RMCUMC Disability Visions-Ability Matters Committee
Event Planning for Universal Accessibility and Full Inclusion

The *Disability Visions-Ability Matters* Committee of the Rocky Mountain Conference provides this list and information for use in event planning. Universal accessibility, full inclusion, respect for individual dignity, comfort and safety are the focus of our event planning recommendations.

Universal accessibility means that all persons are able to equally participate in all the conference programming at any location selected. Having accessibility issues identified in advance, and handled in advance is important. The *Disability Visions- Ability Matters Committee* embraces the abilities of persons with disabilities, and affirms inclusive ways to engage all persons in meaningful ways.

Some key event planning questions and accommodations to have in place in advance of the event:

1. Does the facility offer an adequate number of universally accessible hotel/motel/inn rooms for the total number of persons who will need them?
2. In the banquet or restaurant areas is there:
    a. Adequate space between tables and furnishings for persons in wheelchairs, with limited mobility, or with assistive devices to negotiate passage throughout the area?
    b. Are buffets accessible to all?
3. Are the facilities set up to allow all persons who are in ceremonies, presenters, musicians or who may be ordained at the event safe access/and passage wherever they need to be at a given time?
4. If you have a speaker in a wheelchair, with limited mobility or with an assistive device is the place where they will speak universally accessible and set up to meet their needs?
5. Are there ramps where there need to be ramps?
6. Are restrooms and bathrooms universally accessible?
7. What universally accessible emergency and disaster plans are in place at the facility and any off site planned event locations to serve persons attending who may need them?
    a. In the event of fire or other emergency is there a safe universally accessible evacuation route?
    b. Do you have a back-up plan in place in the event that the first plan does not work for all persons?
    c. Are the universally accessible rooms in a place where persons using them can get to safety easily?

8. Has the event planning team clearly asked registration questions in such a way that it offers all persons the opportunity to fully respond with detail needed to address needs? (See our specific recommendations on this).
9. Has it been verified with and by the facility that they can and will meet universal accessibility requirements?
10. Has a walk through been done ahead of time that includes a person or persons with disability(s) who can provide planning input?
11. If used at the event is there universally accessible transportation for all persons who need this, and that covers all routes of the journey to a site that is important to the event, but remote and off site from the main event location?
    a. Were the transportation companies asked in advance to have the appropriate numbers of accessible buses/vehicles available to offer transportation to all who want this?
    b. How will/have the transportation schedules been conveyed to attendees in advance of a journey to ensure their inclusion if they desire this?
    c. If there are people who are on medical oxygen are they aware of the length of the journey to assess their quantity needs.
12. What are the identified event specific universal accessibility needs and how have they been addressed and communicated to participants?
13. In presentations if applicable:
    a. Are planned warm-up exercises fully inclusive? Will some be left out or feel embarrassed because they cannot do it?
    b. If there is a need are there sign language interpreters for persons who are deaf, hard of hearing or for other reasons use this method of communication?
14. Is there any aspect of the event that for some reason is not universally accessible and/or cannot be made to be universally accessible?
    a. Have the appropriate notifications been made to all so that people can plan in advance for this situation or make informed decisions about participation?
15. In situations where obstacles may exist due to terrain or other prohibitive reasons what creative solutions can be used to share that aspect of the event with all participants?
    a. For example if terrain or distance prohibits safe universally accessible passage for some persons, can that event be live streamed to a room at the conference center so that all can engage the event in an accessible way?
    b. If live streamed can a session be offered along with the live stream to talk with one another about the event?
16. How can the event plan creatively include all people in meaningful ways?
17. Has event staff at facility had sensitivity training?

a. Human Resources departments of facilities are suggested as a contact point to ask about any sensitivity training that has been given to the employees around all areas of diversity including persons with disabilities.

b. If this event is at a Church what is the level of sensitivity training provided in that church?

18. Intellectual Disability Questions

a. What is an attendee's preferred learning style or method?

b. How does the site or event accommodate persons with intellectual disabilities?

19. Are there any other concerns that have not been named that came up on registrations or otherwise that can be addressed in advance of the event to offer a seamless experience of welcoming and accommodation to all?

Event attendees can be:

- Persons with physical disabilities needing wheelchair access.
- Persons who use medical oxygen for breathing.
- Persons who have limited mobility, use walkers, canes, or assistive devices.
- Persons with vision impairment.
- Persons who have service animals/guide dogs to meet specific needs.
- Persons with hearing impairment.
- Persons who may need medical care needs in a timely manner (all persons).
- Persons who require quiet spaces away from crowds to pull away for a period of time.
- Persons who request due diligence to ensure they are able to fully participate in all the planned programs, events and ceremonies with regard to identified Universal Accessibility needs that can be addressed.
- Persons with intellectual disabilities.
- Person with a disability that is not visually apparent to another person.

Gifts, Experience and Reality:

In keeping with the name of our committee, *Disability Visions- Ability Matters*, we suggest that, in the process of event planning, there be not only questions sensitive to diverse disabilities and related to identifying special needs and accommodations asked, but also that we ask each participant to identify what gift, skills, and experience (abilities) they have and bring to the event that could help us achieve full inclusion and accessibility for everyone in attendance.

We would also recommend that on the registration forms for such events, these matters be reflected in the kind of questions asked:

(1) What special needs do you have for accessibility and full inclusion in this event?

(2) What gifts, skills and/or experience do you have that can enhance full inclusion and accessibility for all of us in attendance?

When asked persons with disabilities said this about their experience and what things caused them concern when attending functions, meetings, restaurants, church, stores and in other places:

- Yes, places and venues are "accessible", but do people have to ask for some of those things after the person is already there, because many things are "available" but not set up?
- It is embarrassing to the individual, to:
    - Have to remind someone they have unmet accommodations needs
    - Wait, while those forgotten or often overlooked accommodations are set up
    - To be seated apart from the main body of the group because of wheelchairs or walkers
    - Not having others focus on their abilities instead of their disabilities
    - Assuming they want their chicken cut up or their napkin put in their lap instead of offering help and responding to their wishes
    - Accessible bathrooms were overwhelmingly the biggest concern.

Within this group it was also identified that it is important to have someone responsible at an event or facility the use for making sure any accessibility issues that have been identified in advance are met prior to arrival without fuss or attention drawn to the individual.

Communication:

- Communication options are important.
    - Clear communication about when and where accessible transportation will be available for offsite aspects of event
    - About accessible routes and travel to the event
    - Have an onsite liaison for the facility that is available to address onsite needs that are not in place and a way for people needing to communicate with this person to contact that person directly.
    - Communication options in the programming that is responsive to needs of the Deaf Community, and people who have Visual Disabilities.
        - Sensitivity to how things are presented
        - Use of interpreters
        - Text preparation and characteristics
- Provide information that allows all persons the choice to make informed decisions about what to have with them.
- Basic communication to appropriate persons in advance of trips into more remote locations off site to note group location/plan in the event that emergency occurs. (Just as

back country skiers, hikers or campers let someone know where they are planning to be in the event that they need assistance.)

- Communication at time of event sign-up in enough detail that people can be adequately informed to make attendance or other decisions in advance.
- Communicate about any creative and meaningful options that serve all persons.
- It is recommended that the planning teams engage persons who face and negotiate accessibility obstacles in event planning conversations.
- Ask for the appropriate information up front those who register to attend to be able to fully plan for the needs and to engage all who wish to attend.
- Have thorough registration materials that allow for specificity about needs and accommodations requested for planning purposes, and review forms available at the end that allow persons with disabilities to fully express their experience of the event (what went well, what did not).

Disability Recommendations for the Registration Processes:

- **Registration questions**

  - **Do you want us to know about any of the following specific needs/accommodations requests?** Ask that people please check all that apply. Examples, but not limited to given specific situations:
    - ☐ Communications
    - ☐ Physical Accessibility/Mobility Considerations
    - ☐ Hearing
    - ☐ Vision
    - ☐ Room and Facility Accommodations
    - ☐ Transportation
    - ☐ Other (Please be specific)

  - **What gifts, skills and/or experience do you have that can enhance full inclusion and accessibility for all of us in attendance?**
    - Followed by a free text box to respond

  - **What details can provide about your needs for accessibility and full inclusion in this event?**
    - Followed by a free text box to respond

  - **Is there anything we have not asked that you would like to tell us?**
    - Provide a free text area that allows for more detail about needs/requested accommodations and for the person to provide contact phone number so they can be called to discuss needs and options.

  - **May we call you by phone to further discuss your needs at the upcoming event? If so, at what number and best times may we reach you?**

And, at the end of the event on the event feedback/ review form include areas for response to:

- **As a person with a disability(s) attending the event please evaluate with specific detail if and how your needs were addressed at the event.**

- **Were you respectfully treated when having your needs met?**

- **Is there anything that you would like to educate us about in relation to disability and your experience while attending this event?**

Please feel free to visit the *Disability Visions – Ability Matters* area of the rmcumc.org website for more information or to contact us.