

Organising Inclusive Meetings & Activities

When considering an accessible and inclusive meeting, there are 3 aspects you need to think about:

1. Planning and preparation
2. The equipment and information
3. The conduct of the meeting.

Remember:

There have always been disabled people engaged in political activities but never to the extent that they are today.

It is not possible or practical for organisers of demonstrations or certain other political activities to consider the access needs of all the disabled individuals who may want to take part.

Disabled people for their part equally need to understand that with Rights come responsibilities and this includes their own safety.

Nevertheless in order to be able to make informed choices as to whether or not they can participate, disabled people require as much information as is possible to give.

Disabled people would find it useful to know for example:

- Details of a meeting place (nearest stations, bus routes, parking, etc)
- Agreed route of the March and its length
- Details of a rallying place (nearest stations, bus routes, parking, etc)
- If disabled people are to form a separate contingent that the lead disabled people are able to liaise with identifiable stewards in case of changes in plans or possible emergencies.

1. Planning - Choosing a venue

When considering whether a venue is accessible, the first obvious thought may be to avoid entrances with steps. There are however, many other things to watch for or that you can provide to make the venue accessible:

- **Is there a barrier-free pathway to the meeting space?** A barrier-free pathway means that a person with a mobility impairment can make it from the street into the meeting room without encountering stairs.
- **Is it easy to reach the meeting space from public transportation?** Many disabled people rely on public transportation to get around.
- **Is there adequate parking, including disabled parking?**
- **Is there an accessible toilet nearby?**

Consider:

- **Dimensions** - door width, sharp corners, wheelchair ramps, access to parking for anyone with limited mobility, angle of slopes, toilets, background noise levels, lighting, clear signage.
- **Size of the venue** in relation to the number of wheelchair users expected to attend. Space is required for wheelchairs to be manoeuvred. As a general guide allow two spaces for every wheelchair user.
- **Lighting levels** for people with visual impairments, as lowlighting is a barrier.
- **Availability of induction loops** or arrange reserved front seating for attendees who are hard of hearing
- **Crèche facilities** if these are required or whether childcare/carer's expenses can be paid as an alternative.

If you have been unable to get an ideal venue, plan how you will overcome issues to accommodate individuals, e.g. arranging help to get people down slopes.

Always:

- Check the accessibility of a venue for yourself. Not only can you then be confident with what you are saying, but you can also answer enquiries more accurately.
- Brief the Venue staff regarding your needs, including numbers and access requirements.
- Arrange the seating so that wheelchair users have a choice of where they sit.
- Have someone stand by the main entrance to direct people to the meeting room and help those needing assistance. This is a courtesy that everyone will appreciate.

2. Providing Information and Equipment

Planning

- The date and time for a meeting may influence who is able to come.
- The timing of a meeting may also affect people's availability. Those with caring responsibilities may find early starts difficult and those with childcare may need to be home to collect children.

- You should consider your audience and whether you are able to provide expenses or resources for individuals requiring personal assistants, those with caring responsibilities (children and adult) or those with transport costs. Notice periods should be as far forwards as possible to enable people to make arrangements for transport, personal assistance and replacement care.

Publicising

- On any notices or publicity used for the event, it is important to ensure you use the phrase: "If you require any specific requirements please inform [state a contact by phone, email and preferably address too]. This allows people to explain any access/dietary needs (dietary needs may be influenced by faith, health or philosophy).
- Individuals find different formats of information easier to manage. These include large type, Braille, computer disc, audio CD. It is important if you are providing information in a particular format for an individual that you ask which is appropriate for them and not make assumptions.
- Try to use plain English without jargon in all documents including advertising.

Prior to Meeting

If using a loop, check when booking, the area that the loop covers. Check before the meeting that the loop is working.

If Sign language interpreters, lip speakers and deaf blind interpreters are needed check well in advance for cost and availability.

It is useful to hold a briefing meeting for speakers to remind them to use microphones/talk through slide presentations etc.

3. Conduct - During the meeting

Ensure those at reception are briefed on issues. If sighted guides are available they should be dedicated members of staff and should be on hand.

If using PowerPoint presentations or other visual information, ask if people can read it. Don't assume people will read the slides: talk through the information. Have printed copies available.

At the start of the meeting, raise your hand to attract people's attention. Check access e.g. whether people can hear; if the loop is working; if the people can see and read the OHP; if they can see the sign language interpreters.

When using a microphone, speakers should generally speak close to the microphone and preferably have an opportunity to practice using microphones prior to the event.

If using a loop, then all speakers must use the microphone including those responding to questions. If the questioner is not within the looped area then the question needs to be repeated using the microphone.

Even when a loop is not being used, it is good practice to employ a roving microphone. This might seem to slow down proceedings however often it enhances the authority of the Chair and aids the discipline of the meeting thus saving time.

Allow time for breaks in the meeting. This is important for individuals but also for signers and lip speakers. It is extremely important if a meeting is longer than 75 minutes a break of 15 to 20

minutes is required for accessibility needs especially deaf rebels lip reading and BSL interpreters. Time keeping is essential. Many groups of people need to know when breaks are and the finishing time. This is an access issue.
