

Accessible Organizing: Tips for Protest Organizers and Disabled Protesters

Note: This resource is not intended to be legal advice and should not be used as such. These are tips for organizers and attendees on making protest spaces more accessible so everyone can use their power. If you have feedback on these suggestions or additional resources you would like AAPD to consider sharing, please email revup@aapd.com.

Tips for Protest Organizers

Preparation

- Provide as much information as possible about the march, protest, or action so that disabled attendees can make informed decisions about their participation and access needs. Be clear about the access features you do or do not have. If you are not able to provide all information publicly, provide a point of contact that people can reach to ask questions.
- Consider providing the following information and other relevant details:
 - Location and route information
 - Timeline of action
 - Available accommodations (seating, mobility devices available, American Sign Language Interpreting, trained first aid volunteers available, etc.)
 - Bathroom access
 - Spots along the route to rest and take a break
 - Transcripts of chants, rally cries, and any planned remarks
- If possible, consider providing accommodations like American Sign Language interpretation, captioning transcripts of speeches, microphone amplification for speakers, mobility devices, chairs for people to sit in, golf carts and more.
- Encourage attendees to wear KN95 masks and take a COVID-19 test before attending. If possible, provide COVID-19 tests and KN95 masks for attendees
- Train organizers who are helping guide the action on how to create safe aisles for people with disabilities to move, march at their own pace, and participate.
- Clearly label any food that is provided or distributed with ingredients and allergens.
- Provide ways for people to support your cause remotely, if they are not able to attend in person.
- Make sure advertisements and materials:
 - Are written in plain language, with an 8th-grade or below reading level. You can check the reading level of your writing for free using [Hemingwayapp.com](https://hemingwayapp.com)
 - Have large enough text
 - Have strong color contrast
 - Are accessible to screen readers if shared in an online format

During the Action

- Leave seating for people with disabilities and older adults. Know that not all disabilities are visible.
- Keep paths to ramps and curb cuts clear.
- Ask someone if they need or would like assistance first. Do not touch people, their mobility devices, or service animals without their consent. Accept the answer if it is “No, I do not need help.”
- Talk directly to the person with a disability, not their aide, companion, or interpreter first. If the person designates someone else for you to speak with, then you can speak to that person.
- In groups, state your name before speaking.
 - Some people who are blind or low-vision may also find visual descriptions helpful. You can ask if they would like that visual information.

Additional Resources for Protest Organizers

- [Action Network: Ability Access/Disability Inclusion Checklist for Marches and Rallies](#)
- [AAPD Checklist for Accessible In-Person Events](#)
- [Showing Up for Racial Justice: Nuts and Bolts of Disability Access](#)
- [HEARD: The Revolution Must Be Accessible](#)
 - [The Revolution Must Be Accessible: Spanish Resource](#)
 - [The Revolution Must Be Accessible: ASL Resource](#)

Tips for Disabled Protestors

Preparation

Depending on whether you are attending a high-risk or a low-risk protest, you want to be prepared.

For both types of protests, make sure you have:

- Travel logistics planned
- Comfortable clothing and shoes
- Face mask (plus one extra)
- Water bottle
- Snacks
- Check to see if you know someone else going and plan to go with a friend

When attending a high-risk protest, you may want to wear glasses instead of wearing contact lenses, bring a two-day supply of medication in the case of arrest, and bring goggles to protect against chemical irritants. You may also want to cover tattoos, wear plain or all black clothing,

carry cash, and turn off your cellphone's location services. It is also a good idea to let someone know where you are going and to memorize or write down an emergency contact's phone number.

Etiquette and Safety

Safety can look different based on the identities that you hold. People with disabilities are generally at an increased risk of police violence.

- Black, Indigenous, and other people of color may have even greater increased risks when interacting with the police at protests.
- Undocumented people and people with previous interactions with the criminal legal system may face heightened risk in the event of an arrest.
- Disabled people may face specific obstacles that can impact safety. For example, mobility disabilities can make it more difficult to get away quickly from unsafe interactions, and communication disabilities can impede access to rapid directions communicated verbally or visually.

For everyone, going to a protest with a friend is one of the most important ways you can stay safe. It is key to discuss with your group any specific needs and your comfort level with certain risks. For example, discuss whether you are comfortable with being arrested or whether that risk is too great for your situation. Discuss any access needs and any plans if the action becomes greater than your risk tolerance.

Another crucial part of maintaining safety during protests is not to talk to the police. If possible, you may want to maintain distance from the police. If you have interactions with the police while protesting, you have a right to refuse to talk with them and to request a lawyer. You should not tell the police anything about yourself or anyone else at the protest. The organizers may have specific people who are tasked with interacting with the police at an action.

Some protests ask that people not take photos or videos that show protestors' faces. It is best etiquette to follow the direction of the organizers to make sure everyone is safe.

General Tips for Disabled Protestors

Protests can be more physically and emotionally taxing than you think. You can improve your experience at protests by:

- Using earplugs or headphones if you experience noise sensitivity
- Bringing a portable stool/chair or a walking stick that converts into a seat if you struggle to stand or walk for long periods
- Staying with your mobility device at all times
- Being familiar with the route of the march
- Checking if the organizer has provided any access information

- Bringing extra medication, since the protest might last for longer than you anticipate
- Bringing chargers and batteries
- Ensuring you have enough food, water, and electrolytes
- Wearing a medical alert or ID badge
- Wearing sunscreen
- Planning space to debrief and take care of each other when the action is over

Access Needs and Direct Actions

You don't have to tell anyone that you are disabled or about your condition or impairment, but it may be helpful to tell the organizer or the group you are going with about any access needs you have. This could include:

- Wheelchair access or access for other mobility equipment
- Access to public transit or parking
- Access to toilets or seating
- Sensory needs
- ASL or language interpretation
- Sighted Guide support

If you have questions about the route or questions specific to your access needs, organizers are often open to discussing these with you directly, even if the route is not publicly shared. It is best to contact the organizers to discuss your participation and to improve access to a protest.

While not all actions will be made accessible to everyone, there also may be alternative roles disabled people can play in direct actions to support what is happening on the ground.

Other Resources for Protestors

- [DREDF Webinar: Tips and Tools for Protestors with Disabilities](#)
- [DREDF: Know Your Rights as a Protestor with a Disability](#) – Check this resource for answers to legal questions and learning about your rights if you've been arrested.
- [DREDF: Protesting While Disabled Pocket Guide](#)
- [Crippling the Resistance: No Revolution Without Us](#)
- [ACLU: Know Your Rights as a Protestor \(English, Spanish\)](#)