

Planning Accessible

ERG Events

Providing forums for discussion and collaboration among employees of various shared identities can enhance a company's diversity and inclusion efforts. These structures, commonly known as Employee Networks, Affinity Groups, Business Resource Groups (BRGs) or Employee Resource Groups (ERGs), are found in 90 percent of Fortune 500 companies¹, and for good reason. They offer employees an opportunity to network, address common issues and concerns, and receive support from those who share similar backgrounds, interests or experiences—including people with disabilities.

To facilitate interaction amongst members, ERGs often plan a variety of events—both online and in-person. When planning such an event or meeting, it's important to ensure the proceedings are open and accessible to all employees, including those with disabilities. Accessibility is key—even for ERGs that focus on topics other than disability inclusion. This ensures that all attendees feel welcome and valued and can contribute to the conversation. With a few simple steps, it is easy to accommodate attendees with disabilities and ensure that your ERG meeting is welcoming to all employees.

Below are some strategies for making ERG meetings or events accessible to everyone:

Mention Accessibility in the Invitation

When drafting invitation language to send out or post to social media, it's important to provide a single point of contact whom attendees can call or email with accommodation requests. This might read "Please email [name and email address] to request accommodations to help ensure your participation in this event." This will also help the event organizers plan for accommodations that require advance scheduling, such as sign language interpreters.

Meeting Materials

It's also important to ensure that all materials for the meeting (agendas, copies of presentation slides, reports, etc.) are available prior to the meeting in accessible formats. Generally, it's a good rule of thumb to email the accessible handouts to registered attendees the day before the meeting. This way, attendees with vision-related disabilities can listen to the text using screen-reading technology if desired. In addition, attendees may request meeting handouts in large print or braille.

Learn more about accessible digital documents at:
peatworks.org/staff-training/digital-accessibility

Physical Accessibility

Finally, when selecting a location for your meeting or event, it's critical to confirm that your meeting room or event venue is physically accessible. This includes ensuring there is an entrance with a ramp, working elevators, and doorways and aisles clear and wide enough for a wheelchair user. It's also important to check that pathways in and out of the event venue don't include objects that could be tripped over, such as extension cords. Within the meeting room, seating should be flexible and able to accommodate users of all abilities.

Learn more about accessible meetings at:
adahospitality.org/accessible-meetings-events-conferences-guide/book

Virtual Meeting Tools

Not surprisingly, many employers and event organizers are moving more toward virtual or online meetings and events using video chat and webinar tools. Remote options can increase the participation of employees with disabilities—if the technology is accessible. When

¹ From "90% Of Fortune 500 Companies Already Have A Solution To Gender Equality But Aren't Utilizing It," by Georgene Huang, Forbes, November 13, 2017.

choosing an online event platform, it's important to test its accessibility ahead of time. For example, user controls should be able to be navigated without a mouse, and there should be good color contrast for those with visual impairments.

Learn more about choosing accessible virtual meeting tools at: peatworks.org/buy-it

Sign Language Interpreters

Some attendees who are deaf or hard of hearing may request sign language interpreters. Interpreters typically work in teams of at least two to provide American Sign Language (ASL) or other sign language interpretation in real time. Sign language interpreters are available for hire in most communities. As with CART, it's wise to create an account with a provider in advance of a meeting or event.

Learn more about sign language interpreters at: nad.org/resources/american-sign-language/interpreting-american-sign-language/

Provide Live Captions

One of the most common accommodation requests is for live captioning of speakers, typically provided through Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART). With CART, a certified provider, who may join in-person or remotely, listens to the conversation and provides real-time captions which can be displayed onscreen through a web browser. CART is an added expense, so you may choose to only provide it when requested by meeting participants with disabilities, such as hearing loss or a language-processing disability. However, it's worth prioritizing CART as a regular practice, as captions can boost user engagement for everyone.² What's more, CART replaces the need for a notetaker by creating an automatic event transcript. Whatever the approach, it's important to set up an account with a CART provider ahead of time, so that it's readily available when needed.

Learn more about CART at: cccaptioning.org/faqs-cart/

Hosting an event in a fully accessible location and fully accessible manner makes all attendees feel welcome and valued and can help ensure its success. The purpose of ERGs is to increase inclusion in the workplace. If ERGs communicate with attendees and plan in advance, they can ensure that their events increase inclusivity and create a welcoming environment for all team members.

² From "[More Research Concludes Nearly All Students Find Closed Captions Helpful For Learning](#)," by Patrick Loftus, 3PlayMedia, December 20, 2016.



The Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion (EARN) is a resource for employers seeking to recruit, hire, retain, and advance qualified employees with disabilities. It is funded by the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy under a cooperative agreement with The Viscardi Center. For more information, visit [AskEARN.org](https://askearn.org).

Preparation of this item was fully funded by the United States Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy in the amount of \$9,241,750 (five year total grant amount) under Cooperative Agreement No. OD26451-14-75-4-36. This document does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. Department of Labor, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.