

5 Tips to Make Holiday Gatherings More Accessible

by The Mid-Atlantic ADA Center

As we enter the home stretch of 2016, celebrating the holidays this year will mean that much more. It has been a tough year for many people, so we want to make sure that the holiday events you are planning are that much more accessible for everyone to enjoy. After all, about 20% of all Americans have a disability or condition that limits their daily life activities – over 56.7 million, and can include your participants, family, friends and colleagues who are attending your holiday event.

That is why the Mid-Atlantic ADA Center (one of 10 regional ADA information centers around the country that are the true experts on the Americans with Disabilities Act), a proud member of the ADA National Network (ADANN) has created this **5 Tips to Make Holiday Gatherings More Accessible**.

When planning events, following these 5 simple tips will help make your holiday event more accessible to participants, family, friends and colleagues:

- 1) **Weave an Accessible Welcome Mat** – When selecting a venue, make sure it is wheelchair accessible and welcoming to your guests. Whether your holiday event is a small family gathering, office party or corporate event – weaving an accessible welcome mat is important. With a choice of on-line registration systems, choose one that is accessible to potential guests who use assistive technology, such as screen readers for those who are blind or have low vision. Whether your invitation is old school paper or a new online format, accessibility logos can be added to the invitation so remember to ask for accommodations such as sign language interpreters, captions (CART), assistive listening devices, handouts in alternate format like Braille or electronic – just as it is now standard to ask for food choices and dietary restrictions. Free resources for accessibility logos can be found at -- https://www.graphicartistsguild.org/tools_resources/downloadable-disability-access-symbols. Resources on how to assure that your facility and services are accessible are available: [Quick Tips: Customer Service for Front Line Staff](#), and [Fact Sheet: Customer Service for Business](#)
- 2) **Deck the Halls** – Planning a holiday party includes not just the room in which it occurs. Make sure your whole venue is accessible. The concept is called “Universal Design,” and it means creating an event, designing products and delivering services for the widest possible audience, including those with disabilities or limitations. So when creating an event, think about the whole process, the big picture – from parking and passenger drop off, routes to the building entrance, building entrance, routes to meeting space, meeting space and restrooms. Check out “[Evaluating Accessibility of a Meeting Site](#)” and other great tips in a great document by the Department of Justice, “[Meeting on a Level Playing Field.](#)”
- 3) **Food, Glorious Food** – One of the best parts of holiday gatherings is great food. For non-plated events, it is good to be mindful of “reach ranges” of buffets and treats. Making these services accessible for guests with disabilities makes good business sense. People with disabilities and their family members, friends, and colleagues who often accompany them, represent a large and growing market. This “Quick Tip” [Accommodating Diners with Disabilities](#)” offers great hints for business operators, event planners, and food service staff
- 4) **Standing Room Only** – Cocktail parties and mixers for mingling are great for networking with new contacts and reconnecting with old friends. Having lower tables and chairs interspersed is important so older guests can sit down to be at the eye level to those guests using wheelchairs, kids, guests of short stature. Also be mindful of guests with hearing loss, so it’s a good idea for

announcements to have assistive listening devices (ALDs), and providing a sign language interpreter and captions (CART) to facilitate communication if requested on your RSVPs.

- 5) **Counter Intelligence** – The ADA National Network has developed great tools, resources and trainings that can be used throughout the year. The [Hotel Customer Service Training](#) is designed as a 50-minute presentation that covers the basics such as customer services, access to hotels and restaurants and communicating with people with disabilities.

One final note -- The holidays are in the air and with increasing frequency, people have been experiencing chemical sensitivities. Consider asking your guests to kindly refrain from using perfumes and scented products.

The ADANN's Hospitality Initiative-has many free great resources and products. They can be found at: <http://www.adahospitality.org> under the "resources" and "publications" tabs and include:

Accessible Meeting, Events and Conference Guide: <http://www.adahospitality.org/accessible-meetings-events-conferences-guide/book>

This comprehensive Guide can-help make every meeting, event, and conference accessible to those with disabilities. It is with great pleasure that we share this work, which will continue to be updated to best serve the needs of planners and hosts and help ensure that all event participants-are able to enjoy the event. The ADANN can help you navigate, plan and create accessible meetings, events, and conferences that serve all your guests' needs.

"at your service" customer service film: <http://www.adahospitality.org/at-your-service>

This 20-minute film and its two-minute preview is available in Spanish, English, and with open captions (for Deaf and hard of hearing audiences) and audio descriptions (for blind and low vision audiences).

The ADA National Network welcomes your questions and here to offer valuable assistance for free on "all things ADA." and providing great customer service. The great news is that where ever you are located, when you call the toll-free number, you will automatically be connected your regional ADA Center: 800-949-4232. Don't forget to check out <http://www.adahospitality.org>

The ADA National Network wishes you peace, health, and happiness this Holiday season and New Year.