

Making Your Meeting Accessible – A Study in Best Practices

Does every attendee have the opportunity to participate fully in your meeting? Many people with disabilities have difficulty doing just that – in ways you may not imagine.

Shirlene Roberts, Associate Director of Meeting Services, Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) and Vanessa Kane, CMP, CMM, Manager, Meetings Events & Exhibits, Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States (VFW) are two veteran planners who face these challenges every day.

PVA has 20,000 members in 35 chapters across the country and organizes 100 meetings a year; all require special accommodations. PAV has a checklist they send hotels they are considering. The location must be able to provide all items on the list. VFW has over one million members in 7,000 posts and organizes multiple meetings each year, including a city-wide annual meeting for 8 – 10,000 attendees. Each meeting requires certain ADA accommodations.

What do Roberts and Kane look for on a site visit? “First of all, we inspect sleeping rooms,” noted Roberts. “We would like to see bathroom doors 28 - 30 inches wide and have doors that open out. If there are not enough rooms to meet the specifications, we need to make modifications, such as removing the bathroom doors. Ideally, the bathroom will have a roll-in shower, with hand-held shower controls that can be reached by a seated person. Beds need to have a six-inch clearance from the floor to the bottom of mattress or frame, in order to install patient lifts.

‘Pillow top’ bedding adds 3-4 inches to the height of the bed, often making an easy transfer difficult. We will have the hotel lower the mattress to the floor for a more reasonable height.” Kane also looks for accessible rooms, ramps for access into the hotel or convention center, the location of elevators, and access for speakers -- a ramp or wheelchair lift to the staging.

Consider advising the hotel or convention center if attendees will be using service animals, providing sign language for general sessions and scooter rental services. “You commonly think of scooters for people who use wheel chairs or walkers, but there are those who just can’t walk too far anymore,” noted Kane, whose annual meeting attracts veterans from WWII, Korea, Vietnam and more recent conflicts. “We provide shuttles, often to transport attendees’ short distances.”

“Know your group, and be open with communications. Be sure attendees tell you all their needs.” Kane said. “Attendees with service animals need the proper paperwork to enter convention centers, for example.” Provide a very thorough event specifications guide for your program. “It’s worth the effort for hotels to have our group. We are a teaching tool for them,” Roberts concluded. •

*by Sara Torrence, CMP Emeritus
President, Sara Torrence and Associates*



The PCMA Capital Chapter is where “You Belong”!

Mission: The Capital Chapter of the Professional Convention Management Association (PCMA) delivers breakthrough education, encourages involvement in community-based service programs, and promotes the value of professional convention and meeting management at the local level.

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If you have any comments, suggestions or would like to write an article for *The Chatter*, email: PCMAchatter@gmail.com.



Message from the Board

Joy Womack, CMP Treasurer



While reflecting on the topic of the Americans with Disabilities Act, I began to wonder about the original premise of the ADA and our industry's ability to follow the codes. In reading the beginning of the code, the following phrase jumped out at me, "... physical or mental disabilities in no way diminish a person's right to fully participate in all aspects of society," and I began to see a correlation

between the ongoing conversations amongst the industry about experiential design and the attendee experience.

It seems to me that in addition to safeguarding against the discrimination of those with disabilities, the ADA holds us accountable for ensuring that the educational delivery methods we design for our events and the networking opportunities that we create meet the needs of all attendees including those with disabilities.

As you read this month's issue, I would encourage you to consider what you and your organization can do in order to guarantee that your event is fully inclusive of all attendees. How can you go above and beyond the basic accommodations of physical space and language interpretation giving all of your attendees the opportunity to actively engage in your event? •




Connect with the Capital Chapter!



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In these modern times, connecting is much more than an e-mail, phone call or (GASP!) an actual hand written letter or note! Connecting is any form of interaction and critical to all of our lives, especially in the meetings industry! The PCMA Capital Chapter wants to connect its members to educate, build business relationships and keep you informed on the latest industry trends. We like to have a little fun too! So connect with us through social media or sign up for one of our events!  Like and check our Facebook page too; you never know who may get "featured" or captioned on any given day!

Keep Planning, Keep Growing, Keep Connected!

ADA Compliance: Total Focus on a Seamless Attendee Experience

Since the Americans with Disabilities Act passed in 1990, our industry has evolved from one of basic accessibility compliance to a community committed to a universal approach. This shift sprang from increased awareness and a professional propensity toward shared responsibility. We embraced the importance of creating “seamless” experiences that offer equal accessibility opportunities for all, regardless of disabilities.

“Seamless” represents an approach I follow as I navigate my events through the complex general contractor planning process. Britt Jackman, deputy senior director for conventions and meetings at The Optical Society and part of the team that produces the OFC/NFOEC show, once shared with me her vision of accessibility as seamless. This resonated with me and achieving seamless access at events, something that in the past might have been handled as an afterthought, is a personal priority. As I work through the many nuances of planning a show, the question I ask is whether the event is accessible to all people in the same way. Challenging myself and others to answer this question is a great way to start working through an accessibility check list.

Initial planning stages are critical. We need to partner closely with all parties to fairly and accurately assess accommodation at many levels – from selecting the right signage systems to identifying needed physical space enhancements, to addressing deficiencies and resolving them. The decisions we make need to consider the entire community being served in order to deliver a “seamless” experience that fosters inclusivity.

Nothing is ever as easy as it sounds but, ultimately, the trust and confidence we can build along the way is worth the effort. Success comes down to the genuine commitment of show organizers, venues and even the attendees to go beyond compliance and deliver exceptional experiences.

Our industry regularly goes beyond basic compliance to produce seamless and universal attendee experiences that integrate accessibility into the planning process. •

—by Vanessa Schley, Director, Account Management, Hargrove, Inc.

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a dark business suit, is sitting in a meditative lotus position on a large, polished wooden conference table. The room is dimly lit, with wood-paneled walls and several empty leather chairs around the table. The text 'The Transcendent' is written in a cursive font at the top. Below it, 'MEETING PLANNER' is written in a simple sans-serif font. The words 'HALL OF FAME' are written in large, bold, white capital letters across the center. At the bottom left, the name 'Annie Jones' is written in a cursive font. Below that, a paragraph of text describes her experience at Hershey. At the bottom right, the 'HERSHEY MEETINGS' logo is displayed, along with the address 'HERSHEY LODGE | THE HOTEL HERSHEY' and the phone number '1-866-726-3387'. A small vertical copyright notice is on the right edge.

The Transcendent

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Annie Jones

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New Trends in ADA



When you think of ADA, what is the first thing that comes to mind from a meeting planner, hotel, convention center or venue perspective? Does the venue have wheelchair access to a 2nd level? Are there ADA compliant bathroom stalls in the public space? How many guestrooms are ADA compliant? Is the hotel compliant with the new pool lift requirements? You know, the normal check list you go through in your mind to make sure you've thought of everything for an attendee that may have a special ADA requirement. Have you ever asked the question, "Are my attendees hearing the content of my meeting"? You might want to start asking yourself this question.

The American Society of Speech-Language Hearing Association's (ASHA) website states approximately 28 million Americans have a hearing impairment. How many of those people are attending your meetings without your knowledge? A new trend for assistance hearing is called "Looping". The hearing loop is a process that starts with a source (example TV). That signal is sent to an amplifier and the wire is run around the perimeter of the room and back to the amplifier to complete the "loop". An attendee with a hearing aid can turn their hearing aid to a specific mode that picks up the magnetic field created by this "loop". Voila! An attendee with a hearing disability can get a clear sound and hear the message.

To learn more about "Looping", check out Loop America at www.loopamerica.com. Loop America is a company that can help educate you on how to install this system at your next meeting or even at your grandma's 90th birthday party at her church! •

by Tamara Jones, Director of National Accounts, Hiltons of Chicago

Happy St. Patrick's Day From PCMA!



The Only Thing We're Missing is **You!**

Guest Authors Needed for *The Chatter*! We're looking for movers and shakers to share their experience and great ideas as guest authors for *The Chatter*.

Articles are no more than 300 words and authors typically have over two weeks to submit their articles. You are encouraged to select your own topic or choose from topics submitted by the committee. Benefits of becoming a guest author include:

- **Networking** with colleagues from across the industry - your article is published with a byline that includes your name and organization.
- **Earning CMP Points** towards your application or renewal. Add another accomplishment to your resume!
- **Getting involved!** Have you been looking to be more active within the chapter? This is your chance!

Interested?

Contact Guest Author Champion:
Beth O'Brien, bobrien@nacacnet.org

Training Hotel Staff About People with Disabilities

The gist of the Americans with Disability Act is to have standards that enable people with disabilities to function on their own just as a person without disabilities is free to do. Guests want their privacy and independence to check in at the front desk, maneuver in their rooms without assistance, shower, enjoy a dip in the pool or Jacuzzi, take a van to the mall and be safe in the event of an emergency. When the hotel is compliant with ADA requirements, mission accomplished, right?!

There are systems in place...computers detail accessible guestroom amenities so reservation agents can answer guests' questions and, in the event of emergencies, print lists of guests who require assistance from emergency rescue personnel. There are simple pool lift operating instructions for swimmers who require lifts to get in and out of the water and various technologies in the guest rooms provided to assist them with their special needs.

So, where does staff "training" come in? Overwhelmingly I heard that it's a sensitivity awareness; an ability to read any guest to know how much or little assistance they desire. It's having empathy and putting yourself in the guest's shoes. There are no fast rules because each guest is different and each individual handles their disabilities in their own unique way. Train the staff to treat all people with respect, kindness and hospitality and your "compliance" will soar. •

—by Marilyn Atchue-Zuill, Association Sales Manager, Crowne Plaza Redondo Beach & Marina Hotel

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EXHIBIT SALES ROUNDTABLE

Exhibit Sales Roundtable (ESR) — March 21 in Washington, DC — is an forum for 18 exhibit sales and service managers and subject matter experts to meet, network and share the latest sales techniques to strengthen your exhibit floor and sponsorship programs.

For more information and to register, visit
www.lippmanconnects.com/ESR.



LARGE SHOW ROUNDTABLE

Large Show Roundtable (LSR) — April 4 at McCormick Place, Chicago, IL — is a one-day, facilitated forum for 16 managers of shows with at least 125,000 net square feet to discuss strategic issues with their peers.

For more information and to register, visit
www.lippmanconnects.com/LSR.



Produced and Facilitated by Sam Lippman

Sam Lippman is a trained facilitator and executive-level consultant with 35 years of hands-on experience as a show manager. He is the producer of Exhibition and Convention Executives Forum (ECEFF), Attendee Acquisition Roundtable (AAR), Exhibit Sales Roundtable (ESR) and Large Show Roundtable (LSR).

Designing an ADA Compliant Website

Many people with disabilities use assistive technology that enables them to use computers. Some assistive technology involves separate computer programs or devices such as screen readers, text enlargement software and computer programs that enable people to control the computer with their voice. Poorly designed websites can create unnecessary barriers for people with disabilities, just as poorly designed buildings prevent some people with disabilities from entering. But an accessible website does not require people to see, hear or use a standard mouse.

Problem: Screen readers only read text and cannot interpret photographs, charts, color-coded information or other graphic elements on a webpage.

Solution: Add text such as “Photo of...” to every image. Create an “alt tag,” or alternative text, for images, video files, plug-ins, etc. which will give specific instructions understood by a screen reader.

Problem: PDFs, powerpoint files, Java applets or other image based formats are often not accessible to those who use assistive technology.

Solution: Always provide documents in an alternative text-based format such as HTML or RTF (Rich Text Format).

Problem: People who are deaf or hard of hearing can see the information but may not be able to hear the audio of a video. On the other hand, persons who are blind or have low vision are unable to see the video images but can hear the audio.

Solution: Provide text captions synchronized with video. Provide audio descriptions of images (including changes in setting, gestures and other details) to videos for the visually impaired.

Problem: Blind people or individuals with neuromuscular impairments use their keyboard almost exclusively and cannot use a mouse.

Solution: Make sure that all content can be accessed with the keyboard alone using only the tab key.

Other considerations:

- Include a “skip navigation” button;
- Offer pause option to moving or auto-updating objects or pages and flashing images or other distractions;
- Design online forms to include descriptive HTML tags.

(Source: Title II of the ADA) •

by Tanya Barrett, CMP
Manager, Meetings Services, U.S. Pharmacopeia

COMMUNITY SERVICE

Volunteer to Celebrate N Street Village Work and the Amazing Women they Support!

The Capital Chapter and N Street Village, a community of empowerment and recovery for homeless and low-income women in Washington, DC, have shared a great partnership for several years. CSC is trying something different with them this year in recruiting volunteers to assist with their Annual Fundraising Gala taking place April 10, 2013.

This is N Street’s largest fundraising event of the year benefiting women who are working toward their goals of self-sufficiency. The Gala will be held at the Ritz-Carlton, Washington, DC and will include a cocktail reception from 6:30 – 7:30 p.m. followed by dinner, awards and program. During this extraordinary event, N Street Village will be honoring Senator Roy, Mrs. Abigail Blunt and Senator Kirsten Gillibrand for their personal and professional efforts on behalf of individuals who live on the margins of society. N Street Village also recognizes the women they serve, celebrating their accomplishments and triumph over adversity.

CSC is recruiting 20 to 30 volunteers to assist with event registration, raffle ticket sales, and VIP guest management on the night of the event.

If you would like to volunteer or have questions, please contact Amanda Clark, aclark@naco.org or Beverly Johnson, b_johnson@acs.org. •

— by Amanda Clark, CMP, Manager, Conferences & Meetings,
National Association of Counties

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mark your Calendar for PDC’s Spring Events!

The Professional Development Committee has several events planned for the next few months so be sure to mark your calendar and don’t miss any of them! The first educational event of the year will be a breakfast meeting on April 4.

On April 17, the Professional Development Committee and Emerging Professionals Committee will be holding a joint planner workshop.

Last but certainly not least, we will be cheering on our very own National League East 2012 Champions, the Washington Nationals as they begin a new season. The Nats will be taking on the Detroit Tigers on May 8 sponsored by none other than Visit Detroit.

We are finalizing the locations for the educational meetings so be sure to check our website for the most up to date information and upcoming events. •

— by Lisa French, Senior Sales Manager, Hilton Baltimore

The Importance of ADA Compliance and Inclusion of People with Disabilities

Statistics have consistently shown that people with disabilities (PWDs) have a weaker presence within the workforce as compared to those without. As of January 2013, 13.7% of PWDs were unemployed, compared to 8.3% of those without disabilities (ODEP). One could say the convention management industry serves the critical role of bringing people together to exchange ideas and information, thus furthering the work of a particular sector. By ensuring ADA compliant events, convention professionals play an active role in heightening the presence of PWDs in the workforce.

Lack of access often serves as a reason for the low employment rates of PWDs. That cycle is perpetuated in part by the PWDs absence at events which would normally promote the exchange of professional resources and opportunities. The easiest way to ensure ADA compliance is to consider accessibility during each phase of the event management process. Accommodations are often handled as an “add on” in the planning process, which can create last minute complexity and



puts an unnecessary limelight on the PWD. In considering the audience of an event, it is important to recognize that ADA accommodations are not “one size”. Disability functions on a continuum, with many disabilities being subtle or invisible. A person with a physical disability is three times more likely to use a walking aid than a wheelchair (US Census Bureau). Even those with similar disabilities may have varying needs.

Before and during registration, it is encouraged to include information that allows participants to detail accommodation requests. Participants who are given the opportunity to articulate a specific need will often be the best resource for ensuring access compliance. An excellent website for resources tailored toward convention professionals can be found at <http://www.adahospitality.org/content/Planning-Accessible-Meetings>. The process and end result of ADA compliant events serves both intangible and tangible benefits for all parties involved. •

*by Rebecca Berman, Global Inclusion and Social Development Professional
Kara Frost, Program Manager, Volunteers of America National Office*

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Disabilities Etiquette 101

Have you ever been in a position where you just didn't know what was appropriate to do, or not to do, around a person with a disability? Well you'll be happy to know you're not alone. Hopefully this article will clear the air about some misconceptions and put you and the person with the disability at ease. The following was excerpted from *Associations Now*, Vol. 3, No. 13. To reference the article in its entirety go to <http://www.asaecenter.org/Resources/ANowDetail.cfm?ItemNumber=38765>

People with mobility impairments have varying abilities. Some get out of their wheelchair, walk short distances and use arms/ hands. Other people don't appear to have a mobility impairment but experience difficulties under fatigued/symptomatic conditions.

DON'T push, touch or lean on a wheelchair; make assumptions; or grab someone's arm (they may need it for balance).

DO consider physical obstacles for directions; keep halls/ aisles clear; ask before helping; position equipment/ counters within an individual in a wheelchair's reach; be at eye level when conversing; and provide assistive/adaptive devices.

People with vision impairments in general live independently, travel, read, write, have a career, active social life, etc. All do not use canes or guide dogs. Some use auditory, tactile cues or echolocation to navigate. "Visually impaired" is the generic term for all types of vision loss.

DON'T touch a person's cane or guide dog.

DO identify yourself and others; note obstacles when walking (stairs, revolving doors, plants, etc.); describe location of objects; offer to read written information; use accessibility guidelines on your website; provide magnification devices/writing guides for computer screens; and consider speech-recognition software and adaptive devices.

People who are deaf or hard of hearing have a range of communication preferences/styles: American Sign Language, lip reading, amplification and assistive devices.

DON'T smoke, chew gum or obscure your mouth.

DO use a qualified sign-language interpreter (when appropriate); look and speak directly to the person who is deaf; use simple sentences, meaningful facial expressions and gestures; gain attention before speaking (gently wave hand or tap shoulder/arm); dial 711 for TTY assistance; ask preferred communication method.



A person who is hearing impaired may have a speech impairment or disability necessitating sign language, writing, voice or assistive technology communication.

DON'T assume a cognitive impairment; tease/laugh at a person with a speech impairment; exhibit negative attitudes/connotations; pretend to understand.

DO communicate in a quiet environment; be patient; ask for short answers; make sure communication devices are within reach.

A disability is not always evident. Some people have hidden disabilities.

DON'T use condescending euphemisms ("physically challenged"), stereotypes, or pity.

DO realize appearances are deceiving, simple tasks may be painful; limitations may change with medications/disease progression; modify tasks and; accept possible ADA accommodations (limited travel, flexible schedule, etc.).

When talking with or writing to people with disabilities:

DON'T use outdated language such as "crippled" vs. "person who uses a wheelchair".

DO use current terminology ("person who is deaf or hearing impaired" vs. "deaf mute").

More information can be obtained from:

National Federation of the Blind (www.nfb.org)

National Association of the Deaf (www.nad.org)

The National Organization on Disability (www.nod.org).

by Jacqueline K. Mongold, CMP, Assistant NRA Secretary, National Rifle Association

Capital Chapter Mix 'N Bowl - Photos by Chuck Fazio





Capital Chapter Member Spotlights

Spotlight on a Supplier

*Sara Buzzanuco, CHSE
Director of Sales
Loews Don Cesar Hotel*



Sara grew up in Altoona, Pennsylvania, but spent most of her life in Pittsburgh and is a huge Steelers and Penguins fan. She attended Duquesne University; going to a lot of concerts at the old Civic Arena: and even met Bruce Springsteen in a small club at an album release party for the "Iron City Houserockers. 'She remembers it like it was yesterday!'"

She began her hotel career as a lifeguard during college summers at a Holiday Inn, then worked the front desk and eventually transitioned to Sales. When her mother asked why she wanted to go into hotel sales, she said, among other reasons, "I'll have lunch in the restaurant with clients." Still a favorite part of her job today!

"I had no idea that two of my passions, swimming and being in the sun, would lead to a career of wonderful hotel positions and experiences. I've been very fortunate and love it as much as I did when I started." Sara's nephew Alex is the light of her life; she loves being his favorite aunt. And she's a workout fanatic; spin classes are her favorite. Her dream vacation is visiting the Kim Crawford winery in New Zealand with her husband Dan.

Sara likes belonging to the PCMA close-knit community "where members are like-minded and there's an atmosphere of education and camaraderie." She's been a member for almost as long as she's been a Steelers fan! •

*by Jacqueline K. Mongold, CMP
Assistant NRA Secretary, National Rifle Association*

Spotlight on a Planner

*Jacqueline Barnes
Associate Director Meetings and Conventions
American Association for Justice*



Happy Anniversary Jackie! This month Jackie Barnes celebrates her 23rd anniversary with the American Association for Justice. Just 23 short years ago, Jackie began her career as a secretary in the meetings department. In this capacity she learned so much of what she'd be doing later. From secretary she moved on to Registration, where she

would travel twice a year to their conventions. Realizing she liked the travel aspect of the job, she worked her way up to Meetings Coordinator, then Meetings Manager and finally to Associate Director of the very department she began in as a secretary.

Encouraged by a friend/mentor to join PCMA, Jackie became a member 13 years ago and has been an active member of the Capital Chapter. Currently she serves on the Community Service Committee and is very excited about new projects with the DC Metro food banks.

A self-described "foodie", Jackie loves to eat and cook. She enjoys spending her free time with friends, going to movies, teaching 4th grade catholic education and working off all those great meals doing zumba and cardio kickboxing! Those who have the pleasure of knowing Jackie recognize her for her quiet, fun loving nature and how she shares her experiences to help educate others.

Jackie was born in Washington, DC. She went to school, raised her two children Joceline and Keenan and to this day still lives in Washington, DC. However, Jackie doesn't plan on spending the rest of her life in Washington, DC. She has a goal to retire in North Carolina near the beach, do volunteer work and take Zumba classes. •

*by Gail Seawright
Director of National Accounts, Loews Ventana Canyon*



News Bytes

Email your news: PCMAchatter+news@gmail.com

ALISHA WAID, CMP has rejoined the Loews Hotels team as Executive Director, National Accounts for the Mid-Atlantic Region.

Congratulations to **MALENE WARD, CMP, CEM** who is now the Director of Education and Conferences with the Direct Marketing Association Nonprofit Federation and the Email Experience Council.



Mark Your Calendar

CAPITAL CONNECTION

Please join us for these upcoming events. Visit our chapter website for details and to register: www.pcma.org/connect-and-grow/chapters/capital

- 4/4 PDC Breakfast Educational Event**
Risk Management
 8:00 am-11:00 am
 Hilton Old Town Alexandria
 1767 King Street, Alexandria, VA
- 4/10 N Street Village Annual Fundraising Gala**
 Ritz Carlton
 1150 22nd St Nw, Washington, DC
 6:30 pm - Reception, Dinner, Awards
 20-30 Volunteers Needed
aclark@naco.org or b_johnson@acs.org
- 5/8 Washington Nationals Baseball Event**
Detroit Tigers at Washington Nationals
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