Meeting Accessibility

Recommendations for meeting accessibility

COINS is working to establish guidelines for meeting accessibly. In keeping a meeting accessible to all, there are at least three groups that should be concerned with accessibility - **the organizers**, **the presenters**, and **the attendees**. Not every meeting can be completely accessible, but following a larger number of these guidelines will ensure a more inclusive space, in particular for those with physical and/or mental disabilities. When it is not possible/practical to follow these guidelines, please be clear about the level of accessibility available so that people with limited access can make their own arrangements or choose not to attend.

One page PDF summaries on accessibility are available for meeting organizers and for meeting attendees.

For the meeting SOC/LOC

Pre-meeting

Before the meeting, the most important task is ensuring good communication between the SOC/LOC and anyone needing accommodation.

- The registration form should provide a specific place for accessibility concerns and requirements as part of the registration form.
- The registration form should include an option of listing an emergency contact (and encourage people to take the option)
- Clearly state on the announcement who to contact with any additional concerns, requests, or questions.
- Childcare or information about where to find nearby affordable childcare should be provided (perhaps even have a wiki page available where parents can share/discuss childcare options)
- Information about meeting accessibility should be part of the website. This includes:
  - Possibility to have of sign language interpreters
  - Wheelchair accessibility
  - Information for people who are limited to walking short distances (i.e., could they easily get from hotel to conference to meals?)
  - The availability of accessible restroom facilities; the availability of non-gendered restroom facilities.

Meeting Logistics and Site

The balance of cost, size, and location sometimes means there is little control over the accessibility of the site. Where possible, these guidelines should be followed to improve access.

- There should be microphones for the speakers as well as for questions from the audience. Hands free microphones should also be available.
- If there are microphones available for questions, using a runner and a wireless microphone allows participation from those who can't easily get to a microphone on a stand.

- Tables and seats should be provided during the reception and/or buffets
- Organizers should be aware of any dietary restrictions when planning food during breaks and/or conference dinners, and to the best of their abilities accommodate them.
- Have the possibility for telecoil software (for people with hearing implants) or accommodation for interpreters.
- Accessible routes and bathrooms should be clearly indicated.
- Provide a separate viewing room of the presentations or remote viewing possibility
- Include a space on name badges to encourage attendees to indicate their preferred pronouns, and provide examples.
- Name badges should be made with large, clear font and high contrast
- Ensure that talks are finished within the allotted time to protect breaks
- Provide sufficiently long breaks between sessions (at least 30 minutes)
- Remind conference attendees and speakers of the guidelines below - both at the beginning and throughout the conference

For presenters

- Try to minimize the use of jargon and idioms.
- Try to give sufficient time for conference participants to process the information by speaking slowly and including occasional, pertinent pauses.
- If possible, have a full version of your presentation uploaded to the wiki ahead of time.
- Use multiple communication methods to convey your most important points to people with different learning styles (i.e., demonstrate in a graph, write on the slide, and say out loud)
- Plan to finish your presentation in the time allotted to help the session chair keep to time.
- Often it is recommended for the speaker to repeat the questions before answering

Hearing Impairment

- Using captions for audio/video content is recommended.
- Speak as clearly as possible into the microphone while facing the audience.
- Try to keep your lips visible for anyone who speech-reads.
- If you have paper handouts, you should also provide electronic versions for people who may need it to use reader software.

Visual Impairment

- Use a large, easily readable font and sufficient color contrast when possible.
- Try to describe any graphics or figures, and remark on important features.
- Try to use colors that are accessible to anyone who is colorblind (e.g., by avoiding red-green color pairings). Resources include Color Oracle for Python and Matplotlib's list of named colors.

For meeting attendees

Some suggestions for an accessible and inclusive meeting environment overlap with general guidelines for being respectful and courteous, while others are related to more specific issues. Please contribute to a positive and inclusive conference.

General

- Respect the preferred pronouns of others, and please help us to make sure that nobody is singled out by including your preferred pronouns on your badge.
- Please minimize the use of fragrances and scented products (e.g., colognes and perfumes).
- If you smoke, do so outside in designated areas, and please wash your hands after smoking to reduce the scent.
- Ask before photographing anyone, and do not use flash photography without permission.
- Always use (and wait for) a microphone if one is available, whether presenting or asking questions.
- Respect the privacy of people with visible disabilities (i.e., be particularly careful not to stare).
- Use inclusive rather than ableist language. For example, instead of referring to a parking spot as "handicapped," please refer to it as "disability accessible" or "accessible."
- Additionally, avoid making contrast between person with disability and "normal," e.g., do not say, "I'm sorry normal people aren't aware of accessibility for blind people" Say, "I'm sorry sighted people aren't aware of accessibility for blind people"
- You may offer help a person with a disability, but do not assume that help is needed. If they refuse help, respect this.
- If someone has a mobility aid or guide animal, please try not stare and do not to touch the mobility aid and/or guide animal unless it is unharnessed (off-duty) and you have obtained permission.
- If someone has a helper (e.g., pushing a wheelchair or sign language interpreter), try to speak to/look at the person with the disability instead of the helper.

Accessibility of Meeting Spaces

- Keep aisles pathways clear for people who use wheelchairs or who have limited mobility.
- Move into the center of a seating section so people with limited mobility or claustrophobia can use the aisle seats.
- Reserve the front row and aisle seats for people with accessibility needs, and assume that if someone is on the aisle it is for a good reason.
- Please minimize the use of fragrances and scented products (e.g., colognes and perfumes).
- If you smoke, do so outside in designated areas, and please wash your hands after smoking to reduce the scent.
- Always use (and wait for) a microphone if one is available, whether presenting or asking questions.

Cultural Sensitivity

- Be aware of cultural differences with respect to personal space and greeting customs.
- Respect any expressed desire of an attendee to avoid physical contact - this may include handshakes for some.
- Try to be inclusive when making lunch and evening plans
- Generally, try to recognize, respect, and enjoy cultural differences

Mistakes happen, and it can be difficult to follow all of the recommendations. If you make a mistake, apologise, and learn from it to help you to remember for next time.

References and Additional Resources

- Inclusive Astronomy 2015 Materials
- AAS Policies Regarding Meeting Etiquette
- Web Accessibility Initiative
- Regarding Color Choices in Visuals
  - Matplotlib's list of Named Colors
  - Color Oracle for Python