

The Community Accessibility Starter Kit

A compact starting point for libraries, churches, art groups, nonprofits, clubs, and small organizations that want to become more accessible - without needing a giant budget or a perfect plan.

Start here

Accessibility does not begin when someone asks for an accommodation. It begins when a space assumes that different bodies, brains, communication styles, energy levels, and support needs will be present.

This kit is designed for small organizations that care about access but are not sure what to do first. Start with the defaults you can change now, learn from the people who use your space, and keep improving.

The 12 best first changes

- ☐ 1. Put essential information in writing - location, schedule, cost, parking or transit, accessibility details, and what to expect.
- ☐ 2. Let people leave, take breaks, move around, or come back without having to explain themselves.
- ☐ 3. Offer seating whenever people may need to wait, listen, gather, or participate.
- ☐ 4. Keep at least one path through the space clear of boxes, bags, furniture, cords, and displays.
- ☐ 5. Identify a quieter or lower-stimulation place people can use, even if it is just a chair in a calmer corner.
- ☐ 6. Allow headphones, earplugs, sunglasses, fidgets, mobility aids, AAC, and other personal access tools.
- ☐ 7. Use captions for videos and microphones or sound amplification when the room makes hearing difficult.
- ☐ 8. Give instructions in more than one way when possible - spoken, written, visual, demonstrated, or posted.
- ☐ 9. Make food, fragrance, lighting, noise, stairs, bathrooms, and seating conditions clear before people arrive.
- ☐ 10. Create one obvious way to ask for help or request an accommodation, and tell people who will receive the request.
- ☐ 11. Train staff and volunteers to respond to access needs with curiosity and respect instead of suspicion or debate.
- ☐ 12. Ask participants what made access easier or harder, then change one thing based on what you learn.

A useful rule

Do not wait for perfect. An organization can become meaningfully more accessible by removing one unnecessary barrier at a time. Access is a practice, not a finish line.

1. Make the Space Easier to Use

Walk through your space as though you have never been there before, you are tired, you cannot stand for long, you process slowly, or you cannot easily ask a stranger for help.

Physical access	Sensory access
☐ Entrances, doors, hallways, aisles, and common routes are kept clear.	☐ Lighting can be reduced, changed, or escaped when possible.
☐ People can identify an accessible entrance before arriving.	☐ Flashing or strobing effects are avoided, or clearly warned about in advance.
☐ There are places to sit and rest.	☐ Noise level and acoustics are considered when choosing rooms and activities.
☐ Seating is not limited to one body size, posture, or type of chair.	☐ A quieter or lower-stimulation area is identified.
☐ People using mobility aids have room to turn, park, transfer, and participate.	☐ People may use ear protection, sunglasses, hats, fidgets, or other regulation tools.
☐ Bathrooms are easy to find, and accessibility information about them is accurate.	☐ Strong fragrances and scented products are minimized when possible.
☐ Important activities are not placed only on stairs, stages, grass, gravel, or other hard-to-access surfaces without an alternative.	☐ Loud music, alarms, applause, performances, or other intense sensory elements are disclosed ahead of time.
☐ Water, medications, medical supplies, and mobility devices are welcome.	☐ People may step outside and return without penalty.

Do a 10-minute access walk

Ask one staff member or volunteer to enter the building from outside and complete a common task: find the room, find a bathroom, get a chair, ask a question, and leave. Notice every place where they have to guess, search, squeeze through, stand, wait, or ask permission.

Barriers we noticed:

Low-cost improvements	More low-cost improvements
☐ Move furniture instead of buying new furniture.	☐ Put earplugs, fidgets, pencils, paper, or communication cards near the entrance.
☐ Print clearer signs and arrows.	☐ Turn off unnecessary music or overhead lights.
☐ Create a quiet corner with an existing chair.	☐ Rearrange tables or cover cords when safe and appropriate.

2. Make Information Easier to Understand

A space becomes more accessible when people can figure out what is happening without having to decode hidden rules, remember long verbal explanations, or disclose a disability first.

Communication	Participation
☐ Use plain, direct language whenever possible.	☐ Offer more than one way to participate - speaking, writing, observing, chat, movement, art, or asynchronous response.
☐ Put important verbal information in writing too.	☐ Do not make eye contact, public speaking, camera use, touch, or personal disclosure the default proof of engagement.
☐ Break instructions into steps.	☐ Make group activities adaptable when possible.
☐ Use readable font sizes, strong contrast, and uncluttered layouts.	☐ Allow people to arrive late or leave early when the activity can support it.
☐ Caption videos and provide transcripts or summaries when practical.	☐ Build in processing time after questions.
☐ Explain jargon, acronyms, traditions, rituals, and insider language.	☐ Avoid surprise participation requirements.
☐ Tell people what will happen before asking them to participate.	☐ Let people bring a support person when appropriate.
☐ Offer a way to ask questions privately.	☐ Assume quiet people may still be participating.

Before you advertise an event, publish these details

- ☐ Exact address, room, entrance, and basic arrival instructions.
- ☐ Cost, including whether anyone can attend free or request a reduced fee.
- ☐ Parking, public transit, drop-off, and distance from entrance when known.
- ☐ Stairs, elevators, ramps, seating, bathrooms, and standing expectations.
- ☐ Expected noise, lighting, crowds, fragrances, food, and other relevant sensory conditions.
- ☐ Whether captions, interpretation, microphones, or written materials are available.
- ☐ Schedule, break plan, expected length, and whether leaving and returning is okay.
- ☐ How to request access support and who to contact.

Use this sentence

"We want you to be able to participate. If something about this event or space creates an access barrier, contact _____. You do not need to provide a diagnosis to tell us what would help."

3. Build an Access-Friendly Culture

The best checklist will not help if people are afraid to use accommodations. Staff and volunteer behavior is part of the environment.

Helpful responses	Responses to retire
☐ "Yes, that is fine."	☐ "But nobody else needs that."
☐ "Thanks for telling me what you need."	☐ "You do not look disabled."
☐ "Let me see what we can change."	☐ "Why did you not tell us sooner?"
☐ "Would written instructions help?"	☐ "That is just our policy."
☐ "You can step out and come back."	☐ "If we do it for you, we have to do it for everyone."
☐ "You do not need to explain your diagnosis to me."	☐ "Can you prove that you need it?"
☐ "I am not sure yet, but I can find out."	☐ Discussing someone's access request publicly when it can be handled privately.

A simple accommodation process

Step 1 - Make the contact point obvious. Put one email address, phone number, form, or named person on your website and event materials.

Step 2 - Ask about the barrier and the needed change. Often you do not need a diagnosis to understand what would make participation possible.

Step 3 - Respond quickly. Even "I am checking and will get back to you" is better than silence.

Step 4 - Look for the simplest workable solution. A chair, written copy, quieter room, different arrival process, remote option, or extra time may solve the problem.

Step 5 - Build recurring requests into the default. If several people ask for the same thing, the system is teaching you what it needs.

Remember: safety and access can coexist

An access-friendly policy can still have boundaries. If a request conflicts with safety, another person's access, essential program requirements, or something the organization genuinely cannot provide, explain the constraint and look for another way to reduce the barrier.

One culture change we can make this month

Who will own it? _____ Review date: _____

4. Your 30-Day Accessibility Starter Plan

Choose a few improvements you can actually complete. Small organizations do not need to fix every barrier at once to begin building trust.

Week	Focus	Our action	Owner
1	Notice	Walk through the space. Ask: where do people have to guess, wait, stand, ask permission, or push through discomfort?	
2	Change defaults	Choose 2-3 no-cost or low-cost barriers and remove them.	
3	Communicate	Update your website, event listing, signs, or welcome email with clear access information.	
4	Listen + repeat	Ask participants what helped, what was hard, and what should change next.	

Pick your first five upgrades

- ☐ 1. _____
- ☐ 2. _____
- ☐ 3. _____
- ☐ 4. _____
- ☐ 5. _____

Access information template for your website or event page

Physical access: _____	Seating: _____
Bathrooms: _____	Sensory environment: _____
Communication access: _____	Transportation / parking: _____
Cost / reduced-cost options: _____	Breaks / re-entry: _____
Access contact: _____	Other: _____

Ask after the event or visit

- ☐ What made this space easier to use?
- ☐ What made participation harder than it needed to be?
- ☐ Was there anything you needed but did not feel comfortable asking for?
- ☐ What is one thing we should change next time?

Accessibility note: This starter kit is a practical planning tool, not a legal compliance audit. Legal duties vary by organization, activity, location, and jurisdiction.