

# The Art of Accessibility: How to Make Sure Virtual Meetings, Conventions and Events are Accessible for All

*Lauren Weatherly, SVP of marketing, PGI*

While many organizations quickly turned to virtual events amid the COVID-19 pandemic, it's no longer enough to host an event virtually and just hope it works for everyone.

Programs must be both accessible and inclusive. As the world transitions into the next phase of events –whether in person, virtual or hybrid – the impetus is on organizations to rethink how they plan and execute an event.

The good news is that today's technology enables organizations to deliver content and programs that meet everyone's needs. Solutions can be as simple as providing transcriptions of speakers at an event, including closed captions on pre-recorded content or hiring a sign language interpreter for live streaming or in-person events.

Here are a few ways to make sure your next event is both accessible and inclusive.

## Understand the audience

The first step to making an event inclusive and accessible is something every organization should already be doing: Understand the audience and consider how they will engage and consume information.

As an example, consider that 48 million people in the country are hard of hearing or deaf, according to the National

Association of the Deaf (NAD). Meanwhile, according to the CDC, about 12 million people 40 years and older have a vision impairment, including one million people who are blind.

A “standard” event with basic audio and video may not work for every attendee. That means the planning phase must evaluate the audience’s needs and consider everything from the lighting to the audio. The goal is to make sure an event is clear and understandable for everyone, for in-person, virtual and hybrid events.

Consider incorporating questions about accessibility needs into the registration. An in-person or hybrid event should evaluate on-site signage and how attendees navigate a location, with an eye toward possible ways to improve.

## **Consider tailoring content**

Creating content or prerecording segments in advance is a great way to make sure an event goes off without a hitch. Doing so also allows organizations to tailor content to the audience.

Thanks to technology, events are no longer bound by a one-size-fits-all mentality. They can – and should – include different tracks that attendees can select based on their interests. The same holds true for attendees who may have additional needs.

Organizations taking this approach should consider translating the content into different languages. Audiences want to engage with content, and the less they have to work to do so, the more accessible it becomes to a larger audience, and a higher value can be placed upon it.

# Make an agenda

Creating a schedule is essential for any event, and planning ahead especially benefits anyone who might need extra assistance. Be sure any materials that are shared are in an accessible format.

Knowing in advance what's in store for an event lessens the burden for attendees. The less time they spend worried about navigating an event, the more time they can focus on the content.

As part of the process, let attendees know how they can join the conversation, ask questions and engage with their fellow attendees.

Think too about the speakers. Are they representative not just of the organization and its message but of the target audience?

Technology allows organizations to engage with their audiences in ways that were unimaginable just a few years ago. But the best technology in the world is useless unless we deploy it in such a way that makes it accessible and welcoming for all.



**About the Author:** *Lauren Weatherly is the SVP of marketing at global virtual meetings and events company PGI, [www.pgi.com](http://www.pgi.com), which is dedicated to making meetings and online events simple to join and secure to use so people connect wherever they are. She is responsible for developing and leading a results-focused global marketing strategy to drive growth and build brand recognition for the company.*