



VANCOUVER ISLAND UNIVERSITY

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# Accessible Event Planning

## A Check List



This document was prepared to assist University personnel when organizing events. Planning with access in mind is not just a good thing to do but our responsibility under the law. Contact the Human Rights Office should you have any questions or concerns. (250) 740-6430.


1/25/2010

# Accessible Event Planning

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When planning an event at VIU, please consider the following checklist to ensure that your event is accessible to all your participants.

## Advertising, outreach and registration forms

- Give ample notice for your upcoming event – a month is good. This allows people to arrange for transportation, assistants or other supports they may require.
- Provide space on your registration form for people to identify their accommodation or access needs
- On advertising include contact information (e.g., phone number and e-mail address) so that attendees can contact you regarding access and accommodation issues. *Sample: Please contact \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_ should you have any access related concerns or needs.*
- Follow up with people who request accommodations in a timely fashion to inform them whether or not their needs can be met.
- On the posters or information sheets, include accessibility symbols - . 
- Promote a scent-free practice for all events.
- If you are serving food, ask participants about any dietary restrictions.
- If you are not serving food note if the cafeteria will be closed (e.g. weekends) as access to snacks may be important for some participants (e.g. low blood sugar, etc.)

## Selecting the room or venue

Attempt to find a space that is fully accessible and meets the needs of your event. Things to look for include:

- The location and approximate distance for nearest accessible parking – this should be less than 30 metres from the accessible entrance to your event.
- Make sure that wheelchair access is via the main entrance. If this is not possible post clear, legible signs at the main entrance showing alternative, safe and accessible entrances.
- Make sure people with a disability can reach all areas used at your event independently or with assistance from your volunteers.
- If your event occurs after 4:30 contact Facility Services in advance to ensure that essential elevators will be in operation.

## Events in the Royal Arbutus Room

The Royal Arbutus Room is often chosen to host university events. As it is located on the second floor of Building 300 and as there is no elevator access it is important to carefully plan for an accessible event.

- Access to the Royal Arbutus Room for persons who cannot use the stairs can be made by a “Garaventa Stair-Lift”. The maximum capacity of the stair lift is 450 lbs (person & wheel chair combined) and may not be appropriate for all users. It could not be used by anyone using a scooter (as scooters are too heavy) unless the person had the physical capacity to leave the scooter on the lower floor, access the room via the lift and attend the event without use of the scooter. A further complication is that washrooms are on the lower level, requiring arrangements for an operator for the stair lift should the person need to use the washroom.
- It is recommended that you ensure that any advertising or invitations ask participants with mobility impairments to contact you. *Sample: Please contact the organizer if you have limited mobility or use a wheelchair or scooter.* This will ensure that you are aware of their mobility needs and can make appropriate arrangements. You don’t want a participant to arrive, just to find out that they cannot access the room or that arranging for the stair lift at the last minute creates delay and inconvenience.
- Inform any participant using a wheelchair that access to the room involves ascending the stairs on an open platform. This ensures they have full information when making the decision on whether to attend the event. You might want to look at it yourself so that you can accurately describe it to any potential user.
- Ensure that you know who will be available to operate the stair lift. If it is during cafeteria hours a cashier may be able to assist but after hours security will need to be called. Ensure that security knows that they will be needed for your event and the approximate time when they will be needed. Remember to make arrangements for both the beginning and the end of the event. Ensure you know how to connect with security should a washroom visit be required, especially when the event spans a significant number of hours. Access to your event should be convenient and respectful of the person requiring this assistance. Security can be contacted during the day at 250-740-6512 and in the evening/week-ends at 250-753-3812.

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## Setting Up the Room/Facility

Make sure the room set-up for your event is as accessible as possible. Consider the following elements:

- Allows for easy movement for wheelchair and scooter users. (You may have to rearrange furniture).
- Wide aisles - ideally at least 4 feet wide.
- Includes accessible areas interspersed throughout the room – front, middle and back.
- Plenty of space around tables.
- Good lighting (bright, without glare and allows for adjustment).
- If a stage is used, ensure it is easily visible.
- Projector screen is easily visible.
- Good acoustics.
- Provide seat reservations for people who are hearing impaired or visually impaired as appropriate.
- A person attending with a Guide Dog will need a table without a bar underneath so that there is room for the Guide Dog.
- Accessible washrooms within a reasonable distance.

### **Also make sure that you:**

- Cover electrical cables or cords that cross over aisles or pathways so wheelchair users as well as people who use canes, walkers or have a visual loss can traverse safely across them.
- Post clear and easy-to-read signs showing locations of accessible washrooms, elevators, phones, etc.
- Wherever possible, try to eliminate or reduce background noise during proceedings.
- Make sure organizers, presenters and volunteers are aware of emergency evacuation procedures for participants with disabilities.

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## Planning ahead with any volunteers or other event organizers

- Train your volunteers for the event about how to respectfully assist people with disabilities and to respond to any accessibility issues that may arise.
- Make sure that volunteers are easily identified (use name tags and/or other identifiers).
- Book English/American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters or computerized note taker / real time captioning, if these services have been requested. Students can often make their own arrangements through the Disability Services Department (250) 740-6446.
- Provide interpreters and note takers with agendas and presentation outlines in advance of the event.
- Assess whether the interpreters and/or captionists should be introduced and whether an explanation to participants would be appropriate.
- If food is provided, make sure the total count includes interpreters, note takers, and attendants.

## Suggestions for Effective Presenters

- Remind presenters to end meetings or presentations on schedule (people making transit arrangements often have very little flexibility).
- Consider producing some materials in large print (16-point type or larger) and have available electronically in case of a request for such a format.
- It is always good to have a few print copies on hand. Encourage and support presenters to offer copies of their material in different formats before their presentation starts.
- For presenters, lectern heights and audio visual controls need to be adjustable to meet the needs of different speakers.
- During the session, presenters should verbally describe contents of videos, or any written materials, including overheads or chalkboard notes for those audience members with vision loss.
- Encourage presenters to use captioned videos.
- Ensure presenters are aware of accessible facilities and whom to contact if there is a problem.

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## Budgeting for your event

- Set aside some funds early in the planning stage in the event there is a request for ASL/English interpretation or to have materials prepared in Braille. The cost for these accommodations can be significant. Note that students with disabilities attending an institutional event can often be accommodated through the Disabilities Services Department.

## Evaluation

- Include a section about the accessibility of the event on the evaluation form. This can provide valuable information for use in future event planning.

## Institutional Resources

### Disability Services Department – 250-740-6446

- Available to assist registered students with disabilities with their access and accommodation needs.
- Willing to assist University personnel problem-solve access related issues.

### Human Rights Office – 250-740-6430

- Available to assist organizers understand our responsibility to ensure our events are as accessible as possible
- Able to assist University personnel problem-solve access related issues

This information has been adapted by the VIU Human Rights Office from a check list provided by Hall, Dale. (2006, November 21). *Accessible Events Guidelines*. Retrieved August 16, 2007, from Canadian Association of Disability Service Providers in Post-Secondary Educations (CADSPPE): <http://www.uottawa.ca/cacuss>