

Designing Inclusive Spaces

This article is Part II of a 3-part series on race and inclusion. Look out for the final piece in the coming month. You can read Part I [here](#) and Part III [here](#).



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Last month, I hosted an intersectional feminist iftar in Los Angeles, CA in collaboration with Interfaith Youth Core and Community I.D.E.A. The event was attended by over 60 women and brought together an incredibly diverse group of participants. As I planned the dinner, I actively considered how to make the event an intentionally inclusive space.

I started by mapping out the holistic experience of attending the event from start to finish — driving to the venue, entering a room where you may not know anyone, participating in the program, and returning to the outside world after the event finished. This exercise allowed me to see the many aspects of physical, spatial and programmatic design that would ultimately drive the experience of our guests.

After completing several attempts at inclusive design experience mapping, I sent an email to attendees to highlight our event design to foster an inclusive experience. The email was simple — it provided up front information about the amenities and program in an effort to ensure a comfortable space for everyone. At the end of the email, I asked people to contact me if there was a need that had not been addressed. I admitted that I may not be able to accommodate, but that I would do my best.

The impact of this email was greater than I could have ever imagined. When I gathered feedback about the event, this email communication repeatedly came up as one of the most important elements of the event's success. Our attendees commented that the intentional, but simple, effort to include them was meaningful and unique. One participant shared that while she doesn't expect every event or space to anticipate her

needs, **the simple invitation to safely make a request made her feel that she truly belonged.**

Organizing this event reaffirmed what I had always suspected: people are literally *craving inclusion*. So many of us are searching for simple and accessible spaces where we can belong to find joy and meaning. **I truly believe that with a little bit of effort, inclusive experiences don't need to be exceptional or rare, but can become the new norm. Especially when many aspects of inclusion are manageable through minimal design changes.**

To that end, I want to share the framework our team utilized so that other organizers and leaders can think about the small things that can make an event or space more safe for participants. I believe this is a scalable approach that can be used to assess equity and inclusion in social gatherings, conferences, schools, office spaces and beyond.

By no means is this list all encompassing, but it is a start and actively encourages organizers to ask their stakeholders what they have missed. **Designing for inclusion is deeply rooted in empathy, and a recognition that what is satisfactory for us may be an anxiety inducing barrier for someone else. We need to be more intentional about asking others what they need as we organize events and design spaces. When you don't know how to ensure your stakeholders feel included, start the process by simply asking.**

There is no way for an organizer to be able to predict and necessarily satisfy every need of every participant. Even if you can't honor every request, you can honor the voice behind the need and let them know that they've been heard, and that you will consider their perspective for future events.

Does this work sometimes complicate and add to an already long list of tasks? Absolutely. But I can personally confirm that the effort is well worth the profound impact on your guests and resulting success of your event. To be able to create a positive and inclusive experience for someone who has rarely felt affirmed is probably one of the most incredible things you can be a part of.

I hope you find benefit in this resource and I look forward to updating it with more experience and input.

Designing Inclusive Spaces



Things to consider



PRICING & COSTS
PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION
HANDICAPPED PARKING
WHEELCHAIR ACCESSIBILITY
DIETARY RESTRICTIONS
GENDER NEUTRAL RESTROOMS
NAMETAGS WITH GENDER PRONOUNS
NURSING ROOM FOR MOTHERS
CHILDCARE OPTIONS
QUIET SPACE FOR REFLECTION & PRIVACY
PERMISSION TO PHOTOGRAPH & RECORD
SCENT FREE ENVIRONMENT
MICROPHONE & SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETER
LARGE FONTS & PRINTOUTS OF SLIDES
TRANSLATION SERVICES

INCLUSION CHECK

*Ask your guests what they need.
Even if you can't honor a request,
you can honor their voice and let
them know that they've been heard.*





Inclusive Design Experience Mapping Guide

Pricing and Costs — If you can secure funding, make your event free. If you can't make it free for everyone, try to secure funds for deserving participants that may find the experience cost prohibitive.

Public Transportation & Handicapped Parking — Share public transportation options for those that do not have a car or cannot afford a ride sharing option. Also, share parking information and the cost to park in the lot. It is also important to note whether or not there are handicapped parking spaces available.

Wheelchair Accessibility — Map out elevator paths, ramps, and wheelchair accessible entrances for your guests. Share this information on a map if the event venue is large enough to require it.

Dietary Restrictions & Waste Free Options — While gathering RSVPs for your event, it is good practice to ask about dietary restrictions up front. This way, when you are preparing catering for the event, you can make sure to plan for those restrictions. Encourage people to bring take home boxes for extra food so that the event is waste free.

Gender Neutral Restrooms — Share information about the nearest restrooms and be sure to call out whether there are gender neutral restrooms available.

Nametags with Gender Pronouns — Allow people to write gender pronouns on their name tag when signing in.

Nursing Room for Mothers — If you are expecting mothers, secure a private space for women to nurse or pump.

Childcare Options — If the event is for families, set up a childcare option to allow parents to enjoy the event.

Quiet Space for Reflection & Privacy — Think through the layout of the space you are using. If you are able to, create a quiet space for people to pray, reflect, or just take a break.

Permission to Photograph and Record — If you have a photographer or videographer to cover the event, ask if anyone would prefer to not be photographed or recorded. You can indicate this preference on their name tag and seat them in a specific area.

Scent Free Environment — Sometimes, people with asthma or allergies struggle to be in environments that are heavy with scent. Ask guests to avoid heavy perfumes and arrive scent free.

Microphone & Sign Language Interpreter — To be inclusive of those who have hearing loss, secure a microphone and speakers. Ask if anyone needs a sign language interpreter.

Large Fonts & Printouts of Slides — Make sure fonts on slides and printed documents are large and legible. Print a few copies of the slides for anyone who has trouble reading the presentation screen.

Translation Services — If you are expecting a significant number of people who do not speak the primary language of the event, consider bringing a translator on site to help with event logistics and communication of content. Also be sure to provide translated versions of written documents.

Inclusion Check — Ask people to share any needs that have not been addressed. Even if you can't honor the request, you can honor their voice and let them know that they've been heard.

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Sana Rahim is the founder and president of Emerge Consulting. Emerge is a management practice that builds the capacity of nonprofit organizations through leadership and strategy services to create more effective solutions. She speaks and leads workshops on leadership, strategy, and diversity and inclusion. Sana is currently an MBA candidate at UCLA Anderson, focusing on social impact and sustainability. You can

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