Accessibility Checklist
For Organizers and Facilitators

THIS DOCUMENT was created by members of Accessibilize Montreal as part of the "By and For Us: The Community at the Head of the Organization" project organized by the Center for Community Organizations (COCo).

Organized during the Spring of 2015, "By and For Us" brought together community organizations who center the leadership of people who are directly affected by the issue the group focuses on, to learn from each other and reflect on how best to center marginalized communities in community organizing.

THE GOAL of this document is to help facilitators and event organizers create spaces that are more accessible, in a broad sense of the word. This means working to create spaces that take into consideration people's diverse needs and lived experiences, and using concrete strategies to try to ensure that people who are so often excluded are able to attend and participate more fully. The checklist below provides a list of some things to keep in mind, addressing various aspects of accessibility.

PLEASE KEEP IN MIND that this list does not include everything that might need to be taken into consideration in terms of accessibility. This checklist was created with events like the "By and For forum" as an example, and while much of this check list will apply to many different kinds of events, there are definitely things that are not included on this checklist.

Sensory Accessibility

- The event is **SCENT FREE** (this includes all chemically-scented products – e.g. perfumes, colognes, shampoo, body sprays + lotions, deodorant, cleaning products, dry-erase markers and sharpies, etc.) Other participants or attendees must be notified of this in advance.

- An option for **non-fluorescent lighting** (bring other lamps, turn off lights during daytime, etc.) If fluorescent lighting will be used/is the only option for lighting, include this in the information sent out about the event

- Have a variety of options for **chairs** if possible – e.g. chairs with arm rests and solid backs, padded chairs, etc. (this is part of physical accessibility too)

- Provide **"fidget toys"** , especially for longer meetings – e.g. "stress balls," Rubik's cube, small stuffed animals, etc. Make these available to everyone, not just those people who you think "might need them"

- Be aware of **the acoustics** in the room. Some spaces get really loud really easily and this can make things overwhelming for some people, and can make it harder to hear and understand for people with hearing loss and people with auditory processing difficulties

- Try to provide an option for a **"chill space"**, "chill room," or "chill corner" (especially at longer meetings/events and/or larger meetings/events)

Accessibility of Presentation

- Use **plain language** as much as possible. Avoid jargon/technical terms/academic terms, and explain any jargon/academic terms (in the same document – don't tell people they can "just look up words they don't know," etc.)

- Explain/write out all a**cronyms and abbreviations**

- Be aware that **metaphorical language** may not be understandable to all participants

- If writing on a dry-erase board, chalkboard, flipchart, etc., try to **write as clearly as possible** (and avoid using cursive!) Write big and leave lots of spaces between words

- **Use a lot of contrast** – dark-coloured markers on light paper, chalk + chalkboard (avoid brightly coloured/light coloured pens and markers)

- **Read out** what you write (don't assume that everyone in the room can "just read" what you write down on a board or flipchart)

- Consider having people designated to be **"whisper readers/ translators"** to read written content to individuals who might not be able to/might not be comfortable with reading

- Provide **transcription of audio content**

- Provide a **recording of the event** if possible for people who can't be at the event and/or people who might need to hear/see things again in order to process, remember, understand them, etc. (This is part of financial accessibility also)

- If possible, send **typed transcription**s of flipchart/dry-erase/chalkboard content and send it out to people

Physical Accessibility

- There should be **ramps, or no stairs, at EVERY door**

- An **elevator** if event is not on first floor

- **Information posted/sent out (in advance**) about the width of doors, the type of ramps (and slope of ramp if possible), etc.

- **Automatic doors** (or people designated to help with doors) for entryways and bathrooms

- **Bathrooms** have a wheelchair accessible stall (this means a bigger stall, with a door that opens inward and grab rails)

- The event is close to **metro** and bus lines

- Any ramps, sidewalks, or building entrances are shoveled/cleared of **snow** in winter

- **The address,** information about how to get to the location, and details of the location sent out as much in advance as possible (minimum 48 hours – this allows people to book Transport Adapté if necessary)

- Do not only send a link to a Google map; and if you do send a link to a Google map, make sure you also write out the address when sending out information

Accessibility of Documents

- Avoid long chunks of text when possible

- Break up blocks of text and use bullet points

- Don't use "justified text" when formatting documents – "left aligned" is the best option

- Consider **bolding** parts of sentences (key words, etc.) in order to help people know what parts are the most important in terms of what you are trying to communicate

- For longer documents (handouts, etc.), provide a **short summary** of the main/most important points of the document. The summary should be approximately 2-5 sentences (depending on the length of the document) and highlight the most important points and key words

- Send out handouts in advance whenever possible, with ideally all handouts sent in one email

- **Send PDFs** (use OCR – Optical Character Recognition – for screen reader access)

- Provide written descriptions of all images

- Do not use a font size smaller than 12 point

- Use sans serif fonts for typed documents (good ones include: Arial, Helvetica, Verdana)

- Videos should be **captioned** whenever possible (and if not captioned, sub-titled is an okay option). If not captioned, provide transcription of video.

- Documents sent out should have **concise and descriptive names/titles.** Example: "Agenda_June 6 2015.PDF"

Accessibility During the Event

- Provide **clear agenda**. Give an overview of the plan for the event (out loud and in writing).

- Have whisper translation available

- Have signed interpretation available (or available by request/with advanced notice)

- Have childcare available (and pay childcare workers whenever possible)

- Have **food** and water available if possible

- Avoid top allergens if you are not sure of people's dietary needs (especially peanuts and nuts

- Have **designated break times** – even if you tell participants to take breaks as they need/want to. Allow people time to get food and water.

- Be aware of configuration of group. Chairs arranged in a circle are helpful for visual and auditory access, but only up to a certain size/certain number of people

- Make sure to keep spaces for folks with hearing loss and/or vision loss to sit closest to the facilitator and flipchart/board/screen (make sure to announce this option out loud and in writing)

- Offer different ways to participate besides speaking

- Always include **option to pass** and never position this option as less valid than other ways of participating. Pro-actively announce the option to pass during activities – don't leave it to participants to have to bring it up

- Provide **evaluation forms** at the beginning of the event if possible and inform people how they can get the evaluation form back to you if they need to take it home with them to complete

Accessible Facilitating

- Use plain language and explain all jargon

- Speak/communicate as clearly as you can (and/or ask for support in this if you aren't able to speak/communicate clearly)

- Explain choices and motivation behind activities as much as possible

- Always give the option to pass! Never position this option as less valid than other ways of participating. Pro-actively announce the option to pass during activities – don't leave it to participants to have to bring it up

- Try to keep track of people who may be trying to speak but are having difficulty entering the conversation

- Keep track of time and keep group updated about time. Ask someone to act as a timekeeper if you need to.

- **End on time** (even if the agenda is not finished). This is especially important for anyone who uses Transport Adapté, but is also important in terms of accessibility in general

- Model expectations. For example: if you ask the group to do a "check-in," demonstrate what you mean by that by being the first one to do the check-in

- Try to be aware of your own needs and accessibility needs as the facilitator. If you are comfortable talking about/expressing any of these things to the group, it can help others feel less singled out. This can also help the group better know how to be supportive of you as a facilitator

- Be open to trying different ways of facilitating (including small groups, hands-on activities, etc.)

Financial Accessibility

- Make all events sliding scale/pay-what-you-can

- Offer **travel reimbursement** (bus/métro tickets, Transport Adapté/ adapted transport, etc.)

- Provide food vouchers/money for food to anyone who may need if food is not offered at the event

- Provide **compensation** for people's time whenever possible (this includes facilitators!)

- Be aware of the timing of the event and try to ensure it will not conflict with people's work schedules

- Offer **confidential** ways of asking for things like bus tickets and food vouchers

- Don't assume people have a computer, access to Internet on a regular basis, etc.

- Don't have a dress code that includes anything like "business casual," "fancy attire," etc. Don't be judgmental of people who might "dress up" even for a more "casual event"