

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Universal Accessibility in Meetings



BestCities
GLOBAL ALLIANCE



G
GainingEdge



November 2018

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Universal Accessibility in Meetings

1 | OBJECTIVE

The goal of this research project by BestCities Global Alliance-GainingEdge-Rehabilitation International is to promote awareness among meetings organizers and the supplier community on what can be done to remove barriers in meetings and conventions for delegates with disabilities. As more and more persons with disabilities are becoming active members of the workforce, meeting and event planners and suppliers should ensure they are accommodated. Effectively, many people will benefit from these provisions including the aging population, parents with prams, and those with reduced mobility.

2 | SCOPE

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD) is to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all people with a disability and to promote respect for their inherent dignity.

The term 'disability' represents many different personal challenges of impairment. The percentage of people with disability also increases as people age. Although the subject of universal accessibility and inclusiveness is broad, for this project we consider 'disability' to cover the following:



SENSES



MOBILITY



COGNITIVE/
DEVELOPMENTAL



MEDICAL

3 | BARRIERS

Barriers to universal accessibility can include obstacles in the physical environment as well as communication or attitudinal obstacles in the broader environment:



ATTITUDINAL
MINDSETS



LEGAL
ISSUES



ARCHITECTURAL
OBSTACLES



TECHNOLOGICAL
INEFFICIENCIES



4 | ACCESSIBILITY IN BESTCITIES

Destinations around the world have innovated and adapted in order to meet the needs of people with disabilities. Communities also evolved to create an inclusive environment. Policies on disability not only allow people with disabilities to be given equal treatment and opportunities, they also present wider and more diverse opportunities for businesses.

BestCities destinations which have established an enviable reputation as leading destinations for meetings and business events, participated as the focus group in this Project:



BERLIN

Berlin's comprehensive approach to universal accessibility is fully embedded in the city's policies and broadly supported by its decision-makers. Its "accessBerlin" app is an invaluable travel aid for all visitors with special needs. Berlin's accessible hotels have been certified under the *Reisen für Alle* ("Tourism for All") nationwide certification scheme and its accessBerlin app is an invaluable travel aid for all visitors with special needs.



BOGOTÁ

In the planning stages, the Ágora Bogotá Convention Center sought the recommendations of its *Secretaría de salud de Bogotá*, a public organization for citizen health, with universal accessibility being a key focus. Staff at Ágora are trained and certified in responses to industrial security, emergencies and attending to people with disabilities. The centre hosted One Young World Summit 2017 where the global business campaign on disability inclusion, called #valuable, was launched.



CAPE TOWN

Universal access for people with disabilities is a compulsory requirement for the grading of all types of tourism accommodation and meetings, exhibitions, and special events (MESE) venues by the Tourism Grading Council of South Africa. The Cape Town International Convention Centre -CTICC- incorporates international norms as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the South African National Building Regulations (NBR) Standards.



COPENHAGEN

A Danish initiative called *God Adgang* "Access Denmark" is an Accessibility Label scheme based on a set of criteria developed by the Danish Standardization Institute in cooperation with the Danish organizations of people with disability and representatives from the companies/buildings involved. The label scheme includes seven labels aiming at different groups of disabilities, each with different requirements for accessibility.



DUBAI

Dubai's "My Community – A City for Everyone" project means that new public spaces have had to fulfil an emirate-wide, disabled-friendly code while many older buildings are being retrofitted ahead of Expo 2020 Dubai. This is in line with the Dubai Disability Strategy 2020 using smart technologies and facilities aimed at integrating those with disabilities ("the determined ones") into the society.



EDINBURGH

As "Accessibility for All" is a key priority within Edinburgh's community, there is a range of information and tools available for conference organizers and delegates visiting the city. Local initiatives assist hotels and venues welcoming guests with disabilities making Edinburgh a role model. Among others, the Edinburgh Airport and the Edinburgh International Conference Centre (EICC) have blazed trails with their inclusive approach and designated autism friendly.

4 | ACCESSIBILITY IN BESTCITIES



HOUSTON

The Houston Museum of Natural Science is just one of many establishments in the city which offer sensory information with evaluations for noise level, visual stimulation, tactile components and any scents that a visitor may encounter. Customer service staff who interact with guests on a daily basis are trained on awareness and sensitivity, and best practices for instruction and interactions.



MADRID

Madrid has taken great strides to adapt and improve its tourism infrastructure for universal access.

The city has worked with accessibility expert PREDIF (Spanish Representative Platform for the Physically Disabled), as well as different tourism associations and organizations such as AEHM (Madrid Hotel Business Association) and the AEHCAM (Madrid Hostel and Guest House Business Association).



MELBOURNE

As part of Melbourne's "Good Access is Good Business" Initiative, a study by Monash University revealed that businesses enjoy a 20-25% increase turnover for universally accessible retail environments compared to non-accessible environments. The city's "Open Innovation Competition" yielded creative solutions that use smart technologies to create a universally accessible city.



SINGAPORE

Singapore's Building and Construction Authority (BCA) introduced a Universal Design Guide in 2007 to offer guidelines in the design of products and environment. This mandates new projects and existing buildings which undergo A&A (Additions and Alterations) to follow the new code. The Accessibility Fund encourages building owners to include accessibility features for the visually and hearing-impaired such braille signage and hearing loops.



TOKYO

Efforts to make Japan increasingly barrier-free have gained momentum ahead of the 2020 Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games which will do much to lift awareness and promote inclusion. Along with promoting measures to make railway stations, roads and buildings barrier-free, the Tokyo 2020 Accessibility Guidelines will emphasize the importance of city planning that is friendly to everyone from the perspective of universal design.



VANCOUVER

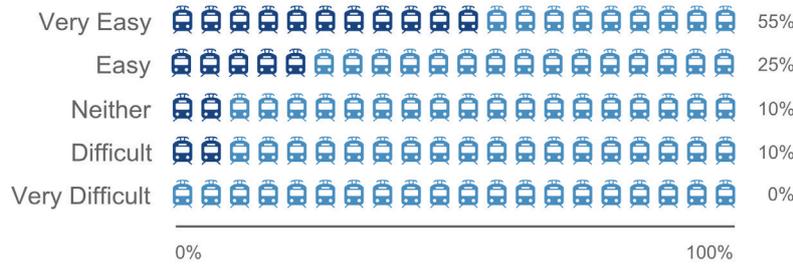
As a result of hosting the Paralympic Winter Games 2010 in Vancouver, more Canadians with a disability are now aware of the opportunity to play sports and have found heroes and role models to inspire them and make Canada one of the top Paralympic nations in the world. The gear developed for the Paralympics can benefit the people with disabilities outside the competitive sports world as well.

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ACCESSIBILITY IN THE MEETINGS INDUSTRY

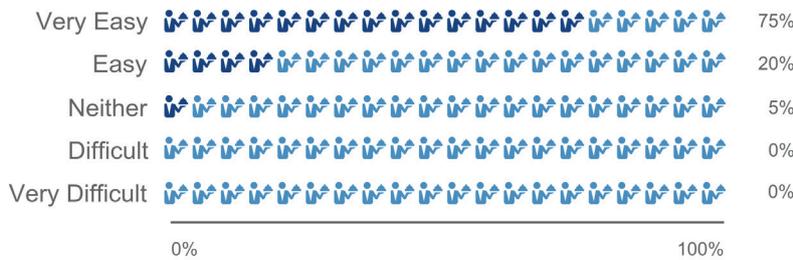
20 venues in BestCities destinations participated in this survey

Q. How easy is it for special needs participants to get to your venue using public transportation?



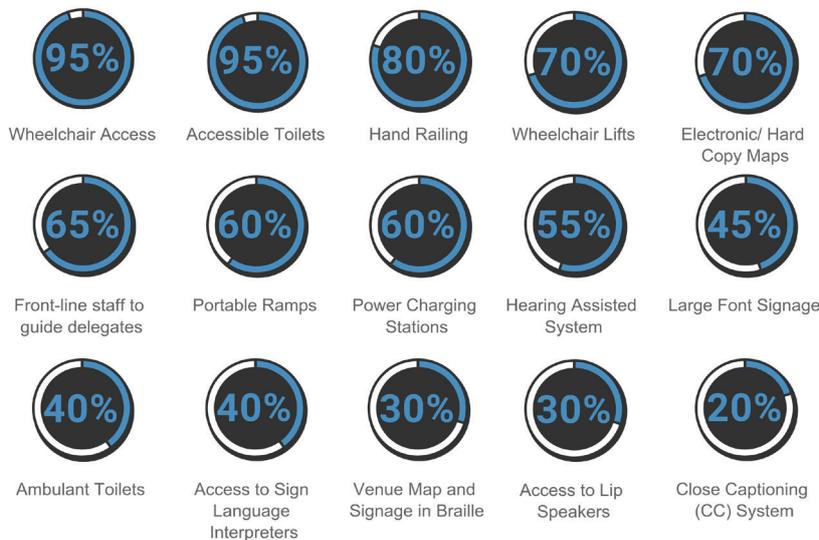
Accessible public transport systems are systems which integrate all people. Well planned public transportation systems can be used by as many people as possible. This means being able to get on and off vehicles, being able to get to and from terminals or stops, and travelling with confidence regardless of impairments. Public transport services have an important role in promoting accessibility.

Q. How easily can your venue cater to the varying special dietary needs of participants?



Accessibility should not be used synonymously with 'disability' because food allergies is also an access issue. Inaccessibility limits the number of delegates who can attend conferences. The meetings industry is one that comprises groups of people ranging from delegates, to planners and volunteers who may have varying dietary requirements.

Q. What facilities for assistive devices and technologies do you currently have in place at your venue to assist delegates with special needs?



Other facilities provided include:

- All crossing and main walkway turning points outdoors have in-floor Braille barriers.
- Toilets for ostomates.
- Full tour guide script in Braille and a British Sign Language version on a tablet.
- Lowered information desk.
- Noise absorbing roof coverings.
- Non-mirroring floor materials.

5 | ACCESSIBILITY IN THE MEETINGS INDUSTRY

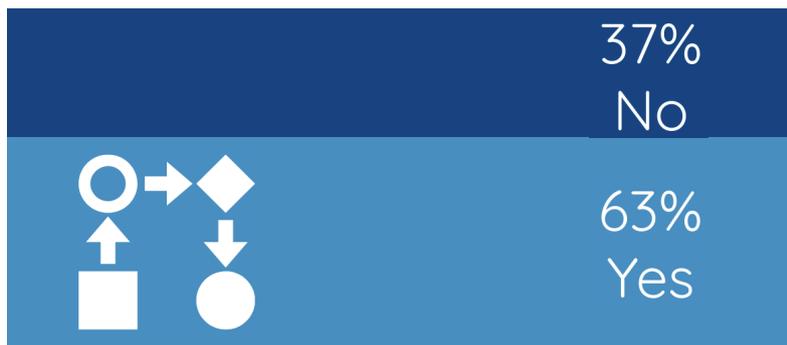
Q. Is mandatory training on accessibility and inclusion provided for in-house events staff and front liners so they are capable of assisting people with special needs?



Additional Information:

- ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) is a vital part of CMP (Certified Meeting Professional accreditation), and all our front-line floor managers are CMP trained.
- We are working with IDT in best practices on Accessibility and inclusion.
- We have a 2-hour training session with front line staff in Accessibility, in association with VisitScotland.
- We encourage our employees to participate in a training programme aimed at workers in the hospitality industry where the customers include the elderly and people with disabilities.
- Our FOH staff complete an e-learning training tool via the Edinburgh Fringe Society. Additionally, we cover accessibility and inclusion as part of our FOH staff induction programme.
- Training on Accessibility and inclusion is conducted and carried out by our certified Accessibility Partner, Sedra Foundation.
- Training on Accessibility and inclusion is part of our 'get on board' procedures and employees are trained in the first 48 hours of joining Scandic.

Q. Do you have a Standard Operating Procedure to manage accessibility requests with your clients?



Additional Information:

- Our teams are trained to manage Accessibility requests.
- For every event, related departments within the hotel meet to discuss and confirm how to attend to the special needs. If training is necessary, we provide it based on the support the client needs. Information on a particular event or group is given to the whole hotel, not just the departments involved, so that there is a more thorough approach to servicing this group.
- We have instructions and procedures to improve guest experience at all stages, from booking to check-out.
- We have a working file that the team can refer to.
- We consider 135 points in our operational manual.
- We are developing our SOP manual.

“ Event organizers and providers of services in the travel and tourism industry need to embrace the concept of “universal access.” Event organizers need to ensure that their programs and materials are accessible to people with disabilities. Service providers (such as conference facilities, transportation companies, hotels, restaurants, special venues. etc.) need to provide accessible solutions for people with disabilities. The disability market segment is large and has more discretionary income than other coveted market segments, representing an opportunity for event organizers and providers of services. ”

Dr Terry Howard
Executive Director
Alpha Iota Delta Decision Sciences Institute

“ For most, the % of attendees requiring is still small enough that it is not viewed as that significant to make it to a determining factor. Obviously this is different if the group has a significant portion of special needs attendees or is about PWD (Person with Disabilities). In my own experience, even ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) in the US is not enough to effectively provide for attendees. Do a site visit with someone in a wheelchair and it immediately becomes clear how much work there is to be done. ”

Gregg Talley, FASAE, CAE,
President & CEO
Talley Management Group Inc

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ACCESSIBILITY IN THE MEETINGS INDUSTRY

Q. Does your venue currently have, or make references to, Accessibility Standards?



Additional Information:

- Building and Construction Authority (BCA) Code on Accessibility in the Built Environment 2013.
- Tokyo 2020 Accessibility Guideline (Guidelines for the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympic Games).
- OPERA Identification code, special Service attitude.
- In conjunction with rules and regulations laid out by our Community Development Authority.
- DIN German standards combined with our own.

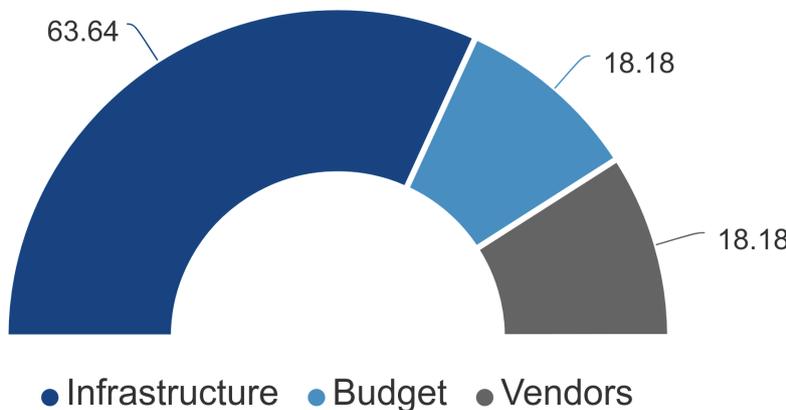
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Every public space should be accessible. In the past, buildings did not have the modern thinking and approach to people with impairment but today, we, in the building industry, are more alert and we have evolved our thinking. These days, we have enough technology and vision to include everyone and meeting space should be better thought through. If you want every expert at your conference, you have to include them all, and that includes people with disabilities.

”

Silvia Taurer,
Region Manager Europe
RTC Events Management
(RTCEM)

Q. Are there any challenges your venue is currently facing in meeting the needs of delegates with special needs?



Other challenges:

- Measuring the impact on our commercial KPIs.
- Mentality.

“

Destinations should look into the concept of universal design. Universal design should be looked at from the beginning, not an after-thought. Understanding the broader issues of meeting delegates accessibility is paramount to developing positive delegate experiences and building capacity in the meetings industry to cater for the different levels of disability and promote inclusion.

”

Venus Ilagan
Secretary General
Rehabilitation International

6 | MAKING MEETINGS MORE ACCESSIBLE

Universal accessibility in the meetings industry means contribution to business growth, knowledge sharing, an improved experience and increasing competitiveness in the destination.

- 1 | **Self-education.** Identify and understand what enablers are required to promote and encourage universally accessible meetings in our industry. Accessible meetings and events are not only competitive opportunities, but also our social responsibility.
- 2 | **Establish a strong and tangible business case** for universally accessible meetings and events to the individual businesses in your destination. The accessible market which is largely underserved, offers destinations and businesses new opportunities.
- 3 | **Design venues with accessibility in mind.** The ISO Standard 21542: Accessibility and Usability of the Built Environment (2011) can be referenced for designing meeting/conference venues to be accessible and inclusive. When applied in the early stages of building design, the costs of providing accessibility and usability measures are minimal. Retrofitting will incur additional costs and is more complex.
- 4 | **Ongoing accessibility provisions.** In addition to referencing this international standard, facility managers must maintain the universal accessibility and usability of a venue throughout its lifespan. This also includes raising disability awareness and providing training to the relevant staff.
- 5 | **Awareness and training.** Make disability awareness and sensitivity training mandatory in your organization. This training will help your team members gain insights into critical issues for people with different disabilities and learn appropriate language and terminology and communication strategies while focusing on attitudinal and practical issues. The training will enable individuals and organizations to be confident when supporting their customers and employees who have disabilities.
Universal Accessibility certification. Develop an industry-wide certification programme for Universal Accessibility. As a start, the certification programme can be a credential recognised at local or national level. This can be an assessment, an examination or accreditation that is administered and recognised by a third party with expertise in issues related to inclusion. This certification project can be carried out through three levels:
 - 6 | Level 1: Participate and support project by signing a commitment to enhancing universal accessibility and conducting a self-assessment and submitting a report;
 - Level 2: Work to improve universal accessibility by complying with at least 50% of accessibility standards;
 - Level 3: Fully meet universal accessibility guidelines by complying with 100% of accessibility standards and submitting to a third-party assessment.
- 7 | **Universal access audits.** Develop a universal access audit checklist and minimum recommended standards for meeting organizers and destination suppliers. Define minimum requirement standards of universal accessibility with help from experts in this field.
- 8 | **Develop local champions.** Work with your local associations or groups to understand better the specific needs of special delegates and to better provide accessible mainstream services and fulfilling experiences. Seek champions from within these groups.
- 9 | **References and guidelines.** Provide reference documents or links to guidelines on how to accommodate participants with disabilities for event organizers. Rehabilitation International Commission on Technology and Accessibility (RI-ICTA) has prepared some guidelines on “Accessibility to Meetings and Conventions”, please refer to the Full Report for details.
- 10 | **Best Practice case studies.** Share Best Practices through a good practice document developed for industry organizations who have a stake in the meetings industry. The compilation of such best practice case studies will spread practical advice on how to make meetings and events more accessible to people with disabilities. Include a recognition programme so that best practice events are identified, rewarded, and emulated.

6 | MAKING MEETINGS MORE ACCESSIBLE

- 11 **Visitor Information.** Provide information on accessibility in your city. Destination marketing organizations (DMOs) and convention bureaus are usually the first point of reference for such information.
- 12 **Check if your website is accessible.** Web accessibility means that websites, tools and technologies are designed and developed so that people with disabilities can use them. These barriers to print, audio, and visual media can be overcome through Web technologies.
- 13 **Access guides.** Determine the accessibility needs of delegates attending your meetings. Create a separate map for persons with disabilities, along with facilities that are helpful to them. The guide should be easy to read and available in alternate formats with attention paid to the type faces, sizes and colours. Use apps and other technology aids available.
- 14 **Jobs and awards.** Offer jobs and opportunities for people with disabilities. Provide Awards and Accolades to incentivise and promote inclusion efforts.
- 15 **Bid specifications.** Meeting planners can address issues of accessibility within their bid specifications and bid evaluations.

In our interviews, some association planners clarified that although accessibility clauses are not part of their RFP, this issue will be discussed directly with the shortlisted destination/s subsequently to ensure full inclusion. In certain cases, the planners will work with the local host committee to make sure that disability awareness and sensitivity training will be provided.

“
It is our intention that BestCities bureaus, as partners of the world's leading convention bureau alliance, will trail blaze the way for other destinations around the world to make significant improvements for universal access in the meetings industry. This will be achieved through knowledge sharing and best practices from BestCities destinations which can then be emulated or adapted to support convention delegates with special needs.”

Jeannie Lim
Chair
BestCities Global Alliance



“
At GainingEdge, we recognise that building an understanding of the broader issues of delegate accessibility will encourage the industry to cater better for people who have a range of needs. Bringing these into the meetings arena can help develop management practices that create a more inclusive environment.”

Gary Grimmer,
CEO
GainingEdge

7 | ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

BestCities Global Alliance, GainingEdge and Rehabilitation International are grateful to all organizations and individuals who have participated in this Project to promote universal accessibility in meetings and conventions. We are proud to present this Project to you and we are hopeful that disability action plans will soon be on boardroom agendas and be well accepted across our industry and around the world.

November 2018

[Download the full report from here](#)



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