

Guidance for Inclusive Events 10 Point Guide to Inclusive Events

Introduction

Creating an inclusive event is not just about ensuring accessibility on the day - it requires embedding inclusivity into every stage of the planning process. From the initial concept to post event feedback, inclusivity must be considered to ensure that all attendees feel welcomed, valued, and able to participate fully. This means considering accessibility, representation, faith, cultural needs, and diverse requirements at every step.

Each event is unique, and the nature, participants, and purpose of the event must be considered when designing an inclusive experience. There is no one size fits all approach, every event should be considered to ensure that its specific audience and objectives are reflected in the inclusivity measures adopted.

An inclusive event benefits everyone by fostering engagement, creating a sense of belonging, and encouraging diverse perspectives. This guide provides a structured approach to making events more inclusive, ensuring that no one is unintentionally excluded due to physical, cultural, or logistical barriers. Below is a comprehensive 10-point framework to help create an environment where all individuals, regardless of background, can engage meaningfully and comfortably.

1. Accessibility Comes First

Inclusivity should be a priority from the outset. Consider how both physical and virtual spaces can accommodate all attendees.

- Provide hybrid event options for remote participation.
- Ensure venues are wheelchair accessible and have step free access.
- Provide clear details about access from the event management in advance, such as nearby accessible parking and transport infrastructure, routes through the building to the event space, how a support worker such as a BSL interpreter can access the venue. This will help people with mobility and sensory impairments know what to expect in advance. It will also provide some reassurance for people who are neuro-diverse about what to expect.
- Communicate accessibility provisions in advance and ask about any additional requirements. Make sure someone is allocated to follow each response up.
- Have a robust system to track, implement, and follow up on requested adjustments to ensure they are met.
- Gather specific requirements regarding reasonable adjustments, such as seating arrangements, assistive technology, dietary, or mobility support.
- Consider a full range of transport options (walking and cycling routes, public transport, and private parking).
- Provision for carers/advocates to attend – is funding available for caring responsibility, travel costs etc?
- Offer wayfinding support in advance, including clear entrance/exit instructions.
- Check if there is an accessible car park nearby.
- Provide cycle storage options.
- Make sure a copy of the agenda is available in advance for participants to plan their attendance and engagement. Ensure you have comfort breaks every two hours or so (minimum 10 minutes breaks)

2. Safe Spaces and Quiet Areas

Create designated spaces where attendees can step away from busy environments.

- Provide separate areas for private phone calls and quiet reflection.
- Establish safe spaces for individuals who may need emotional or sensory support.
- Clearly communicate policies and reporting procedures for addressing discriminatory or inappropriate behaviour.
- Talk to the event space managers about washroom facilities and emergency egress so you can be clear that all participants can safely exit if required. Let everyone know what options are available at the beginning of the day and in the paperwork provided.
- If you are providing food or offering a space to eat, make sure the space is conducive to socialising together and is accessible to all.

3. Representation Matters

Diverse representation among speakers, panel members, and event staff promotes inclusivity.

- Aim for an equitable gender balance on panels and include speakers from ethnically and other diverse backgrounds.
- Ensure representation from underrepresented groups, including disabled individuals and neurodivergent people.
- Strive for a range of perspectives to ensure more engaging and impactful discussions.

4. Catering for Dietary, Faith, and Cultural Needs

Respect attendees' dietary, religious, and cultural practices.

- Offer prayer rooms and spaces for religious observances.
- Where refreshments are available, ensure catering meets a range of dietary needs, including halal, kosher, vegetarian, vegan, gluten free, and allergy friendly options.
- Avoid scheduling events on significant religious or cultural holidays.
- Clearly label all food and provide detailed ingredient lists, ensuring transparency about allergens and potential cross contamination risks.
- Provide basic refreshments including fresh water. If refreshments are not available, please let participants know in advance so they can prepare for their own dietary needs.
- Consider alternatives to pubs and bars for networking or socialising, as these environments may not be comfortable for everyone, including those who do not drink alcohol for religious, cultural, or personal reasons.

5. Supporting Disabled Attendees Broadly

Recognise that impairments vary widely and require different forms of support depending on the individual concerned. Don't assume but ask how they would like reasonable adjustments to be made.

- Provide event materials in multiple formats, including large print, braille, digital, and audio upon request. If you are involving people with learning disabilities, Deaf people or others with communication barriers, make sure you have accounted for support requirements and discussed with each individual what they require for the best experience. For example, there are preferred places a Deaf person may require an interpreter to sit or stand. Avoid the 'does he take sugar' scenario and communicate directly with the disabled person about their requirements.
- Ensure accessible transport options are available and clear to participants.
- Train presenters in inclusive communication techniques. For example when working with interpreters, fast speaking presenters will need to speak a little slower for the information to be conveyed.
- Confirm in advance that all accessibility provisions are in place and meet attendees' needs.
- Ensure name tags are easily readable, with appropriate font size and colour contrast.
- Allow for assistance dogs, including fresh bowls of water and a green space nearby for them at the break.
- Provide a variety of seating and table heights. This should include chairs with arms and without.
- Ensure there is ample space for wheelchair users and semi ambulant participants and other guests to move around comfortably.

Sensory Access and Inclusion

- Ensure clear and visible signposting, including temporary signage for the event. Where a participant is blind or visually impaired ensure they have all navigation information in advance and be on hand to support navigation if required.
- Ensure presentation screens are visible and clear from all angles. Where there are blind or visually impaired participants, ensure they have a pack of the PowerPoints made accessible to them in advance and remind speakers not to refer to a slide without explaining what is on it (eg this is a graph showing the latest increase in prevalence).
- Provide printed copies of materials where needed.
- Use a public address system and ensure there are loop induction systems available for those that use them. Some loop systems connect directly to public address systems.
- Arrange for British Sign Language (BSL) interpreters and live captions where required in good time (usually a few weeks in advance of the meeting date).
- Ensure adjustable lighting.
- Provide advance notice of flash photography or bright lights.
- Use microphones for all speakers, including audience questions and comments.
- Ensure temperature control in the venue.
- Record or livestream the event where possible.

Cognitive Access and Inclusion

- Ensure event information and materials are written in plain English or an easy read version is available where required.
- Share schedules and agendas with attendees ahead of time.
- Provide general housekeeping information in advance.
- Offer sessions in multiple formats (written, verbal, visual aids, etc.).

6. Be Mindful of Timing

Consider how event timings impact different attendees.

- Avoid scheduling sessions too early or too late, as this may exclude those with caring responsibilities or disabled participants.
- If you have people using free bus passes, make sure the timing works for that, e.g. 10-10.30am start
- Plan sufficient breaks to prevent fatigue and allow attendees time to refresh.
- Offer flexible scheduling and on demand content where feasible.
- Announce the date and time early so attendees can plan accordingly.

7. Avoid Exclusionary Dates

Check calendars for significant religious, cultural, or national observances that may affect attendance.

- Be mindful of dates such as Ramadan, Yom Kippur, Diwali, Easter, and public holidays.
- Avoid clashing with other major events or national celebrations.
- Avoid Friday, Saturday or Sunday mornings when religious observance may be required.
- Consider school holidays and planned transport strikes.
- Be aware of potential weather related issues (snow, storms, heatwaves etc.) or national or local emergencies and how they might affect the planned event. Make sure you are able to contact all participants quickly in advance if you need to cancel or rearrange.

8. Inclusive Communication

Ensure that language and communication styles accommodate all attendees.

- Use inclusive language in event materials and presentations.
- Provide multilingual support where necessary.
- Share event materials in accessible formats ahead of time.

9. Guidance for Facilitators and Presenters

Speakers and facilitators play a crucial role in fostering an inclusive atmosphere.

- Use inclusive and respectful language.
- Encourage contributions from a diverse range of attendees.
- Ensure presentation materials are accessible (e.g., high contrast slides, clear fonts, verbal descriptions of visuals).
- Adapt to different communication needs and be mindful of neurodivergent attendees.

- Check in with those who have requested adjustments to ensure their needs are met and to keep them apprised.

10. Inclusive Marketing and Imagery

- Event marketing should reflect the diverse audience you aim to engage. Use imagery that represents people from different backgrounds, abilities, ages, and genders.
- Avoid tokenism; ensure genuine representation in promotional materials.
- Provide captions and audio descriptions for promotional videos and after event webinars.
- Use explicit messaging that highlights the event's commitment to accessibility and diversity.

Inclusive Events Checklist

Pre Event Planning

- ✓ Venue is wheelchair accessible with step free access.
- ✓ Online participation options are available.
- ✓ Accessibility needs are collected and addressed.
- ✓ A process is in place to implement and follow up on requested adjustments.
- ✓ Transport options, parking, and cycle storage are considered.
- ✓ Catering includes halal, kosher, vegetarian, vegan, gluten free, and allergy friendly options.
- ✓ Date avoids major religious and cultural holidays.
- ✓ Event schedule accommodates diverse needs.
- ✓ Speaker lineup represents diverse backgrounds.
- ✓ Marketing materials reflect diversity and inclusivity.

During the Event

- ✓ Quiet spaces and safe spaces are available.
- ✓ BSL interpreters and live captioning are provided.
- ✓ Clear policies on anti discrimination are communicated.
- ✓ Attendees know how to report any issues.
- ✓ Materials are available in accessible formats.
- ✓ Facilitators and presenters are trained in inclusive communication.
- ✓ Accessibility provisions are checked and verified.

Post Event Follow Up

- ✓ Feedback is collected from attendees, speakers, and event staff.
- ✓ Key areas for improvement are identified.
- ✓ Adjustments are implemented and communicated for future events.
- ✓ Confirm that requested accommodations were delivered.

By embedding inclusivity at every stage, your event will be more welcoming, engaging, and accessible to all. A truly inclusive event benefits everyone, fostering collaboration, learning, and a stronger sense of community.