



Affirming, Accessible, and Inclusive Guide for Facilitating Professional Trainings

Ensuring that training information, processes, and environments are affirming, accessible, and inclusive means presenting them in a way that's understandable, meaningful, and usable for the broadest range of individuals. Creating inclusive trainings involves not only welcoming all individuals irrespective of race, gender, neurotype, disability, and other needs but also actively adjusting and accommodating to meet their diverse requirements. It's about eliminating barriers and ensuring everyone has equal access.

In facilitating professional trainings, numerous details must be addressed to ensure a successful experience. Prioritizing the accessibility and meaningfulness of the training for every participant is paramount among these considerations.

Training hosts and facilitators should make efforts to understand the comfort level of participants and, within reach, accommodate their needs in each setting. Putting forth an accessible and inclusive message to each person who enters a training will allow for not only a more engaged audience, but a wider spread awareness for creating affirming trainings. It also communicates that a training is assessable, accepting, and affirming which means more participants can attend and gain valuable information.

Training hosts and facilitators should be aware that participants may openly share about and/or have a disability that is more visible. Some participants may be reluctant to share about their personal self in this way and/or may have a disability that may not be seen or recognized. This speaks to the need for training hosts and facilitators to develop policy and protocol that puts accessibility and inclusive forward. In this way, attendees are aware that they are welcome, it is a safe training environment to share about their need(s), and they can expect acceptance and accommodation.

Training hosts and facilitators may not be able implement everything that is mentioned in this guide but striving to do as much as possible, creates a significantly positive difference for many. Through the implementation of this guide, it is our hope to provide hosts and facilitators with information to make trainings as accessible, inclusive, and affirming as possible by allowing for individualized needs that make up the neurodiversity of humans.

Considerations

Develop a training experience that is accepting of participation looking differently than your expectations. For example, there may be times when someone may not want to share verbally and is participating in an alternative way. There may be times that a participant will not participate in a group discussion, an experiential activity, or may need to use a technology device for communication. Being accessible, inclusive, and affirming means allowing participants to participate in the way(s) they feel most comfortable. This requires acceptance (without judgment) from the host/facilitators.

Develop training practices that accommodate various methods of accessing the content. Offer diverse registration methods for participants, such as mail, email, online, and phone; ensure follow-up aligns with the modality a participant used to sign up.

Develop training practices that enhance accessibility, particularly in the physical training spaces provided. While all buildings should be Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant, it does not mean they are. Be proactive and aware of the physical space and think ahead for potential use and accommodation. For example, provide alternative seating options, accommodate standing, and offer more frequent stretch or movement breaks than typically provided. Also, consider entering and exiting doorways and access to tables and training materials.

Develop trainings that recognize and provide for diverse learning styles. Incorporate options for in-person attendance, online participation, and access to both written materials and recordings. Be sure to not overlook the unique needs arising from disabilities when designing training presentations. Remember that not all professionals can access the internet, travel long distances, or might require specific amenities available only in their personal or professional spaces.

Develop training practices that communicate messages in an affirming manner. If someone asks in any way for an accommodation, try to affirm them in their strengths and provide accommodations if able, and if not, help find a solution. Always remember that what is comfort to you may not be comfort to others, what is accessible to you, may not be accessible to others, what is “no problem” for you, may be a problem for someone else. Affirm sensory inclusion, alternate forms of delivery, adaptive seating options, breaks, social distancing, allergies, language or communication differences, and assistive and alternative device usage.

Quick Guide for Affirming, Accessible, and Inclusive Trainings

- Understand and implement the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) guidelines.
- Offer multiple ways to register for a training (phone, email, online, mail).
- Offers multiple ways to complete a training (in person, live webinar, recorded webinar, home study course).
- Consider learning differences and provide for various methods of teaching (lecture, case example, videos, group discussion, experiential activities).
- Normalize opting out of a process (interventions, small group work, a physical activity) that are uncomfortable or not doable for a participant. An example statement at the beginning of the training might be, “We may do a variety of things today like experiential activities, small group sharing, going outside, if something is not comfortable and/or not doable for you, please opt out and take care of yourself.”

- Ensure that training materials are sensitive to cultural differences and don't inadvertently perpetuate stereotypes. This might involve reviewing case examples for cultural appropriateness or including content that addresses a wide range of cultural experiences.
- Provide a transcript or subtitles for video content, for participants who learn more from reading than audio (and/or participants who are deaf or hard of hearing).
- Presenters should use the accessibility check feature in PowerPoint, utilize alt text for visuals, be aware of font color for ease of readability.
- Make sure the physical space (including restrooms) is accessible for physical disabilities and needs including wheelchairs and other mobility devices.
- For in-person trainings, allow participants to social distance, wear a mask, and in general navigate the social and room dynamics in ways that meet their needs. Also, provide a separate non stimulating space to accommodate for sensory needs.
- For in-person trainings, allow for multiple seating options including the option to stand as needed.
- If the training involves providing meals or snacks, ensure there are options that cater to different dietary requirements (e.g., vegetarian, vegan, gluten-free, allergy-specific needs).
- Welcome participants to take care of their own needs and utilize their own accommodations – noise reducing headphones, fidgets and sensory items, doodling, etc.
- Ensure that there are clear evacuation procedures in place that take into account participants with mobility challenges and provide this information at the beginning of the training.
- For live webinars trainings, be aware that some participants may need to turn their camera off at times or not stare directly into the camera. Some live webinar backgrounds may be distracting or create sensory reactions.
- For live webinars, allow for the use of communication through the chat feature and possibly opting out of break out rooms. Also, enable closed captioning for live webinars (and on any videos shown during presentations).
- Make policies clear and visible that communicate efforts toward accessibility and inclusion. Include this on your website, training registration page, advertisements, etc. A sample statement might be, “We want to make this training affirming, accessible, and

inclusive of all neurotypes and disabilities. We will strive to create such an environment but may miss something that you may need. Please reach out to us and let us know if you have a specific need. While we cannot guarantee that all needs can be covered, we will make every effort to ensure all participants can attend, be comfortable, and learn in a least restrictive space.”

- Establish a system where participants can provide feedback on accessibility and inclusivity measures. This feedback will be valuable for refining future training sessions.
- The best efforts cannot plan for every experience/need. Try to accommodate individual needs as much as possible and always with affirming care.

Additional Learning

Boston University Community and Inclusion (2023). *Ability and Neurodiversity*.

<https://www.bu.edu/diversity/resources/self-guided-education/living-language-guide/ability-and-neurodiversity/>

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Morgan, H. (2019). Connections between sensory sensitivities in autism; the importance of sensory friendly environments for accessibility and increased quality of life for the Neurodivergent Autistic minority. *PSU McNair Scholars Online Journal*, 13(1), Article 11. <https://doi.org/10.15760/mcnair.2019.13.1.11>

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U.S. Department of Justice and Civil Rights (2023). *Introduction to the Americans with Disabilities Act*. <https://www.ada.gov/topics/intro-to-ada/>

Youth.gov, (2023). *Accessibility and Inclusion*. <https://youth.gov/youth-topics/inclusion-and-accessibility>

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