



5 Tips to Make Holiday Gatherings More Accessible

by The Mid-Atlantic ADA Center

As we enter the home stretch of 2016, we want to make sure your holiday celebrations are accessible for everyone to enjoy. After all, about 20 percent of all Americans – more than 56.7 million individuals – have a disability or condition that limits their daily activities. The participants, family members, friends, and colleagues who will attend your holiday event will likely include some of these individuals.

That is why the Mid-Atlantic ADA Center, a proud member of the ADA National Network (or ADANN, the 10 regional ADA information centers around the country that are the true experts on the Americans with Disabilities Act), has created this **5 Tips to Make Holiday Gatherings More Accessible**.

When planning events, follow these 5 simple tips to help make your holiday event more accessible to participants, family, friends and colleagues:

- 1) **Weave an Accessible Welcome Mat** – When selecting a venue, make sure it is wheelchair accessible and welcoming to your guests. Whether your holiday event is a small family gathering, office party, or corporate event – weaving an accessible welcome mat is important. With a choice of on-line registration systems, choose one that is accessible to potential guests who use assistive technology, such as screen readers for those who are blind or have low vision. Whether your invitation is paper or an online format, accessibility symbols (free to download from the [Graphic Artists Guild](#)) can be added to draw attention to accommodations registrants may need to request, such as sign language interpreters, captioning services (CART), assistive listening devices, or handouts in alternate formats like Braille or electronic. Just as it is now standard to ask for food choices and dietary restrictions, participants should have an opportunity to request disability accommodations. Publications to help assure that your facility and services are accessible include [Quick Tips: Customer Service for Front Line Staff](#) and [Fact Sheet: Customer Service for Business](#).
- 2) **Deck the Halls** – Planning a holiday party includes not just the room in which it occurs. Make sure your whole venue is accessible. The concept of “Universal Design” means creating an event, designing products, and delivering services for the widest possible audience, including those with disabilities or limitations. When creating an event, think about the whole process, from parking and passenger drop off, routes to the building, entrance, routes throughout the facility, meeting space, and restrooms. Check out the

information on evaluating the accessibility of a meeting site and other great tips in [Meeting on a Level Playing Field](#) from the Department of Justice.

- 3) **Food, Glorious Food** – One of the best parts of holiday gatherings is great food. For non-plated events, it is good to be mindful of “reach ranges” for buffets and treats. Making these services accessible for guests with disabilities makes good business sense. People with disabilities, as well as the family members, friends, and colleagues who often accompany them, represent a large and growing market. [Food Service: Accommodating Diners with Disabilities](#) offers great hints for business operators, event planners, and food service staff
- 4) **Standing Room Only** – Cocktail parties and mixers for mingling are great for networking with new contacts and reconnecting with old friends. Having lower tables and chairs interspersed is important so older guests or those who can't stand for long periods of time can sit down, or to enable a standing guest to comfortably get eye-to-eye with guests using wheelchairs, kids, or guests of short stature. Also, be mindful of guests with hearing loss. Assistive Listening Devices (ALDs), sign language interpreters, or captioning services (CART) may be needed if there will be announcements, speeches, or presentations.
- 5) **Counter Intelligence** – The ADA National Network has developed great tools, resources, and training materials that can be used throughout the year. The [Hotel Customer Service Training](#) is designed as a 50-minute presentation that covers the basics of customer service, access to hotels and restaurants, and communicating respectfully with people with disabilities.

One final note – The holidays are in the air, and many people experience chemical sensitivities. Consider asking your guests to kindly refrain from using perfumes and scented products.

The ADANN's [Hospitality Initiative](#) has many great, free resources and products, including:

[Accessible Meeting, Events and Conference Guide](#): This comprehensive online guide can help make every meeting, event, and conference accessible to those with disabilities. The ADANN can help you plan, create, and navigate accessible meetings, events, and conferences that serve all your guests' needs.

[“at your service”](#) customer service film: This 20-minute film and its two-minute preview are available in Spanish, English, and with open captions (to accommodate audience members who are Deaf or hard of hearing) and audio descriptions (for individuals who are blind or have low vision).

The ADA National Network welcomes your questions and is here to offer free, valuable assistance on “all things ADA” and providing great customer service. Where ever you are located, when you call the toll-free number, 800-949-4232, you will automatically be connected to your regional ADA Center. Don't forget to check out the ADANN's [Hospitality Initiative](#).

The ADA National Network wishes you peace, health, and happiness this holiday season and in the coming year.