Access in the Making (AIM) Lab

Event Organization Protocol

Acknowledgement[1]

As we write our values and principles, we want to acknowledge in bold letters that it was the methodological work of **the Civic Laboratory for Environmental Action Research (CLEAR)** that has inspired and guided us throughout the process.[2] We are extremely grateful to CLEAR Lab for the incredible amount of work that they have done in how to run a feminist and anti-colonial lab,[3] and their generosity in sharing this know-how with others. **We cannot cite you and thank you enough.**

Citation

Inspired by CLEAR Lab's work, AIM Lab has worked on this document over almost a process of ten months (and we are still and will be working on it). This document is the result of *labour*, including doing research, collective conversations, and editing. This document is a research output. This document is *a publication*. If you quote, use, or in any way benefit from this document, cite it.

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[1] Please note that in our *Manifesto* and *Protocols*, we make the deliberate decision to use, not endnotes, *but footnotes*. In order to subvert the design hierarchy scripted into footnotes (which automatically decreases their font size vis-a-vis the font size of main text) we choose to use the same font size for both footnotes and the main body of the text, with the same line spacing. These design choices reflect our commitments to feminist ethics of citation. Through these choices, we seek to emphasize the shoulders we stand upon, and the various intellectual genealogies, activist, and artistic traditions that we draw from. Thank you, Annemarie Mol, Sara Ahmed, and Max Liboiron for teaching us about the importance of citations and the politics of footnotes (Mol, *The Body Multiple*; Ahmed, "Making Feminist Points,"; Liboiron, Pollution is Colonialism).

[2] CLEAR, *CLEAR Lab Book: A living manual of our values, guidelines, and protocols*.

[3] For methodological projects of the CLEAR Lab, see:

https://civiclaboratory.nl/methodological-projects/

As a lab committed to disability justice and feminist citational practices, we are especially concerned that the intellectual labour of marginalized folks (including BIPOC, disabled artists, activists, scholars) and those occupying precarious positions in the academia (graduate students, adjuncts, emerging scholars) are not properly (sometimes, never) recognized. Our own citational practices seek to dismantle that ignorance and erasure, and we hope that you, the reader, will do the same.

Values publication co-authorship

This publication emerged out of a series of numerous conversations within AIM as well as from a litany of members' own experiences in various academic and community spaces as well as activist and social movements. The writing of this manifesto was by and large produced by Raphaëlle Bessette-Viens, Roï Saade, and Sabrina Ward-Kimola in consultation with AIM's Steering Committee.

Event Protocol

This protocol[4] is designed to give a non-exhaustive reminder of what should be looked-out for when organizing an event at the AIM Lab. This includes issues regarding accessibility but also internal organization structures which favor horizontality and that are mindful of power dynamics.

General principles

1. Accessibility: Accessibility requires flexibility and accountability. When we talk about accessible events, we are referring to the need to reflect prior to the organization of an event on a series of questions and actions related to its scale (economical/geographical limits) and the human relationships (values and emotions) that we want to develop among organizers and attendees. In addition, it is important to take into account the environment in which it is going to be produced, the necessary material and energy resources required, as well as the practices that we want to generate.

2. In our commitment to "Nothing About Us Without Us", we wish to create the conditions for and support disabled people in hosting events.

3. We aim at being sensitive to power dynamics within events and event organization. We orient our intentions into creating safer and accountable spaces.

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[4] For further resources on event accessibility, see Sins Invalid, *Access Suggestions for Public Events*, and Dreisinger, Make Events Accessible: A disability primer for organizers.

4. We try to avoid or lessen the impacts of, what critical disability studies scholar Margaret Price calls, "kairotic spaces". Price defines a kairotic space as "the less formal, often unnoticed, areas of academe where knowledge is produced and power is exchanged".[5] This can include formal or informal discussions which happen in real-time, where impromptu communication is required involving a strong social element and where the stakes are high. These moments require participants to spontaneously perform knowledge which then may have consequences in terms of advancement.

   At the AIM Lab, in a perspective of enlarging accessibility which includes neurodiversity and mental health, we hope to minimize these kairotic spaces within and outside of academia, wherever our events will take place. This involves being explicit about the expected interactions within spaces (in-person, online, hybrid, synchronous and asynchronous) and avoiding creating spaces where advancement of individuals is the focus. This is facilitated by being explicit about scheduling, activities, and how participants are expected to contribute/participate (or not), by favoring an atmosphere where all comments or contributions to discussions are equally held as valuable, and by trying to hold more organized moments than impromptu ones.

5. We aim to work with groups that share our values (see Partnerships Protocol).

Contents of the Event Protocol

In consideration of the fact that access goes, not just into the time of the event, but also into its planning, actualization, and aftermath, we have divided our events protocol into five phases.

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[5] Price, *Mad at School,* 60.

1. Pre-event considerations (Access Audits, Equipment, Catering, Online access check)

2. Communication (Channels of communication, Promotion of access, Communication production, Communication plan, Access form for participants)

3. Organizing the event (Organization, Delegation of tasks, responsibilities and roles, List of support that should be hired)

4. During the event (Welcoming and orienting participants, Code of conduct)

5. Post-event (Cleaning, Loose-ends, Communication follow-ups)

1. PRE-EVENT ACCESS

All event considerations: Put time aside for access detailing and troubleshooting sessions of spaces, platforms and with all parties supporting and involved in the event access (interpreters, live captioners, etc.)

1.1.   Hybrid
1.1.1. Access audits of in-person space

- Form an access audit team of at least two AIM Lab members.
- As the access audit team, plan at least one visit to the event location to conduct the access audit, where good access points and barriers are identified. Think of possible solutions/alternatives.
- The access audits should focus not just on the event space but also its surroundings as well as how to get to/from there.
- Points to keep in mind during the access audits:
  - Is the event location accessible by public transportation? If so, identify which are the closest bus stops, metro, and train stations. Also indicate the price of tickets.

- o   Is the public transportation (metro station, train station, or bus) accessible itself? Where is the closest Transport adapté stop?

- o   Are there any open or closed areas to lock bikes? Are there any Bixi stations around?

- o   Is the entrance to the building, where the event is going to be held, accessible? Are there ramps at the main entrance? If not, is there another entrance with ramps? Are there push buttons at the entrance?

- o   Is the signage to the event building clear and readable? Does the signage have braille?

- o   Can attendees easily find the building and event space? Is additional signage needed?

- o   Is there enough free space for more than 3 or 4 wheelchairs to fit?

- o   Can the furniture (including chairs and tables) be moved around?

- o   Is there is fluorescent or flickering, buzzing light, throbbing light or sound? (to avoid)

- o   Are there strong odours or perfumes?

- o   Is there proper ventilation?

- o   Is there an appropriate area to change masks?

- o   Are the bathrooms accessible? Are there gender-neutral washrooms or is it possible to make the washrooms gender-neutral for the duration of the event?

- o   Is there a space available to create a quiet (low-sensory/chill) space?

1.1.2. Equipment

- ● Find, rent, borrow, or buy material that will be needed for accessibility such as microphones, translation devices, lights, recording equipment. Establish a team

or person responsible for managing this equipment, its set-up and return. Check first with Equipment Coordinators if these are available at AIM.

- Rehearse with speakers, including brief of working with live captioners and/or sign language interpreters.
- Prior to the event, send live captioners and/or sign language interpreters a document including the following information: the Land Acknowledgements that the host and presenters will do, along with the proper spelling and pronunciations of Indigenous words; b) any jargon that you will use in the event, their spelling and pronunciations; a) proper nouns, their spelling and pronunciations.
- Using the Owl
  - There should be a designated person for captioning located at the event.
  - ASL/LSQ interpreter located at the event, so that they can relay event context.
  - Transcription of the speaker.
  - More tech support
    - Live comment responder
    - In-person host
    - A few people for live tech troubleshooting.

1.1.3. **Catering**

- In the Access Survey (see 2.2. in this document), ask participants whether they have dietary restrictions and allergies. Organize the catering according to the access survey results.
- AIM commits to ordering its catering for public events from the caterers in Kahnawá:ke. As of September 2022, no caterer or provider is yet listed among

Concordia's approved caterers list, and this despite the university's Indigenous Directions Action Plan and its broader commitment to decolonization. We hope that AIM's commitment to working with Kahnawakeronon caterers will push the university for revisiting and revising its approved caterers list.

- For events within Concordia, work with Concordia Zero Waste Events. Use the form on their website (https://www.concordia.ca/about/sustainability/sustainability-initiatives/zero-waste/zero-waste-services/zero-waste-events.html) and book them in order to get help with the event. Zero Waste Events provide:
  - Reusable dishware, Waste bin set-ups (including compost and recycling)
  - Custom signage for bins that reflect the waste generated at your events
  - Volunteers to help your guests sort waste
  - Consultation on the packaging and merch provided at your event
  - Surplus food donation to local shelters
- Signs for all the food in English, French, Braille (French and English), delegated caterers to orally describe food if needed.
- Have an access support person stationed at each catering table.
- Water is always available, coffee, herbal tea.
- Flexible coffee/washroom breaks.
- Make sure there are plastic straws.

1.2. Online

- Scheduling and Time Zones: Be considerate of the scheduling participants/speakers who are in other time zones.
- Ensure the host platform is compatible with:
  - Screen readers,
  - Auto-captioning (or manual captioning functionality),
  - Joining by both computer and phone number,

- o Participation with all/either: visual, audio, text-based.

- Provide necessary tech information so that everyone is on the same page:

  - o Explain how participants can participate with the platform.

  - o When necessary, provide time slot before the event for troubleshooting with participants that will be using access features (ensure compatibilities).

  - o Have a point person during the meeting to troubleshoot issues that might come up during the event in relation to access needs.

- For audio describers, interpreters, captioning, speakers:

  - o Address any technical concerns or questions they might have.

  - o Do audio and visual testing (clarity, ample brightness, etc.).

  - o Ask if they have any (content-wise) interpretation and audio description questions.

  - o Ask presenters for a rough script of their presentation for interpreters and audio describers in advance. This will make their job much easier. Also provide the contact details of presenters, in case the interpreter/describer needs to clarify something with them in advance.

2. COMMUNICATION

2.1. Channels of communication

- Ensure to communicate through all existing channels of communication, and in multimodal ways (e-mail, newsletter, Facebook, twitter). (See Communication Protocol)

2.2. Access survey for participants

- An Access Survey Form should be sent to all registered participants long before the event. The form should ask whether the participant has any access needs that would impact their participation to the event.

- As you send this form, you might want to include a brief description of various access needs so that participants can keep their horizons open and be able to recognize and verbalize their access. For example, you might want to ask about any potential allergies and dietary restrictions, any light or chemical sensitivities, need for a quiet place, childcare, etc.

- Inquire on general access and welcoming, for example: "Is there anything else that could support you in feeling welcome in the space?"

- Keep in mind that the access survey is one part of doing access work. Access work is always ongoing, complicated and it can be difficult. Do not think that you are finished with accessibility, once you got the survey done. There might be other issues of access that will emerge on the spot and require you to be attendant, and careful to be able to notice and address them.

2.3. **Promotion of Access**

- Communicate in a friendly and calm non-aggressive tone.
- Be inviting, anti-elitist and community oriented.
- Use clear and transparent information in plain language.
- Consider language barriers and include translations when possible.
- Use screen-reader accessible websites.
- Include audio and image descriptions.
- Have captions for videos.

2.4. **Communication Production**

- Follow AIM Lab design guidelines for consistency and identification.
- Avoid call-to-action marketing command such as "Click here!", "Subscribe Now!" (See document on tone)

- Follow the WCAG compliance[6] for all online presence.
- Avoid visual hyper stimuli, flashing colors, rapidly flickering images in media content.
- No violent or disturbing content.
- Use disclaimers to alert viewers if necessary.
- Be explicit about location, dates, time and time zone, event program.
- Provide clear information about the amenities and their locations, and accessibility.
- Include detailed information in a pre-event guidebook for attendees. The guide might contain: Images and text about space and site accessibility, location map, transportation options, signs, sitting options, childcare facilities, screening, and organizers/artists.

2.5. **Communication Plan**

- Build core content of event, write event description.
- Send invitations to interested parties, groups database, create social media page/event, newsletter, locate and invite target audience, social seeding.
- Follow up with online registration. Send a reminder to registered participants.
- Schedule online event on Event Calendar, invite speakers as guests and set up confirmation emails.
- Include a way for people to contact you prior to the event in case they have questions or need further accommodation or need.
- Contact all event members, rather than just one delegate, keeping it inclusive.

3. ORGANIZATION OF THE EVENT

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[6] See: Web Accessibility Initiative, Web Content Accessibility Guidelines.
https://www.w3.org/WAI/WCAG21/quickref/

3.1. Organization

- Ideally, event organization should rely on a consensus-based model (see Consensus-Based Decision-Making Protocol) with relevant people (team members who have defined their roles as event contacts, anyone else who is going to be working at the event), as decisions will need to be made about various elements of the event (e.g., caterer, venue, date/time, rental companies etc.)
- It's important that everyone in the event team feels empowered to make suggestions; this integrates an ethic of not all the work falling on one person from the beginning.

3.2. Delegation of tasks, responsibilities and roles

- Distributing tasks and responsibilities is vital to ensuring that responsibilities do not repeatedly fall on the same people. It is important to avoid unwanted or imposed leadership situations, as well as situations that lead to work overload and burn out.
- All members will be given the opportunity to take on various roles as attention is brought to not assign tasks to individuals repeatedly. Of course, because of our membership's various skills and backgrounds, there are times when the same task may be repeatedly assigned to one individual.
- Common roles will likely include (and may not be mutually exclusive, depending on event size and number of people):

Hybrid

- o Host/questioner
- o Hospitality
- o Financial organizations
- o Communications

- o Chairs, bathroom-check, coat-check
- o Technical support
- o Facilitator for training and support sessions (giving interpreters and audio describers the down-low on how sessions will go)
- o Access support team for troubleshooting access needs
- o Contact person (both pre- and post- event)
- o Cleaning
- o Space auditor (someone to scope out the event space if it is new. The space auditory should bring a checklist *TBA,* possibly take photos of the space and send them to the communication team)

Online

- o Host/questioner
- o Communications
- o Technical support (a larger capacity than the in-person events)
- o Greeter, general assistance
- o Facilitator for training and support sessions (how does the online platform work?)
- o Access support for troubleshooting access needs
- o Contact person (both pre- and post- event)
- o Supportive/active listener available during/after an event

Hired support

Hybrid

- o Caterer
- o ASL/LSQ interpreter (for a list of interpreters, see events folder)
- o Live captioner (for a list of captioners, see events folder)
- o Audio describer (for a list of describers, see events folder)
- o Attendant care worker (includes support and active listening)

- o Augmented and alternative communication partner

- o Childcare (ask attendees in the access survey form if they require it)

Online

- o ASL/LSQ interpreter

- o Audio describer

- o Live captioner

- o Attendant care worker

4. DURING THE EVENT

4.1. Welcoming and Orienting participants

Hybrid

Explain where the following amenities are, and be transparent about the limitations of the space:

- Bathrooms

- Scent-zone and scent-free zones

- Quiet room

- Ramps/elevators if applicable

- ASL location/AD person/CC if applicable

- Locations of water/coffee/tea stations

- Locations of venue maps

- Fire escapes

- How to locate care workers and/or access support people (These people should be identified verbally routinely throughout the event.)

- Remind attendees of informed consent if there will be recordings. (This will be done by putting a sign at the entrance reminding audience members that the

event will be recorded, and the host will announce this as well.) Include an area of the audience for people who might not want to be recorded.

Online

- Keep speakers and interpreters pinned on Zoom.
- Provide participants with multiple channels and modes of communication so that they can chose the one that best fits their access needs. For example, on online platforms, allow people to use both the chat function and raise their hands.
- Person designated as host welcomes participants and reminds them of the "house-keeping" guidelines:

  o raise hand to speak,

  o do not speak over each other,

  o encourage people to use chat function (the host can make time to read these at the appropriate time),

  o mute yourself when not speaking.

4.2. Code of conduct for event participants:

- Wait for people to finish before speaking. Do not try to complete people's sentences. Keep in mind that people may talk at different paces and take longer to express themselves. Respect crip time, and let people articulate their ideas and thoughts in accordance with their access needs. Do not push for "wrapping up".
- For those who speak at a fast pace, please try to slow down in order to help sign language interpreters and live captioners. Interpreters and captioners rely on small breaks to catch up with what has been said and talking too fast would make their task very difficult.

- Before speaking, introduce yourself – e.g. "This is Prakash speaking..." and when finished speaking, indicate as such by saying "that is the end of my thought".
- Remember to mute/unmute yourself after/before speaking during online events.
- Give space to others who may not be talking as much as you.
- Set phones to silent/vibrate.
- Talk clearly into the mic and always use the mic. Do not assume that everybody can hear you even if you have a loud voice.
- Respect pronouns.
- Avoid ableist, racist, sexist, homophobic language.
- Provide a glossary in advance of any jargon or acronyms. Perhaps include examples of language that is encouraged for those who might not know certain words are now problematic.
- Ask people to use trigger warnings if bringing up difficult subjects (i.e., violence).
- Mention that there is someone available as a supportive or active listener in case people need emotional support or as an access need point person.
- For the Q&A:
  - Once the lecture/speaker ends their presentation, a moderator announces a 5-minute break for everyone to relax and have time to collect their thoughts.
  - Once we are ready for questions, the host will prioritize non-academic audiences, and then move onto the students, postdocs; and once this group is finished, we move onto adjuncts, non-tenured professors; and at the end, if there is time, we finish with tenured professors.

5. POST-EVENT

5.1. Hybrid

5.1.1. Cleaning

- Ask who would like to clean - organizing committee themselves clean up.

- Reminding people to properly dispose of garbage, compost, and recycling.[7]

- Be respectful of the space were in and leave it better than we found it.

- If there is any food left, make sure to distribute it to the conference team and people they know who might appreciate some catered food.

- Return loaned objects and rented equipment.

5.2. Online

5.2.1. Communication

- Sending email "Thank You's" to the people involved in the event.
- Also sending a "Thank You" notes to the people who attended and any extra information and/or recordings.
- If possible, send a short summary of takeaways or future action points.

5.2.2. Follow-ups

- Gather team notes.
- Do regular payments (stipend, honorarium, reimbursements, etc.) and follow up in order to make sure that everyone is paid on time. The follow-ups are particularly important because Concordia is quite slow in processing the payments on time.

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[7] See Zero Waste Concordia,

https://www.concordia.ca/about/sustainability/sustainability-initiatives/zero-waste.html

- Debrief with the organizing team and evaluate the event. Collectively address questions such as: what worked well, what needs further improvement, what did we forget, what lessons we learned, etc.
- Share opinions, insights and gained knowledge from experience.
- Create an online page about the event. Share photos, texts, recordings. Keep in mind that these resources will have both an archival and an asynchronous access function.

References

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