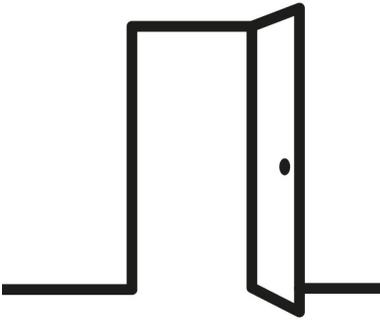


**Seeds for
Change**
Short guide



Venues and Accessibility

A guide to choosing and preparing venues to meet everyone's access requirements

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Introduction

From benefit gigs to film screenings, community kitchens to campaign meetings – many of us are involved in putting on events as part of our campaigning and community organising.

A big part of organising events is looking for a good venue that is accessible to anyone who might want to come. There are many ways a venue can impact on how easily different people can get involved in your event – from being able to move freely around the building, baby changing areas accessible to all carers of young children, adjustable lighting, gender neutral toilets and catering for particular diets, to name but a few.

This guide covers many access issues but it isn't comprehensive. Make sure to communicate with attendees about their requirements and take on board their ideas. We've also included a list of resources at the end which give more detail than this guide.

Finding accessible venues often isn't straightforward. Our society is organised in a way that makes things easy for some people, and puts barriers in the way of others and this is often reflected in the availability of venues for hire. The fact that most buildings have steps, not ramps or lifts, is just one example.

If, despite your best efforts, you struggle to find a venue that meets all access requirements, remember to keep an open dialogue with potential attendees and look for solutions together.

Planning ahead

Planning ahead can really help ensure your venue is as accessible as possible. It gives you time to find out from potential attendees what they require from a venue and to look for a venue that would work well. You may not always have the time or capacity to go through all these steps for a specific event, for example if you need to put on an urgent meeting. However, by getting to know the venues in your area and spending some time thinking about different people's access requirements you can be off to a head start.

Find out about different access requirements: for example by advertising the event without an exact location and asking people to contact you with their specific requirements for a venue.

Contact some venues and ask about the things discussed in the *Choosing and preparing venues* section below, and any specific requirements people have already told you about.

Make a short-list of potential venues and visit them to check the information you were given about them was correct.

Book the most appropriate venue and write down information about its accessibility.

Create event publicity that has your contact information (phone and text-based). Invite people to get in touch about their access requirements. Also specify where existing information about accessibility can be found.

Ask for specific information from anyone who contacts you to discuss their access requirements. For more information on this see the '*Communicating with attendees*' section of this guide.

Make what changes you can to the venue after listening to, and consulting with, attendees that have specific access requirements. If its not possible to make temporary changes to the venue, can you find a better one?

Difficulties in finding a suitable venue

Despite your best efforts you may struggle to find a venue that meets all access requirements. This will be influenced by factors such as whether you are in a city or rural location, financial resources and your own capacity. For example, the only venue in your village may be a club room on the first floor of your village pub, with issues around step free access, selling alcohol and noise levels, to name but a few. Or you might have the choice of two inadequate venues, each meeting different access needs. This may put you in a position where you feel you have to choose between excluding some people or not running your event at all.

Remember to keep an open dialogue with people and think creatively – look for solutions together. If cost is an issue, could you find ways of raising money to hire a more accessible venue through crowd funders or asking local charities for a grant? Could you raise the issue with the venue and see if they are interested in looking at longer term work on improving access? Are other groups experiencing similar issues in finding a venue and could you work together to improve the situation?

Choosing and preparing venues

It's important to visit venues before you book them in order to find out whether they meet your access requirements. Public venues such as community centres are covered by equality legislation and should make reasonable adjustments to be accessible. However, how well venues implement equality guidance varies widely and some may fall far below the standard you are looking for, even if they advertise themselves as accessible.

Below is a list of some things to consider when visiting venues. It's a long list and it's likely you won't find a venue in your price range that meets all these criteria without making some temporary changes yourself.

When making temporary changes, it is important to consider the dignity of the people using the venue. Despite our best intentions this doesn't always happen. We can sometimes get a bit carried away, trying to make something accessible and end up with an adaptation that isn't very dignified for the person who'll be using it. People are different. Some people might love the plywood ramp you made by recycling the old compost loo. Other people, understandably, will not. This would be especially true if your DIY ramp was to be used in a really smart venue rather than a protest camp where everything was made from recycled wood.

If you are in touch with people who have particular accessibility requirements, communicate with them as much as possible, they will keep you on track! We've included some ideas for ways of addressing issues where appropriate, but that is no replacement for simply asking people.

Getting to the venue

Accessibility is not just about what happens when someone gets to the front door. You also need to consider how people will get to your venue.

Public transport: Is there public transport to the venue, at the right times / frequently enough? Is the public transport accessible for people who use wheelchairs or are travelling with a pram? If not, consider other options, such as a shuttle bus or arranging for a taxi to be on standby.

Directions to the venue: How easy is the venue to find? Can you make it easier by providing clear directions for different modes of transport, maps and pictures of the venue / key points of the journey?

Parking: Is there an area near the front entrance for parking? Can you reserve parking spaces for people who most need them? Is there ample space for mobility aids / prams either side of where a car would park?

Approaching the building: Is the path to the entrance clear or blocked by wheelie bins, rubbish bags etc.? Is the '**accessible entrance**' kept locked? If so, this sends a message to the people who need it that they aren't welcome. Insist that the door is kept unlocked during your event.

Ground: Is the ground solid or do you need to put boards down? Soft mud and loose gravel can be problematic for a variety of people.

Getting in and moving around

Entry system: Is there an entry system which involves people having to talk and hear a reply e.g. an intercom? Do people have to locate buttons and press the correct one? If so you might need someone stationed at the entrance to meet arrivals and let them in to the building.

Step free access: Can lifts be accessed without having to ask for a key? Are ramps of a gentle gradient (1:20) and do they have handrails either side? If there is no ramp, could you hire one?

Space to move around: Check whether there is enough room and whether the floor is suitable for wheelchairs to move around easily. Are the main circulation routes free from trip hazards and obstructions?

Ideally People using wheelchairs or walking aids should be able to access all areas, not just the room where the event is happening. The kitchen, the garden, everywhere!

Are there signposts from the entrance to the room you will be using and from the room to the toilets, kitchen etc.? Is the signage large and high contrast? Embossed or in Braille? If not, can you put up your own signs?

Lifts: Is there a working lift? Does it require a key, and are there enough keys for everyone who needs one? Can more keys be provided?

Facilities at the venue

Is there an adapted toilet? Is it unlocked, clean and free of clutter?

Sadly a number of venues keep the adapted toilet locked, or use it as a storeroom for equipment. Make sure it is unlocked while you are in the building, and clear away any clutter. The cubicle is bigger for good reason!

Are there visual (flashing) fire alarms in private spaces like toilets, to alert deaf or hard of hearing people of a fire? If not, consider what you need to do in case of a fire alarm.

Is there a loop system in your meeting room for hearing aid users? If so, is it working? Does anyone know how to switch it on or alter the volume? Will that person be there when you hold your event in the building?

Can the venue cater for special diets, such as halal, vegan, allergies?

Are gender neutral toilets available? If not, can you re-sign (some of) the doors? Think carefully how this will work, e.g. re-labelling the door of an already gender-neutral accessible toilet could lead to it being over-used by people who don't actually need facilities like extra space. Sign the doors clearly, e.g. 'Toilets (cubicles only)', or 'Toilets (cubicles and urinals).'

Seating and tables: Are there comfortable chairs which have good back support? If not, could someone bring some cushions to be used as back supports? Are there tables available, as some people will definitely need these if they are to eat, drink, take notes etc. Can seating be set up so that people who lip read can see everyone's face?

Heights: Are things set up at a height everyone can access (e.g. tea urn, leaflet table, flipchart stand). If not, can you move them?

Accessible smoking areas: Is there a designated smoking area that everyone can access?

Does the venue sell alcohol? If yes, be aware that some people wouldn't want to attend a venue where alcohol is present.

Environmental factors

Is the lighting (daylight and artificial) easily controllable? If not, could you make the light temporarily more controllable, for example by making blinds from thick towels? For some people bright light, flickers, glare and reflections make it hard to read or concentrate, and can trigger headaches or migraines. Flickering lights or strobes can also trigger seizures for people with photosensitive epilepsy.

Temperature control: Is it warm enough? Or too warm? If not, are you allowed to alter the settings or bring portable heaters/fans?

Is there excessive noise at the venue? For example from the road, building works or noisy groups in adjoining rooms? This would be challenging for lots of different people.

Allergens / asthma triggers: Is the venue likely to trigger hay fever, asthma attacks or aggravate allergies? Common things that cause a problem are smoke (including from smoke/fog machines), dust, cats, newly cut or flowering grass, hay and strawbales.

Will anyone else be using the venue at the same time? Does this have any impact on accessibility? E.g. users such as a silent meditation group may not be compatible with a high input room or crèche.

Backgrounds: If you are running a workshop or presentation, try to limit the visual distractions within people's field of vision. For example, can you temporarily take down posters that aren't related to your event on the wall behind where you are speaking?

Extra rooms at the venue

It can be helpful to have some rooms set aside for specific uses, e.g.:

A room that individuals can use as a **prayer room**.

A quiet break out space for group discussions. This is really helpful for people who find it hard to hear / focus when there is background noise.

A 'low input' room. This is a place where there is no talking, low lights, no noise, and no moving lights, images, or objects. This can be helpful for many people, e.g. some autistic people or people with chronic fatigue.

A 'high input' area, somewhere people can be energetic and make as much noise/move around as much as they need to in order to give themselves enough stimulation or release energy.

How child-friendly is the venue?

Even if your event is aimed at adults, the venue may need to be accessible to children, to enable parents and guardians to come. Look for:

Baby feeding: Is breast feeding welcome and are there signs and policies welcoming breast feeding in all areas of the venue? Are there facilities to heat up milk / baby food? Is there a private baby feeding area for those that require it? Are there high chairs?

Baby changing area: Is it gender neutral and accessible to everyone who might need to use it?

Child friendly toilets: Are child steps, toilet inserts, potties and baby wipes provided? If not, can you bring some?

Play area: Is there a low hazard play area with toys for different age groups? If the venue doesn't provide one, can you make one?

A quiet area for small children to eat / be fed and to rest.

Prams and buggies: Is there somewhere to store prams and buggies?

Safety issues: Are there safety issues, such as unlocked doors that open onto busy roads, or stairs with no stair-gates? Can you address them?

Access issues and publicity

This guide has previously touched on the idea that communicating with attendees is key to 'getting it right'. Event publicity is one of the first steps in a chain of communication you'll have with attendees. When you advertise your event you should provide accurate information on the accessibility of the venue. You may not be able to fit in **all** the information people will require, but you need to give some basic details. This will enable potential attendees to make a reasonably informed decision about how accessible the venue is to them. You should also provide contact details so people can get in touch with you to discuss their specific requirements.

Example of access information on publicity



- **Two wide parking spaces 5 metres from front door reserved for people who need them.**
- **Level entrance to the building from the car park.**
- **Hearing induction loop in the meeting room.**
- **Vegetarian, vegan, halal and kosher food available.**
- **Non gendered baby-changing facilities.**

See a more detailed example of access information on the *DIY Space for London* website: diyspaceforlondon.org/access

Accurate information

The information you provide should be facts, not assumptions. For example you might say 'the only entrance has three steps with a handrail on the left hand side only'. You wouldn't say 'the venue is not wheelchair accessible'. This is because three steps might be inaccessible to some people who use a wheelchair but others might have ways to manage. Either way, it's their decision to make, not yours!

Contact information

Include a phone number and a text-based method (e.g. email) so people can choose between written or verbal communication. Request that anybody with access requirements should contact you ASAP to discuss what can be done to make the venue accessible to them.

How people find the access information

If the advertising for your event is highly visual such as a poster (real or virtual) you may not be able to fit all the access information on it. In this case your poster should say exactly where access information can be found e.g. via a menu tab on your website or the 'about' part of a facebook event. Ensure that on a virtual poster, the sentence explaining where to find access information can be read by screen reading software. This means it can't only be in the image on social media, it will need to be in text outside of the image too.

Communicating with attendees

Good communication with attendees, both in advance and during your event, is key to making your event as accessible as possible. In this section you'll find some tips on how to do it well.

Before the event

Find out what each person's preferred way of communicating is and what time of day is best, e.g. on the phone out of office hours. When discussing access needs, ask for detailed, specific information. For example, if someone says they have 'limited mobility', that doesn't tell you exactly what they can and can't manage in the venue you've found.

The information you want is about what they require from the venue during your event. Focus on information that is relevant to you, not personal information about them. For example if someone tells you they need a quiet room in the venue, you don't need to ask why, but you may need to double check that any available rooms suit their requirements.

People will probably have some suggestions on adaptations you can make. If you come up with ideas of your own, make sure you check in with people to see if your ideas would actually work and are wanted.

Think about what access information should be shared with all attendees and appropriate formats for sharing it. It's best to consult people about this in advance. For example, if you provide a special facility, there may be benefits to having it clearly labelled so everyone in the group can use it. On the other hand, the person who requested it may prefer some privacy around it, so it's best to check with them first.

During the event

Check in with people to find out whether the venue works for them and whether any adjustments can be made. It may be helpful to designate a contact person or even set up a help desk for access issues. A contact telephone may also be useful, so people can ring if they encounter difficulties.

There may be times when you have people with specific accessibility requirements coming to your event and you've had no information in advance. If this happens, do what you can, but you'll have to accept that your venue might not have everything people require.

Asking for feedback

Remember to ask for, and act on, feedback. If you listen non-defensively, feedback can be really useful. Other people will have perspectives and experiences you don't. If you are nervous about encouraging feedback, remember that it won't be judgements about you as a person, it will be about the venue! Always acknowledge feedback and think carefully about what you can do differently to improve the accessibility next time.

Further advice and support

Euan's guide - Disabled access reviews of venues by and for disabled people. You can search for venues in your area and find fairly detailed reviews. www.euansguide.com

Attitude is everything - an organisation improving Deaf and disabled people's access to live music. Includes guides for organising live music events (a lot of the guidance is relevant to other events too). www.attitudeiseverything.org.uk

Manchester Disabled Peoples Access Group - advice and resources on accessible meetings and venues. www.mdpag.org.uk

Sisters of Frida - Accessibility Guide to Meetings and Events – a Toolkit. www.sisofrida.org/resources/sisters-of-fridas-accessibility-guide-to-meetings-and-events-a-toolkit/

New Work Network - No budget guide for Artists to Disability Access. www.ju90.co.uk/access.htm

Radical Access Mapping Project - Free Audit Templates for checking your venue. <https://radicalaccessiblecommunities.wordpress.com/about-ramp/>

Equality and Human Rights Commission - For guidance protected characteristics and how to comply with the Equality Act 2010 (Great Britain). www.equalityhumanrights.com

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