



# National Volunteer Management Conference

Accessibility Guide

**Tuesday 28 April 2026**  
Sheraton Athlone Hotel, Gleeson Street  
Athlone, County Westmeath, N37 D953



**Volunteer  
Ireland**  
Obair Dheonach Éireann



# Conference Accessibility Guide

Welcome to the National Volunteer Management Conference. This guide is for anyone with extra support needs, or example, if you are autistic, have ADHD, bipolar disorder, a mobility challenge, or any other condition that means you need a bit more care or additional support. We've set up the event to be as accessible as we can.

## Getting here and the venue

- **Location:** Sheraton Athlone Hotel, Gleeson Street, Athlone, Co. Westmeath, N37 D953, Ireland. (just off the M6 motorway, exit N55).
- **Parking:** There is an underground car park (Level -1) with marked disabled parking spaces and electric charging points. If you have a Blue Badge, you can park in designated spots. Service (guide) dogs are welcome everywhere. You can get your parking validated at the reception before you leave the event.
- **Entrance:** The hotel entrance is step-free. Lifts go to all floors. You can reach Reception on Level 0 (ground floor), main plenary (Hoey Suite) on Level 1, and breakout rooms on Level 2 by lift or stairs. All corridors are wide and flat. There are accessible toilets and baby-changing facilities on each level. (There is a baby-changing table in all restrooms).

## Registration and support desk

- **Check-in:** When you arrive, go to the Registration Desk (Level 1). We have a quiet check-in option for people who prefer a less crowded space. Staff will wear name badges – if you need help, just let them know. You can tell us about any needs (e.g. hearing support, an aide with you, etc.) here or on your registration form.



- **Help Desk:** Next to Registration is an Accessibility Desk. Here you can pick up printed programmes, quiet area info, and any aids (noise-cancelling headphones, fidget toys, ear plugs etc.) you need. Feel free to talk to the person there at any time. Stuart is the lead person for this area.



- **Our Team:** All our event team know about common hidden disabilities (they've done JAM-Card training) and will be glad to help. If someone is wearing a green "JAM-friendly" or yellow "Sunflower" lanyard, it means they have a hidden condition and are gently asking for patience.

## Quiet & Sensory Spaces

If you feel overwhelmed by noise or lights, or just need a break, please use our Quiet Room:

- It's on Level 2 (Siege Suite), plus an adjacent quiet lounge area. The doors will be marked. Feel free to go in anytime, it's a no-talk, low-light space.



- Inside, you'll find soft seating (chairs, couches). Noise-cancelling headphones, stress balls / fidget toys, can all be picked up from the Accessibility desk on Level 1. This is a calm spot to relax, breathe, and collect yourself.
- We ask people to stay quiet (no phone calls, no loud music). The idea is to keep it peaceful.
- You can come out and go back in as needed during the day. Staff will check on the room occasionally, but you can stay as long as you need. (If you're alone and want a someone to sit with you quietly for a few minutes, just let us know.)

## Session participation & schedule

- **Session Length:** Most talks or workshops are about 45 to 60 minutes, followed by a break. We'll usually ask for questions before each break so you're not surprised when we stop.



- **Movement Allowed:** You do not have to sit still the whole time. It's OK to stand, stretch, move around at the back, or step outside briefly if you need a moment. If you have trouble sitting still (e.g. due to ADHD), feel free to pace quietly or use a fidget during sessions.
- **Communication:** Presenters will speak clearly and at a gentle pace. Key points will be shown on slides and written boards. Handouts of slides where possible will be provided after the event, but if you wish to have a copy let us know seven days before the event. If you need anything explained in simple terms, ask any event team member.
- **Asking Questions:** At the end of sessions, we will either pass a microphone around or collect question cards so you don't have to shout out. You can also write a question on a card during the talk if you prefer.

- **Captions** We will have live captions for main talks and keynotes if needed. If you use sign language (e.g. ISL), please tell us early so we can arrange an interpreter.

## Food & break times

- **Meals:** Lunch is served in La Provence Restaurant (Level 1). We will label common allergens (nuts, gluten, dairy, etc.) on the menu at the reception desk in the morning. If you have a specific diet, special meals (vegan, halal, etc.) can be requested at registration. If in doubt, speak to a volunteer or chef.



- **Snacks & Water:** There will be water stations at the back of the main conference room and some snacks available throughout the day. (Keep hydrated – it helps you think.) We also have a quiet snack zone away from the buffet line if the lunch area feels busy.
- **Breaks:** There are built-in breaks in the schedule (mid-morning, lunch, mid-afternoon) for resting. You do not have to attend any social event if it's too much – all social/networking times are optional. Use break times to go back to your room, sit in the quiet area, or have some quiet conversation in a corner.

## Staying Comfortable (Sensory Tips)

- **Lighting & Sound:** Most rooms have regular lighting, but we won't use any flashing or strobe effects. If a video or demo will be loud or bright, the speaker will give a heads-up.



- **Noise:** You'll see headphones and earplugs at the Accessibility Desk. Use them if the environment gets too noisy (e.g. during breaks or networking).
- **Calming Items:** Feel free to bring your own comfort objects (a picture, a small fidget, plush toy, etc.). You can also use items from the quiet room or our 'calm kit'.

## If you start to feel overwhelmed

- It's completely okay to step away. Go to the Quiet spaces or even step outside into the fresh air for a few minutes, you can access this on Level 2
- Try some deep breathing or walking slowly, it can really help clear your head.
- If you need medical help or feel unsafe at any point, tell a staff member
- Remember you are not alone. We are here to help Lots of people at the conference might have similar needs. Don't worry about being judged – just use the tools and spaces we've set up to help yourself.

## Additional Support & Contacts

- **Buddy/Carer:** If possible, bring a friend or carer with you. They can help advocate for you, carry things, or just sit with you during busy times. (If your carer is not a paid attendee, they can join in for free; just let registration know.)
- **Event Team:** Look for volunteers in the foyer and session rooms. They have special badges and are there to help. You can ask them for directions, to repeat information, or even just a quiet chat.

- **Key Person:** Stuart Garland is the conference's Access Coordinator. You can email [stuart@volunteer.ie](mailto:stuart@volunteer.ie) or call, text or WhatsApp him on (087) 696 4020 if something's not working or you have a special need.



## Checklists

### Before You Arrive:

- Read this guide and the schedule. Note any sessions or crowds that might be challenging.
- Pack any medication, sunglasses, snacks, or sensory items you need. Bring an alarm or watch to help keep on your personal schedule.
- Plan your travel so you're not exhausted on arrival. If flying or taking train, schedule buffer time.

### At the Conference:

- Visit the Accessibility Help Desk at check-in to ask any questions or pick up aids (headphones, maps, etc.).
- Identify the Quiet Room (Level 2, Siege Suite) and remember you can use it anytime.
- Set reminders on your phone or watch for breaks and meals.
- Use the buddy system: team up with a friend if possible, and check on each other during breaks

### During Sessions:

- Sit where you feel most comfortable (near an exit if you need quick break).
- Use headphones or earplugs if loud noises become too much.
- It's okay to stand or move around quietly if that helps you focus.

## Information sessions

In advance of the conference two online sessions are offered for attendees to outline the day and show you videos of the building layout and explain the programme, these are for those with additional support needs or for those for whom it is their first time to attend.. These are take place online via Zoom on Monday 20 April at 11:00 and again at 19:00. An email will be sent for free registration, if you require assistance with this please let [stuart@volunteer.ie](mailto:stuart@volunteer.ie) know.

## Other items

- **Scholarships and bursaries:** The conference offers limited free or reduced-cost tickets for those with financial need (email [stuart@volunteer.ie](mailto:stuart@volunteer.ie) to apply).
- **Mother's/Nursing Room** A private space for nursing or quiet rest is available on Level 2
- **Captioning:** If interpreters or captioning is needed please let us know in advance.
- **Emergency Plan:** Beyond normal fire exits, think about emergency evacuation help for people who cannot use stairs easily. (The venue has lifts, but in a fire they shut off.)

All of the above is designed to make the National Volunteer Management Conference as friendly and stress-free as possible for everyone. If you have any ideas we didn't mention, please let us know – your input helps us improve!

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on social media with the  
hashtag #NVMC2026**

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