NCPH Guidelines for Building an Accessible Annual Meeting

Adopted by the National Council on Public History Board of Directors on August 6, 2019. These guidelines will be reviewed and updated biennially by NCPH staff and board to ensure accuracy; communicate policy changes; and reflect evolving standards related to event accessibility, both physically and programmatically.

NCPH Conference Accessibility Policy:

The National Council on Public History is committed to fostering an annual meeting environment that is inclusive and accessible to all our attendees. To that end, our annual meeting will meet and wherever possible exceed the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990). NCPH will provide attendees with accessibility information that may impact their ability to fully participate in the meeting and will work directly with conference registrants to meet accessibility needs to the maximum extent we are financially and logistically able.

Arranging for Accessibility Accommodations or Modifications at the Annual Meeting:

Upon registering for the annual meeting, we ask that people who may need accessibility accommodations to fully participate in the conference experience check the box next to the text that says "Please indicate if you would like to be contacted by our office about accessibility accommodations." This box will be available on our online registration form and paper registration form. Attendees are also welcome to call or email the NCPH office (317-274-2716; ncph@iupui.edu) if these methods of communication are preferred, regardless of whether the attendee checked the box while registering. Accessibility requests must be received by the Early Bird registration deadline (six weeks before the conference) to ensure NCPH staff have time to make arrangements.

Accessibility accommodations might include, but are not limited to:

- ASL interpretation
- Assistive learning devices
- Wheelchair or scooter access
- Accessible transportation
- Food and beverage accommodations
- Materials in alternative formats
- Scent sensitivity accommodations
- Orientation to the conference space
- Provisions for a service animal
- Complimentary registration for an attendant or caregiver

National Council on Public History staff will reach out to those who checked the box within one week of receiving the request to inquire about specific needs. The NCPH Program Manager will be the designated point-person on staff for accessibility requests and arrangements, both before the

conference and onsite.

NCPH Accessibility Commitments

For every annual meeting, NCPH will do the following:

1) We will book primary conference venues that are ADA-compliant. We will work with all venues to ensure that conference spaces are accessible, aisles are kept clear and navigable, and space is provided for wheelchair or motorized scooter seating.

2) When budgeting for the conference, we will earmark a line in the budget specifically for event accessibility. These funds will be used flexibly to meet the specific needs of attendees, which will likely vary from year to year. Valid uses of these funds might include, but are not limited to, American Sign Language (ASL) or other interpretation, rental of a lower podium, rental of assistive listening devices, or transportation to a nearby conference venue like an offsite reception or plenary. We will make these accommodations directly with attendees, and we ask that needs be communicated no later than the Early Bird registration deadline to give us time to make arrangements. In order to accommodate as many attendees as possible, per-person caps on this funding may be implemented.

3) We will seek to book accessible transportation for bus tours and trips as requested. In the case of tours that are not accessible, whether because of transportation or limitations of the tour site itself, we will mark it clearly in the *Program* to enable attendees to make informed decisions. For walking tours, we will indicate tour distance and terrain.

4) We will work with our A/V provider to ensure there are microphones in every session room and expect presenters to use them. All presenters for major speaking events like plenaries or keynotes will also be equipped with microphones.

5) We will provide digital copies of our conference *Program* and errata sheet that allow for use of the zoom feature to increase text size and can be read by text-to-speech software. We will adjust our digital conference presences to be friendlier to text-to-speech software (e.g. using the hashtag #NCPH2020 as opposed to #ncph2020 on Twitter).

6) Conference events that are open to the public, and for which we have no way to collect information on accessibility needs in advance, will feature ASL interpretation as a matter of course. This includes the public plenary event, and may include other publicly-accessible events that vary from conference to conference.

7) We will provide the use of a Nursing Parents' Room for the duration of the conference, so that people who are nursing, chest-feeding, and/or pumping can feed their children, pump in privacy, and store milk in a refrigerator. Those looking to make use of the room can sign out the key from the conference registration desk. In years when there is money in the accessibility line of the budget that has not been allocated by the Early Bird Deadline, and as additional funds are

raised for these purposes, NCPH may utilize these funds to provide a limited number of childcare grants to help offset the costs of childcare for attendees. To inquire about the availability of funds, attendees can email ncph@iupui.edu or call the office at 317-274-2716 after the Early Bird Deadline.

8) Upon request, we will provide a complimentary guest registration to any attendee who needs or wishes to bring a personal aide or caregiver to the conference. To arrange for this, attendees can email ncph@iupui.edu or call the office at 317-274-2716.

9) We expect presenters to do their utmost to make their presentations accessible. With upwards of 300 people presenting at NCPH conferences, it is logistically impossible to oversee every individual presentation and guarantee 100% compliance. However, NCPH will clearly communicate our expectations and provide guidelines and resources to help presenters be mindful of accessibility. This will include a *History@Work* blog post to be updated and reposted annually; an email to presenters specifically related to the accessibility of their presentations; and a page on the conference website for presenter resources.

10) We will communicate our accessibility-related expectations to attendees via the conference website and, where appropriate, pre-event emails. These expectations may include, but are not limited to: use of person-first language while communicating with and about people with disabilities unless otherwise requested; forgoing the use of perfume, cologne, or heavily-scented products at the conference to avoid harming people who are scent-sensitive; respecting the presence of working service animals; and best practices for communicating with a person who is using an interpreter.

11) We will make every effort to accommodate food allergies and dietary restrictions at events that include food. We ask attendees who want to alert us to dietary restrictions to do so during registration or by emailing ncph@iupui.edu two weeks or more before the conference. Restaurant guides in the NCPH *Program* will include a wide variety of restaurants, including those that are vegan- and vegetarian-friendly and have gluten-free and dairy-free options.

12) We will provide space on the annual meeting evaluation form for attendees to leave us feedback specifically about conference accessibility and to make suggestions for future growth. Being more intentional about evaluating accessibility efforts will yield useful feedback from attendees, which may in turn provide direction for annual updating of the accessibility plan.

13) We will protect attendees' privacy. Information related to accessibility needs will be shared only with those helping to make arrangements or perform essential services, which may include: NCPH staff and conference volunteers; staff employed at the meeting venue, such as the event manager; third party vendors contracted to perform accessibility-related services, such as American Sign Language interpretation; and people associated with tours or offsite events where such arrangements will be carried out (such as tour guides, bus drivers, or plenary site managers). For more information, see the NCPH Privacy Policy.

Site Selection

The process by which NCPH selects the sites of future annual meetings is informed by many factors, including geographic region, affordability for attendees, and the size of our anticipated attendance relative to the amount of session space we require. The organization requires a strong local membership presence to drive local arrangements, and proposals to host the conference are generated by these local members. Once the NCPH Board of Directors has voted to pursue a conference in a proposed city, NCPH works with a third-party event management company to solicit bids from properties with the capacity to host our annual meeting.

After potential venues are identified but before the signing of a contract, a member of the NCPH staff (usually the Program Manager) will conduct an in-person site visit to determine the venue's suitability. At this site visit, the staff member will go through an accessibility checklist with representatives from the venue to determine that the venue is an appropriate host for our conference.

NCPH will use the American Bar Association's Commission on Disability Rights' *Planning Accessible Meetings and Events: A Toolkit* checklists to assess the accessibility of a venue's exterior features, interior features, and event/meeting rooms.

Compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) will be requisite to sign a contract with a primary NCPH conference venue. NCPH staff will advocate that venues go above and beyond this requirement, and the organization will prioritize venues that demonstrate a higher level of commitment to accessibility concerns or demonstrate willingness to work with us to address issues identified during the site visit or in the course of conference planning. NCPH will use the conference website and pre-event communication to advise attendees of venue's accessibility.

Promotional, Registration, and *Program* Materials

NCPH will adhere to the following guidelines for preparing promotional and registration materials for NCPH annual meetings:

- Print and digital *Programs* will include the Conference Accessibility Policy to demonstrate our commitment to accessible meetings, and will clearly indicate the process and deadline for requesting accessibility accommodations.

- There will be a page of the conference website and section on the annual meeting mobile app dedicated to conference accessibility at the primary meeting venue, including maps of the space which clearly mark the location of accessible restrooms and elevators.

- Attendees will be able to register via a variety of methods and formats (online, via print form, via phone—although please note NCPH cannot accept credit card payments over the phone).

- All major annual meeting-related publications (the registration form, *Program*, and errata sheet) will be available in print and digital PDF formats. PDFs will be calibrated for accessibility using Adobe's Accessibility Setup Assistant.

Standards for Accessible Presentations

NCPH will provide these standards to all presenters at NCPH conferences via email and via a Presenter Resources page on the NCPH website, with the expectation that presenters will comply with them to the maximum extent possible. While we do not have the capacity to enforce these expectations to the letter onsite, we can communicate them clearly and encourage presenters to utilize resources that will help them craft accessible presentations. Session organizers will be empowered and asked to hold their fellow presenters accountable to accessibility guidelines.

- Microphones will be made available in all presentation spaces. We expect that presenters use them—even if they think they are loud enough and even if they are not fully comfortable with speaking into a mic. The burden should not be on people with hearing loss to request microphone use; it is expected for all presentations. For roundtables, working groups, and structured conversation-style formats, passing the microphone is recommended. For audience questions, it may be useful to appoint one member of the presentation team to serve as mic runner in the audience. If this is not possible presenters should repeat the question into the microphone before answering.

- Presenters should consider making PowerPoint slides or other shared materials available digitally. We encourage use of the conference Twitter hashtag—always #NCPH[year], for example #NCPH2020—for sharing of materials prior to presentations. Following the conference, we encourage presenters to send materials to ncph@iupui.edu so that we may upload slides or resources to the conference website. A link to these available materials will be sent to all registered attendees in the week following the conference.

- Presenters should print 5-10 print copies of slides and material to have on hand for audience members. All print material should be in font size 16 or higher, using high-contrast colors (such as black and white). Presenters should consider providing a few of these copies in large print.

- PowerPoint presentations should be checked for accessibility. Microsoft has identified several slide templates that are optimized for accessibility, and presenters are encouraged to use them. High-contrast colors, large san serif typefaces, and only simple transitions or animations are preferred.

- Presenters will be advised as soon as possible if there will be American Sign Language (ASL) or other interpreters in their session. In that case, NCPH will provide further recommendations for ensuring the interpreters can interpret smoothly. We may ask presenters to provide slides or notes in advance to help interpreters prepare; this material

will not be shared publicly without the presenter's consent.

- If showing a video, presenters should provide or turn on closed captioning if available.

- Presenters should thoroughly describe all images and other media used as a part of their presentations.

- Presenters should endeavor to communicate clearly; to face the audience while communicating; to remain as visible as possible to the interpreter and/or audience; and to keep hands and objects away from the mouth while speaking to allow for lip-reading. Presenters whose sessions or workshops include audience participation elements (such as performances, movement-based activities, or call-and-response) are encouraged to include this information in the session description.

- When addressing audience questions, presenters should repeat the question into the microphone for the benefit of the room before answering.

Areas for Future Growth

The National Council on Public History is a small organization with a modest budget and a full-time staff of three. The crafting of this event accessibility plan was included in NCPH's [2017-2022 Long Range Plan](#) and is designed to demonstrate the organization's awareness of shifting accessibility standards and attendee needs; to commit what resources we can to building a more accessible meeting; and to clearly outline what those commitments look like at our current capacity in order to open transparent lines of communication between the organization and its members and conference attendees.

The organization's long-term goals include growth in the area of event accessibility that exceed our current capacity. We hope the coming years, including the conclusion of the current 2020 Vision Endowment Campaign, will bring an increase in budget and staff capacity that will allow us to do more.

The following areas are currently targeted as areas for improvement or growth:

- **More microphones.** NCPH commits to providing one microphone in every session, working group, and workshop room for presenter and audience use. However, we recognize that many of our community's preferred session formats and presentation styles depend upon conversational presentation styles between presenters, or between presenter and audience. Two or even three microphones would be preferable to one. As our budget allows, NCPH hopes to scale up the number of mics in session rooms, beginning with working groups.

- **Sensory overload.** In recent years, we have received increasing requests in conference evaluation forms for the provision of a sensory relief space for conference attendees who may be experiencing sensory overload or overstimulation but do not have their own overnight room in the conference hotel to go to. This need may be felt particularly acutely

for those with sensory processing difficulties, such as people with ADHD or PTSD or people on the autism spectrum. In future contracts, an additional space to serve as a sensory relief room will, if possible, be worked into the negotiating process. In the meantime (for contracts signed prior to the crafting of this plan, through 2021), staff will try to find reasonable alternatives to provide a quiet and more private space at the conference venue for attendees seeking down-time.

- **Assistive listening devices or microphones for walking tours.** While many tour buses do come equipped with microphones, NCPH has not to this point been able to explore any additional A/V support for walking tours. Some conferences of other organizations are exploring portable wireless audio systems to increase the auditory accessibility of their tour offerings for all attendees, and this is an area of interest for NCPH to consider in the future.

Resources Consulted and Further Reading

ADA National Network, *New Customer Service and Accessible Meetings Resources* (2015).

Adobe, *Accessibility features*.

American Bar Association Commission on Disability Rights, *Planning Accessible Meetings and Events: A Toolkit* (2015).

American Public Health Association, *Accessible Poster Presentations*.

Council of Ontario Universities, *A Planning Guide for Accessible Conferences* (2016).

Cornell University, *Accessible Event Planning Guide*.

Institute for Human Centered Design and ADA National Network, *ADA Checklist for Existing Facilities* (2016).

Microsoft, *Best practices for making PowerPoint presentations accessible*.

Mid-Atlantic ADA Center, *A Guide to Planning Accessible Meetings* (1993, updated 2015).

Mid-Atlantic ADA Center and TransCen, Inc., *Commitment to Digital Accessibility: Best Practices for Inclusive Technology* (2018).

National Center on Disability and Journalism, *Disability Language Style Guide* (2018).

New York State Department of Health, *People First: How to Plan Events Everyone Can Attend* (2009).

Pacific Alliance on Disability Self Advocacy, *Holding Inclusive Events: A Guide to Accessible Event Planning*.

Rooted in Rights, *How to Make Your Social Justice Events Accessible to the Disability Community: A Checklist* (2017).

Shawna McKinney, Event Management Blog, *20 Tips for a More Accessible Event* (2018).

Special Interest Group on Accessible Computing, *Accessible Conference Guide* (2019).

Stephanie F. Gilson and Robert M. Kitchin Jr., Association for University Centers on Disabilities. *Guidelines for Creating Accessible Printed Posters*.

University of Washington DO-IT (Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking, and Technology), *How can you make your presentation accessible?*

US Department of Justice, *Accessible Information Exchange: Meeting on a Level Playing Field* (2009).

US Department of Justice, *Information and Technical Assistance on the Americans with Disabilities Act*.

US General Services Administration, *Section508.gov GSA Government-wide IT Accessibility Program*.

WebAIM, *Power Point Accessibility*.