



CREATING ACCESSIBLE SPACES, ORGANIZATIONS AND EVENTS

This is a short list of things to consider when shaping spaces and climates for events and organizations.

This isn't meant to be a complete checklist, but a starting point as you move along in a shared educational journey.

For more information, please search for resources online or contact the workshop facilitators to discuss.

* **Chemical Sensitivity/No-Scent Policy:** Asking people to refrain from the use of artificially-scented hygiene products allows for people with chemical sensitivities to participate without having temporary or long-term health affects.

* **Community Service/Outreach:** If you/your organization want to organize some event for a community, please make sure to carefully and critically recognize the difference between charity & solidarity. Charity can be seen as raising funds and giving from "privileged" to "underprivileged" people; solidarity would entail working alongside a community in need to ensure that we are supporting them in solving the root causes/issues from a systemic perspective, rather than by just giving money to provide temporary fixes without engaging with that community/issue.

* **Physical Accessibility:** Think about how people with a range of abilities might physically access an event/building: strive to support spaces constructed with *Universal Design* in mind. This can mean, for example, ensuring: that distances between rooms aren't unnecessarily far and that they are clearly stated in the program or elsewhere; that elevators are in equitable/visible spots; that chairs in a conference room aren't all tied together; that all chairs do not have arms or otherwise restrict larger bodies; that alternatives to steps are clearly sign posted and easily available; that sign language interpreting is provided when requested; that signs are written with good contrast in mind (usually dark letters on light backgrounds are best), in larger fonts and that alternative formats (e.g., Braille signs) are also provided, etc.

* **Gender Neutral Restrooms:** When not permanently available, you can and should create them for events by re-signing gendered restrooms. If you do, be sure to have discussions with the owners of the space (when possible) and have educational information available - use them as a learning tool without putting more scrutiny on the people using the gender neutral restrooms. Consider placing signs informing of the closest gendered restrooms and vice versa.

* **Mission/Vision/Goal Statements:** Be sure that your statements reflect openness, don't discriminate, directly name systems of oppression and resistance (rather than only broad "diversity" language that, for example, is afraid to mention racism and white privilege) and are broad enough to incorporate change. The process of changing a mission, constitution, etc can be difficult but also liberating and a way to celebrate forward direction.

* **Whose Voices:** Always ask yourself "*Whose voices are at the table, who is making decisions, who is not here -- and why?*" Recognize that simply inviting a person of color, a trans person, or a person with a disability doesn't automatically make your organization open, comfortable, and equitable. If an organization has been built by mostly white people, for example, it may feel to a person of color like a white group created for white people who have asked one person of color to join them at their white table. Work to build authentic relationships so multi-racial, multi-gender, multi-ability, multi-generational, multi-class (etc) teams are setting the agenda and sharing power *from the beginning*. Nobody should feel invited as a token or feel that they can only bring one of their identities to the table. Finally, make sure that your event does not clash with any major religious holidays (consulting an interfaith calendar can be a good idea).

* **Photography/Strobe Lights/Strong Lighting:** Warn people if your event includes flash photography, strobe lighting or other lighting issues. Also, if you are using flash photography make sure to ask before taking a photo. Always ask people if they object to having their photograph taken and be clear and open about how photos taken will be used, to respect confidentiality.

* **Childcare:** Consider providing free childcare for your events to enable people who are parents to attend. This is especially important when organizing evening and weekend events, since many parents usually have no arranged childcare provisions for these times.

* **Ask Early:** If you ask participants what they need to authentically access an event, they can tell you. Make sure to advertise this accessibility early and in all promotion of your event, so people know the event will be accessible to them immediately and can make requests (interpreters, childcare, etc) early enough that your organization can prepare within your means.

* **Pronouns:** Consider making it part of your organizational culture that people identify their Preferred Gender Pronoun as an institutionalized part of meeting or event introductions (but also make sure people can opt-out if they do not wish to disclose that day), to disrupt the genderist assumption that we know what someone's gender identity is simply by looking at their body. People should have the right to self-determine how they are addressed.

* **Cost:** Is your organization or event economically accessible? Systems of oppression create real access barriers to earning income. If only people who have enough money to attend your organization or event show up, you will be missing critical voices and not reaching for systemic change. If you must charge for your event, offer a sliding-scale fee or scholarships, and be very clear about what is required to apply for one.

* **Feedback/Challenges:** Be open to hearing that what you've done or are doing isn't working for someone or that it has hurt/harmed them; try not to feel defensive but rather take that feedback as a gift, thank people for sharing, and consider how you can take the feedback to help implement honest systems change -- this isn't a personal attack; this is about making our communities more just and accessible. If you are offering feedback, name it as such and try to be specific and grounded in your experience.

* **Green/Sustainability:** Recognize the ties between social justice and loving the earth. Sustainability is not just an environmental construct but also a socio-economic one: systems of oppression are tied to sustainability and how we interact with the web of life, so be sure to consider greening your spaces. Here are some ideas to get you started:

- Offering water fountains/pitchers & encouraging people to bring reusable drinking containers
- Eating vegetarian & vegan meals which incorporate local, fresh, and organic foods (and don't forget halal and kosher options for all provided meals and snacks!)
- Minimize paper handouts, plastic give-away toys, conference bags, etc
- Encourage car-pooling, biking, walking, and using public transportation, and specify which public transportation lines/routes fall along your event or meeting's path
- Email PDFs of full handouts after workshop session; ask presenters to do a 1-page summary to hand out
- Ask caterers to provide food in bulk on platters/bowls and not individually wrapped items
- Provide compostable plates, cups, & utensils
- Provide only materials that are truly needed. If you are using nametag holders, collect them at the end of the experience and use them in future years or share them with other organizations
- When you do sustainable things, market them as such so that participants can learn from the experience.

Website Resources

- * UMN GLBTA Programs Office/Transgender Commission: www.glbta.umn.edu/trans
- * UMN GLBTA Programs Office: www.glbta.umn.edu
- * UMN Disability Services: www.ds.umn.edu
- * MN Transgender Health Coalition: www.mntranshealth.org
- * Multiple Chemical Sensitivities: www.multiplechemicalsensitivity.org
- * Bisexual Organizing Project: www.bisexualorganizingproject.org
- * Useful UK sites on Bi Information (how to run a local group): www.bicommunitynews.co.uk
- * Disability Access Information and Support: www.daisweb.com
- * Universal Design Education: www.udeducation.org
- * Organizing Sustainable Events: www.planetfriendly.net/promote.html
- * Creating More Inclusive Events: www.mtholyoke.edu/studentprograms/inclusive.html
- * Interfaith Calendar: www.interfaithcalendar.org

* Feminist issues to consider when organizing events: www.geekfeminism.wikia.com/wiki/Women-friendly_events

* Solidarity: www.solidarity-us.org