

Access in Movement Spaces Gaps, Variability, and the Limits of Assessment

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Background

- The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) sets baseline accessibility requirements, but does not ensure meaningful access
- Research and advocacy regarding accessibility often focuses on healthcare, education, and employment
- Community organizing and advocacy spaces are central to social change efforts
- Disability justice calls for the *leadership of those most impacted*
- Accessibility in these spaces is often inconsistent or incomplete
- When access needs are not met, those most impacted cannot fully participate or lead

Methods

- Observational accessibility assessment
- Layered accessibility lens combining:
 - ADA-based criteria (physical access)
 - Expanded accessibility criteria (sensory, health, food, communication, participation access)
- Data collection:
 - **Pre-event:** Review of promotional materials and stated accessibility information
 - **During event:** Observational accessibility assessment
 - **Post-event:** Reflective notes on access, participation, and barriers
 - **As needed:** Access requests and communication with organizers
- Analysis: Identification of patterns, gaps, and variation across events

Criteria

ADA-Based Criteria	Expanded Accessibility Criteria
Step-free entrance	Hybrid attendance options
Door width and maneuverability	Sliding scale or free cost
Accessible path of travel	Quiet/sensory space
Accessible restroom availability	Food accommodations and labeling
Elevator/lift access (if 2+ floors)	Access transparency in event promotion
Accessible parking or Transit proximity	Scent policy
	Mask and COVID-safety policies
	Microphone use
	(Scheduled) Breaks
	Interpretation, ASL, CART
	Accessible outreach and communication practices
	Image/visual descriptions
	Flexible seating
	Lighting/Noise

Sample

1. Organizer and funder convening
 - Community meeting space
2. "Know Your Rights" ICE response training
 - Place of worship
3. Prison reform community meeting
 - Cultural center
4. Pro-democracy large-scale public protest
 - City park
5. Mutual aid workshops
 - Community center
6. Health justice legislative advocacy day
 - State capitol building



bit.ly/lendaccess

Event Accessibility

Criteria	1	2	3	4	5	6
Step-free entrance	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Door width and maneuverability	Green	Green	Green	White	Green	Green
Accessible path of travel	Yellow	Green	Yellow	Yellow	Green	Green
Accessible restroom availability	Green	Green	Yellow	Red	Green	Green
Elevator/lift access	Green	Green	Red	White	Green	Green
Accessible parking	Green	Green	Yellow	Green	Green	Yellow
Hybrid attendance options	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red
Sliding scale or free	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Quiet/sensory space	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Red	Yellow	Red
Food accommodations and labeling	Green	Green	Red	White	Green	White
Access transparency in event promotion	Red	Yellow	Red	Red	Red	Red

Event Accessibility 2

Criteria	1	2	3	4	5	6
Scent policy						
Mask policy and COVID-safety policies						
Microphone use						
(scheduled) Breaks						
Interpretation, ASL, CART						
Accessible outreach and communication						
Image/visual descriptions						
Flexible seating						
Noise level						

Who is (not) Included?

Groups Impacted	1	2	3	4	5	6
Mobility disabilities						
Mobility disabilities						
Mobility disabilities, Blind/Low Vision						
Mobility aid users, Urinary/Gastrointestinal						
Mobility disabilities, Energy-limiting conditions						
Mobility disabilities						
Low-income, SSI/SSDI/fixed income, People with caregivers						
Dietary restrictions, Allergies, Gastrointestinal issues, Autism						
Immunocompromised, Energy-limiting conditions, Transportation barriers, Mobility disabilities						
Autism, PTSD, Migraines, Sensory sensitivities						
All - Mobility disabilities, Deaf/HOH, Blind/Low Vision, IDD, Immunocompromised						

Who is (not) included? (cont.)

Groups Impacted	1	2	3	4	5	6
Chemical sensitivity, Migraines						
Immunocompromised, Chronically Ill, Family members of PWD, Respiratory vulnerability						
Deaf/HOH, ELL, Auditory processing disabilities						
Energy-limiting conditions, Autism, ADHD, Chronic Pain						
Deaf/HOH/DeafBlind, ELL, Auditory processing disabilities						
Blind, Low-vision, Cognitive and intellectual disabilities						
Blind, Low-vision						
Chronic pain, Little people, Fat/Large Size, Mobility aid users						
Autism, PTSD, Migraines, Sensory sensitivities						

Discussion

- ADA-based access does not ensure meaningful participation in movement spaces
- Accessibility is uneven across groups of disabled people
- Reliance on accommodation upon request may contribute to persistent access gaps
- Accessibility cannot be addressed through standardized approaches alone
- Accessibility requires context-specific, multi-perspective practices

How can accessibility be built in contexts where “best practices” are not fully feasible?

Recommendations

- Provide accessible clear, proactive access information in outreach and transparent accommodation request processes
- Plan for multiple access needs (sensory, health, communication, etc.)
- Build in flexibility (breaks, participation options, pacing)
- Create feedback loops with disabled participants of diverse experiences and needs
 - Center the leadership of disabled organizers and develop cross-disability access teams

Limitations

- Single evaluator perspective
 - Reflects one set of access needs and lived experiences
- Limited, convenience sample (6 events)
 - Not representative of all movement or community spaces
- Context-dependent and observational
 - Some access barriers may not have been visible or experienced
- Standardized criteria limitations
 - Accessibility cannot be fully captured through fixed measures
- Assessment was limited to observable features and did not include formal accommodation requests
- Variability in access needs and interactions

Implications

- Accessibility assessment should be conducted by cross-disability teams to better capture diverse access needs and perspectives
- Proactive accessibility practices should be studied in relation to participation in political and organizing outcomes
- Future research should examine structural barriers to accessibility implementation, including financial, informational, and regulatory constraints (e.g., zoning, venue restrictions)