



MEETINGS FOR ALL

Advice and inspiration for accessible conferences, seminars and other events



norden

Nordens Välfärdscenter



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MEETINGS FOR ALL

NORDIC CO-OPERATION consists primarily of a variety of large and small meetings. We create nordic added value at these meetings: we learn about and from one another.

There is a lot to think about at Nordic meeting events. There are different languages and content, not to mention travel and technology. It is important to think ahead so everyone will be able to participate in the meeting on equal terms. These materials provide advice and inspiration for how to think ahead about accessibility.

Why think about accessibility? You may be wondering.

In much the same way that you, the organizer, should be aware of equality between men and women, you should also keep in mind people's differing functionality as an aspect of human diversity. Accessibility enables people with disabilities to participate on equal terms with others.

Meetings need to be organized in a way that works for all participants in order for people with impaired vision, hearing or mobility to be able to participate on equal terms with others.

Differences in functional capacity are an aspect of human diversity. Both experts invited as speakers and participants who come to our events and meetings may have some form of disability.

Organizing meetings that work for everyone is a quality factor and fully in line with our shared values of equal value. In several of the Nordic countries, moreover, lack of accessibility is a form of discrimination. This is especially true when official organizations are in charge of an activity. A compelling reason for arranging meetings that are accessible to all participants is that, in many cases, it's against the law not to do so.

This list of advice and inspiration was developed by The Council for Nordic Co-operation on Disability within the scope of the project *Disability perspective, gender and diversity* project. The points are derived from three different sources: The National Agency for Participation in Sweden, Deltasenteret at Children, Youth and Family Affairs (Bufdir) in Norway and the Mainstreaming in the Field of Disabilities project in Denmark.

On the following pages you will find advice and inspiration about:

PRINCIPLES FOR MEETINGS AND CONFERENCES FOR ALL

Selecting a location for an event: Always contact the site via telephone or email and make sure to get information about, and confirmation of, adequate physical accessibility at the event location. As the organizer, you should also visit the site.

The accessibility requirements should be specified in writing if you hire an external organization or firm as the technical organizer.

Entrance: All participants should be able to enter the building through the same entrance.

Interior: All participants and speakers should be able to get to all areas used during the conference, such as breakout rooms, restaurants, toilets and facilities used during breaks. The site should have uniform, non-glare lighting and it needs to work for people with asthma, allergies or other sensitivities.

Conference room: Ensure that everyone in the audience and who is participating in the program can do so on equal terms.

Breakout rooms: Ensure that accessibility is just as good in breakout rooms as it is in the conference room.

Hotel rooms: If the conference requires an overnight stay, all participants should be able to stay at the same hotel.

Travel/transport: Make sure it is possible for all participants to get to the event with the least possible effort.

Invitation: An accessibility perspective should be apparent in the planning, implementation and evaluation of all meetings and conferences. It is also important to send them well in advance.

Program: The perception of the conference is influenced by its accessibility. A smart approach to the conference works for everyone.

Implementation of the event: It is important to involve the speakers so they know what is required of them in order for everyone to be able to take part in the conference.

After the event: Proper follow-up work can make the next event even better. Conduct an internal evaluation as the organizer by sending an electronic evaluation form to the event manager, participants and helpers/assistants.

Design of the presentations: Ensure that all presentations are easy to read, easy to understand and intuitive. The layout helps to facilitate the understanding of the message.



TIPS AND INSPIRATION FOR MEETINGS AND CONFERENCES FOR ALL

Selecting a location that works for all. Always contact the site via telephone or email and make sure to get information about, and confirmation of, adequate physical accessibility at the event location. As the organizer, you should also visit the site.

The accessibility requirements should be specified in writing if you hire an external organization or firm as the technical organizer.

ENTRANCE

Principle: All participants should be able to enter the building through the same entrance.

- The building has a good geographical location, close to public transport.
- There is reserved parking within 25 metres of the entrance for people with disabilities and a location within 25 metres of the entrance where transport services and taxis can park.
- The walkway to the main entrance is accessible for wheelchair users. If there are stairs in front of the entrance door, then there is also a suitable ramp or lift. The walkway is also accessible for people with visual impairments, with proper glare-free lighting, good maintenance and elements that guide you to the correct entrance.
- The entrance door has an automatic door opener and has a free clearance of at least 90 centimetres. The doorway either does not have a threshold or the threshold is no higher than 2.5 centimetres and bevelled.
- The designated smoking area (if any) is at least 15 metres from the entrance.

INTERIOR

Principle: All participants and speakers should be able to get to all areas used during the conference, such as breakout rooms, restaurants, toilets and facilities used during breaks. The site should have uniform, non-glare lighting and it needs to work for people with asthma, allergies or other sensitivities.

- Participants can move between areas without having to take stairs or steps.
- If there is a lift, it is at least 1.1 x 1.4 metres. The lift door is placed on the short side, larger lifts may have lift doors positioned on the long side. The space in front of the lift is at least 1.5 x 1.5 metres.
- Stairs are marked so they attract the attention of people with impaired vision and there are handrails on all staircases and ramps.
- Doors that need to be passed through have a free clearance of at least 90 centimetres. Doorways either do not have a threshold or the threshold is as low as possible (2 centimetres maximum, but preferably less than 1.5) and bevelled. The bevel has a maximum incline of 1:12 and is in clear contrast to the walls. Heavy doors that must be passed through have automatic door openers.

- Signs, symbols and texts are designed so that they are easy to read and positioned so that they are easily spotted.
- The toilets are accessible for wheelchair users. The soap in the toilets is unscented.
- The premises either do not have carpets or the carpets are all allergy-free. The site does not have any plants or anything else that can aggravate allergies or pose problems for persons with hypersensitivity. Furred animals (except guide dogs or other service dogs) are not allowed on the premises.
- The site has good acoustics.
- The site has good lighting and the fixtures have good contrast colours in relation to their surroundings. Large glass surfaces that can be mistaken for doorways are clearly marked.
- Windows are equipped with sun screens.
- It is possible to order food according to needs. If there is a buffet, the ingredients are clearly marked. The buffet is at a height that can be reached by all.

CONFERENCE ROOM

Principle: Ensure that everyone in the audience and who is participating in the program can do so on equal terms.

- The podium or stage is easy for wheelchair users to access. The podium has edge protectors and the lectern height can be adjusted - also for speakers who are seated.
- There is hearing equipment so people with hearing impairments can participate on equal terms - or such equipment can be lent. The equipment works in the hall as well as on the stage.

- There are portable microphones and microphones to accommodate potential questions from the audience.
- There is space in the auditorium for participants who use wheelchairs.
- There is space for interpreters.
- If the lights need to be switched off, for example when viewing a film, a spotlight can light up the speaker and potential sign-language interpreter.

BREAKOUT ROOMS

Principle: Ensure that accessibility is just as good in breakout rooms as it is in the conference room.

- There is hearing equipment so people with hearing impairments can participate on equal terms - or such equipment can be lent.
- Breakout rooms are laid out with space for people using wheelchairs.

HOTEL ROOMS

Principle: If the conference requires an overnight stay, the main concern is that all participants can stay at the same hotel.

- Book a hotel where there are accessible rooms available for people with disabilities. Book well in advance of the event - there is often a lack of accessible hotel rooms.
- The hotel is located as close as possible to the event site.
- Evacuation routes are well marked for those with visual and/or mobility impairments. The hotel has rooms for people with impaired hearing where the smoke and fire alarms and telephone are connected to a vibrating alarm.

TRAVEL/TRANSPORT

Principle: Make sure it is possible for all participants to get to the event with the least possible effort.

- Airlines may have rules about the number of wheelchair users allowed to travel on a flight. You may need to plan around this if travelling together. The same applies to trains and buses.
- Make sure that transport between the airport and conference hotel, site visits, etc., works for participants who need proper accessibility.

WRITING THE INVITATION TO AN EVENT

Principle: An accessibility perspective should be apparent in the planning, implementation and evaluation of all meetings and conferences. It is also important to send them well in advance.

- Announce the event through various forms of media and use different distribution channels.
- Send out invitations well in advance of the event.
- If the invitation is sent digitally, it will be readable for people who use assistive devices on their computer.
- The invitation should provide clear directions to the location where the meeting will be held.
- Ask participants to provide information about things that the organizer should be aware of, such as:
 - if they have someone accompanying them
 - if they have a mobility dog/assistance dog/guide dog

- if they use a wheelchair - manual or electric
- if they need a sign language interpreter (or a writing interpreter)
- if they need a hearing loop
- if they need a special diet or menu (vegetarian, lactose-free, gluten-free, no nuts, seafood or shellfish, etc.)
- if they have other allergies (perfume, animals, smoke, etc.)
- if they need conference documentation in alternative formats, such as in digital format on a USB, in easy-to-read language, etc

- The invitation should inform participants to avoid wearing perfume
- If an overnight stay is required, provide information about hotels that have accessible rooms for people with disabilities.
- If participants have requirements that cannot be met, communicate this as soon as possible.

PREPARING THE EVENT PROGRAM

Principle: The perception of the conference is influenced by its accessibility. A smart approach to the conference works for everyone.

- The program starts at a reasonable hour for travellers to arrive on time.
- The program is varied.
- The program is structured so there are breaks at appropriate intervals; aim for 45 minutes between breaks.
- There is enough time for participants to get to group discussions, parallel sessions, meals, etc.

THINGS TO CONSIDER RELATED TO THE EVENT

Principle: It is important to involve the speakers so they know what is required of them in order for everyone to be able to take part in the conference.

- The speakers should be informed that it is important to stick to their time slots.
- The speakers should be informed that it is important to speak into the microphone, to speak clearly and describe what is shown in pictures and videos that are not subtitled or do not have an audio description.
- The speakers should be informed that perfume and aftershave should not be used.
- Conference participants should receive information in alternative formats at the same time as other information if this was requested at registration.
- Conference participants should be informed about the contents of foods and beverages and what the alternative choices are.
- Writing or sign language interpretation should be provided if necessary. If there is a written script, the interpreter should get a copy of this in advance.
- Meet with the event manager and any support staff for the event.
- Offer assistance to participants and the event manager as necessary.

THINGS TO CONSIDER AFTER THE EVENT

Principle: Proper follow-up work can make the next event even better. Conduct an internal evaluation as the organizer by sending an electronic evaluation form to the event manager, participants and helpers/assistants.

Ask the participants:

- What was your general perception of the event?
- Was the event structured well? Was the content interesting?
- Did the event hosts live up to your expectations?
- Did the conference facilities live up to the agreement regarding accessibility?
- Were participants satisfied with accessibility at the event?
- How was the site?
- How was the quality of the food and drink?
- How was the information about the contents of the food and drink?

For discussion in the organizing group:

- Did the caterer live up to the agreement to meet specific dietary needs?
- How was the cleanliness and decoration of the site?
- To what extent was the goal of making the event accessible to everyone implemented? What did we learn and what should we remember for next time? What went well? What didn't go so well?

DESIGN OF THE PRESENTATIONS

Principle: All presentations are easy to read, easy to understand and intuitive. The layout helps to facilitate the understanding of the message.

- Minimum font size of text is 24 point, and 32 point for headers. Use fonts without serifs (Arial, Verdana, Helvetica).
- Use style sheets (embedded headings, lists and other text formats).
- Capital letters, italics, and underlining impair readability.
- Write short sentences and use highlights - maximum four or five per page in the presentation.
- Have clear contrast, for example, use dark text (black, blue, green) on a light background (white or other light colour). Reverse type (light text on a dark background) can be hard to read if the lines are too thin.
- Never write text on top of a patterned background, images or graphic elements. It is difficult to read.
- Graphic elements and images should fill at least half of the page in the presentation. Maximum two graphic elements per page.
- Make presentations that are easy to read even when they are printed out or copied. Do not put too many of the presentation images on the same sheet of paper
- Choose effects with care

ACCESSIBILITY FOR DIFFERENT GROUPS

Principal points that are important to think about for respective disabilities

MOBILITY

- It is possible to move independently and safely in the built environment.
- Areas are spacious enough so that it is possible to get around with a wheelchair or walker. The toilets, for example, are large enough.
- Furnishings and other equipment are positioned so that they can be used. For example, the height of reception desks, stands, shelves, signs and displays are suitable for those who use wheelchairs or are of short stature. Wheelchair users can sit comfortably at tables and worktops.

VISION

- It is possible to orient oneself and move about without being exposed to unnecessary safety hazards. For example, there are contrast markings and/or guidance routes that can be followed by those who use a cane/white cane.
- Access to personal services, such as an escort, is often a prerequisite for an unfamiliar environment to be accessible.
- Information must be presented in an accessible way.

HEARING AND DEAFBLINDNESS

- It is possible to communicate with other people, share information, and to perceive alarms.
- There are good acoustics, and, if necessary, access to a hearing loop.
- An important aspect is that sign language is the first language for many. If needed, information is available in sign language and there is access to a sign language interpreter. Tactile sign language is a prerequisite for communication for people with deafblindness.

COGNITIVE ABILITY AND MENTAL DISABILITIES

Accessibility means different things to different individuals; people with impaired cognitive ability represent a diverse group.

In this context, cognition means, for example, the ability to remember, orient oneself in space and time, the ability to solve problems and numerical and linguistic ability.

- It is possible to orient oneself and interact with the physical environment without being exposed to unnecessary safety hazards.
- Furnishings and other equipment are designed so that they are easy to understand.
- Various types of information are available in a simplified form.
- The information is clear, concrete, concise and unambiguous, for example, translated into easy-to-read language.
- Information signs are easy to understand, for example, by using symbols.

- User guides are concrete and have a clear layout.
- It may be necessary to get help from a supervisor or assistant for communications and interpreting activities. At a conference, for example, this could mean that the supervisor has the ability to stop a speech and be given time to explain what was said.
- In some cases, mental illness can lead to reduced cognitive ability. The prerequisites for accessibility vary greatly from individual to individual.
- It is particularly important that the environment be calm and peaceful, that distractions, such as light and sound disturbances, are minimized and that there is access to a relaxation room and privacy when needed.

RESPIRATORY SYSTEM DISORDERS, ASTHMA AND ALLERGIES

- It is possible to stay in the environment without being affected by allergic reactions or respiratory distress.
- There must be good air quality in the building.

- It is possible to avoid substances, materials, plants and fragrances that can cause allergic reactions or bother persons who suffer from hypersensitivity.

FOOD INTOLERANCES AND FOOD ALLERGIES

- It is possible to obtain food without being affected by allergic reactions and discomfort and stomach problems. It is possible to get information about the food being served.
- Special meals are available as needed.

READING AND WRITING DIFFICULTIES

- The design of the information is simple and easy to understand.
- Information is available in alternative formats such as audio and DAISY talking books.
- It is possible to have electronic information read using speech synthesis.
- The layout provides optimum readability and the structure of the text makes it easier for the reader.

MORE DETAILED INFORMATION IS AVAILABLE HERE:

The National Agency for Participation

<http://www.mfd.se/publikationer/rapporter/riktlinjer-for-tillganglighet-riv-hindren/>

Deltasenteret at Children, Youth and Family Affairs

http://www.bufdir.no/uul/Arranger_universelt_utformet_motekonferans/

The Mainstreaming in the Field of Disabilities project

<http://www.handicapmainstreaming.dk/vaerktoejer/handicapaspektet-kulturforvaltninger/>



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