

Access Issues at Events and Meetings



- ✓ Are there any visual flashing fire alarms in the toilets to alert deaf and hearing impaired people of fire? If not, consider what you will need to do in an emergency.
- ✓ Is the baby changing area accessible to disabled people?
- ✓ Is the venue child-friendly? Are there obvious hazards, such as unlocked doors that open onto busy roads, or stairs with no stairgates.
- ✓ If you list the access in the publicity, disabled people will feel more confident that you know the building, that it is accessible, and that your organisation cares about access issues. Physical access to a building is only one aspect of making community work practices inclusive to everyone, but it is an important aspect.
- ✓ Does the venue have a

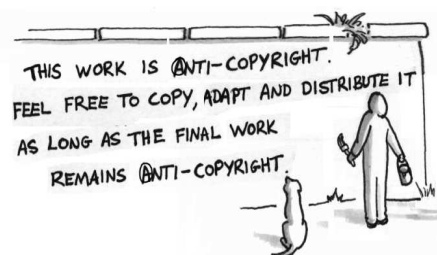
private room that can be used as prayer spaces? Remember some faiths require followers to pray at regular intervals. Does your event timetable allow for this?

- ✓ Event organisers will also need to consider accessible work practices, such as making paperwork accessible to visually impaired people and people with learning difficulties, booking sign language interpreters, induction loops, lipspeakers or translators; and ensuring (if food is provided) - that all diets are included.
- ✓ Finally, if anyone complains about access to your venue, listen carefully and make a note of the difficulties so that you can either sort out the problem or add the information to future publicity.

Easy access to a venue is essential for a successful community event. Unfortunately it is also extremely rare for the access to be easy for everyone who may wish to come. As an event organiser you can help to make sure that the best use is made even of a less than perfect venue.

It's important to remember that access issues are not just about people with physical impairments: there are many other factors which you should consider as an event organiser. Some people have sensory impairments, experience mental distress (e.g. claustrophobia or anxiety) or have learning difficulties and their access needs should also be considered.

Just as some people experience barriers as a result of disability, they may experience other barriers you need to think about. These include such things as childcare or social, ethical and religious principles that participants may have.



For more briefings and training workshops see:
www.seedsforchange.org.uk

Before your event

Gather accurate information about the venue and the event and list all access features clearly in all your publicity. For example your publicity might say:

- 2 parking spaces for blue badge holders;
- level entrance to the building from the car park;
- stepped entrance with a handrail on the left;
- hearing induction loop in the meeting room;
- vegetarian, vegan, halal and kosher food available;
- baby-changing facilities and crèche available.

If there is poor access to a building, or you haven't the resources to run a crèche, then say so.

You don't need to apologise, but do make clear what options you can offer, e.g.: say that you can lift wheelchair users in, and describe the issue: "the only entrance has three steps up, with a handrail".

Where to get help



To find out about venues with disabled access, you could contact your local Disability Rights information centre – look in the Yellow Pages or Phone Book (under "Disability – Information and Services") or ask your local council or Citizen's Advice Bureau for contact information.

What to look for in a venue

Visit the venue before booking it to check accessibility. Here are some things to check:

- ✓ What are the public transport links? Are any of these accessible, if so in what ways?
- ✓ Is there a car park or any area near the front door for cars? If so, are there marked blue badge spaces? If not, consider reserving the parking spaces for badge holders.
- ✓ Is the "accessible entrance" kept locked? If so, this is sending a clear message to wheelchair users and people with mobility impairments that they are not wanted. Insist that the locked entrance is kept unlocked for the duration of your time in the building. Make sure that the path up to the accessible entrance is not blocked by wheelie bins, rubbish bags, advertising boards etc.
- ✓ Is the adapted toilet kept locked? If so, make sure that it is unlocked while you are in the building - it is a myth that all disabled people have a RADAR key. Non-disabled adults do not have to ask for permission to use the toilet, so why should disabled people? Is the adapted toilet clean and free of clutter? Sadly a number of venues use the adapted toilet as a storeroom for equipment. Make sure this is not the case in the venue you are about to hire.
- ✓ 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? If so, will that person be there when you hold your event in the building?
- ✓ Are there clear signposts from the entrance to the room?