

# Hosting Inclusive & Accessible Events at SEAS

## Purpose:

This guide provides tips and considerations for planning meetings and events that are accessible and inclusive of all participants. **Accessible** meaning that **everyone** is able to **fully participate** and **Inclusive** meaning **everyone** participating feels **safe, welcome, and included**. This guide will evolve as we continue to conduct research and receive feedback on best practices for accessibility and inclusion.

## Who should I contact if I have further questions or comments?

For general event questions, contact the [SEAS Office of Events](#):

Susan Forrest, Director of Events, [sforrest@seas.harvard.edu](mailto:sforrest@seas.harvard.edu)

For questions related to the [SEAS Office of Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging](#):

Alexis Stokes, Assistant Dean for DIB at SEAS, [astokes@seas.harvard.edu](mailto:astokes@seas.harvard.edu) and

Veronica Santana, Assistant Director of DIB at SEAS, [vsantana@seas.harvard.edu](mailto:vsantana@seas.harvard.edu)

For questions related to [Harvard University Disability Resources](#):

617-495-1859 / [disabilityresources@harvard.edu](mailto:disabilityresources@harvard.edu)

For questions related to [Harvard Digital Accessibility Services](#):

[digitalaccessibility@harvard.edu](mailto:digitalaccessibility@harvard.edu)

Vittorio Bucchieri, SEAS Digital Accessibility Liaison, [vbucchieri@seas.harvard.edu](mailto:vbucchieri@seas.harvard.edu)

## SEAS Mission & Vision

### ***Mission***

Through teaching and collaborative research, SEAS discovers, designs, and creates novel technologies and approaches to societal challenges—in service to the world, the nation, and our community. We bridge disciplines, both within engineering and the applied sciences and beyond, to prepare broadly trained leaders, to advance foundational science, and to achieve translational impact.

### ***Vision***

By playing an important role in the education of all Harvard students and shaping Harvard's identity as a university, SEAS will train the next generation of leaders. Our vision is for a SEAS that is...

**Diverse and Inclusive** – A collaborative, tightly-knit community of scholars, educators and innovators, SEAS will be a model for diversity and inclusion at Harvard and beyond.

**World-changing** – Our research and education will make a difference to people's lives, and will benefit humanity.

**Contextual** – By melding rigorous analytical thinking within a liberal arts context, SEAS will prepare the next generation of ethical, engaged, visionary and innovative leaders.

**Convergent** – SEAS will be a point of intersection and impact for many disciplines and for many Schools.

**Agile** – SEAS will catalyze new opportunities enabled by an expanded campus, growing enrollments, and an increased array of partnerships and programs.

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## BEFORE THE EVENT

### ***Pre-Planning***

#### Planning Committee

- Create a diverse planning committee – bring all voices to the table to shape the event.

#### Budget

- Does the amount you have available allow you to host an event that can be planned properly and ensure inclusivity? If not, request additional funding from your organization and/or consider other ways to reach your target audience. Also, consider shortening the duration of the event if necessary.
- Prioritize essential budget items first (e.g., closed captioning, American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters, transportation, AV, facilities support/space related costs, rentals, name badges, event promotion such as poster printing/distribution). If food, beverage, and/or entertainment is an essential part of your event, be sure to factor in the following costs:
  - Kosher, Halal, vegan, gluten-free, etc. meals - be sure the options are equivalent to what's offered to other guests (i.e., don't just offer salad while everyone else is having pizza).
  - Certified serving staff (e.g., certified bartenders - resources [here](#) and [here](#)). Never serve alcohol on your own.
  - Other licenses that may be needed include a one-day liquor license (if purchasing on your own from an approved city vendor) and/or entertainment license. Cambridge License Commission [here](#); Boston License Commission [here for alcohol](#) and [here for entertainment](#).
  - Discuss certifications/licenses with the catering vendors you are using to determine what they already have and what you will need to obtain on your own

(if any). Full service, onsite catering companies will typically have all the needed certifications/licenses through their business operations. NOTE: all drop-off orders will require you to secure your own certified staff and licenses regardless of vendor used.

- If hosting an event with a cash bar and/or over 100 people in attendance where alcohol is being served, security will be needed. Harvard police detail can be secured [here](#). NOTE: be sure to place a request at least two-weeks in advance (cost information can also be found through the provided link).

## Goals/Objectives

- Incorporate goals/objectives specific to diversity into events; make them measurable and track actions taken, as well as results.
  - Examples of goals/objectives: Event will have 50% or more underrepresented minority speakers; a post-event survey will indicate that 100% of attendees/speakers felt welcome and accommodated at the event, etc.
- Continuously reevaluate all events and look for areas of improvement in relation to diversity, inclusion and belonging. This will ensure your events are up-to-date regarding accessibility and other DIB elements. Also, beware of doing things how they've always been done – change is often needed and a good thing.

## Date and Time Selection

- Consider all religious holidays, as well as other dates of significance.
- Check interfaith calendar at <https://www.interfaith-calendar.org/>
- Other major dates to consider avoiding:
  - Election days
  - Juneteenth
  - Local public school vacation weeks
  - September 11

- Select a time of day that works best for the majority of your target audience. For virtual events, choose a time of day or night that works best across as many different time zones as possible (or the time zones of the majority of your target audience). Additionally, consider offering the same event twice to accommodate attendees in different locations around the globe.

## Vendor Selection

- Carefully consider the vendors being used. Working with minority- and women-owned business enterprises (MWBs), and small businesses enterprise (SBE) is encouraged. Additional information can be found [here](#).
- Be considerate of timelines and discuss deadlines with vendors early in the planning process.
- Talk to your SEAS Finance contact about vendor tipping and what is allowed. Guidelines may be dependent on the funds being used to cover the cost of the event.

## ***Planning***

### Timeline

- As early as possible in the planning process, talk to all vendors and other participants to gather information regarding deadlines. For example: when does AV support need the event details finalized; when does the caterer need the final food/beverage order and headcount, etc.).
- Create a custom work plan to keep the event organized and on schedule.
- Note that every event is different and deadlines will vary depending on vendors used, venue, attendee/speaker travel, AV needs, etc.

## Location/Venue Selection

- Be sure to take a venue's history into consideration and avoid locations that would make anyone feel excluded, hurt and/or awkward. In addition, avoid religious locations (unless it is specifically a religious event).
- Travel the path guests will follow to evaluate accessibility such as...
  - Entrances/Exits
    - Is there a paved/flat route to and from the entrances/exits; is there a wheelchair accessible ramp?
    - Do the automatic power door buttons work?
  - Elevators
    - Are the elevators accessible and in working order?
    - Is there enough space for a wheelchair to fit and is it easy to get on/off?
  - Restrooms
    - Are they accessible to all (location, automatic powered doors, stalls, sinks, etc.)?
    - Are there gender-neutral restrooms? Are they clearly marked and easy to find?
  - Parking
    - Is parking close to event location?
    - Is there an accessible elevator?
    - Is the path from the parking location to the venue easy to navigate and fully accessible?
  - Wayfinding Signage
    - Is the wayfinding signage clear and easy to find/see; does the wayfinding signage include braille?
    - Add custom wayfinding signage for attendees on event day if it is lacking.
  - Other

- Are there any other onsite barriers that would make it difficult for some attendees to navigate/participate in an event (stairs, excessive walking, doors, etc.).

## Space/Room Layout

- Be sure the space/room layout includes...
  - Wide aisles throughout - at least 3-5ft wide. All areas/elements of an event should be equally accessible to every attendee.
  - Reserved seating for those who may not be able to sit anywhere (e.g., wheelchair, service animal, assisted walking, etc.).
  - Remove/cover any tripping hazards (cords, electrical floor boxes, etc.); tape down rugs or power cords if needed.

## Audio Visual (AV)

- Meet with the AV support team/vendors as soon as possible in the planning process to discuss overall needs and associated deadlines.
- Request microphones (handheld or lapel) for any event larger than a small sit-down meeting. An attendee with a hearing impairment may have difficulty hearing most speakers (even those who speak loudly).
- Be sure all live online content (Zoom or other), as well as pre-recorded videos, is closed captioned.
  - Provide the vendor with a list of keywords and/or presentation materials in advance to ensure greater accuracy in transcribing.
  - Harvard preferred closed captioning vendors for recorded video content can be found [here](#).
  - Harvard preferred CART vendor (closed captioning for live virtual events): [Vitac](#)
  - Remember to communicate to attendees through the chat function during virtual events that closed captioning is enabled so that those in need are aware.



- Secure American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters if needed. NOTE: be sure to place a request at least two-weeks in advance.
- Provide assistive listening devices if needed.
- To locate SEAS rooms with assistive listening devices and other needed room features, visit the EMS “RoomBook” site [here](#). Room information can be found two ways once logged in (Harvard Key is required):
  - Create a Reservation > Select Template > Book Now > Features - Add/Remove (under the “Let Me Search For A Room” blue bar on left-side)
  - Browse “Locations” (gray bar on left-side) > Scroll to See Rooms > Click on Preferred Room > Select “Features” Along Top of Pop-up Window Menu (Note: if features is not offered, it is likely the room does not have any and is a basic space)

## Catering

- Discuss overall needs and associated deadlines with the caterer early in the planning process. Don’t wait until the last minute. Vendors can be fully booked or closed for religious holidays (e.g. Kosher food orders).
- Provide ample food options for those with food allergies/restrictions. Don’t just provide salad to those with dietary restrictions.
- Think outside of the typical menu for your meetings and events. Order food from different cultures, support small and local businesses, use minority owned vendors.
- Consider individuals with an array of food preferences and needs (including Kosher, Halal, vegan, vegetarian).
- Incorporate a question related to dietary requirements into the registration form or provide contact information regarding who to contact if there is no pre-registration.
  - Sample language:
    - Do you have any food allergies/restrictions? If yes, please specify. *Note: do not ask for “food preferences” unless that is truly what you are looking*

*for; “food preferences” will result in general likes/dislikes such as “I love french fries” or “I hate broccoli.”*

- Contact <insert name and email/phone> by <insert deadline> if you are planning to attend and have any food allergies/restrictions.
  - Provide the list of dietary needs to restaurant or caterer by requested deadline.
- Ask restaurants and catering services about possible cross contamination. Be sure there is no cross-contamination in cases of severe allergies (nut, seafood, gluten, etc.) and strict restrictions (kosher, halal, vegan, etc.).
- Request all catering staff be fully aware of food ingredients/cross contamination and have a list on hand in the event a guest asks for details. If it is a drop-off catering order, request information be sent via email.
- Designate a main point of contact for catering related concerns/questions. This person should be available for the duration of the event. Be sure that the caterer and main point of contact can contact each other quickly if needed (i.e., exchange cell phone numbers). If using an onsite, full service catering company, the catering manager staffing the event should act as the main point of contact for dietary questions, as well as other catering staff members supporting the event.
- If your event has alcohol, an ample amount of food must be served, as well as non-alcoholic options. This is absolutely essential for both safety and inclusivity reasons.
- Your event should not promote or glamorize the consumption of alcohol, in respect to those who do not consume alcohol.
  - For increased sense of belonging, try including mocktails along with any alcoholic beverages.

## Speakers

- Does your event or event series have a diversity of speakers? If not, consider postponing until the event can be planned properly. Things to consider include...
  - Diversity of social identity; particularly underrepresented groups for your field

- Avoid tokenization, the practice of expecting a speaker of a minority group to be the lone representative and voice of that group, and/or only having them as a speaker for the optics of diversity. This can be avoided by having a more diverse panel/day of speakers overall.
  - Additionally, ensuring genuine knowledge, appreciation, and interest in what the speaker has to present, that may be informed by their social identity, but is not the totality of their worth to your event.
- Do not confuse speaker series with a diversity of speakers with affinity group events. Each of these event types serves a very different purpose.
- Provide speakers/facilitators with a list of recommendations and accommodation requests prior to the event to ensure their presentation(s) is accessible to all.

## Themes

- Be thoughtful around choosing a particular theme for a celebratory event or gathering. Any themes and party props that reference a culture or certain population may be based on unmindful or harmful stereotypes of that culture or population. Some examples of event themes to avoid (unless hosted for educational purposes or by members of that community for celebration) include...
  - Cinco de Mayo
  - Oktoberfest
  - St. Patrick's Day
  - Hawaiian-themed events
- If you are celebrating a cultural holiday, speak with an organization or office related to this culture. Is the event meant to be educational? Will attendees understand the history behind the event? Will there be a speaker to articulate the importance of this holiday or practice?
- If any game/activity is being planned that is specific to a culture - it is best to be led by someone of that culture who has played/participated before and can provide educational context.

## Event Promotion (Registration, Pre-event Communications, etc.)

- Does your poster and/or event advertising reflect diversity and is it welcoming to all? Be conscious of the images that are used.
- Review how to create accessible documents, including posters, registration forms, etc.
  - Visit the [Harvard University Disability Resource webpage](#) for information.
- Include language on how to request accommodations materials, dietary modifications, etc. This should be included on registration forms/RSVP requests. Additionally, provide a clear deadline and a person to contact. Visit the [Harvard University Disability Resource webpage](#) for sample language.
  - Also, consider gathering pronoun information through registration forms/RSVP requests.
- Send out a detailed communication to attendees in advance of the event regarding getting to the event location(s), including accessible entrance(s), public transportation directions and any other important details.

## Land Acknowledgement

- An Indigenous Land or Territorial Acknowledgement recognizes the Indigenous peoples who have been dispossessed from the homelands and territories upon which an institution was built and currently occupies and operates in.
  - This is a [Harvard's Land Acknowledgement](#) created by the Harvard University Native American Program.
- An Indigenous Land or Territorial Acknowledgement is not only what its name implies, it is a commitment: to reflect on one's participation in the ongoing subjugation of Indigenous peoples, to take action to support Indigenous peoples and their rights, and a celebration of Indigenous people now.
  - Please refer to [A Guide to Indigenous Land Acknowledgment](#) or additional helpful information in crafting and delivering a Land Acknowledgement. Please

refer to this website for more of the history and call for Land Acknowledgments :  
[Honor Native Land: A Guide and Call to Acknowledgment](#)

## Presentation Content/Slides And Handout Materials

- Review how to create accessible documents, including slideshows, handouts, videos, etc.
  - Visit the [Harvard Digital Accessibility web page](#) for information.
  - Review [Microsoft's instructions](#) for accessible presentations.
- Be sure all video content shown includes closed captioning.
  - Harvard preferred vendors can be found [here](#).
  - Review deadlines with the vendor as soon as possible to avoid rush charges.
- If any slides are being shown, use large, high-contrast fonts. The SEAS PowerPoint template can be found [here](#) (at bottom of page).
- Speakers should be prepared to verbally describe any visual materials (slides, charts, photos, etc.).
- Speakers should repeat questions asked of them during their presentation before answering.
- If possible and appropriate, send out slideshows and/or handouts for people to review in advance of the event. This is especially helpful for those who use a screen reader.
  - [PowerPoint Live](#) is a new way to use PowerPoint that allows participants to enable their own subtitles (multiple languages available), move back through the slides at their own pace without impacting the presenter, and provide feedback during and immediately after the presentation. [Click here](#) for information.
- Consider including pronouns on name badges. Request this information through the registration process.

## DURING THE EVENT

### Accessibility

- Be mindful of any barriers that can block wheelchair access or create difficulty for anyone using a cane (white cane, red/white cane or other) or crutches due to an injury.
  - White cane = blind or visually impaired
  - Red/white cane = deafblind (with both sight and hearing impairments)
- If needed, set-up temporary wayfinding signage to restrooms, different event locations, elevators, etc.
- Service and assistance animals...
  - Be sure no event attendees or event staff touch or pet service and assistance animals in attendance.
  - Visitors to Harvard-owned public facilities: under the ADA, organizations that serve the public generally must allow service animals to accompany people with disabilities in all areas of the facility where the public is normally allowed to go. Therefore, service animals accompanying visitors to campus are permitted access and visitors do not have to formally notify the campus of the animal's presence.
  - Visit the [Harvard University Disability Resource webpage](#) for information.

### Registration Table/Event Staff

- Include details on accommodation requests in the master attendee list at the registration table.
- Keep the registration table staffed at all times in case an event attendee needs assistance.
- Inform attendees that the event is being photographed/filmed and provide directions on how they can avoid photography/video if preferred.
  - Post signage

- o Convey information at the registration table upon check in; consider using colored lanyards to help the photographer/videographer identify attendees who do not want to be photographed/videoed.

### Photographers/Filming

- Ask the photographer to check in with attendee(s) being photographed, if in close range, regarding the use of flash.
- Designate a seating area as a non-photography/video zone, and make sure participants are aware of where this zone is (if they wish to not be photographed/videoed).

### Speakers/Facilitators

- Confirm that speaker/facilitator presentations and/or handouts are accessible.
- Remind to verbally describe any visual materials (slides, charts, photos, etc.) and to repeat any questions asked during their presentation(s); also, remind of accommodation requests and use of screen readers or assistive listening devices.
- Remember to communicate to attendees through the chat function during virtual events that closed captioning is enabled so that those in need are aware.

### Emergency Planning

- Create an emergency plan in advance of the event.
  - o Work with the facilities team to create a plan that follows appropriate building protocols.
  - o Ensure event staff are aware of the plan.
  - o Know where the accessible exits are and ensure they're clearly marked. Note: elevators may not work in an emergency or be a safe way to exit - have a back-up plan worked out with the facilities team.
  - o Remember that exits may be congested. Ensure there is a plan for evacuating every attendee.

- Create a contact list for all event staff to reference. Include contact information (cell phones preferred if appropriate) for...
  - Speakers
  - Harvard Police
  - Event Staff List
  - Internal Support (Facilities, AV, etc.)
  - Vendor Contacts (AV, Rentals, Catering, etc.)
  - Onsite Catering Contact/Manager

### Other Things To Consider

- Sensory Issues
  - Those with sensory issues may have difficulties with the flicker of fluorescent lights. Be aware of this as a request and attempt to find a space where participants can go if they need to step away.
  - Loud sounds can pose difficulties for certain individuals. If loud music and/or a lot of noise and stimulation are likely going to be part of your event, make sure to place the source of the music and other high noise levels (e.g., DJ and speakers) strategically, so that people who are sensitive to loud noise can make good choices for themselves. Consider offering a low stimulation room for participants to still connect with one another.

## AFTER THE EVENT

### Follow-up Communications

- If possible and appropriate, email presentations, slideshows, and notes to attendees after the event.
- Send a thank you note to attendees for their participation and request they fill out a post-event survey.



## Post-event Survey/Evaluation

- Send a post-event survey to evaluate the attendee experience; this is particularly helpful in assessing how to make the event even more accessible and inclusive for all involved.
- For annual events, be thoughtful while creating the survey and try to use the same survey each year. This will allow for apples-to-apples comparison of the feedback received year-to-year.
- Review surveys and experiences from the event, and record anything that will be helpful for the planning committee, as well as this guide, going forward. Keep in mind that anonymous surveys tend to garner the most honest answers.

## RESOURCES

- [American Sign Language \(ASL\) Interpreting Services](#)
- [Creating Accessible Documents](#)
- [Harvard University Disability Resources](#)
- [Harvard Digital Accessibility](#)
- [Universal Design – Presentations](#)
- [Harvard Preferred Closed Captioning Vendors \(for recorded video content\)](#)
- [Harvard Preferred CART Vendor \(for closed captioning of live online events\): Vitac](#)