



Event Planning Guide for Inclusivity

This guide was developed for the Town of Medway by the Inclusion, Diversity, and Equity Advisory (IDEA) Committee to serve as a resource for event planning. It provides key considerations and recommendations to ensure that events are inclusive, equitable, and reflective of the diversity within our community. By using this guide, organizers can adopt a broader and more thoughtful approach to planning, fostering a welcoming environment for all. While designed for town-sponsored events, this guide is also available as a recommended resource for non-town sponsored events.



How to Use This Guide

This guide is designed to help residents, town departments, and community groups think proactively and thoughtfully about inclusion when planning events in Medway.

Not every section applies to every event.

Not every barrier can be removed in every situation.

This is not a policy or compliance checklist. It is a practical planning resource intended to spark awareness, improve communication, and reduce unintentional exclusion where possible.

The most important principle is simple:

CLEAR INFORMATION,
PREDICTABLE EXPERIENCES,
AND A WAY FOR PEOPLE TO REQUEST SUPPORT GOES A LONG WAY.

What This Guide Is (and Is Not).

This guide is:

- A planning aid for inclusive thinking
- A menu of considerations you can use selectively
- A starting point for learning and improvement
- Grounded in reputable accessibility guidance and best practices

This guide is not:

- Legal advice
- A guarantee that every accommodation can be met
- A checklist that must be completed in full for every event
- A substitute for expert consultation when required

1. Cognitive Accessibility

Present well-organized, clearly spaced information about the event in multiple formats (visuals, recordings, written materials) at least one week prior to the event whenever possible. This allows participants who may need accommodations to plan logistics and request support.

- If the event includes reading materials (books, presentations, handouts):
 - Provide large-print text
 - Offer audio books or audio/video recordings
 - Include Braille materials when possible
 - Consider offering materials at different reading levels, keeping literacy statistics in mind
- If participants will be writing responses:
 - Provide sentence starters for written responses
 - Offer speech-to-text options when possible
- Remind speakers and presenters to:
 - Enunciate clearly
 - Be mindful of your speaking speed, maintaining a rate of approximately 130–180 words per minute
 - Project your voice and/or use microphones in large indoor or outdoor venues
 - Turn off background music during presentations to reduce auditory processing barriers
- If the event includes music, sound effects, or fireworks, inform attendees in advance.
 - Best practices include:
 - Reducing the volume of performances or sound effects
 - Advising attendees of the exact time fireworks will occur and reminding them again before they begin
 - Providing earplugs or headphones
 - Offering a quiet room or quiet area where participants can take a break from overwhelming sounds
- Events incorporating lighting displays can negatively impact individuals with autism, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), or photosensitivity and therefore should avoid:
 - overly bright lighting
 - fluorescent lighting when possible
 - flashing or strobe lights
- Events with structured seating should allow:
 - space for movement breaks
 - the ability to leave and re-enter easily
 - enough space to avoid participants feeling crowded or claustrophobic

Helpful Resources

<https://www.makegreatlight.com/about-us/blog/fluorescent-led-lighting-autism-spectrum-disorder#fluorescent-lighting-and-autism>
<https://www.epilepsy.com/what-is-epilepsy/seizure-triggers/photosensitivity>
<https://autisticadvocacy.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Accessible-Event-Planning.pdf>
https://www.ptsd.va.gov/understand/what/fireworks_ptsd.asp
<https://www.calmclinic.com/anxiety/symptoms/hypersensitivity-to-sound>
<https://nationaldeafcenter.org/resources/access-accommodations/>

2.Economic Accessibility

Reducing financial barriers helps ensure that all community members can participate regardless of income or economic situation.

- Affordability
 - Offer free or low-cost admission whenever possible
 - Provide sliding-scale or pay-what-you-can options for ticketed events
 - Seek sponsorships, grants, or community funding to offset costs
 - Avoid hidden expenses such as required purchases or high-cost materials
- Transportation
 - Consider travel costs for attendees
 - Choose venues accessible by affordable public transit
 - Provide transportation assistance when possible, such as:
 - rideshare vouchers
 - community vans
 - carpool coordination
 - Provide information about free or low-cost parking
- Event Timing & Date
 - Schedule events at times that minimize work conflicts
 - Offer multiple sessions when possible to provide flexibility
- Childcare Options
 - Provide on-site childcare if possible
 - Offer stipends for childcare costs
 - Provide family-friendly activities or materials when childcare is not available
 - Clearly communicate any financial support available for caregivers

Helpful Resources:

<https://medwayma.gov/departments/council-on-aging/gatra-norfolk-t-information-fall-2023-schedule/>
<https://www.mbta.com/schedules/CR-Franklin/timetable>

3. Language Accessibility

Event information should be available in the top non-English languages spoken in the community (Spanish, Portuguese, Haitian Creole, Arabic)

- Provide a prompt explaining how participants can request materials translated into additional languages
- Ensure signage and written displays at the event are also available in these languages
- If registration is required:
 - Ensure forms include multilingual instructions
 - Allow participants to indicate their preferred language of communication during RSVP
- Consider accommodations for deaf or hard-of-hearing participants such as:
 - American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters
 - captioning
 - speech-to-text tools
 - note-takers

Helpful Resources

<https://www.ada.gov/topics/effective-communication/>
<https://veroniiica.com/how-to-create-visual-descriptions/>
<https://nationaldeafcenter.org/resources/access-accommodations/>
<https://www.section508.gov/create/accessible-meetings>
<https://www.section508.gov/create/captions-transcripts/>

4. Physical Accessibility

Reducing physical accessibility barriers ensures that all members of the community can participate in events regardless of their differing abilities. All physical accessibility accommodations should be clearly listed in promotional materials, along with contact information for requesting additional support.

- Mobility & Seating Needs
 - Ensure there is enough seating for participants who need it
 - Provide a variety of seating options for people of different shapes and sizes (ie. chairs with and without arms)
 - Provide seating and activities at multiple heights for different mobility requirements
 - Ensure spaces are available for wheelchair seating during performances or presentations
 - Buildings and venues should provide:
 - wide doorways and aisles
 - ramps or elevators
 - clear pathways
 - if wheelchair accessibility is not possible (for example, at some outdoor locations), this should be clearly stated in promotional materials
- Dietary Needs
 - If food is served, consider offering options for participants with dietary restrictions such as:
 - gluten-free
 - vegetarian or vegan
 - halal
 - kosher
 - nut-free
 - Food prepared for specialized diets should be kept separate from other foods during preparation and serving.
 - Clearly label foods containing common allergens including:
 - wheat
 - peanuts
 - tree nuts
 - milk/dairy
 - gluten
 - eggs
 - shellfish
 - soy
- Communication Needs
 - Provide visual descriptions for participants with vision impairments
 - Offer American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters when possible
 - Ensure adequate lighting for interpreters during evening events
 - Use microphones for speakers
 - Avoid flashing or flickering lights that may affect people with vision sensitivity

Helpful Resources

<https://www.ada.gov/topics/mobility-devices/#top>

<https://www.fda.gov/food/buy-store-serve-safe-food/food-allergies-what-you-need-know>

<https://veroniiiica.com/how-to-create-visual-descriptions/>

5. Religious and Cultural Considerations

When planning events:

- Know your audience if you are serving food.
 - Offer a diverse menu
 - Different cultures and religions may have dietary restrictions.
 - Add varied foods from other cultures with party staples.
 - If you are having an event focusing on food, consider fasting holidays, and try and plan around them.
 - Label all food and drinks clearly/have information on all food and drinks being served.
- Avoid negative cultural stereotypes or cultural appropriation at your event.
- Pay attention to town wide demographics, research the different cultures and religions of the community and try to incorporate things to make everyone feel welcome. Just putting in a little effort can have a big outcome, examples:
 - decorate with a flower that has importance for another culture/religion.
 - use colors that have a symbolic meaning for another culture/religion
- Be aware of major holidays, especially ones that change date year to year (<https://www.timeanddate.com/holidays/us/2026>)
- Choose people from different cultural and religious backgrounds to be involved with planning.
- Use language that will be understood cross culturally, avoid idioms.
- Advertise in multiple languages and use graphics/pictures with universal meaning.
- Keep up to date with cultural and religious inclusivity.

Helpful Resources

<https://www.timeanddate.com/holidays/us/2026>

6. Sensory Accessibility

When planning public events in Medway, it is important to consider participants with sensory processing sensitivities or neurodivergent conditions such as autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

These accommodations benefit not only neurodivergent individuals but also young children, seniors, veterans, and others with sensory sensitivities.

- Include any plans for audio or visual stimuli that may be overwhelming in promotional materials
- Designate quiet, low-stimulation spaces and consider providing sensory kits (you may consult community groups like the SEPAC-Special Education Parent Advisory Council for support and ideas for sensory-friendly spaces)
- Post signage identifying loud areas
- Avoid strobe lighting or rapid flashing lights
- Allow flexible entry and exit and space for movement breaks
- Train staff or volunteers to recognize and respond to sensory distress

Helpful Resources

<https://adata.org/publication/accessible-meetings-events-conferences-guide>

<https://www.ncaonline.org>

<https://www.eventsafetyalliance.org/accessibility>

7. Gender Inclusivity

Create an environment where people of all gender identities feel recognized, safe, and able to participate fully:

- Provide all-gender bathrooms
- Ask participants and presenters for their preferred pronouns
- Avoid activities requiring participants to separate by gender
- Consider diverse representation that includes women, non-binary and transgender individuals
- Modernize registration forms including options beyond male and female

Helpful Resources

<https://lgbtqia.ucdavis.edu/educated/planning-inclusive-events>

8. Other Considerations:

Clear Contact Information

- Provide clear instructions for requesting accommodations
- Provide a contact person for questions

Zero Tolerance for Discrimination

- Establish a clear anti-discrimination policy
- Train staff to address discrimination or harassment
- Provide confidential reporting options
- Enforce consequences consistently

Feedback and Participation

- Encourage and offer multiple ways for participants to share feedback:
 - written responses
 - digital polls
 - display boards
 - surveys or interviews
 - focus groups

Maps and Navigation

- Maps should be available in large print or other accessible formats when possible
- Use universal symbols as well as written words
- Provide accessibility maps that highlight:
 - entrances and exits
 - elevators and ramps
 - accessible restrooms
 - mobility-friendly routes

Reducing Barriers and Anxiety

- Provide a clear event schedule
- List accessibility features in advance (quiet rooms, sensory spaces)
- Ask about accommodation needs during registration

Virtual Participation Options

- Consider offering a virtual option for in-person events and choose accessible virtual platforms that support captions, transcription, and screen readers
- Test accessibility features beforehand
- Provide dial-in options for participants without internet access