



# Equal Access: Universal Design of Your ADVANCE Project

**DO-IT**

A checklist for making ADVANCE projects welcoming and accessible

The National Science Foundation (NSF) seeks to broaden the implementation of evidence-based systemic change strategies that promote equity for science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) faculty in academic workplaces and professions through *ADVANCE: Organizational Change for Gender Equity in STEM Academic Professions* ([beta.nsf.gov/funding/opportunities/advance-organizational-change-gender-equity-stem-academic-professions-advance](https://beta.nsf.gov/funding/opportunities/advance-organizational-change-gender-equity-stem-academic-professions-advance)). Projects under this program work to reduce systemic inequities that exist in organizational policy, practice, culture, and climate. Many ADVANCE projects promote systemic changes that make STEM departments more welcoming and inclusive of women faculty; some have expressed a need for assistance in ensuring that the issues of women with disabilities are fully addressed in ADVANCE projects. This publication addresses that need. It was created by the AccessADVANCE project, which serves to increase the successful participation and advancement of women with disabilities in STEM faculty careers.

## Legal Issues

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and the Americans with Disabilities Act and its 2008 Amendments mandate that no otherwise qualified person with a disability shall, solely by reason of their disability, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination in public programs. This means that courses, services, information resources, and project activities should be accessible to qualified individuals with disabilities. While we can offer recommendations, this publication does not provide legal advice; for such advice, contact campus resources or the U.S. Office of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR).



## Universal Design

Universal design (UD) is a proactive approach that makes facilities, information, instruction, activities, and other facets of a project accessible to and usable by a diverse audience, including individuals with disabilities. UD is defined as “the design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design” ([projects.ncsu.edu/design/cud/about\\_ud/about\\_ud.htm](https://projects.ncsu.edu/design/cud/about_ud/about_ud.htm)). This means that rather than designing for the average person, design for people with differing native languages, gender identities, racial and ethnic backgrounds, and abilities. Universally designing your ADVANCE project will make its resources, trainings, meetings, and other offerings welcoming and accessible to a broad audience, including those with disabilities, and minimize the need for accommodations for individual participants.

## Guidelines and Examples

Addressing the following questions provides a good starting point for making your ADVANCE project facilities, information technology, resources, and activities accessible to people with disabilities.



## Planning, Policies, and Evaluation

Consider diversity issues as you plan and evaluate ADVANCE project offerings.

- In your project proposal and implementation do you ensure there is expertise in disabilities, accommodations, and universal design through a staff member, consultant, or partnership with an organization that specializes in this area? Do you include costs for accommodations in the proposal?
- Do project policies and procedures ensure access to facilities, events, and resources for people with disabilities?
- Does a simple, transparent procedure to ensure a timely response to requests for disability-related accommodations exist and are staff and participants made aware of these services?
- Do project policies and procedures that support people with disabilities move beyond minimum levels of compliance and accommodations for individuals to focus more broadly on universal design?
- Are disability-related access issues addressed in research design, data collection, and evaluation instruments? Do you include disability along with other requests for demographics on surveys and present this data in project reports and published articles?
- If you have an ADVANCE project, have you considered submitting a request for supplemental funding to support access to and engagement in STEM learning, research, and workforce development for students, postdoctoral scholars, or faculty and staff with disabilities? Visit [beta.nsf.gov/funding/opportunities/persons-disabilities-stem-engagement-and-access-pwd-sea](https://beta.nsf.gov/funding/opportunities/persons-disabilities-stem-engagement-and-access-pwd-sea) to learn more.

## Information Resources and Technology

If your ADVANCE project uses digital tools and documents for the delivery of activities and information resources, ensure that they are accessibly designed, that staff members are aware of accessible design practices, and that systems are in place to make accommodations when requested.

- Do pictures in your publications and websites include people with diverse characteristics that include disability?
- Are all publications designed to be accessible to people with blindness, learning disabilities, motor impairments, and other disabilities? Do project web pages adhere to accessibility standards, such as the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines?
- Do key publications and websites include a statement about your commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, as well as procedures for requesting disability-related accommodations? For example, a project website could include the following statement: “The [project name] values diversity, equity, and inclusion and strives to make project facilities, technology, courses, information resources, and services accessible to everyone, including those with disabilities. Please inform staff of accessibility barriers you encounter and request accommodations that will make facilities courses, services, and information resources accessible to you.”
- Do videos developed or used in the project have accurate captions?
- Is technology used for project communication and collaboration accessible?
- Are there flexible policies that allow participants to attend meetings and activities remotely? Are meetings recorded, captioned, and shared for those who cannot attend?

For more information, consult Accessible Technology at [uw.edu/accessibility](https://uw.edu/accessibility).



## Project Facilities

Ensure physical access, comfort, and safety for individuals with disabilities within environments used by your ADVANCE project. Make them welcoming to participants with a variety of abilities, racial and ethnic backgrounds, genders, and ages.

- Are all levels of facilities connected via wheelchair-accessible routes? Are accessible routes of travel easy to find? Do restroom, entrance, and other commonly used doors have sensors or buttons for automatic opening? Are they regularly inspected to ensure functionality?
- Do elevators have auditory, visual, and tactile signals and controls accessible from a seated position?
- Are there parking areas, pathways, and entrances to the building that are wheelchair accessible and clearly identified?
- Are aisles kept wide and clear of obstructions for the safety of users who have mobility or visual impairments?
- Are wheelchair accessible and child-friendly restrooms with well-marked signs available in or near the facility?
- Is at least part of a service counter at a height accessible from a seated position?

- Are adjustable-height tables, ergonomic chairs, and adequate / adjustable light available?
- Are there ample high-contrast, large-print directional signs to and throughout facilities? Is braille signage used where appropriate?

Consult the ADA Checklist for Readily Achievable Barrier Removal at [ada.gov/checkweb.htm](http://ada.gov/checkweb.htm) for more suggestions. For accessibility guidelines for specific facilities (e.g., engineering labs, makerspaces, computer labs), visit [uw.edu/doit/programs/accesscollege/stem-lab/resources/make-physical-environments-accessible-students](http://uw.edu/doit/programs/accesscollege/stem-lab/resources/make-physical-environments-accessible-students).

## Staff

Make sure project staff are prepared to deliver accessibility designed activities and work with all project participants.

- Do staff members know how to respond to requests for disability-related accommodations, such as sign language interpreters?
- Are staff and contractors in specific assignment areas (e.g., event management, web page development, video creation) knowledgeable about accessibility requirements and considerations?
- Are staff members aware of issues related to communicating with participants who have disabilities? See Communication Hints at [uw.edu/doit/programs/accesscollege/student-services-conference-room/resources/helpful-communication-hints](http://uw.edu/doit/programs/accesscollege/student-services-conference-room/resources/helpful-communication-hints).
- Do staff deliver on-site and online courses, conference presentations, and exhibits that are accessible to all participants (e.g., with captions on video presentations,, accessible documents, slides with large print and high contrast)?

For guidance consult [uw.edu/doit/programs/center-universal-design-education/postsecondary/universal-design-instruction](http://uw.edu/doit/programs/center-universal-design-education/postsecondary/universal-design-instruction).



## Checklist Updates

To increase the usefulness of this working document, send suggested improvements to [doit@uw.edu](mailto:doit@uw.edu).

## Additional Resources

The *AccessADVANCE* publication *Equal Access: Making STEM Departments More Accessible to and Inclusive of Faculty with Disabilities* shares guidance on designing an inclusive STEM department ([uw.edu/doit/equal-access-making-stem-departments-more-accessible-and-inclusive-faculty-disabilities](http://uw.edu/doit/equal-access-making-stem-departments-more-accessible-and-inclusive-faculty-disabilities)). For more information about applications of universal design consult *The Center for Universal Design in Education (CUDE)* at [uw.edu/doit/programs/center-universal-design-education/overview](http://uw.edu/doit/programs/center-universal-design-education/overview). CUDE documents that may be relevant to your ADVANCE project (including those that apply to the design of meetings, professional organizations, conference exhibits, presentations, and online learning) can be found at [uw.edu/doit/programs/center-universal-design-education/universal-design-projects-conference-exhibits](http://uw.edu/doit/programs/center-universal-design-education/universal-design-projects-conference-exhibits).

## About AccessADVANCE

AccessADVANCE serves to increase the successful participation and advancement of women with disabilities in STEM faculty careers. The AccessADVANCE leadership team includes the following individuals:

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