



# EVERYONE IS INVITED WITH LAURA GRUNFELD

## INCLUDING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

### 12 TIPS FOR CREATING A TOPNOTCH

# ACCESS PROGRAM

Many festival producers are understandably uncertain about how to get started creating an Access Program for their patrons with disabilities. These tips will help you establish an outstanding and much appreciated service.

- 1. Designate an Access Coordinator:** If you have the resources, bring on a person who has experience with event accessibility or hire an experienced consultant to help train your staff. However, if that is not possible, assign the job to someone who cares enough about accessibility to do the research and learn the job. You will have greater success if this person also has experience working events, has the knowledge to spot a problem, and the clout to get it fixed.
- 2. Plan to Accommodate All:** A common mistake I see is to accommodate people with mobility disabilities but not people with other types of disabilities. Accessibility is much more than a ramp and an accessible portable toilet. Consider those who are blind or deaf, have cognitive disabilities or mental illness, or have non-apparent disabilities such as a heart condition or anxiety disorder. Nearly 20 percent of Americans have a disability as defined by the law. That is a large chunk of your potential audience!
- 3. Site Selection:** It can be quite costly to make a challenging site accessible. Be sure that accessibility is high on your list of considerations when selecting your site.
- 4. Site Assessment:** To perform a thorough site assessment, literally approach the site as a person with a disability would, using various methods of transportation. Ride the public transportation, drive up and park in a car, get dropped off, use a wheelchair on the pedestrian route. Enter the site and tour all public areas. Go back stage also, as there may be performers with disabilities. Are all paths of travel accessible? Note where you will need to make changes, add signage, or give other assistance.
- 5. Transportation:** In your Access Information Guide, include information about how people with mobility disabilities will get to and from the event. Describe all of the options. You may want to provide a shuttle to help people with mobility disabilities get around a large site.
- 6. Website Assessment:** What is the first thing most fans do when they want to attend an event? They look it up on the Internet. Design an accessible website so that those who are blind or who have motor disabilities or who are deaf, are able to access the information you have posted. See #7, "Accessible Website Design" on the "Resources" tab on my website, [www.EveryonesInvited.com](http://www.EveryonesInvited.com), for helpful links.
- 7. Information:** Be sure to include very easy to find Access Program information on your website. Please don't bury the information in your Q&A section. Make sure your maps include access program features. Be prepared to provide sign language interpreters, assistive listening devices, braille, large print, and other forms of communication upon request or just as one of the services you offer without needing a reservation. It is very important to post signage to show the location of your Access Program services and facilities.
- 8. Services and Facilities:** Make sure that your toilets, showers, wash stations and drinking water are accessible. Provide accessible camping and power for charging medical devices such as scooters, wheelchairs, or breathing machines, in both general admission and VIP areas.
- 9. Programing and Activities:** Are your concessions, activities, music and other programming accessible to all? Accessible routes to reserved viewing areas and platforms are usually necessary. Counter heights may need to be adjusted or pathways installed. When choosing activities, include accessibility as one of the selection criteria. Yes, there are accessible Ferris wheels.
- 10. Training:** Do all of your staff, contractors, vendors, and volunteers know the basics about the Access Program and have particular teams received access training that is specific to their needs? Parking, Security, vendors, ushers, service animal screeners, are examples of teams that need their own training.
- 11. Emergencies:** Include patrons with disabilities in your emergency notification and evacuation systems. Make sure all staff and volunteers are trained in these systems.
- 12. Listen to and Connect with your Patrons:** Have your own [access@FestivalName.com](mailto:access@FestivalName.com) email address so that you answer all questions properly and in a timely manner. It is very important that people connect with you directly to avoid the dispensing of misinformation and so that you can give out all the information they may need. During the event, conduct a survey of patrons who are utilizing the access program services. Use the feedback from that survey and from your conversations with individuals to help direct the improvements you make in later years.

This is a good start but is not a complete listing of all that you need to do. A comprehensive Access Program is multifaceted and each event is unique. Your well-run Access Program will not only help you comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act and avoid costly litigation, it will also bring in

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more attendees, promote inclusion, and spread the good vibe among all of your patrons, employees, and the community.

If you would like a free copy of "A Checklist for Outdoor Festivals," write to [Laura@EveryonesInvited.com](mailto:Laura@EveryonesInvited.com) with your name, title, organization, and website. I do not share my list.

**Laura Grunfeld** writes a regular column helping producers make their events accessible to people with disabilities. Suggest topics to her by writing to [Laura@EveryonesInvited.com](mailto:Laura@EveryonesInvited.com). She has worked many festivals across the nation and readers can learn more about her event accessibility consulting, training, and production company at [www.EveryonesInvited.com](http://www.EveryonesInvited.com), [www.linkedin.com/in/lauragrunfeld](http://www.linkedin.com/in/lauragrunfeld), [www.youtube.com/lauragrunfeld](http://www.youtube.com/lauragrunfeld), [www.facebook.com/everyones.festival](http://www.facebook.com/everyones.festival), [www.instagram.com/everyonesfestival](http://www.instagram.com/everyonesfestival).