

Making Events Accessible

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If you are running a public event these are some ideas to help make it more accessible to people with disabilities.

Why bother?

Well apart from the legal and ethical issues of excluding the 20% of the population that have disabilities there is the hard money argument. People with disabilities rarely attend events by themselves – they come with family, friends, and carers. So you aren't turning one person away, you are turning away a group of paying customers.

Because the built environment and events are often so inaccessible, if you make the effort to ensure your event is accessible people with disabilities will not only come, they will become loyal repeat customers. They will recommend your event to their friends and families who also have access needs, and they will also become loyal customers.

Finally if your organisation or event has any sort of mission statement that states that you wish to serve the whole community with equality, I can assure you that these statements ring very hollow if you organise an event that is inaccessible to people with disabilities. And this has the potential to be a PR disaster.

Key Impairments to Consider

The four key types of disabilities you need to ensure your event caters for are as follows;

1. Visual impairment
2. Hearing impairment
3. Mobility impairment
4. Cognitive, neurodiversity and mental health issues (e.g. dementia, autism, anxiety)

Consultation with people with expertise by experience of these issues will help ensure your event is as accessible as possible. It is accepted that not all accommodations will be possible, but advice from experts will allow the compromises to be the best possible. UEA's Access All Areas team is willing to help facilitate this; k.deane@uea.ac.uk

Staff Training

Obviously you may have visitors to your event that have impairments not covered by these four groups, but good staff training and attitudes will likely be able to deal with anything unexpected. Disability confidence training for your staff and volunteers is strongly recommended. Tom Fadden can provide tailored training for your event team; tom@purplereach.co.uk

Advertising your event

- Make sure your web pages are accessible – can people change the font, its size and contrast?
- Are your web pages compatible with text to speech software?
- Do any videos have subtitles and/or transcripts?
- Is there clear information about accessibility for your event? It doesn't need to be all on the front page of the website – but if you can click on an obvious Access Point on the front page and access more detailed info behind that. People with disabilities need huge amounts of info and pictures of venue, toilets, descriptions of events and what to expect, transport options and parking, food, etc. etc.
- If you are offering discounts for people with disability and/or their carers, how do people get these? What sort of proof do you require?
- Is your event reviewed on Euan's Guide or Changing Places websites?
(<https://www.euansguide.com/> and <http://www.changing-places.org/>)

Accessing Services and Proofs of Disability

Queueing and security

It is helpful if people with disabilities can be allowed to access the venue ahead of crowds. Have someone check queues for those with obvious disabilities and let them enter first. Irrespective of when they arrive people with disabilities should be asked if they need assistance identifying their seating area, toilets, fire exits etc.

If you have security checks of bags, ensure staff training to allow variances on the usual rules where needed. For example people with diabetes may need to carry food or drink, people may need to carry medications (and this may include injectable medications) and need water to wash them down. And of course this also applies to no eating or drinking rules which need to be waived where it's a medical necessity.

If you think it would be helpful to identify people with additional needs but whose disabilities are invisible, then you can offer them a specifically coloured lanyard or name badge or ticket to notify staff that they might need more assistance. Highlight this option in the ticket booking system and this allows people the choice as to whether they wish to be identified or not.

Tickets

Having a disability is expensive. Discounted tickets are really important to improve financial access to your event. For people that have to have a carer with them in order to access the event, it is essential that carer tickets are free.

Consider carefully what proof you need to ensure that these discounts are available appropriately. Yes, you need to make sure no-one is freeloading, but you also need to make sure the proof required isn't too onerous – or costs more than a stamp to provide. And you will need to ensure your Data Protection processes are up to the task of handling what can be sensitive information.

Parking

What sort of proof do you need for using accessible parking bays?

How much accessible parking do you have, do you know of nearby?

Can you temporarily create more spaces for the event?

Assistance Dogs

What rules are you going to have for assistance dogs – how do they prove their status?

Have you considered providing water bowls for assistance dogs – and an area close by where they can relieve themselves and suitable bins for doggie bags?

Getting Around your Venue

Signage

Have you considered signage? – Symbols and words are best. Braille can be helpful but not essential (very few VIPs read braille).

Maps which highlight ramps, powered doors, accessible toilets etc are essential.

Mobility access

Have you had a wheelchair user roll around your venue to show you where access needs to be improved?

Have you considered providing temporary ramps over short sets of steps?

Are your lifts in working order? Is it clear how to work the alarm system? Do you have a mirror in the lift to aid reversing out?

Space and furniture

Give a lot of space between tables/chairs/etc. for wheelchair users – if you get a lot of us in a room we take up a lot of space – and too much furniture can make you stuck in one place.

Consider having benches/chairs in areas where people can rest between events.

Consider the design of these chairs. Are they light enough to move? Do some have arm rests?

Key Facilities

Lighting

Lighting levels – consider your VIPs and Deaf audience in particular – can they see the action/ read lips/ see the BSL translator clearly enough?

Sound

British Sign Language (BSL) translators should be provided where relevant for your event.

We can recommend Ensign Interpreting, a BSL interpreting service run by deaf professionals; <http://www.ensigninterpreting.co.uk>. info@ensigninterpreting.co.uk

All live videos should have sub-titles.

Provide hearing loops and/or portable hearing loops in key locations e.g. reception desks, discussion venues.

Toilets

Toilets can make or break an event for someone with disabilities. Without suitable provision visitors with certain impairments will just not come, or only visit for a short time.

Make sure any accessible toilets you have are;

- Well sign posted. (Consider using signs that highlight that people with invisible disabilities may need to use accessible toilets).
- Tell people if the transfer is to the right or left hand side
- Are clean, and inspected regularly
- Have no clutter in them e.g. cleaning materials, spare chairs, baby changing tables
- Have bins suitable to accommodate incontinence pads
- Have red alarm cords that reach the floor and work. (Euan's guide can provide free cards to hang on the cord that tell people they need to hang freely which reduces the chance of them being tied up <https://www.euansguide.com/news/red-cord-card/>)

Have you considered providing a Changing Place – an accessible toilet with a hoist and bench? If you don't have one can you consider hiring a mobile one? Makes the event hugely more accessible to those with more severe disabilities. And if you do have one, have you put it on the Changing Places web site? <http://www.changing-places.org/>

Food

Have a care to dietary needs with catering – cross contamination is a pest and can be very harmful – do your caterers know how to manage keeping food nut/dairy/gluten free etc?

Is the signage clear enough about food content and common allergens? Do the food vendors have information on all of the content of their food in a format that is usable by the public?

How can customers pay for their food? Are the counters low enough for wheelchair users?

Do the card readers have extension cables so they can be reached?

Can you provide facilities to warm baby food, or pureed food?

Can you provide water bowls for assistance dogs?

Can tables and chairs accommodate wheelchair users? Can they be moved around? Is there enough space between them?

Quiet Rooms

A quiet room for people to lie down, have a chill out break can be essential. Cushions, chairs, sofas, and suitable security in the room (e.g. CCTV) are helpful.

Alternative Access Options

Have you considered livestreaming as much of the event as possible? Helps ensure access to those for whom travel/crowds/fatigue are problematic. Can you provide videos of the event with transcripts afterwards?

Have you considered “relaxed” performances – where it is expected that the audience may be talking, stimming, moving around etc. The Theatre Royal do these sorts of events and so may be able to offer advice on how to do them and advertise them - Matthew Piper is their expert on this m.piper@theatreroyalnorwich.co.uk

Safety and Fire

Have you had a conversation with fire safety about the maximum number of wheelchair users in a given space? And whether there might be some solutions for this – evacuation chairs (and trained staff), extra exits etc. etc.

Also have you considered how to let someone with hearing loss know a fire alarm is going off?

Are any lifts, platforms etc. suitable for the weight of wheelchairs?

Will any constructions withstand being accidentally hit by a wheelchair or mobility scooter?

Do your staff know how to respond to first aid issues when associated with disability? E.g. responding appropriately to an epileptic fit (<https://www.epilepsy.org.uk/info/firstaid>).