Engaging with disabled people

An event planning guide

Contents

Event planning checklist

The following checklists highlight things to consider when planning an engagement event involving disabled people.

1. Arranging the event	Additional notes
Check the date against major religious festivals and holidays	– Check interfaith calendars for key religious holidays. Christian holidays will largely coincide with bank holidays (events in weeks containing bank holidays usually have a lower turnout) and you should also consider other religious holidays that may prevent someone from attending, for example, Yom Kippur or Ramadan. Check the date against school term times (where applicable).
Check that the timing is likely to be suitable for most stakeholders	– Consider times that may be awkward for workers, families, etc. At least two events at different times will be helpful. Avoid early starts and peak travel times.
Provide the contact details and deadline date for requesting reasonable adjustments	– Consider how to share information in line with data protection legislation. – Provide a deadline date, as it can be very difficult to find communication professionals, such as British Sign Language interpreters, at the last minute
Provide the contact details and deadline date for dietary needs	– Label any food, including pork products, and segregate meat from vegetarian items. If a nut allergy is advised, you may prefer to make up a separate plate even if nut-free products have been requested.
Agree the briefing with anyone presenting or chairing	– Arrange a briefing sheet or meeting to ensure appropriate language, description of any images, and how to time for additional support needs such as interpreters. Doing this early will help you to create a realistic timetable. – Stress the importance of not over-running. People may rely on medication, food or support needs, so meetings that over-run can cause distress.

1. Arranging the event	Additional notes
Agree the deadline dates for materials with presenters	– Warn anyone presenting that materials may need to be provided well in advance so they can be produced in alternative formats.
Make sure that programme timing allows for support needs	– It's important to allow enough time for support needs, including translation and language support services, interpretation of tactile materials, and longer breaks to allow for physical access needs to toilets, for example.
Provisionally book communication support	– Remember that sign language interpreters need regular rests, so you may need to book two interpreters to cover longer events (you may also need lipspeakers).

2. Finding a venue – the essentials	Additional notes
Location	– If you have a venue that is already familiar to consultees, this would be helpful. Is there an option to take the consultation nearer to their location? For example, if you want feedback from existing tenants in one location, there may be a community hall you could use to minimise inconvenience and simplify travel planning.
Easy to reach by public transport	– Publicise telephone numbers for taxis, as well as public transport information for getting to the venue.
Accessible parking	– Check that there is level parking nearby and accessible/ Blue Badge bays within 50 metres (provide a link to the Blue Badge map if possible).
Vehicle drop-off available close to the building	– Typically, within 50 metres is acceptable.
Step-free access and egress (level, ramped or lift access)	– Ramps should be no steeper than 1:12.
Enough space available inside the meeting area	– Ensure routes to and from the room are wide enough. Main routes/aisles should be at least 1200mm wide, but preferably 1500mm wide. Aisles to tables should be at least 1m wide, but preferably 1200mm. – Wheelchair users will welcome being given a choice of where to sit.
Lift access, if required	– Check lifts are at least 1100x1400mm internal size.
Accessible toilets are suitable	– Some will need to be large enough for a wheelchair user (typically 1500x2200mm, although 1500x2000mm may be manageable, or 1700x2200mm for exemplary access). If you have a venue with a Changing Places toilet as well, that would be beneficial.
Suitable refreshments available	– It is usually simpler to provide drinks only (dairy-free alternatives to cow's milk could be offered if providing hot drinks). – If providing a lunch a simple buffet is best, but consider Halal, vegan, gluten free and other dietary requirements, with special attention to any allergies notified.

2. Finding a venue – the essentials	Additional notes
Staff fully trained	– Disability equality and deaf awareness training for venue reception and all presenters and support staff.
Presentation	– If using PowerPoint, is the screen visible for everyone (that is, large enough)?
Sufficient light levels	– Does the main room have even lighting (without any flicker) that is good enough for reading (at least 350 lux?)
Sufficient power points	– Make sure there are enough power points for charging specialist equipment.
Hearing enhancement systems available and working	– Ask a hearing aid wearer to check it is working or invest in a testing kit – there is a wide variety on the market.
A roving microphone for questions	– If this is not available, then make sure all presenters and the chairperson understand the importance of repeating questions and getting feedback from the consultees.
Robust and safe fire evacuation for everyone	– Entry level rooms are preferred as they make fire evacuation simple. If you choose an upper floor level, ask to see their fire procedures for evacuating anyone who is unable to use the stairs. Avoid choosing a space below ground unless there is a suitable lift for use in a fire.

3. Publicising	Additional notes
Printed materials – leaflets and posters following accessibility principles **(see page 19 for more information on alternative formats)**	– Are the invitations in a minimum of 12 point sans serif font (ideally 14 or 16 point)?
Maps and directions provided	– Maps should be supplemented with easy read directions from nearest transport links. Provide a phone number for directions on the day in case of difficulty.
Electronic mailshots by email	– Embed the details in the emails as well as using attachments.
Accessible information on a website	– An accessible website with clear information on travel options and facilities at the event.
Direct invitations sent to established user groups	– Any existing access group in the area is the obvious first point-of-call. Local charities or representative groups for medical conditions and disabilities will be able to disseminate your request for consultees if you would like more people.
Contact number and email for enquiries provided	– Nothing is better than a reassuring voice on the end of the phone when you are lost, late or need to give notice of a last minute cancellation (whether a presenter or a consultee).
Social media used for wider reach – for example, Twitter, LinkedIn and Facebook	– Try all three as they often reach different audiences. LinkedIn is more for a professional audience, but will of course capture people working in the area.

4. Final preparations	Additional notes
Have materials ready to make temporary instructions and signs	– A few sheets of cream card, large black marker pens, Blu Tack and scissors.
Take a magnifier	– A handheld magnifier or a smartphone app, such as Magnifier, can help with last-minute requests for larger print documents.
Take a task light	– A portable, battery-operated LED reading light can make all the difference to people with a visual impairment.
If name badges are to be worn, have different options for display	– Labels can mark some clothing items and not everyone can manage a clip or pin – consider having a lanyard available or simply allowing someone to display their name on the table instead of wearing it.
Immediately on arrival, check that any essential lifts are working	– A back-up fast call-out service for repairs may be justified.
Can additional parking be provided if needed?	– Have plastic bollards available, or temporary notices, to reserve additional parking bays.
A reminder sheet for presenters to describe images and repeat questions using the microphone	– More information is provided in the facilitators' guide on page 12.
People to help facilitate the event	– You can never have too many helpers. They will need to be trained in disability equality and awareness, as well as being natural communicators. – Tasks for facilitators include managing parking, arrival and refreshments, as well as helping to explain tactile displays.
Provide alternative formats for handouts	– If none are requested, have at least one large print version. An easy read version may also be helpful, if available. Braille is usually only provided if requested in advance.

4. Final preparations	Additional notes
Ensure displays and drawings are suitable for all	– Use large enough fonts and provide tactile versions if requested in advance. – Take some tactile labelling, also known as 'Bumpons', to assist those with visual impairments.
Portable hearing enhancement system	– Consider having a portable wireless system (radio or infrared) as a backup in case of any issues.
Refreshments – dietary options provided and food easy to manage	– Make sure you have catered for dietary needs. – Provide straws for drinks, finger foods for easy management, and make sure there are people on hand to help.
Assistance dogs	– You will need to provide a water bowl for assistance dogs, and find out in advance arrangements for dog relief areas/spending facilities nearby.
Telephone numbers for taxis and public transport information for getting home	– Ensure details of accessible transport are available, including licensed taxis who are reliably known to welcome wheelchair users and people with assistance dogs.

5. On the day	Additional notes
Arrive in good time	– Aim to arrive one hour ahead to check arrangements. – Have someone available to check that anyone arriving early can enter and be seated. – If it's a hot day, consider opening the windows and door to freshen the room while waiting for people to arrive (unless the room is air conditioned). – If possible, try to identify a quiet area where people could go if they need to.
Furniture layout allows suitable circulation for everyone	– If expecting wheelchair users, ensure a minimum of 1200mm in front of the table.
Ensure the tables and desks are suitable for everyone	– A minimum 700mm under table height is recommended for wheelchair users. Have at least one lap tray for a wheelchair user in case of any issues.
Ensure there is a mix of seating styles	– Seat heights of 450mm plus are preferred, some with arm supports and, typically, most with back supports. Adjustable height and operator chairs are best for communication support providers, especially speech-to-text who will also welcome a table. A few cushions may be welcomed, depending upon the time spent sitting down.
Communication support positions	– Reserve or arrange places at the front of the room for BSL interpreters and lipspeakers. Speech-to-text operators may prefer to be seated elsewhere so always check.
Seats reserved for people using communication support and their providers	– Consider seat reservations near the front for people using BSL interpreters and palantypists, and some seats with larger spaces for people with assistance dogs and wheelchair users.
Ensure any seat reservations include carers/assistants where applicable	– Where people have pre-booked for support assistants/carers, reserve pairs of seats so that they can be seated together.
A roving microphone for questions	– Ask presenters to repeat all questions and feedback if this cannot be provided.
Feedback	– Encourage feedback on the consultation process – how could this be improved for future events? A feedback form that can be taken away or filled in online may be welcomed.

Facilitator's guide

Chairperson briefing	Additional notes
Ensure any directions for toilets include the accessible provision	– If you have several wheelchair users present and there is only one accessible toilet, extra time may be needed for breaks.
Ensure any instructions for fire evacuation include information for disabled people	– The host organisation should advise in advance on their fire safety arrangements for people requiring assistance (see also the event planning checklist).
Ask communication support about break needs before the start	– Typically if there are two BSL interpreters they will rotate every 20 minutes or so. Usually, you will not need to stop the meeting for this – find out before the meeting starts.
Ask if anyone needs the loop system before the meeting starts	– Always ensure hearing enhancement technology is switched on and working before the event starts, no matter how unimportant the information seems.
Every professional should be identified by name and role	– Ensure everyone is introduced verbally and that facilitators wear badges.
Depending on the size of the group, ask presenters to repeat all questions if a roving microphone is not provided	– It is also helpful for the chairperson to sum up each point for clarity.
Control the timing	– People may rely on medication, food or support needs at certain times, so meetings that run over can cause distress. Check the contingency arrangements for extending the session, and always ask participants if the time between breaks extends beyond 5–10 minutes if they are happy to continue.

Chairperson briefing	Additional notes
Are timed agendas the answer?	– Everyone needs to be given the opportunity to participate and sometimes this takes longer, or less time, than expected. A timed agenda can help a chairperson to pull the situation back and readily see when things are slipping, which is helpful in taking corrective action.
Encourage everyone to have their say.	– Some participants may dominate the conversation, but quieter members with a worthwhile contribution may need a specific window and invitation to feel comfortable to speak out. At the end of any public consultation, always give options for feeding back at a later point, and provide the deadline for this, in case someone has not had a chance to speak or thinks of something later.

Presenters' briefing	Additional notes
Facilitating lip reading	– Dangling earrings, zigzag patterned ties and loud graphic prints can make lip-reading more difficult. Trim back moustaches, avoid glossy lipstick and try not to talk with your hands over your mouth.
Practice your timing and include at least 20 per cent contingency time.	– Always time your delivery before the event, allowing extra time for explanations, questions and interpretation. It's not uncommon for a communications professional to ask a presenter to slow down or repeat something.
Presenting speed	– Aim to speak at your usual speed unless you have a strong accent or your normal pace is very fast. Speaking more slowly will help everyone, including people with a hearing impairment. Do not raise your voice considerably or over-enunciate, as this distorts the sound and affects your lip pattern, making it harder for people with a hearing impairment.
Over-running	– It is often critical not to over-run on timing. People may rely on medication, food or support needs at certain times, so meetings that over-run can cause distress. It's tempting to speed up when you are running out of time, instead try to simplify your message. – If extra time is needed, you or the chairperson should check with consultees whether it is acceptable to continue and, if so, for how long.
Have a clear structure	– This also helps interpreters to know when the subject is changing. Colour coding your presentation and using clear headings may help to present complex information in a manageable way. Summarise at the end.

Presenters' briefing	Additional notes
Explain key terms at the start or when first mentioned	– There are likely to be some policy or technical terms that the group may not have heard before. Explaining these quickly as they crop up will be helpful to some attendees.
Maps, charts and plans	– Don't assume everyone will readily understand maps, charts and plans – explain them, highlighting key areas. This helps everyone, including people with a visual impairment or learning disability.
Describe any photographs or images	– Try to do this as naturally as possible and only for images that form a key part of the presentation. For example, logos and graphics intended to brighten up a slide do not need to be described, a photo of the new head of housing services would be mentioned as exactly that, but an image of a housing layout would be explained in more detail including, if relevant, the relationship and shape of rooms if they are important.
Alternative formats	– Be ready to provide alternative formats for any handouts. You may receive requests for large print (printing one slide per page should suffice) or, rarely, Braille – you may need to allow a week to have this prepared. Tactile drawings can be a common request for people who are blind or have a visual impairment and are attending a consultation on a development. These can be produced individually using a mixture of embosser pens (Tactimark), tactile labels (Bumpons), self-adhesive Velcro and felt or Braille tape (Dymo), or can be produced using swell paper by a professional provider if you have a two-week window to send plans away for this process. Images can also be printed onto Zytex2 Swell Paper to create tactile diagrams. More information about Zytex2 Swell Paper can be found online.

Easy capacity-building suggestions for access groups

Access groups often need help to become established. They may have a group of willing volunteers, but many groups initially lack financial support for set up or lack knowledge on how to access the consultation process.

Here are some ways in which you can support an existing or new group to become sustainable and help to create a valuable resource for the future. Some of these ideas are very low cost; affordable even to small councils or housing services providers:

– Give professional advice on the structure and mission for a new group.

– Provide free access to a room in a community space or council building to hold regular meetings.

– Give support with administration of the meeting – for example, a secretary to take minutes or someone to record finances, or organise refreshments on the day.

– Invite members to attend some council training sessions on policy, disability equality and awareness or equality impact assessments.

– Provide financial help for running the group.

– Give mentoring in protocol and etiquette at meetings.

– Provide training in reading and understanding drawings or policy documents.

– Give online or physical access to a pool of useful documents, such as the local plan, policies and national design standards (these could perhaps be on a portal of the council's website).

– Alert the group to opportunities for grants or sponsorship.

– Help the group to contact other groups over regional or national issues.

– Share resources or contacts for easy read and other alternative format suppliers/materials.

Glossary of alternative formats

Audio description – audio description is typically available for films. However, in a live event a presenter may give a description of PowerPoint images or displays for the benefit of people who are blind or partially sighted, prior to discussing in further detail.

Braille – embossed text created from symbols formed by patterns of raised dots. Diagrams and illustrations are not readily converted into braille but can be annotated. Tactile plans usually include raised lines with embossed shapes to indicate well-known features.

British Sign Language (BSL) – BSL is a language that uses visual gestures to translate speech for deaf people.

Deafblind interpretation – a deafblind interpreter will communicate with a deafblind person using the deafblind manual alphabet and the block alphabet.

Easy read – an alternative format for people with learning difficulties. This is typically written in very easy-to-understand language, using short sentences avoiding difficult words, and illustrated with pictures for key points.

Lipspeaker – a lipspeaker conveys the speaker's message to a deaf person or a person with a hearing impairment using unvoiced speech supported by gesture and facial expressions. A lipspeaker can also support the message using finger spelling.

Speech-to-text reporter (STTR) or palantypist – the STTR uses a palantype or stenograph machine to type a verbatim report of what is being said and the text appears on a screen.

Subtitles – subtitles are usually displayed at the bottom of a video and describe what is being said.

Textphone – a telephone, or a machine connected to a telephone, which has a keyboard and screen. A deaf person communicates through an operator (Typetalk – a national telephone relay service run by the Royal National Institute for Deaf People).

Useful contacts for alternative formats:

Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB)
www.rnib.org.uk
Tel: RNIB Helpline 0303 123 9999

Deafblind UK
www.deafblind.org.uk
Tel: 01733 358100 (voice and text calls)

Communicating with deaf people
www.signature.org.uk

Factsheet – hearing enhancement systems

There are over 11 million people with hearing impairments in the UK, many of whom can benefit from appropriate hearing enhancement systems. There are four types of system. Appropriate signage advising the public of the availability of the loop system should be displayed clearly, otherwise a hearing aid wearer will not know to use the 'T' switch and will not benefit from the amplification available.

1. Induction loop

Loop systems allow hearing aid users to listen to a single sound source without any background noise. They can be fixed or portable. A loop system comprises a microphone, amplifier and loop of wire. They only work in conjunction with a hearing aid fitted with and switched to the telecoil or 'T' position. The microphones should be positioned near to the amplifier.

Counter loops enhance two-way communication at reception desks, service counters, checkouts and tills. They are usually a mains-powered fixed installation with two microphones, one either side of the counter.

Portable table-top loops are suitable for one-to-one discussions or small group meetings – placed on a table, they relay sound to a hearing aid user up to one metre away.

Conference folder/clipboard loops are suitable for small group meetings. These battery-operated, portable aids can be loaned out to hearing aid users.

2. Radio systems

Radio systems can be completely portable and are commonly used in learning environments and museums – typically, the presenter/trainer wears a transmitter and moves around the space describing exhibits to visitors wearing receivers. The radio signal can usually be received up to a distance of 60 metres.

3. Infrared systems

Infrared systems are commonly used in multi-screen cinemas, theatres and lecture rooms, where it is convenient for visitors to borrow headsets from a central source. A person with a hearing impairment or someone who wishes to benefit from simultaneous voiceover, such as translation or audio description, can use an infrared system by wearing an infrared headset. Alternatively, the infrared receiver can be coupled to a person's own hearing aid by means of a small induction loop worn around the neck. Because infrared systems are based on light and operate at different frequencies, sound cannot be picked up outside the room in which the infrared signals are generated.

4. Soundfield systems

Soundfield systems raise the level of the speaker's voice and allow complete freedom of movement. Soundfield amplification is extremely beneficial in school environments, to assist a mixed class of children with and without hearing impairments.

Contacts

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