

# Accessible Fundraising Events Guide

**Holland Bloorview**

Kids Rehabilitation Hospital Foundation

A world of possibility

**Whether you are planning a fundraising gala, business meeting, outdoor event such as a charity run, or any type of gathering, it is important to include accessibility throughout the entire process from beginning to end. Planning an accessible fundraising event allows for universal participation and a better experience for all of your guests and attendees.**

*This document was created by event professionals and has been reviewed by Holland Bloorview staff, clients, families, volunteers, and people with lived experience of disability. **September 2023***

*This is only a guide with best practices and suggestions, it is the event planners or the planning organization's responsibility to ensure they are meeting the needs of their participants through direct conversation and continued education. The guide includes linked resources for further guidance.*

## **What are the Benefits of Accessibility for your Fundraising Events and Meetings?**

- 1 Accessibility considerations will increase overall participation at your fundraising event, which, in turn, will produce greater satisfaction from all attendees.**

Accessibility can also support a more enjoyable experience for all attendees which means that you are more likely to receive positive feedback and return attendees at future fundraising events.

- 2 Ensuring accessibility and including all voices in planning makes the process efficient, saving time and money.**

Considering accessibility in every step of your planning, allows you to budget accordingly from the outset and to avoid the costs incurred by last minute accommodation planning. For example, having to re-do the seating plans or change venues.

It is important to understand that it may not always be possible to create an event or book a venue that is accessible for every individual, and for that reason the term “fully accessible” should be avoided. This guide will help you to ensure you have taken reasonable steps to support the greatest participation possible for people of all abilities.

### **Note: Hybrid Fundraising Events**



*Wherever possible, it is important to incorporate a virtual component to your fundraising event to extend your welcome to more guests. This could look like live streaming, pre-recorded material, webinar style, or real-time social media updates.*

# Table of Contents

<b>Definitions</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Before the fundraising event</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<i>Accessing the location</i>	
<i>Accessing the venue</i>	
<i>Identifying accessibility needs</i>	
<i>Preparing marketing and communications</i>	
<i>More considerations</i>	
<b>During the fundraising event</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<i>Registration</i>	
<i>Venue</i>	
<i>Presentations</i>	
<i>Fundraising</i>	
<b>After the fundraising event</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>Hybrid Virtual Events</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>Before the fundraising event</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<i>Accessing the virtual platform</i>	
<i>Preparing marketing and communications</i>	
<i>Registration</i>	
<i>Preparing presentations</i>	
<i>More considerations</i>	
<b>During the fundraising event</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<i>Registration</i>	
<i>Virtual platform</i>	
<i>Presentations</i>	
<i>Fundraising</i>	
<b>After the fundraising event</b> .....	<b>11</b>
<i>Survey</i>	
<i>Debrief</i>	
<i>Evaluations</i>	
<b>Hybrid event case study: An Evening of Possibility</b> .....	<b>12</b>

## Definitions



**Accessible:** capable of being reached/within reach for everyone.

**Accessibility:** the practice of making information, activities, and/or environments sensible, meaningful, and usable for as many people as possible.

**Mobility devices:** are designed to help people who have problems moving around enjoy greater freedom and independence. Typically people who have disabilities or injuries, or older adults who are at increased risk of falling, choose to use mobility aids.

**Accessibility features:** are designed to help people with disabilities use technology more easily. For example, a text-to-speech feature may read text out loud for people with limited vision, while a speech-recognition feature allows users with limited mobility to control the computer with their voice.

**Accessible venue:** a venue that includes having the ramps, lifts and wide access for people using a mobility device to get to their places comfortably.

**Accessible washroom:** specifically designed to provide enough space to accommodate wheelchair access and assistance when transferring from wheelchair to toilet. Accessible toilets include features such as lower mirrors, sinks, and toilet, plus grab rails and braille signage.

**Assistive technology/devices:** a piece of equipment, or product system, whether acquired commercially off the shelf, modified, or customized, that is used to increase, maintain, or improve functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities. Some examples include hearing aids, wheelchairs, communication aids, eyeglasses, prostheses, pill organizers and memory aids.

**Support Person:** a person whether a paid professional, volunteer, family member or friend who accompanies a person with a disability in order to help with communications, personal care or medical needs or with access to goods or services.

**Service Animal:** an animal, typically a dog, that has been trained to assist a person who has a disability.

**English and American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter:** facilitate communication among deaf, deaf-blind, hard-of-hearing, and hearing people. It's usually interpreted simultaneously, and depending on the duration and subject matter, it can require multiple interpreters.

## Step 1: Before Your Fundraising Event or Meeting

It is imperative to include diverse groups and voices from the outset of the event planning stages and on volunteer committees to ensure that you consider all needs.

### Investigating the Venue

Finding a fully accessible venue may not always be possible but must be a priority. Use the guide below to check your spaces for accessibility, and work with your venue contacts to fill in the gaps.

#### Assessing the location:

- Check for roadblocks or construction along the route to the venue
- Consider the distance to public transit, parking options and other ways your guests can get to the venue
- If the location is not accessible by transit, consider offering alternate routes for your guests
- Use Google Maps to find wheelchair-accessible transit routes
- Check for nearby parking options and accessible parking spaces
- Consider how weather can affect travel (snow banks, puddles, etc.)
- Ensure paths and its surface to the venue, entrance doors and hallways are at least 1m wide to allow enough room for mobility devices and free of obstructions (see [Accessibility in Ontario's Building Code](#))

#### Assessing venue accessibility:



**Note:** Your venue may have accessibility features in place, however during your site visit and on the day of the fundraising event, it is crucial to ensure they are all operational.

#### Plan a site visit to look for:

- Accessible washrooms
  - Automated and wide doors
  - Push buttons
  - Stalls large enough to accommodate mobility devices
  - Check locations of all washrooms and ensure that accessible washrooms are available within the main event space
  - If not available in the washroom, a private area where changing can be accommodated
- Door, elevator and floors
  - Is the front entrance fully accessible? Do not consider the delivery or shipping entrance as an acceptable alternative
  - Are the doors within the venue automated, level and wide?
  - If the venue lacks accessible doors, volunteers/staff will need to be stationed at these doors
  - Determine if elements of your fundraising event will take place on multiple levels/floors. If so, ensure all guests can access different levels/floors with elevators
  - Check for raised/braille buttons and auditory signals on the elevator

- Layout of space/equipment:
  - Ensure that spacing of tables and chairs, vendor booths, food stations, bar, etc. allow for freedom of movement for those with assistive devices
  - If using the venue's furniture, ensure there are spaces at tables for wheelchairs and lower cocktail tables
  - Good, adjustable lighting that lacks glare
  - Visible projector screen and good acoustics
  - Ramps will be needed for stages and elevated areas
  - Designate space for interpreters if they are being used
- Consider designating a separate room or area for those with sensory sensitivities
- Ensure electrical cords and cables are covered or hidden
- Ask if service animals are permitted and if there is a relief area for service animals
- Find out the venue's evacuation plan and the layout of emergency exits:
  - When developing seating plans, identify which emergency exits are accessible and where they are located in relation to the tables or main stage
  - Share this information with the staff and volunteers supporting the event



### ***Identify Accessibility Needs:***

When identifying what accommodations may be required for your fundraising event, ensure that all guests, speakers, vendors, volunteers, and others who will be at the fundraising event have an opportunity to share their needs with you in advance.

- Describe the activities of your fundraising event in as much detail as possible
- Use RSVP forms or provide contact information to ask guests for their accessibility/dietary needs ahead of time. Ensure the form is presented in a way that is accessible
- Ensure open ended questions are asked on forms for detailed accommodation responses (avoid yes/no questions)
- Communicate the due date for guests to register their needs
- It is best practice to plan for enough time between collecting RSVPs/ accommodations and the fundraising event itself. This will allow you to implement any additional accessibility features in advance.
- Determine if an ASL interpreter or transcription service is required
  - Sign language interpreters/transcribers are in high demand and require several weeks to ensure availability. Tentatively book these services before your fundraising event, but cancel them as early as possible if it's not required.
- Follow up with people who request accommodations within 72 hours. If a specified accommodation cannot be fulfilled, speak with the attendees about arranging for alternatives.
  - Prepare a map of the venue and surrounding area including accessible parking/transit

**External Resource:**  
***Making an Outdoor***  
***Event Accessible***



- Specify the accessibility features of your location in advance (wheelchair access or proximity to washrooms)
- Ensure communications use inclusive language (See [Tips for talking about disability](#))
  - Promote a scent-free environment
  - Indicate any sensory warnings about the event space or event agenda (loud music, flash photography, etc.)
  - Ensure your pre-registration/ticketing process is easy to understand and use
  - Create a fundraising event schedule that incorporates breaks
  - Inform audience of any additional accessibility features will be incorporated (based on RSVPs)
  - When creating signage, use universal access symbols to indicate accessibility features of your fundraising event  
Ensure signage is clear and easy to read/understand
- Preparing Presentations:
  - PowerPoint presentations need to comply with accessibility standards
  - 12 point is the minimum size for text documents and 16 point for slide texts
  - San serif styles are the most accessible kinds of fonts like Arial, Helvetica, Verdana, Tahoma, or Geneva
  - See [Accessible Handbook on Graphic Design](#)
  - See [Contrast Checker](#)

## More considerations:

### Assistive Technology

- If any video conferencing technology will be used at your fundraising event, familiarize staff and yourself with its accessibility features well before the event.
- Keep electrical outlets near the seating areas to offer your guests an opportunity to charge their devices.
- Speakers and those asking questions should always speak into a microphone.

### Support Persons

- If a guest requires a support person, it is best practice to not charge them additional admission or fees. If necessary, communicate any associated costs (i.e. meals or reduced fees)
- If seating is offered to guests, ensure support persons have access as well

### Service Animals

- Service animals are allowed in all private and public areas, with the exception of food preparation spaces.
- Provide water, only if requested to the service animals.
- Ensure that there is a place for the service animal to relieve itself - consider making volunteers available to bring the animal outside for this purpose.

### Volunteers

- Volunteers are clearly identifiable (name tags, volunteer shirts)
- Share accessibility features of your fundraising event with volunteers in advance and provide training (i.e. where accessible entrances and bathrooms are)
- Ask volunteers if they require any accommodations in advance
- Ensure volunteers with accessibility requirements are provided with appropriate volunteer roles

### Other

- For meetings: Circulate any materials and presentation a week prior to your event. This gives participants time to review and convert the materials to their desired format.
- Ensure not all activities and social time are focused on food/drink



## Step 2: During the Fundraising Event

### *Prepare the Registration Desk*

- Place large-print and high-contrast signs to mark and give directions to areas of your fundraising event
- Wheelchairs, scooters, and service animals need to be able to maneuver around the desk easily
- Staff and volunteers should be familiar with the elevator locations and emergency exits
- If using, a sign language interpreter, they should be stationed at the desk during check in process
- Nameplates and ID tags need to be easily readable
- Match attendee with disclosed disability to supports and accommodations upon arrival as needed/requested. (i.e. in clear sight of interpreter)
- Volunteer/support person briefed on all accommodations available to all persons
- If event schedules change, give as much notice as possible to attendees
- Provide phone number of event staff who can support accommodation (and other) requests live during fundraising event
- Ensure a volunteer is available to support additional registration needs (i.e. helping guests with iPad check in, any written forms, etc.)

### *Venue*

- Do a additional site checks at the venue on event day to identify any obstacles (including room layout, construction and weather) that may have suddenly manifested before/during your event
- Check that all of the signs are in the right location. Support person to verbally reinforce locations to those who require it
- Test the audio equipment and any listening devices
- Confirm dietary accommodations will be met and food properly labelled
- Ensure orders are being taken if bar/buffet is not accessible
- Ensure reserved seating is available and marked off for guests who require it
- Remove chairs from assigned seats of people who use wheelchairs





## ***Presentations***

- Complete run-through with AV/tech to ensure high colour contrast between the text colour and background
- Ensure setup for speakers/presenters is accessible based on their needs, i.e. adjustable podium, handheld/lapel mic if podium is not adjustable
- Describe images and charts during the presentation. Couple all visuals with alt text for the digital formats
- Turn on captions and subtitles to audio and video materials
- Remind speaker to speak clearly and at a moderate pace
- Remind speakers to face the audience so that lips can be read and or ensure ASL interpreter is clearly visible
- Question-and-Answer period: instruct the questioners to identify themselves prior to asking a question and to speak clearly and slowly. Have the moderator repeat the question for the benefit of those who are hard of hearing and who may be seated at the front row for this reason.
- Have support in place should presenters need support with tech. Or, if in person, have a ramp and accessible podium available. Ensure there is ample space for a support person on the stage as needed.

## ***Fundraising (Raffles, donations, etc.)***

- Use large font on materials like raffle tickets, pledge forms, bid sheets, etc.
- Designate a help desk or floaters to help guests fill out ballots, forms, tickets, etc.
- Send links to online auctions or raffles in advance
- Use links and QR codes when available for hybrid fundraising events. Use visual prompts
- Allow for multiple formats to accept donations (square, online, manually)
- Have a support person to available to accommodate for physical games/tasks
- Have a grabber device on hand to pick items up
- Prepare to have volunteers assist guests with dining upon request

## **Step 3: After the Fundraising Event or Meeting**

- Distribute evaluations and surveys to all of the attendees
- Debrief all staff and volunteers on the event's successes and shortcomings
- For the guests who requested accommodations, follow up with them to see if you met their expectations
- Accessible evaluations/surveys should be digitally available as well
- Evaluations/surveys should have a portion devoted to commenting on the venue's accessibility

## Hybrid (virtual events)

It is important to incorporate a virtual component to your fundraising event to extend your welcome to more guests. This could look like live streaming, pre-recorded material, webinar style, or real-time social media updates.

### Step 1: Before the Fundraising Event

- Assessing the virtual platform
  - Identify accessibility needs, source platform according to what is needed
  - Ensure the platform you choose has accessibility features (ex. Closed captioning, multi-screen options for viewing presenter/interpreter/presentation)
  - Ensure the platform is compatible with communication devices (ex. Speech-to-text)
- Preparing marketing and communications
  - Ensure digital versions of all materials are provided to all guests
  - Communicate the full agenda for your fundraising event to your virtual guests
- Ensure your marketing/fundraising materials are created in an accessible format:
  - Large font
  - High contrast
  - Alternative text
  - Image descriptions
  - Available in different formats
  - See [Contrast Checker](#)
- Registration
  - Ensure your online pre-registration/ticketing process is easy to understand and use
  - Ensure accessible payment options are available for any payment needed for registration ie ticket purchase or required donation
- Pre-Event Communication
  - Ensure communications use inclusive/anti-ableist language
  - Indicate any sensory warnings about the event agenda (loud music, flashing video, etc.)
  - Ensure your online pre-registration/ticketing process is easy to understand and use
  - Create a fundraising event schedule that incorporates breaks
  - Inform audience of any additional accessibility features will be incorporated (based on RSVPs)
- Preparing Presentations:
  - Videos must be closed captioned (See example [using closed captioning in Zoom Rooms](#))
  - PowerPoint presentations need to comply with accessibility standards (See [Accessibility tools for PowerPoint](#))
  - 12 point is the minimum size for text documents and 16 point for slide texts
  - Use Sans serif style fonts -these are the most accessible kinds of fonts. For example, Arial, Helvetica, Verdana, Tahoma, or Geneva
  - QR codes: use these frequently throughout when appropriate and possible

**External Resource:**  
**[Planning Accessible Virtual Events](#)**



### **More considerations**

- Ensure virtual guests receive the same benefits as in-person guests ie meals, gift bags, participant kits etc.
  - Plan enough time to send materials to virtual guests
- Test your virtual platform, ensuring accessibility features are functioning
- Assign dedicated role for staff/volunteer support to own the virtual portion (ex. on-site, in platform chat)
- Assign dedicated role for staff/volunteer support with technology in advance of fundraising event
  - Provide contact details to guests ahead of event date
- Plan to have accessible payment options for fundraising and registration
  - Have a plan for all options, ensure staff are trained for each
- Ensure you have a stable internet connection to host your virtual component

### **Step 2: During the fundraising event**

- Contact provided for technology support during virtual fundraising event
- Virtual Platform
  - Anything shared in the chat should be repeated out loud
  - Announce features of platform for guests and how best to engage in the fundraising event
- Presentations
  - See above (re: font, sizing, etc.)
- Fundraising
  - Ensuring all fundraising elements that are included in in-person fundraising event are virtually accessible as well (ex. Raffle, fund-a-need, live auction, silent auction, donation form)
  - Accessible payment options (cash, credit, cheque, etc.)
  - Have fundraising resources available in accessible formats (step-by-step, digital/paper donation form, promotional materials, etc.)
  - Ensure EMCEEs and hosts recognize virtual guests who contribute to fundraising activities

### **Step 3: After the fundraising event**

Virtual guests should be followed up with in the same manner that in-person guests are.  
See step 3 above for complete steps.

## Hybrid Event Case Study: An Evening of Possibility

### Background:

An Evening of Possibility is Holland Bloorview's annual fundraising gala, the event welcomes 250 guests for an exclusive culinary experience prepared by Toronto's top chefs. The event consists of entertainment and speakers from Holland Bloorview and guests have the opportunity to take part in various fundraising elements - the silent auction, raffle and Menu of Possibility fund a need to support the hospital's highest priority needs. After the 2020 pandemic the annual event was brought to a virtual format for two years. Through the virtual format we saw many additional benefits for accessibility, flexibility and scope which led to our decision to introduce a hybrid format.



### The Evening of Possibility Hybrid Experiences:

Our hybrid experience started with sponsorship and table recruitment. In conversations with sponsors and guests we offered a hybrid option that included substitutional benefits to create an at home experience. If guests chose the hybrid option they received an at home delivery that included a gift card to one of our participating chefs restaurants to allow them to have a at home meal similar to in-person guests. Hybrid guests were invited to watch a high-quality livestream of the event through a zoom webinar. We assigned a Holland Bloorview employee to oversee the webinar and communicate with guests throughout the evening. They shared all event details and links, and they were available to answer questions. Hybrid guests received the same communication as in-person guests and all of our fundraising elements were available in both in-person and virtual formats.



Hosting a hybrid event allowed us to widen our fundraising audience by sharing fundraising elements with our entire network, and it allowed us to share our event with international guests thus introducing new people to our organization. Hybrid events are inclusive, as they are an accessible option for those that are not able or comfortable to attend in-person events.

Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital believes in creating a world where all youth and children belong. We are the only children's rehabilitation hospital in Canada focused on combining world-class care, transformational research, and academic leadership in the field of child and youth rehabilitation and disability. Together we dream big. Together we champion a world of possibility.

**Holland Bloorview**

Kids Rehabilitation Hospital Foundation

150 Kilgour Road, Toronto ON, M4G 1R8  
416-424-3809 | [foundation@hollandbloorview.ca](mailto:foundation@hollandbloorview.ca)

Follow us     