Accessible • Sustainable • Inclusive

A Guide to Planning Sustainable & Accessible Events at Trinity College Dublin

Practical steps for events that are easier to join, more welcoming, and lower impact.

Plan well. Welcome more people. Waste less.

Use this guide alongside the Trinity Accessibility & Sustainability Event Generator. Start with the essentials, tell people clearly what to expect, and improve one event at a time.

Redesigned Draft For Review • October 2026

Original guide prepared by Trinity disAbility Service and Trinity Sustainability. This redesigned edition reorganises and updates the material for clarity, accessibility and practical use. Proposed badge criteria require approval before being described as an official Trinity certification.

Sustainable & Accessible Event Guide
Trinity disAbility Service | **www.tcd.ie/disability**

Trinity disAbility Hub

Trinity College Dublin
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath
The University of Dublin

How to use this guide

You do not need to do everything at once. Begin with the essentials, then use the rest of the guide to make your event better. The earlier you consider accessibility and sustainability, the easier and less expensive they are to build in.

> ## The main idea
>
> Do not wait for someone to ask for access. Plan for a range of people from the beginning and publish enough information for attendees to decide what they need.

A good event should make five things clear

1 Can I get there?

Give specific information about step-free routes, entrances, lifts, accessible toilets, parking or drop-off, public transport, and any known barriers.

2 Can I take part?

Think about seating, sightlines, microphones, captions, ISL, slides, online access, quiet space, breaks and how questions will be taken.

3 What will it feel like?

Describe likely noise, lighting, crowding, queues, smells and the availability of quieter spaces. This can be just as important as physical access.

4 What is the environmental impact?

Prevent waste before you recycle it. Reuse where possible, make plant-based food the default, avoid unnecessary printing and support lower-carbon travel.

5 Who can I contact?

Name a real person or team for accessibility questions and requests. Make the contact details easy to find in every event listing.

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The Word version uses real heading styles, so you can also move through the guide with the Navigation Pane or a screen reader heading list.

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1. The 10 essentials

If you only have a few minutes, start here. These actions make the biggest practical difference for most events.

Check	What good looks like
Plan early	Book enough time for access requests, venue checks, interpreters/captioning, catering and sustainable procurement.
Choose an accessible venue	Check the actual route from arrival point to event space, not just the building entrance.
Publish specific access information	Say what is available and where. Avoid a vague statement such as “the venue is accessible”.
Invite access requests	Provide an email or contact person and make clear that late requests will still be considered where possible.
Budget for access	Treat captioning, ISL, accessible formats and other accommodations as part of the event budget - not optional extras.
Make digital information accessible	Use real text, headings, alt text, captions, good contrast and descriptive links. Do not rely on image-only posters.
Think about sensory access	Give people information about noise, lighting and crowding; provide a quieter place to step away where possible.
Reuse first	Avoid single-use items. Use reusable crockery, cups, signs, lanyards, decorations and equipment wherever practical.
Make plant-based food the default	Offer clear allergen information, suitable dietary choices and water refill options.
Ask what worked	Collect short, accessible feedback and use it to improve the next event.

A useful rule of thumb

Accessibility is not something that should be “offset” by sustainability points. A highly sustainable event in an inaccessible room is still an inaccessible event. This matters when using the proposed badge system later in this guide.

2. Before you book

The best time to solve accessibility and sustainability problems is before the venue, date, suppliers and format are fixed.

Start with the event itself

What is the purpose of the event, and who do you want to be able to take part?

Is the event in person, online or hybrid? Could an online option improve participation without creating a poor experience for remote attendees?

How many people are expected, and will they be seated, moving around, networking or taking part in activities?

Will there be speakers, panels, performances, catering, alcohol, photography, filming or exhibitions?

Are there any known access, security, safety or sensory issues that should influence the venue or time?

Check the venue in person where possible

Check	What good looks like
Arrival	Step-free route from the street/campus route, accessible parking or drop-off, surface quality, gradients and doors.
Entrance	Level or ramped entry, usable door width, door weight or automatic opening, clear signage and a staffed alternative if needed.
Inside route	Lifts, corridors, thresholds, turning space and a route that does not depend on service areas or locked doors.
Event room	Space for wheelchair users to sit with colleagues/friends, varied seating, clear aisles, usable lectern/stage route and good sightlines.
Toilets	An accessible toilet reasonably close to the event space and a clear route to it.
Hearing / communication	Microphones, hearing enhancement systems where available, space and sightlines for ISL interpreters or caption displays.
Sensory environment	Lighting, glare, echo, background music, ventilation, heat, crowd density and a quieter space nearby.
Emergency	Accessible evacuation arrangements, trained staff/stewards and clear information about what to do if lifts cannot be used.

Be specific about barriers

If something cannot be changed, say so clearly and early. Honest information is more useful than describing a venue as “fully accessible”. Where a barrier would prevent participation, change the venue or provide an equivalent accessible way to take part.

Choose the date and time carefully

Avoid unnecessary clashes with major College events, public holidays and known exam/teaching pressures.

Give enough notice for attendees to plan travel, personal assistance, interpreting or other supports. Two weeks is a useful minimum for many events; larger events need longer.

Avoid very early starts or very late finishes unless they are genuinely necessary.

Build in proper breaks for longer events. Breaks support concentration, comfort, medication, movement, prayer, personal care and sensory regulation.

3. Tell people what to expect

Clear information is part of accessibility. People should not have to email just to find out whether there are steps, where the toilet is, or whether they can take a break.

Use an accessibility statement on every event listing

Suggested wording

We want this event to be welcoming and usable by everyone. If you have an accessibility requirement or would like to discuss an accommodation, please contact [name/team] at [email] by [date]. If you contact us after this date, we will still do our best to help.

Add an “access at a glance” section

For an in-person event, include short factual lines such as:

Step-free access: [route / entrance].

Accessible toilet: [location].

Seating: [fixed / movable / spaces for wheelchair users / seats with backs].

Sensory environment: [likely noise / lighting / crowding] and quiet space [location, if available].

Communication: [microphones / live captions / ISL / hearing system, if provided].

Travel: nearest accessible public transport, parking or drop-off information.

Online participation: [platform / captions / recording / chat / Q&A, if applicable].

Contact: [name/team and email].

Make event publicity accessible

- Put the essential event information in real text on the webpage or email. Do not make a poster image the only source of information.
- Use a clear sans-serif font, strong colour contrast, meaningful headings and left-aligned text.
- Add alt text to informative images. Decorative images can be marked decorative.
- Caption video and provide transcripts where useful.
- Use descriptive links such as “View the venue accessibility information” rather than “click here”.
- If you attach a PDF or image flyer, repeat the key event information and access statement in the email or webpage body.
- Write in plain English. Short sentences and clear labels help everyone, including people using screen readers, translation tools or who have cognitive fatigue.

Registration: ask only what you need

- Keep forms short, keyboard accessible and usable on a phone.
- Ask an open question such as: “Is there anything we can do to make it easier for you to take part?”
- If food is provided, ask about dietary requirements and allergies separately from disability/access questions.
- Explain who will see access information and use it only for planning the event.
- Offer another contact route if the registration form itself creates a barrier.

4. Venue, layout and sensory access

A room can be technically accessible and still be difficult to use. Think about movement, comfort, sound, light, wayfinding and choice.

Room layout

- Keep routes and aisles clear throughout the event. Do not use access routes as storage areas.
- Do not place all wheelchair spaces in one location. Where possible, provide choice so people can sit with friends or colleagues.
- Offer a mix of seating, including chairs with backs and arms where available, and leave space for mobility aids and assistance dogs.

- Make the speaker, stage, poster area and refreshments reachable without steps or narrow pinch points.
- Keep registration desks and serving surfaces at a height that can be used from a seated position or have staff ready to assist.
- Use clear signs with large text, good contrast and simple arrows. Put signs where decisions are made, not after the turn.

Sensory access

- Avoid unnecessary background music, especially during registration, networking and spoken sessions.
- Where possible, offer a quiet or lower-stimulation room that is not used for phone calls or staff storage.
- Warn attendees in advance about flashing lights, loud sound, smoke/haze effects or other intense sensory elements.
- Use steady, comfortable lighting and reduce glare where practical. Do not dim the room so much that lip-reading or ISL becomes difficult.
- Publish information about busy periods or queues if you expect a large crowd.
- Allow people to stand, move, use headphones or step out and return without drawing attention to them.

Quiet space does not have to be complicated

A nearby room with ordinary seating, lower noise, clear signage and no event activity may be enough. The important part is that attendees know it exists and can use it without having to explain themselves.

Photography and privacy

- Tell people in advance if official photography or filming will take place.
- Provide a simple way to opt out, and brief photographers and staff on how that choice will be respected.
- Ask before photographing individuals at close range. A general event notice is not a substitute for reasonable care and consent.

5. Programme, speakers and digital content

Accessibility also depends on how information is presented. Good audio, clear structure and accessible files can make the same content easier for everyone to follow.

Brief speakers before the event

- Use the microphone even if the room seems small. Do not rely on “I can project my voice”.
- Describe important visual information shown on slides, charts or demonstrations.
- Use large, high-contrast slide text and avoid overcrowded slides.
- Share slides or key materials in advance where possible, especially for longer or technical sessions.
- Caption prerecorded video. Do not play essential audio without a transcript or equivalent text.
- If an ISL interpreter is present, maintain good lighting and keep the interpreter visible to the audience.
- Repeat audience questions into the microphone before answering them.

Give people more than one way to participate

- Allow questions by microphone, chat, QR form or another written route where feasible.
- For sensitive topics, an anonymous question form can make participation easier.
- Make it acceptable to pass, leave early, return after a break, or participate without speaking.
- For workshops, explain activities before they begin and provide an alternative where an activity is not accessible.

Online and hybrid events

- Choose a platform that supports keyboard navigation, screen readers and captions.
- Turn on live captions where available and check that participants know how to enable them.
- Have a named person monitor chat and access issues so the presenter is not trying to do everything.
- Avoid treating remote participants as an afterthought. Make sure they can hear questions, see shared content and contribute to Q&A.
- If a recording will be shared, say so before the event and confirm consent arrangements.

Budget accessibility from the beginning

ISL, professional captioning, accessible venue hire, additional staff time and alternative formats can have costs. Put a realistic access line in the budget at the same time as catering, AV and room hire.

6. Food, materials and waste

The most sustainable item is often the one you do not need to buy. Prevent waste first, then reuse, then recycle or compost what remains.

Food and drink

- Make vegetarian and plant-based choices the default and provide other options where needed.
- Ask for dietary requirements when people register and label ingredients/allergens clearly at the event.
- Order for realistic attendance rather than the maximum possible number. Agree in advance what will happen to safe surplus food.
- Provide tap water or refill points and encourage reusable bottles.
- Use reusable cups, crockery and cutlery wherever practical. If a reusable system is not possible, choose the lowest-waste alternative available.
- Make the serving layout accessible and provide assistance without making people queue again.

Printing and event materials

- Use digital information where it genuinely replaces printing - but keep a small number of printed copies for people who need or prefer them.
- If you print, use only what is needed, print double-sided where appropriate and use recycled paper where available.
- Use QR codes as an extra route, not the only route. Always include a readable short link or text alternative.
- Reuse signs, name-badge holders, lanyards, display stands and decorations.
- Avoid dated branding on materials that could otherwise be reused for future events.

Waste stations

- Use the waste streams available in the venue and follow Trinity waste guidance.
- Place bins together as a station so people can compare options.
- Use clear words and images on labels; do not rely on bin colour alone.
- Brief staff or volunteers on where food waste, recycling and general waste go.

A simple “sustainability moment”

At the start of the event, take 20 seconds to point out water refill points, waste stations, reusable items and how people can help. Keep it practical rather than preachy.

7. Travel, energy and procurement

- Travel and purchasing can account for a large share of an event’s impact. Give people realistic choices and avoid creating new barriers in the name of sustainability.
- Travel information should be both sustainable and accessible
- List public transport options and identify which routes/stops are step-free or likely to be most accessible.
- Include accessible parking and drop-off information where relevant. Do not remove needed accessible parking to meet a “car-free” message.
- Give walking and cycling information where useful, including cycle parking.
- For external speakers, consider rail and public transport before flights or taxis where practical, while allowing for access needs.
- For larger events, consider remote participation for speakers or attendees who would otherwise need long-distance travel.

Energy

- Use a room that fits the expected audience rather than heating, cooling or lighting a much larger space.
- Use natural light and ventilation when comfortable and appropriate, but do not create glare, temperature or noise problems for attendees.
- Turn off unused displays, lighting and equipment after the event.

Suppliers and purchasing

- Ask suppliers about reusable systems, low-waste packaging, take-back arrangements and accessible service.
- Rent or borrow equipment that will be used once.
- Prefer durable items that can be used by future events.
- Buy only what the event needs. A sustainable product is still waste if it is unnecessary.

8. On the day

Even a well-planned event needs people who know what to look for. A short team briefing is one of the easiest ways to prevent problems.

Brief staff and volunteers

- Who is the accessibility contact and how can they be reached?
- Where are the step-free entrance, lift, accessible toilet, quiet space, first aid point and emergency exits?
- What accommodations have been arranged, and who is responsible for them?
- How should staff respond if a lift, automatic door, captioning system or other access feature fails?
- Where are the waste stations, refill points and reusable items?
- How will photography opt-outs be recognised and respected?

Do a final access walk-through

- Check that the accessible entrance is open and not blocked.
- Test lifts, automatic doors, microphones, caption displays and hearing systems where available.
- Remove boxes, cables, furniture or signs from routes.
- Check that quiet spaces and accessible toilets have not become storage areas.
- Make sure signage starts at the point where attendees actually arrive.

If something goes wrong

Tell attendees quickly and clearly. Do not make an individual attendee repeatedly explain the problem. Focus on the practical alternative: another route, another room, a staff escort, remote access or a change in the programme.

During the event

- Keep doors/routes clear and monitor queueing or crowding.
- Use microphones consistently and keep captions/ISL visible.
- Announce breaks, quiet space and practical information without singling anyone out.
- Allow people to move, stand, use sensory aids, leave and return.
- Refill water and waste stations before they become confusing or unusable.

9. After the event

The event is not finished when the room empties. A short review turns one-off effort into better practice next time.

Close the loop

- Return reusable equipment, signs, lanyards and materials to a place where the next organiser can find them.
- Recycle or compost correctly and follow the agreed plan for safe surplus food.
- Share accessible slides, notes or recordings if you said you would.
- Thank interpreters, captioners, volunteers, venue staff and anyone who helped resolve access issues.

Ask for short feedback

Four useful questions

1. Was the access information clear before the event?
2. Was there anything that made it difficult to take part?
3. What worked particularly well?
4. What one thing should we change next time?

Record what you learned

- Keep a short note on venue access, suppliers, room layout and any problems that occurred.
- Where possible, record simple measures such as attendance, no-show rate, surplus food, reusable items used and accessibility requests fulfilled.
- Share improvements with the next organiser rather than starting from zero each time.

Proposed event recognition badges

A simple Bronze / Silver / Gold system can make the Event Generator more motivating and easier to understand than the older Green / Blue / Orange labels. The badge should reflect good practice without pretending that a score can guarantee access for every person.

> ## Important: essential access comes first
> An event should not receive a badge if it fails an applicable critical accessibility check. Sustainability points cannot compensate for a venue that people cannot enter, an inaccessible registration process, or essential information that is not available in an accessible form.

Step 1 - pass the essential access checks

- In-person route to the event space has been checked and is step-free or an equivalent accessible participation option is in place.
- Accessible toilet and circulation information has been checked and communicated for in-person events.
- Registration and event information are available in accessible digital form.
- A named accessibility contact and accommodation request route are provided.
- Emergency arrangements consider disabled attendees and any known access requirements.
- Any major known barriers are communicated before booking/attendance, with a practical alternative where necessary.

Step 2 - score the applicable good-practice actions

The Event Generator can calculate a percentage using only questions that apply to that event. “Not applicable” should not lower the score when it is genuinely not relevant.

Badge	Suggested score	What it means
BRONZE	50-69%	The event has passed the essential access checks and has taken a solid set of practical steps across accessibility and sustainability.
SILVER	70-84%	The event shows strong, consistent practice across most relevant areas, with clear information for attendees and good waste/reuse planning.
GOLD	85-100%	The event demonstrates leading practice, with accessibility designed in from the start, strong reuse and low-impact choices, and evidence of review or continuous improvement.

Suggested scoring categories

- Access & information - venue, registration, access statement, wayfinding and attendee information.
- Inclusive experience - sensory access, seating choice, communication support, participation options and staff briefing.
- Food & materials - plant-based default, allergens, refill water, reusable serviceware and reduced printing.
- Travel & energy - accessible low-carbon travel information, appropriate room size and responsible energy use.
- Waste & reuse - prevention first, reuse systems, correct waste stations and surplus planning.
- Learning & improvement - feedback, post-event review and reuse of what was learned.

What a badge does - and does not - mean

A badge is a useful prompt and a visible sign of effort. It is not a guarantee that every individual access need has been met. Organisers should still publish specific access information and invite requests for each event.

Publication note: Bronze / Silver / Gold thresholds and the “essential access” gate are proposed for the Event Generator and should be agreed with Trinity disAbility Service and Trinity Sustainability before being used as official certification.

10. Quick checklist

Use this as a final review. The Event Generator can provide a more detailed version and create a summary for attendees.

Before booking

- □ Purpose, audience, format and budget agreed.
- □ Accessible venue/route checked in person where possible.
- □ Accessible toilet and evacuation arrangements checked.
- □ Date/time allow enough notice for access arrangements.
- □ Access and sustainability costs included in the budget.

Publicity & registration

- □ Accessibility statement and named contact included.
- □ Step-free route, toilet, sensory and travel information published.
- □ Registration form is accessible and asks about access requirements.
- □ Event details are in real text, not only in an image/poster.
- □ Videos are captioned and images have useful alt text.

Programme & room

- □ Clear aisles, varied seating and wheelchair spaces with choice.
- □ Microphones, captions/ISL and slides planned as required.
- □ Quiet/lower-stimulation space identified where possible.
- □ Speakers briefed on accessible presentations.
- □ Alternative ways to ask questions or participate are available where feasible.

Sustainability

- □ Plant-based food is the default and allergens are labelled.
- □ Reusable cups/crockery/materials are used where possible.

- □ Printing and giveaways are reduced to what is genuinely useful.
- □ Water refill and well-labelled waste stations are ready.
- □ Accessible public transport / walking / cycling information is shared.

On the day & after

- □ Staff know the access contact, routes, toilets, quiet space and emergency plan.
- □ Final access walk-through completed.
- □ Known access failures or changes are communicated quickly.
- □ Reusable items and surplus materials are recovered after the event.
- □ Short accessibility and sustainability feedback is collected and recorded.

11. Trinity tools and contacts

Use the most specific Trinity resource for the job. Web links may change over time, so this page is best treated as a starting point rather than a substitute for checking current College guidance.

Trinity Accessibility & Sustainability Event Generator

Generate clear event access information and review accessibility/sustainability choices.

Open Trinity Accessibility & Sustainability Event Generator

Event Checker - Making College Events Accessible

Quick Trinity guidance on accessible event planning and related resources.

Open Event Checker - Making College Events Accessible

Universal Accessibility Guide

Broader Universal Design guidance for campus spaces, services and events.

Open Universal Accessibility Guide

Physical Access Information

Campus access information, maps, facilities and accessible event resources.

Open Physical Access Information

TCD Sense

Sensory environment information, supports and sensory spaces.

Open TCD Sense

TCD Sense Map

Detailed sensory, wayfinding and physical access information for campus spaces.

Open TCD Sense Map

Accessible Information Policy

College policy covering accessible information and events.

Open Accessible Information Policy

Green Events Guidelines

Current Trinity guidance on lower-impact event planning, waste prevention, reuse and food.

Open Green Events Guidelines

Junior Dean - Events and Parties

Event permissions, expectations and application information.

Open Junior Dean - Events and Parties

Estates & Facilities - Event Support

Support for event logistics, safety, attendants and facilities.

Open Estates & Facilities - Event Support

Key contacts

Trinity disAbility Service: askds@tcd.ie | +353 1 896 3111

Trinity Sustainability: sustainability@tcd.ie

Estates & Facilities Service Centre: estatesandfacilities@tcd.ie

Final thought

The aim is not a “perfect” event. It is an event where people have useful information, barriers are reduced before they become problems, and organisers learn from each event. Small improvements become normal practice surprisingly quickly.

Trinity Event Generator: supporting accessible and sustainable event planning.