

DSA New Orleans Accessibility Guide (working document)

In our struggle to create a better world, DSA New Orleans aims to be a model for chapter accessibility in DSA, even in an extremely inaccessible city.

(1) Thinking about Accessibility

This guide is meant to offer a broad-based primer in accessibility. Our movement will not succeed if we cannot build a welcoming environment for all comrades. Please bear in mind that not all disabilities are apparent, and we should never assume we are a chapter of abled people based on appearance. Similarly, a perceived lack of disabled members in the chapter or any given committee should never serve as a deterrent to striving for accessibility; building accessibility is an essential step towards building an inclusive and representative organization.

Accessibility is not a “one-and-done” accomplishment. It is an ongoing practice of basic respect and honoring human dignity. Each time you are organizing on behalf of DSA, think about inclusion. A few items to consider before planning an action or meeting, whether your audience is the general membership, a specific committee, caucus, working group, ad hoc group, or the general public:

- **Mobility:** Can a person navigating with a wheelchair, walker, cane, or other mobility aid attend this event? This goes beyond considering whether a building is ADA-compliant.
- **Sensory overload:** Is any aspect of this event overstimulating? Ambient noise, conversational chatter, crowded or cluttered spaces, bright and/or strobing lights, overlapping activities, strong aromas, and other stimuli can result in sensory overload. Is there a rest area comrades can use to take a break? Is that publicized?
- **Fatigue:** How much exertion or energy will be required at this event? Do we have places for people to sit, waters, and snacks if necessary?
- **Sensitivity:** Will there be common allergens present? Can we ask comrades to avoid wearing fragrance and/or smoking near entrances/exits?
- **Sight and Hearing:** Are we unconsciously relying on ableism, or can a person with a visual impairment or d/Deaf and hard-of-hearing people participate?

(2) Unlearning Ableist Language

[Please review these guidelines for avoiding ableist language.](#) Acknowledging that the landscape of preferred language is and will likely always be changing, this information

may change over time, but we should outline preferred language for chapter members to use both in inward- and outward-facing writing and media.

Chapter members must also recognize that before relying on prescriptive language guides, we must always defer to a disabled person's preferred language and terms for themselves. This doesn't mean, for example, that you get to call a disabled person who identifies as a crip a crip; it does mean that you should not correct someone in the way they self identify. There are some forms self-id it is appropriate to repeat, such as many people with autism (or various disabilities in general) often preferring to use disability-first language. Try to notice, ask politely if you don't know, and be prepared to learn from your mistakes.

(3) **Planning for Physical Accessibility (in meatspace)**

- **Meetings and events are to be held in ADA-compliant, wheelchair-accessible venues.** Every effort will be made to assess this prior to securing a space. Any accessibility notes or directions should be prominently featured in meeting description, along with contact info in case of further questions.
 - Regardless of physical accessibility, meeting organizers should ensure a call-in option for meetings via [freeconferencecall.com](https://www.freeconferencecall.com).
 - All promotional materials for the meeting should include information about how to call-in to the meeting, with a request for potential meeting attendees to inform organizers if they intend to call-in. Meeting organizers should be prepared to facilitate a call-in option for the meeting, either by speaker phone or via a laptop, via the committee or chapter's FreeConferenceCall.com account if they receive such a request. Meeting organizers should be prepared to accommodate a request to record the call and disseminate that recording within 24-hours of the meeting, and all recordings should be stored in a centralized space for access afterwards. If you wish to directly participate via conference call or web meeting, please let meeting organizers know at least 24 hours in advance to aid technological/logistic preparation.
 - The possibility of streaming or recording all meetings will be explored by the Accessibility Working Group, in collaboration with the Local Council.
 - A chapter or committee public-facing event should, barring emergency circumstances, never be planned at an inaccessible venue.
- Membership should avoid the use of perfumes or other airborne allergens at DSA events (to include smoking near entrances/exits).

- We should provide content warnings on publicity materials for any gatherings that might involve sensitive or triggering material, as accessibility is fundamentally about inclusion.
- Given the [history of police and state violence against mentally ill individuals](#), in the case of a psychiatric crisis/emergency, a number to call instead of the police is Metropolitan Human Services District at 504-826-2675.
- [Stimming](#) should be explicitly allowed at meetings and events.
- **MATERIALS** should be prepared in easily read large print (at least 14 point font, double spaced) of any important information at meetings (e.g. agenda, anything being voted on, anything publishing a future event's date and time). Avoid color-coding as a primary means of differentiation.
- There may be types of accommodation a particular event inherently cannot offer (e.g., a canvass more or less requires a certain level of stamina, someone with chronic fatigue might not be able to comfortably participate). That is generally OK, but it's important that we actively consider these things beforehand and put as much information as possible in publication materials.

(4) Planning for Digital Accessibility (on the internet)

- On all social media platforms, the chapter accounts will always complete image descriptions on any picture posted to allow people using screen readers to fully engage with our content. (Note: Some sites like Twitter have an actual mechanism for this; other sites will require us to caption our image in the post's body.)
- For longer posts, writers will break up the text with line breaks as much as possible to make it more accessible for individuals with reading comprehension disorders.
- Any video media created by the chapter will be captioned and/or have a transcript available.
- Our full accessibility guidelines, once approved, will be posted on our website along with the accommodation request Google form.

(5) Honoring Accessibility Requests

- While every effort will be made to make all events and meetings welcoming and accessible, the chapter does not at this time have the resources or capacity to ensure in advance that every mode of accessibility is accommodated at every gathering. As such, the chapter will create a Google form, which will be available on our website and publicized with all event information, allowing chapter and community members to submit in advance any particular accommodations they might require.
 - We should be prepared to meet requests for interpreters, translators, quiet spaces or resting areas, sound amplification, travel support, specific

lighting, elimination of allergens (perfumes, smoke, particular foods/materials), braille copies of important documents, and any other access requests promptly, using chapter financial resources as needed.

- The Local Council should be able to approve spending to fulfill accessibility requests up to a certain dollar amount (to be determined by the general body) through the general chapter funds.
- This Google form should report to accessibility@dsaneworleans.org, and follow-up with the requestor should be made within 48 hours (sooner if the event is sooner than that). There will be two people from the Accessibility Working Group designated at any given time to monitor this account.
- The form should include a link to these guidelines and include a leading statement of purpose.

(6) Publicizing Accessibility

Any gathering in Corpus Christi, and any gathering where we have checked to ensure wheelchair accessibility, should include a “wheelchair accessible” designation on all publication materials (e.g., social media graphics, flyers, press releases). Any other particular accommodations being offered should be publicized as well (such as “child/family friendly; dinner provided”).

(7) Further Resources and Reading

- ADA standards for accessibility can be found [here](#)
 - Access for wheelchairs is more than just lack of stairs and a large bathroom stall. Consider the height of sinks, soap dispensers, mirrors, presence of grab bars, large heavy doors, blockades in passageways, narrow doorways, etc. when assessing a space. If uncertain of a space’s accessibility, consult ADA standards and/or confer with members involved in the Accessibility Working Group.
- [Disability 101 Flashcard Project](#)
- [Bodily Autonomy and the Left](#)
- [A Brief History of ADAPT](#)
- [A Social Theory of Disability](#)
- [Disabled People of Color Struggle To Be Heard](#)
- [Sick: A Compilation Zine on Physical Illness](#)
- [Why We Need to Stop Comparing Mental Illness to Physical Illness](#)
- [Disability and Socialism](#)
- [Disabled People Are Not an Inconvenience](#)
- [I'm Not Your Inspiration](#)
- [When Accessibility is Labeled Wasteful](#)
- [Beyond Awareness: Mental Illness and the Ableism of Capitalism](#)

- [Disability and Disaster: We're Not Ready](#)
- [Sick Woman Theory](#)
- [Immigration Rights are Disability Rights](#)
- [When Medicine is a Business. Rare Disease Patients Suffer](#)
- [How to be a Person in the Age of Autoimmunity](#)
- [The 1977 Disability Rights Protest That Broke Records and Changed Laws](#)
- [NAMI New Orleans Resource Guide](#)

Note: This is in no way an exhaustive reading list, but rather a jumping off point for thinking about disability and access as socialists. Suggestions for additional readings can be submitted to the Accessibility Working Group.

(8) Growing this Guide

We acknowledge that as we as a chapter and as individuals learn and grow, this guide will need to do the same. The Local Council, with input from the Accessibility Working Group, is empowered to add modes of accessibility we are able to offer, update information around the chapter's use of physical and online spaces, add readings, and modify logistical processes for accommodation requests. Any major fundamental changes to this guide must be approved by the general body.