



AUPE
**HUMAN
RIGHTS**
COMMITTEE

CREATING ACCESSIBLE **UNION EVENTS** **TOOLKIT**

Planning an event can be quite the project. There are so many ways to bring AUPE members together, whether to organize, learn, and, of course, have fun! From AGMs and rallies to picket lines and bowling nights, there is so much we can accomplish.

It is just as important to ensure our events are as accessible as possible. All members deserve the opportunity to feel included and engaged.

Every event will have different possibilities and barriers. Your Human Rights Committee created this booklet to share some ideas and actions to consider when you plan a union event. We know you may be limited by things like your budget, venue, volunteer power, and other resources, but every effort to be more accessible matters.

Many AUPE members deal with disabilities that may or may not be visible to you. In AUPE's *2023-24 Demographics Survey*, 12% of members reported that they have a disability some or all of the time.

We should always consider the needs of our fellow members with disabilities. This is essential to building solidarity.

In 2023 and 2024, AUPE conducted a "Demographics and Discrimination" survey of the membership. Almost 8,000 active members responded. This toolkit is inspired and informed by the responses from that survey. The quotes throughout are from real AUPE members with disabilities.

When we asked members to tell us about their disability in their own words.

Here is what some had to say:

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“I have worn out knees from working in hospitals.”



“

“I struggle with fibromyalgia and day-to-day life is very difficult, but I love to care for others.”



“

“I injured my back at work.”



“

“I’m afraid to let anyone know I have any disability issues.”



GENERAL PRINCIPLES FOR INCLUSIVE EVENTS

Make your event as inclusive and accessible as possible. You should always welcome requests for specific accommodations, but it is better if everyone's needs are met without them having to ask.

Not all disabilities are visible or permanent. You shouldn't try to guess who does and does not need an accommodation. To accommodate all disabilities, visible and invisible, you should think about common accommodation needs and plan for them.

Appointing one of the event volunteers to handle accessibility planning and requests is a good idea. This is someone members can go to for things such as a copy of speaking notes, reserved or special seating, to disclose a specific allergy, and more. This person should be identified both ahead of time and at the beginning of your event.

MOBILITY

Some members have difficulty walking, standing, or using stairs. Simple ways to make events accessible for these members include:

- Using a venue that is accessible to mobility devices like wheelchairs, walkers, and canes. This includes venues with:
 - No stairs or an alternative ramp/elevator.
 - Doors and aisles wide enough for wheelchairs to pass through, which is approximately 36 inches wide.
 - Doors with buttons you push to open.
 - Accessible washroom stalls.
- Access to seating.
- Parking close to the venue, including accessible parking stalls.

It is great to visit the venue in person ahead of time to confirm that it is accessible.

If a venue that checks all these boxes is not possible, you need to consider how you can work around the issues, like:

- Assigning a person to help with doors, if they are not automatic.
- Offering carpooling to the door, if parking or transit stops are far away.

If you can't fix the issue, ensure members know about the limitations of the venue. An email to members might include:

"The venue has accessible washrooms, but there are three steps required to enter the building."

Other things you can do to make your event accessible for people with mobility barriers include:

- Good signage to reduce walking back and forth.
- Allowing people with mobility issues to go first, like in food line-ups.
- Instead of "please stand", say "please stand, if you are able".
- Having lots of seating.



"I feel like there is always an expectation of physical ableness and we never offer options for [members] who cannot walk distances when social events are planned."



HEARING AND VISION

Some members may have problems hearing or seeing your event, even when assisted by hearing aids or glasses.

There are simple ways to ensure these members are included, such as:

HEARING

- Use a microphone if the room is large. Even if you project your voice loudly, a clear amplified voice can help those with hearing impairments.
- If members are talking to each other during a meeting while the main speaker is speaking, pausing the meeting to politely ask people to quiet down.
- Have transcription or closed captioning for events or videos that have speakers on a screen, such as a hybrid event, Zoom call, or YouTube video.
- Consider amplification headsets for those who may need them.

VISION

- Clearly describe what is on the screen so people with vision impairments don't miss important information.
- Provide digital information in a screen-reader accessible format, including using alt-text on images. This must be typed text, not a screenshot or picture of text.
- Think carefully about text font and colour on presentations and printed materials. High contrast (black font, white background) is best for visual accessibility.
- Have dedicated seating at the front for people with disabilities, including vision impairment.
- Provide a printed copy of materials with a large font.

LEARNING, REMEMBERING, AND CONCENTRATING

Some members have difficulty learning, remembering, or concentrating. Conditions that contribute to these difficulties include neurodivergence (including ADHD), chronic pain, and stress.

Things you can do to make events more accessible for these members include:

- Ensure instructions are in two formats, when possible, like sharing on a screen and verbally announcing the same information.
- Repeat instructions and important information.
- Reduce distractions, like side conversations and competing sounds.
- Provide hybrid/remote options for people who are better able to concentrate or process at home.
- Record presentations so they can be reviewed again later.
- Provide breaks to help people absorb information and provide an opportunity to move around without disturbing the group.
- Allow people to use aids like fidget toys.

EMOTIONAL, PSYCHOLOGICAL, AND MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS

Some members have emotional, psychological, and/or mental health conditions. These commonly include post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, depression, and panic disorders.

Ways to make events more accessible for these members include:

- Have a “quiet room” at the venue where people can retreat to have a break.
- Identify exits during the opening of the event.
- Give content warnings or trigger warnings if potentially upsetting or sensitive material is going to be shown.
- Offer single occupancy hotel rooms for traveling members.

SERVICE ANIMALS

Some members may need to bring their service animals to your event. Service animals play an essential role, helping members with certain disabilities navigate their day to day lives.

Alberta's Service Dogs Act requires that service dogs must be permitted anywhere that allows public access. It is important to welcome service animals to your events to ensure accessibility and follow the law.

Here are some ways you can make your event more accessible for service animals:

- Collaborate with the service animal handler to ensure they have what they need.
- Communicate proper service animal etiquette to guests, such as notifying attendees not to pet or distract the working animal.
- Make sure the person with the service animal has enough space for their animal to sit comfortably with them.
- Coordinate with people with allergies so they are not affected by the animal.

OTHER ACCESSIBILITY NEEDS FOR THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Some members have needs for their physical environment that are not related to the disabilities we have already covered. Some members may have:

- Sensitivity to scents, such as perfume and cleaning products.
- Sensitivity to overhead fluorescent lighting.
- A need for washrooms to be nearby.

Potential solutions for these issues are:

- Have a scent-free policy for events and share it with members beforehand.
- Allow members to self-manage the way they interact with or avoid certain lighting, such as wearing hats or sunglasses.
- Host your event near washrooms and communicating where they are located.

Always make sure to have an evacuation plan that includes those with accessibility issues!



*"I have asthma so some
smells and scents make it
hard to breath"*



THE BENEFIT OF HYBRID EVENTS

Members tell us that hybrid events help reduce barriers to participation.

Members appreciate hybrid events because:

- Members with specific needs, such as reduced lighting, quick access to a washroom, needing to physically recline, and more, can remain at home where their needs are met.
- Members with mobility restrictions or who are experiencing pain can participate without needing to travel.
- Automated audio transcription is usually available through streaming platforms and, while not perfect, helps make events more accessible to people with hearing impairments.
- Immunocompromised members can be included without risking exposure.



“I cannot be in large groups of people for an extended period of time, so I have a medical accommodation to work from home and I can only attend AUPE events when they are virtual or hybrid.”



**THANK YOU FOR YOUR COMMITMENT
TO HOSTING ACCESSIBLE EVENTS
FOR ALL AUPE MEMBERS!**



**THANK
YOU!**

**In solidarity,
AUPE Human Rights
Committee**

RESOURCES

For more education and resources, check out:



“Planning Accessible Events: So **everyone** feels welcome” by Accessibility Canada



“Best practices for accessible virtual events”
by the Government of Canada



“Accessible events: A guide” by Perkins School
for the Blind



“Accessible Meeting and Event Checklist”
by Cornell University



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