Planning for inclusion

It's never too late to start

When you're putting together a public engagement activity it can feel like there is a never-ending list of things to think about, inclusion being one of them. The good news is that whilst early planning is encouraged, it is never too late to start building inclusive practices into your engagement work.

No public engagement activity is ever inclusive of all people at all times, and acknowledging this is the first step towards a more inclusive way of doing public engagement. If we try to create a one-size-fits-all activity, then it can be overwhelming to try and pre-empt everyone's needs. The best place to start is to think about your target audience and shape your activity to them, and to work with them to support their access where you can. Your audience's needs and preferences should shape everything from the partners you work with to the venue you choose. The resource 'Focusing On Your Audience' is also full of helpful advice and guidance.

Communication is key

Good communication is at the heart of inclusion, so here are some points to consider:

- Any **access information** you have in advance should be included in your activity's listing.

- Invite attendees to let you know if they have any **access needs**; include a question on your booking form, a sentence on your website listing and information on flyers.

- Make sure that there are **obvious contact details** for you and your organising team.

- Ensure your contact **email or phone is monitored regularly** and has a reasonable turn-around time for responses.

- Let anyone who contacts you know **how long it will take for them to get a response**.

- Remember that if someone has bothered to contact you about access then **they really want to come**, and they may be worried about whether they can or not.

- Using a **code of conduct** for activities is one way of helping to keep everyone on the same page.

It can be easy to assume that access needs are all about physical or financial accessibility, but mental health and safety management are also key considerations for many. Certain topics or speakers may raise concerns for some potential audience members. If there are any additional details about your content, how discussions will be managed, and your activity layout and venue facilities that you can share in advance, this can help individuals plan their attendance and their own safety.

Resources matter

Some of this is going to need resources, so planning them in can really help. Some essentials to consider are:

- Having a **designated person to handle access requests**, ahead of the activity and on the day. This might be a task allocated to a colleague or a volunteer.
- Working with your venue to **check what security there will be** at the activity. This can be particularly important for groups who do not regularly use the venue; we want them to feel welcome. It can be useful to send a briefing to the venue in advance.

- Making sure your **venue is considered accessible**, e.g. meeting minimum requirements that venues should be step-free and have accessible toilets.
- For online activities, checking if there is a clear **preferred platform** by your target audience (asking your cultural and community partners can be helpful here). Make sure platforms are free and easy to access for attendees as well as user friendly e.g. visual busyness, button layout.

- Having trained **facilitators can be essential** to navigating topics that could potentially cause harm or create divisive conversations.
- Getting **the right contributors**. If your activity is about specific groups of people, it shouldn't happen without those groups being involved as speakers and partners.

- Bringing in **interpreters** in different languages or for sign language, or **have captioning**. There are some council and charity funding pots that can help with this, but budgeting it in from the beginning can help.
- Planning to **have take-aways** from your activity that people can engage with at their own pace e.g., videos, podcasts, magazines etc.

Top tip: Take time to reflect

Just like it is never too late to start, it's also never too early to reflect on how you could do better.

Is there a particular type of inclusion you don't know much about?

- Could you bring in an expert to consult with?
- Is there an issue someone has raised that you'd like to make sure doesn't come up again?
- Could you add an agenda item to your planning meetings from this point forward?
- Could you attend any training to better understand the needs of your audience?

Taking a little time on a regular basis to touch base with your organising team on what access issues are emerging, what learning you have done, and how your activities are being shaped by this will be helpful to all of you as your activity draws nearer.

Where to start

Not sure where to start? Try considering the key points below as your activity takes shape. Also, check in with team members and ask your contributors or collaborators if they can see any inclusion issues you might not have identified yet. Doing a risk assessment for your activity will also help to think through these considerations.

Physical considerations	Notes
Does the venue have step-free access? Check for lifts, ramps, and whether corridors and doors are wide enough for a motorised chair or crutches.	
If you have seating, is there room to get up and move around if needed? Are there a variety of seats for people who need arms/ no arms/ back rests?	
If your activity is mobile, are there options for those with limited mobility, different amounts of control over movement, or different energy levels?	
For activities outside or in multiple locations, does your route have wheelchair or scooter access? Can you provide a map and idea of the terrain in advance?	
Are there t-loops for hearing aid users? Do you need to provide captions or a BSL interpreter?	
Does the venue have plenty of toilets, including accessible and gender neutral ones?	
Are there gender neutral baby changing facilities?	
Are there quiet spaces for prayer or for calm time?	
Is there somewhere for breastmilk pumping or breastfeeding without being disturbed?	
Is there visible, easily understood signage in your venue? Can you provide directions and instructions in advance for those using screen readers or being assisted in attending?	
Does your venue have reasonable rules around food and drink access?	

Online considerations	Notes
Are there clear instructions on how to access the activity and a plan for sending them to attendees?	
Are you planning to use technology that your target audience has access to?	
Are you sending out postal packs? Don't assume attendees have equipment/materials.	
How will the audience interact with you? Are you using chat, reaction functions or break out rooms? Is someone monitoring behaviour in these places?	
Should cameras and microphones be on or off?	
Have you scheduled in breaks? Is someone making sure everyone sticks to time?	

Look and feel	Notes
Are you using captions? Are you recording it?	
Check current guidelines for design and audio access.	
Do your images/examples include diverse people?	
Do your scripts describe anything that's being seen by the audience?	
Is your language gendered? Does the language you use take into consideration gender, race, age, LGBTQ+ status, disability?	
Do you give instructions for making additional access requests or using access facilities?	
Are you working with a cultural or community partner in advance to ensure all your instructions make sense to your audience?	

You and your team	Notes
Do you have what you need? Take care of yourself and your team too!	
Does your team have any access needs? Consider food, breaks, ease of access to spaces and equipment, help to move things, time to set up and take down.	

The original version of this document was produced with consultant Charlotte Thorley.