



EVERYONE'S INVITED

INCLUDING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

ELEMENTS OF A **SUCCESSFUL ACCESS CENTER**

The Access Center serves as the headquarters and face of your Access Program. A well-managed Access Center is key to providing a good experience for your patrons with disabilities. What follows is some of what you will need to consider while planning your best possible Access Center.

Access Center & Info Booth, Separate or Together?

Are you debating whether you want to have an entirely separate Access Center tent for your patrons with disabilities or if you want to roll it all in with your Info Booth? It is my experience that with quite small events it can work to combine the two, although a designated line for questions related to accessibility services is helpful. When you consider what functions the Access Center serves you may see the advantages to having a separate Access Center, especially for the larger events.

Privacy and Urgency

"I don't have any documents proving that I have a disability but let me show you this," the patron raised his shirt and showed the scars on his torso from his recent operation. "I have irritable bowel syndrome and I can't stand in those long lines for the bathroom. Can you help me?" "I have been fighting cancer for the last 3 years. This may be the last time I can come to this festival." Some conversations that happen at the Access Center are best held where there is a bit of privacy. While no one is required to disclose or provide proof of their particular disability, many patrons will want to share their story with you and it can get emotional! Patrons with disabilities shouldn't have to stand in a long line at the Info Booth as their requests can sometimes be of a more urgent nature.

Staffing

Ideally your Access Center Coordinator is experienced in the accessibility field, has supreme customer service skills, can handle a crisis, and is a kind-hearted soul dedicated to serving your patrons. You will want to carefully train this person as to what they can or cannot say or ask of the patrons and what services are available at your festival. In a pinch, well-trained volunteers may staff the Access Center but to protect yourself legally, it is best that you have an experienced employee managing the Center.

Access Center Services

Not every festival provides all of these services and they may provide others in addition to this list. Look over the list

and see what works for your event. You will need to develop tracking systems to keep an accounting of the various things that you distribute out of the Access Center.

1. Information regarding the Access Program services and facilities
2. Request for assistance such as helping to set up a tent, etc.
3. Access Wristband checkout system giving permission to use accessible facilities such as the raised viewing platforms, shuttles, restrooms, etc.
4. Codes or keys to locked toilets
5. Assistive Listening Device (ALD) checkout
6. Schedule of activities and programming that are interpreted by a sign language interpreter
7. Request for assistance from a sign language interpreter
8. Braille handouts of programming information, braille map
9. Guide service for people who are blind (I usually offer a one-time tour)
10. Large Print handouts of programming information
11. Service animal registration
12. Service animal relief area nearby
13. Wheelchair/scooter rental or loan
14. Recharge station for wheelchairs, scooters, medical equipment
15. Accessible restroom nearby
16. Accessible shuttle stop
17. TTY (Text Telephone) available for use
18. Access Program Survey to fill out or take home

Headquarters for Access Program Operations

1. Access Program staff HQ
2. Sign Language team HQ
3. Access volunteer check-in, training, and HQ
4. Accessible Golf Cart Shuttle stop, dispatch and HQ

A Sanctuary

In addition to the other services listed, your Access Center is a sanctuary for your patrons with disabilities. It is a place where they can get out of the sun or weather, where they can sit and relax to regain their strength, where they can get a bottle of water,



where they can get a power bar if they are running on empty, where they can get a friendly word, have a meltdown, make a complaint, or just chillax for a bit. The Center or a nearby tent can serve as a quiet place of refuge for sensory-sensitive individuals.

Access Center Signage

How should the Access Center be identified? Not everyone calls it an "Access Center." That is terminology I have been using since the 1990s and many festivals now also use that wording. While "Access Center" is my first choice, I've worked with festivals that have used "ADA/Access HQ," "Accessibility Center," or just the wheelchair symbol on their Info Booth sign.

I like to include additional symbols that graphically represent other services provided for people with disabilities. American Sign Language, braille, large print, and other symbols can be found here: https://www.graphicartistsguild.org/tools_resources/downloadable-disability-access-symbols. The new wheelchair symbol is available here: <http://accessibleicon.org/#use>.

Size of Your Access Center

The size of your event and how many people come to the tent at peak times will determine the size of your tent. At one festival I work, that tops out at 80,000 patrons, we have a 20' x 40' Access Center. Half of that space is for wheelchair rental and recharging. The other half is where we talk with people and give space for them to sit down. We have four 6' tables and room for four lines of people at one time. There is a round table with chairs so that people can sit and relax in the shade. There is storage space, a fairly large cooler, and a water dispenser. At smaller festivals we have managed with a 10' x 10' tent but it is not ideal. I recommend at least a 10' x 20'. It's best to have room in the tent so that people waiting in line are out of the sun/weather.

Placement of the Access Center

Put this tent where it will be needed and used the most. You may have one entrance that is more accessible or closer to the accessible parking area. The Access Center can be positioned just inside that entrance so that people can get their information,

access wristband, and other needs immediately upon entering the festival. If you have a golf cart shuttle, this can be the first stop so that people have the least amount of distance to walk. This may seem obvious, but you'd be surprised; make absolutely sure that you place the Access Center in an accessible location!

Publicity & Training, Spreading the Word

Publicize the location of the Access Center and the services provided:

1. On your website in the Access Info Guide
2. On your patron map
3. On signage at all of the entrances to your event
4. On signage in the accessible parking lot
5. In your access information handout
6. Make sure that all of your staff, vendors, contractors, and volunteers get basic access information training including the location of the Access Center
7. Promote to groups that serve people with disabilities
8. When people email or call you for information about the Access Program, tell them about the Access Center and its location.

Your Access Center is the nerve center of your Access Program. Be sure to give it the attention it needs so that your patrons feel well supported.

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. 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. www.linkedin.com/in/lauragrunfeld, www.youtube.com/lauragrunfeld, www.facebook.com/everyones.festival, www.instagram.com/everyonesfestival.

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