Making events accessible to participants with sight loss

The degree of sight loss and the level of personal independence will determine the amount of assistance required by an event participant who is blind, partially sighted, or deafblind. Begin by asking the participant what assistance he or she desires or requires.

Consider assigning the participant a "buddy" who is trained in the sighted guide technique. The "buddy" can find out the participant's needs and make the necessary arrangements, as well as assist the participant on event day.

Prior to the event

- Use questionnaires sent out when organizing the event to inquire about format preferences for event material. Choices should include regular print, large-print, braille or audiocassette.
- If you have input into the development of videos and slides, have a descriptive narrative included.
- Provide event material in the preferred format to the participant in advance so that he or she may review it before the event. Advance material can include information to be shown on overheads, background information, handouts and a map of the building indicating the location of meeting room(s), washrooms, etc.
Guidelines for event material

- Use Arial or other plain, sans serif fonts.
- Font size should be at least 14 point.
- Large-print fonts range from 16-20 point.
- Material should be printed in black ink on white paper.
- Print on non-glossy paper to avoid glare.
- To convert print material into braille or audio format, contact RNIB Transcription Services.

Preparing the event site

Post large-print and/or braille signs identifying meeting room(s), washroom(s), etc.

- Place signs at eye level and on the same side of all doors. Do not place signs directly onto the door as they become inaccessible when the door is opened.
- Make sure doors are either completely open or completely closed. Partially opened doors are hazardous.
- Ensure the event room has adequate lighting that does not produce glare.
- Arrange tables with plenty of space between them for easy walking.
- Use small tables rather than large ones. Participants with sight loss will find it easier to remember others at the table, learn voices and hear what is being said.
- If seating is assigned, label them clearly.

During the event

A "buddy" can assist a participant with sight loss on event day in the following ways:

- Describe the event room, displays, activities and table setups.
- Identify speakers.
- Guide the participant to the washroom, cafeteria, or to his or her seat.
- Assist the participant with beverages or meals.
- Describe food selections in the cafeteria, restaurant or buffet.
• Ask speakers to read aloud all the material on overheads and flip charts. Participants with sight loss may not see graphs or graphic images.
• Read inaccessible event material to the participant.
• During video and slide presentations, describe the scene, people and action as it happens without interfering with already existing narrative.

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