are available at Teachers College to help ensure that events run smoothly and with maximum participation of individuals with disabilities. Please seek out those resources. Your effort to advance Teachers College’s commitment to individuals with disabilities will help welcome a number of valuable contributors to events sponsored by the college.

Special thanks to the Office of Harvard University Disability Coordinator and Harvard University for a significant contribution to this publication.

### **APPENDIX I: ACCESSIBILITY CHECKLIST**

The following checklist can help the event planners in choosing a building for the event or minimizing physical barriers in the chosen building.

#### **Entrance**

* Does the entrance have steps, a threshold, or other physical barriers? If so, is there a ramp or a lift to enable someone in a wheelchair to enter the building?
* Are the doors wide enough to accommodate a wheelchair?
* Can the doors be opened by someone in a wheelchair? If they are heavy or difficult to open, event staff may be assigned to assist individuals with disabilities.
* If the primary entrance is not accessible by wheelchair, is there an alternate wheelchair accessible entrance? If so, is there signage clearly indicating the location of the alternate wheelchair accessible entrance?
* If participants in wheelchairs will be using an alternative entrance and accessible route, is the route free of obstructions? Have the information and a map of the accessible route been provided to individuals who require this information?
* If the event will be held during off-hours, has security been informed that architecturally accessible entrances need to be available?
* If the entrance is accessible by means of a lift, is the lift in good working condition? If the lift is operated by a key, do event staff have possession of the key? Is there someone available who knows how to operate the lift? Note that keys for the wheelchair lifts at TC are at the security desk in the Zankel Building.

#### **Parking**

* If an individual with a disability has inquired about accessible parking, have you checked the availability and procedure to facilitate this request?

#### **Path of travel to the building entrance**

* Is there a path of travel accessible by wheelchair from the street to the event location?
* Are sidewalks even and in good repair?
* Are there curb cuts?
* Are sidewalks clear of ice, snow, or other debris?

#### **Path of travel within the building**

* Is there a level path of travel from the wheelchair accessible entrance to the room(s) where the event is located? If there is not, are there ramps to enable someone in a wheelchair to reach the event? Lifting someone over steps or stairs is not an accessible solution for access to the event location.
* Are corridors and door widths adequate for passage of a wheelchair?
* Are pathways which might be used during the event free of obstacles or protruding objects?
* If the event is on a floor above the ground level, is there an elevator which can accommodate a wheelchair user? Is the location of this elevator clearly indicated?

#### **Restrooms**

* If there are restrooms for the general public, are there also wheelchair accessible restrooms in the same location? If not, are there wheelchair accessible restrooms within a reasonably accessible proximity? If so, is the location of the wheelchair accessible restrooms clearly indicated?
* If there are no wheelchair accessible restrooms, you may want to consider another location for your event.

#### **Refreshments**

* If food is served at the event, is the food service accessible to an individual in a wheelchair or with another type of mobility impairment?
* If the food is being served buffet-style, can a wheelchair user or an individual who is blind or visually impaired negotiate the spaces around and between the tables?
* Are food and dishes at a level that can be reached by someone in a wheelchair?
* If these conditions are not met, what staffing arrangements can be made to accommodate individuals with disabilities?

#### **Other amenities**

* If the event location offers public telephones and drinking fountains, are there also telephones and fountains that are accessible to an individual in a wheelchair? If not, you may want to think about how individuals with disabilities can be accommodated in using these amenities.
* If your event makes use of a box office, registration tables, or information booths, are these at an accessible height for an individual in a wheelchair? If not, you may want to prepare alternative ways for individuals with disabilities to purchase tickets, register, or obtain information.
* If writing surfaces are needed, are they at a wheelchair accessible height? If not, an alternative, such as a clipboard, might be provided.