



Developing, Planning and Facilitating Welcoming Educational Programs and Events

Facilitation Best Practices.....	2
Finding and Vetting Trainers	2
Practicing Humility and Openness.....	2
Setting Guidelines for Interaction	2
Knowing Your Learners’ Needs or Limitations.....	2
Creating Safety for Questioning	2
Welcoming Participation by Everyone:	3
Using Thoughtful Language	3
Honoring Learning Preferences & Differentiating Instruction	3
Training Best Practices.....	4
Tailoring Materials to Your Audience.....	4
Identity and Culture	4
Images.....	5
Language Use in Educational Materials	5
English Language Learners	5
General Accessibility.....	6
Events Best Practices.....	7
Facilities- General	7
Transportation.....	8
Food	9
Technology	9
Lodging.....	10
Translation & Interpretation.....	11
Registration.....	11
General Considerations	12
Appendix A: Useful Websites	13
Appendix B: Example Rules of Engagement.....	14

MSU is an affirmative-action, equal-opportunity employer, committed to achieving excellence through a diverse workforce and inclusive culture that encourages all people to reach their full potential. Michigan State University Extension programs and materials are open to all without regard to race, color, national origin, gender, gender identity, religion, age, height, weight, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, marital status, family status or veteran status. Issued in furtherance of MSU Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Jeffrey W. Dwyer, Director, MSU Extension, East Lansing, MI 48824. This information is for educational purposes only. Reference to commercial products or trade names does not imply endorsement by MSU Extension or bias against those not mentioned.



Facilitation Best Practices

This section focuses on facilitation or delivery. It includes what you do when you are teaching or preparing to teach.

Finding and Vetting Trainers

- Make sure potential trainers understand MSU Extension's commitment to inclusivity and that they will support these values.
- Prioritize developing learning opportunities in partnership with individuals from diverse backgrounds to:
 - directly represent cultural competence and sensitivity through a diverse team and
 - provide opportunities to build more authentic relationships across differences.

Practicing Humility and Openness

- Be careful not to send messages that you are the all-knowing expert.
- Respect the experiences and intelligence of your audience. Engage with concerns rather than dismissing them.
- Assume positive intentions when participants ask questions.

Setting Guidelines for Interaction

- Clarify your expectations and ground rules, especially regarding showing respect for others, mindful listening during discussions, and turn-taking. See Appendix B.
- Post and review rules of engagement during the session. For longer sessions, ask for group participation and reach a group consensus on this. You can then post these rules and refer to them if someone is not complying, by stating, "Remember we had agreed that..." See Appendices for examples.

Knowing Your Learners' Needs or Limitations

- Use a registration system that allows learners to indicate if they need accommodation or have any concerns.
- Find out participants' knowledge/experience level beforehand so those needing support can access background materials in advance. This can be done through questions in the registration system, by speaking with community partners or others familiar with the target audience, or by providing optional background materials to all participants in advance. Choose the appropriate method for your context.
- Discover digital literacy levels of learners and provide extra support, resources, training, or earlier videoconferencing join times to help learn the technology needed.
- Respect needs or desires to have the video camera off when online. They may not want to be in a recording, they may not want others to see their home, or they may have family members in the background, etc.

Creating Safety for Questioning

Learners may not be comfortable asking questions, especially in front of peers. To create a safe place for asking questions, try the following:

- **Online:** Offer options to ask questions anonymously or directly/privately to the facilitator.

- **Face-to-face:** Use a question drop box, sticky notes to post questions on the wall, or other ways to provide an anonymous way to ask a question.
- Invite participants to email you sensitive questions.

Welcoming Participation by Everyone:

- Encourage small group / pair discussion before asking a participant to share their view with the larger group. This creates a safer space for those reluctant to speak in front of a group.
- Consider the impact of relationships and psychological safety. The roles, relationships, and social dynamics of the participants may discourage some from participating. Pay attention to these power dynamics so you can intervene to encourage all to participate.
- Make sure to provide enough wait time after asking questions. Most teachers/facilitators don't wait long enough, and some participants need more thinking time. Count silently to 10 before rephrasing.
- Utilize facilitation strategies to encourage participation: See [ideas from Seeds for Change](#).
- Use a microphone. For virtual training, this will make captions more accurate. For face-to-face training, it will ensure you are heard.

Using Thoughtful Language

- When available given the technology used, explain how participants can add their pronouns and/or change how their name appears in the meeting. For live events, allow them to make name tents.
- Avoid acronyms and jargon. Tell participants to use a designated "virtual buzzer" or other signal you design if they hear you using jargon or abbreviations.
- Avoid words that confirm stereotypes or negative assumptions about groups of people.
- Use person-centered language (*person with vision impairment*, not *blind person*).
- Use non-gendered language (server, not waitress; police officer, not policeman).
- Avoid phrases and clichés that are culturally specific and/or linguistically unknown.
- Use and support nongendered pronouns ("*they*" instead of "*he or she*").
- Raise your awareness of potentially offensive language use. [Learn more](#).

Honoring Learning Preferences & Differentiating Instruction

You can accommodate different personalities and learning preferences by having a variety of interaction patterns. Some interaction patterns include:

- Facilitator-focused content delivery (such as a lecture or explanation)
- Pair work and group work
- Individual and reflective reading or writing work

In addition, accommodate different learning preferences. You can:

- Present the same materials in different ways: reading, listening, seeing, discussing, etc.
- Provide optional background materials beforehand to help support learners with less experience or knowledge about the topic.
- For online meetings, enable live captioning and share how they can turn it on or off as desired.
- If possible, record the training so it can be re-watched. Advise participants to turn off cameras if they are not comfortable with this. You could also edit out participants who do not wish to be in the recording.
- If posting video, include captions and host in a space that allows viewers to change to the playback speed.

The above only skims the surface. Please also see the [Universal Design for Learning framework](#).



Training Best Practices

This section focuses on the creation of educational materials and curricula, or products.

Tailoring Materials to Your Audience

- Use a registration system to learn about the participants. Find out about their level of experience with the topic, if they have accessibility needs, or if there is other information about their context which may help you adapt to their needs. If the training will be done online or requires technology or equipment, ask about their level of digital literacy and access to appropriate equipment.
 - Zoom sessions can include [registration](#), and custom questions.
 - Use a survey or registration system for face-to-face training.
- Provide supplemental materials or training to participants who will need extra help. Examples: Links to tutorials, having some join 15 minutes earlier to learn how to use Zoom, etc.
- As you review your materials and activities, consider the audience and the context. For example, recent events in a community can make a topic or use of specific language sensitive or inappropriate.

Example:

Imagine using the phrase *“Leave the past behind and focus on the present”* on a Power Point slide during a training related to mindfulness. In some context and times, this would be fine. Now imagine presenting that to a primarily Black community immediately following the death of a black man due to police violence. Timing, context, and community can impact what is acceptable.

See also: previous section on *Honoring Learning Preferences & Differentiating Instruction*, p.3.

Identity and Culture

- Be inclusive of the broad range of human experience. Include perspectives, experiences and images from multiple historically-marginalized or excluded identities and communities.
- Remember that all experiences are not shared by everyone in the group.
- Think about the demographics of your audience. Don't stereotype them but do include examples that they can relate to.

Tapping into past experiences is a great way of allowing learners to connect new information with what they already know or have experienced. However, do so in a way that allows learners to make their own connections, without necessarily assuming a shared background or context. For example, think about the assumptions made in the comment:

“Everyone remembers the wonderful smell of cookies baking at Grandma’s house.”

In fact, some participants may not have known their grandparents, and certainly some of them did not have this experience. Instead:

“Think of a smell from your childhood that brought you feelings of happiness or safety.”

Also consider socioeconomic sensitivity and making assumptions about access. For example, rather than, *“Take your boat out for socially distant fun,”* use *“Consider opportunities for outdoor gatherings for socially distant fun.”*



Consider where your audience lives and what their environment is like.

“Part of self-care is doing what you love, such as star-gazing or spending time hunting in your backyard woods with your buddies.”

Examples given in northern Michigan might not be appropriate for metro Detroit.

Images

Finding diverse and appropriate images is both challenging and important. Ensure that the images you select:

- Reflect diversity.
- Avoid stereotypes or negative assumptions about groups of people.
- Are appropriately attributed.
- Display color and contrast for those who are color blind. [Learn more.](#)

Imagine a course where there is a great variety in characters. Now take it a step further and make sure those characters are not fulfilling stereotypes. For example, if you have a character who is a scientist, or include a photo of a scientist, don't use the stereotypical white male in a lab coat.

Ensure accessibility of images, tables, and graphics to those with vision impairments by using alt tags online or describing them during delivery.

Language Use in Educational Materials

- Avoid words that confirm stereotypes or negative assumptions about groups of people.
- Use person-centered language (*person with vision impairment*, not *blind person*).
- Use non-gendered language (*server*, not *waitress*; *police officer*, not *policeman*).
- Avoid phrases and clichés that are culturally specific and/or linguistically unknown.
- Use and support nongendered pronouns (*“they”* instead of *“he or she”*).
- Avoid jargon and acronyms.
- Embrace different varieties of English. There is no standard English dialect; everyone speaks a dialect of their language.

English Language Learners

Honor and respect the effort it takes to learn English. Do not assume that individuals who are not native speakers in English want/need a translator or interpreter because English is not their first language. Make materials accessible to English learners who do not request an interpreter/translation with the actions below.

- Avoid advanced vocabulary, jargon, and acronyms. Explain terms that may be new.
- Pay attention to cultural references and do not make assumptions about learners' knowledge, or lack thereof, regarding culture.



- Speak at a moderate pace, pausing regularly to allow time for comprehension. Scaffold new materials in a way that allows learners to understand. [Learn more about scaffolding.](#)
- Provide access to the materials before/after sessions to allow more processing time.
- If you host videos online, select a player that allows captions to be turned on and playback speed to be modified.
- Do not assume that advanced skills in one modality (speaking, listening, reading, writing) equates to advanced skills in other modalities.

General Accessibility

- Consider accessibility for those with visual, hearing, or speaking impairments. This includes online and face-to-face programming.
- Consider how to best accommodate those with physical limitations or learning disabilities. This includes physical space and program locations. See “Events Best Practices” (p.8) in this guide.
- Provide space and accommodation for those with mental health or homelife barriers.
- When possible, provide the same materials available in various formats.
 - Ex: Record and post captions and also provide the script.
- Abide by accessibility best practices for online documents, audio, and video. See MSU’s [Web Accessibility Technical Guidelines](#).

Events Best Practices

MSU Extension and the MSU College of Agriculture and Natural Resources (CANR) are committed to a culturally inclusive, safe, and supportive environment that is free from any and all forms of discrimination, bias, stereotyping, harassment and assault. The items below are designed to provoke questions and considerations related to diversity, equity and inclusion in planning events and choosing locations for educational sessions.

The items below may not all apply to your specific educational event. Use this as a guide to help you think about your specific audience's needs.

Facilities- General

Consideration

Suggested Modifications / Resources

- Choose facilities that are welcoming and open to all.
- Does the facility allow walking tours or site visits prior to your event?

Walk the space to ensure it is accessible for everyone. Think about how the space will work for those with limited mobility (scooters, wheelchairs, canes, crutches, etc.). Specifically inquire about accessibility with different seating arrangements.

- Is there enough room to move around comfortably?
- Is there space for those with limited mobility?
- Is there space for larger bodies or pregnant folks?

Consider how you will use the space throughout your event.

The layout of the room and space between seating must be considered.

- Is the conference space accessible?
- How big is the overall space?
- How much will people have to move around the entire facility?

Consider the overall size of the facility. Will it be difficult for folks to navigate that have limited mobility? Are there options for folks who may need assistance?

- What are the seating options?
- Are chairs adequate for larger bodied folks or pregnant people?
- Are there other seating options available?
- Is there room to stand for those who can't sit for long periods of time?

Test out the seating options for comfort.

Consider providing high-top tables for those unable to sit for extended periods of time.

- Where are the elevators and ramps? Are they accessible and functional? Is there signage indicating where the elevators and ramps are located?

Provide a map or be specific about where elevators and ramps are located to participants. Consider posting signage if the venue does not have any or clearly explain where elevators and ramps are located and how participants can access them.

Where are the stairs and elevators in relation to your space? Are there stairs or ramps in your space?



Are there designated spaces for prayer, quiet, or family needs?

Are there nursing/family spaces?

[MSU Lactation Room Locations](#)

What are the facility's guidelines/policies/rules on service animals? How is a service animal defined?

Check with the venue ahead of time to ensure accommodations can be made adequately.

Are the restrooms accessible?

[MSU Single Occupancy Restrooms](#)

Where are the elevators and ramps in relation to the restrooms and are they accessible and functional?

Are the sinks, soap dispensers and towels/dryers accessible for all participants?

Are gender-inclusive restrooms close by?

Are there family restroom spaces?

Do restrooms have changing tables?

Transportation

Consideration

Suggested Modifications / Resources

What is the physical route (hills, railroad tracks, highways, etc.)?

Include detailed directions to the facility. Think about including local landmarks, use of both cardinal directions (east, west, left, right, etc.) and landmark directions (enter through the doors closest to the parking lot, etc.). Be sure to include any construction issues or route changes prior to the event.

Where will participants park? Is parking located close to the facility? Is the parking area well lighted? Is there a fee for parking? How is payment made?

If this is not readily obvious, include information about parking for participants.

Where are handicapped parking spaces located? Are the spots located near the facility? What does the route look like?

Include specific information about special parking accommodations.

Will you provide a shuttle service that is accessible?

If not, how can you help transport participants who need assistance?

Is there access to a public transportation system nearby?

[moving-around-msu-transportation-and-location-awareness-.pdf](#)

Will you provide resources about public transportation options available?

What is the proximity of public transportation?

- How accessible is the local transportation?

Food

Consideration

- Have you provided meal options that accommodate dietary restrictions within the main course options?
- Have you provided meal options that accommodate dietary restrictions during break/snack options?

Suggested Modifications / Resources

Be sure that all meals are equitable to the standard entrée provided regardless of dietary restrictions. Be sure that everyone has a meal that satisfies their dietary needs and provides enough food and protein for each meal.

Be sure that there are equitable options for those with dietary restrictions.

Technology

Consideration

- Are you able to provide assistive technology? This includes any device that can be used to enhance learning for a person with a disability such as text to speech, screen readers, etc.
- Is there a cost associated with any assistive technology?
- Is live streaming available?
- Is there a microphone and speaker system? Is there a separate cost for this?
- Are there multiple screens to display presentations at different locations throughout the space?
- Do participants need to access Wi-Fi for the event? How strong is the Wi-Fi?
- If you will need high-speed Internet during your event, is there an ethernet option?
- Is there an available hot spot if Wi-Fi goes down?
- What is the cost? Are there limitations to how many people can access Wi-Fi?
- How will people participate if they cannot access the Internet?

Suggested Modifications / Resources

[Assistive Technology | MSU - Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities](#)

Identify an individual who can help with technical difficulties.



- Is there an individual on-site who can help with technical difficulties?

Lodging

Consideration

Suggested Modifications / Resources

- What comes in a standard hotel room? Is access to Wi-Fi included in the standard room?

- Does the lodging have kitchenettes, microwaves, or fridges available?

Based on your target audience, if these are needed items, investigate other facility options.

Consider asking if refrigerators are available for medication storage.

- Are there multiple electrical outlets that are easily accessible? Where are the outlets located?

Consider touring a room and making note of where electrical outlets are to accommodate those with special sleeping room needs.

- Are there USB outlets? Are they easily accessible?

- Are there accessible lodging options?

- Roll-in showers
- Lowered counters
- Lowered toilets
- Doorbell options

- What security measures are there for the facility property? Do rooms have door locks, window locks, etc.?

- Are there strobe light and vibration fire alarms?

- How are emergency plans posted?

- How is room temperature controlled?

- What are the facilities guidelines/policies/rules on service animals? How do they define a service animal?

- For non-hotel facilities consider asking how rooms are set up for sleeping arrangements. Are there bunk beds? Multiple beds per room? Will participants be sharing rooms?

Be sure to let participants know what to expect with lodging. Make sure that shared sleeping spaces are disclosed to participants and have additional options for those who are uncomfortable or cannot share a room.

- If participants are sharing rooms, how will room assignments be determined? Dividing based on gender or perceived gender may not be an inclusive or safe option for all participants.

- For non-hotel facilities consider asking about bathrooms. Are the bathroom and shower

Be sure to let participants know what to expect with bathroom and shower facilities. Make sure that

facilities private or are they community style?
How are they set up? Are there other options?

- For non-hotel facilities, consider asking if participants need to supply their own linens such as sheets, blankets and towels. Will participants need to supply their own toiletries or are they provided?

community spaces are disclosed to participants and be prepared to have additional options for those who are uncomfortable.

Be sure to let participants know if they must bring anything. Include a checklist so they know exactly what items to bring.

Translation & Interpretation

Consideration

- Will you need to provide translation services?

- Are there resources to find local translators?

- Will you need to provide live interpretation services?

Suggested Modifications / Resources

Consider providing interpretation through Zoom channel for virtual or hybrid events.

Registration

Consideration

- Have you asked participants to share their pronouns? This should not be required from participants but can be provided as an option for those who are comfortable sharing their pronouns.

- Have you used gender-inclusive language?

- Have you asked about dietary needs?

Suggested Modifications / Resources

Consider starting sessions with speakers sharing their pronouns.

Allow participants the option to add their pronouns in online events.

<https://gscs.msu.edu/education/pronouns.html>

<https://www.mypronouns.org/>

Describe clothes sized as fitted or boxy rather than men's or women's.

Use they/them/participants rather than she/him (unless referring to specific person with known pronouns)

Use "participants", "esteemed guests", "colleagues" instead of calling the group "guys", "ladies and gentlemen", "boys and girls", etc.

Using an open-ended text box is preferred in registrations to allow participants to describe dietary needs in detail. However, a checkbox with standard options (vegetarian, vegan, gluten free, dairy free, halal, etc.) could be used with the option to provide additional information. Be conscience of [religious](#)



[holidays](#) that may affect participants dietary needs (Lent, Ramadan, etc.).

Have you explained why we ask for civil rights information?

Use the [script](#) provided by MSU Extension in your registration materials and during your session.

https://www.canr.msu.edu/od/civil_rights_diversity_multiculturalism/resources_and_helpful_documentation

Have you asked about accessibility and accommodations?

Check your responses *at least* two weeks before the event is scheduled to accommodate any requests made. Best practice is to check these responses frequently to provide enough lead time to meet the requests.

[Accessibility at MSU | MSU - Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities](#)

General Considerations

Consideration

Suggested Modifications / Resources

Does your event conflict with any religious holidays or national observance days?

Check calendars or other resources for all [religious holidays](#) and national observance days and avoid scheduling your event during those times.

Have you considered the time of year you are hosting this event? Will it be difficult for participants to travel to the event due to weather conditions?

Have a backup plan for inclement weather. Give your participants specific directions or instructions to make travel easier and more comfortable.

What does your event schedule look like? Have you provided enough time for meals based on the size of the group? Are there enough breaks built in for participants? Is there sufficient time between session for individuals with mobility concerns?

Share the schedule ahead of time so participants know what to expect. If you are not providing meals, consider giving recommendations of local restaurants and include restaurants that will deliver to the facility.

Think about how you will promote and advertise your event. What images and language are used in promotion? How are you promoting (online, print, radio, etc.)?

Is there a need for a specific type of attire while attending the event?

Be clear and specific about what is needed and why it is needed. Think about options to assist folks who may not have the needed attire or equipment.

Appendix A: Useful Websites

This is a small collection of websites that can help you:

- **Conscious Style Guide**, <https://consciousstyleguide.com/>
Website designed to help writers and editors think about the language they use. Provides articles and guides around specific topics to help support authors.
- **MSU Extension Teaching & Learning Course**, <https://www.canr.msu.edu/courses/msu-extension-teaching-learning>
- **WC3 Web Accessibility Initiative: Colors with Good Contrast**. <https://www.w3.org/WAI/perspective-videos/contrast/>
- **MSU Web Accessibility Basic Checklist: Online Content Accessibility**, https://webaccess.msu.edu/Help_and_Resources/checklist.htm
- **Seeds for Change In Depth Guide: Facilitation Tools for Meetings and Workshops**. <https://www.seedsforchange.org.uk/guides>
Strategies and tools for encouraging participation and inclusion.
- **MSU Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities:**
 - **Moving Around MSU, Great Lansing Area and Beyond**. <https://www.rcpd.msu.edu/sites/default/files/2020-04/moving-around-msu-transportation-and-location-awareness-.pdf>
 - **Assistive Technology**. <https://www.rcpd.msu.edu/programs/assistive-technology>
 - **Accessibility at MSU**, <https://www.rcpd.msu.edu/accessibility-at-msu>
- **Interfaith Calendar**, <http://www.interfaith-calendar.org/>
Dates of religious holidays
- **MSU Extension Organizational Development: Compliance Resources**, https://www.canr.msu.edu/od/civil_rights_diversity_multiculturalism/resources_and_helpful_documentation
- **National Center on Disability and Journalism: Disability Language Style Guide**, <https://ncdj.org/style-guide/>



Appendix B: Example Rules of Engagement

Below are ideas for rules of engagement that help create a fair, inclusive, and safe environment. These are suggestions and can and should be adapted and modified according to circumstances.

General Rules of Engagement

- Try on new ideas
- Share the air
- Speak for yourself, not for others
- Practice “both/and” thinking
- What is said here stays here; what is learned here leaves here
- Use the parking lot for unrelated questions and ideas

Dialogue-Focused Rules of Engagement

- Respectful disagreement is fine!
- No blaming or shaming
- Practice “both/and” thinking
- Practice self-focus
- Lean into difficult conversations
- Be aware of intent and impact

Acknowledgments:

Much content of this guide was inspired by a draft of a similar guide created by Allison Peterson and Eduardo Olivio of MSU Residential and Hospitality Services.

Feedback:

Please recognize that this is a living document. For feedback, suggestions, and corrections contact Anne Baker at amb@msu.edu or Kendra Moyses at kmoyses@msu.edu.

Updated: 11/11/2025