

It can be difficult to envisage how a small community group might contribute to increasing opportunities for people with a disability to be involved in their programs and events.

This guide is designed to focus on the little things you can and your group can do to help.

Why think about Accessibility?

Making some small changes to how you do things can make a big difference to the accessibility of your event, program, or group activities. Improving accessibility can make a big difference to a wider range of people than you might expect.

Access for people with disabilities is not only about physical access to buildings for wheelchair users, but also includes, for example, access to written information for people with vision impairments and access to public announcements for Deaf people.

Improving access can also make it easier for the families of people with disabilities to take part in activities helping your community, group or membership to continue to flourish.

What can we do?

Here are some ways you may be able to help as an organiser of a community group, program or event. Some of these solutions below will require planning and/or cost a little bit more, but remember that you can include these costs as part of your grant application budget.

Venues

Whenever possible, choose accessible venues for your events.

- Have you asked the venue management whether the property/rooms are accessible?
- If there are issues (e.g. steps up to the main door) is there another door people can be directed to? Could hiring a portable ramp solve the problem?
- Is the signage provided large and clear? If not, can you print up some temporary signs?
- If you have speakers at your event and will be using a PA system, does it have a built-in hearing augmentation system? If not can you consider hiring a portable hearing loop.

Accessibility Support for activities and events

There is now a wide range of support services which can be used to help people with disabilities engage with information in various ways. Some of the high end services include the use of professional AUSLAN sign language interpreters or stenocaptioners, who convert speech into onscreen text in real time.

Fully covering your program with these services might not be feasible, but here are some alternatives:

- Offer free (or cost only) admission for carers of Companion Card holders. This allows a person issued with a Companion Card to attend events or programs without having to buy a second ticket/fee for their attendant carer.
- Offer concession or discounted prices for Carers Card holders.
- If you are having a series of performances, consider employing an AUSLAN interpreter for a particular advertised session.
- Arrange for someone people to take notes from classes or talks for people with hearing difficulties.
- Consider offering to make material available in written form prior to the event.
- Some activity based groups may be able to engage a trained support worker to be available at particular times to enable people with a disability to access services without having to rely on a privately arranged assistant carer.
- Make sure there are always some appropriate chairs available, for both people with a disability, and those having conversations with them.
- Consider hiring a Marveloo for your event – this is new accessible portable toilet.

Catered Events

Whether you are serving tea and biscuits or a full meal, there can often be unexpected challenges in these environments.

The following tips will help avoid many potential issues:

- Sachets of condiments or milk in very small containers can be just as challenging as balancing a plate at a buffet table. Arrange for someone to be on hand to carry food to a nearby table or help people experiencing difficulty at these times.
- Make sure there is room to move between tables easily - even when the room is full of people!
- Consider dietary needs such as gluten-free food and the needs of diabetics. Make sure food is clearly labelled as being gluten-free or vegan for example. Remember to make the signs large and clear.
- Provide a choice of cutlery and crockery. A mug may be easier for some people with disabilities to use than cups and saucers or plastic cups that do not have handles. Offer drinking straws as a standard as some people with a disability may not be able to hold a cup, glass or mug.
- Consider having a number of food and beverage service areas spread around the venue. This is helpful for people with disabilities as there is likely to be a service point closer to where they are. Everyone will benefit from the shorter queues if you only have a short period for a break before continuing the event program.

Event materials

Your program or event will often involve a variety of publicity materials, hand-outs or notes. While it may be appropriate to offer material in Braille in some circumstances, there are now a number of alternatives that many people can produce themselves.

- Keep Microsoft Word versions of documents, flyers, activities guides, newsletters and websites handy. These can be made available online or emailed to people with print disabilities and can often more easily be used with a variety of accessibility aids than PDFs or PowerPoint presentations. Keep the formatting as simple as possible.
- If you are organising a larger celebration or festival, consider producing an Accessibility Map. This can be used to outline a route to the different areas which is clear of steps, cables and other obstacles which may prove difficult for people with mobility issues to manage.

Promoting your program or event

Make sure you let people know that you are flexible and accessible. Consider including the following when promoting your event, club, program or project.

- Include a statement such as *“Our venue is accessible for people using wheelchairs and all hand-out materials will be available in accessible electronic form on request”* or *“If you have any other access requirements in order to participate fully in this activity, please contact John Doe on 8888 8888 or at johndoe@email.com”*.
- Make sure to include the Companion Card and Carers Card logos on your promotional material.
- Promote through organisations and networks aimed at people with disabilities in order to fully access all possible markets (see the **Guide for Meeting and Even Organisers** Section 15 – *Information about disability organisations who can assist*).
- Refer to the general “Tips for communication and assistance” on page 22 of the **Guide for Meeting and Even Organisers**.

Further Information

Download the full version of the **Guide for Meeting and Event Organisers** here:
http://www.meetingsevents.com.au/downloads/Accessible_Events_Guide.pdf

Further information and details can be found in the following websites:

Companion Cards

<http://www.companioncard.org.au/index.htm>

Carers Cards

<http://carercard.vic.gov.au/home/what-is-the-carer-card>

Marveloo

<http://www.maroondah.vic.gov.au/Marveloo.aspx>

AUSLAN Interpreters

<http://www.saiglobal.com/>

For information on groups with good knowledge of Local Service providers

http://www.humanrights.gov.au/disability_rights/links/links.html#community

Accessible Arts

<http://www.aarts.net.au/>

You can also visit the Disability Services page of the City of Yarra website for additional information and links: <https://www.yarracity.vic.gov.au/services/people-with-disability>

Acknowledgements

This guide is based on the **Guide for Meeting and Event Organisers** produced by Meetings & Events Australia and the Australian Human Rights Commission with the assistance of Michael Small Consulting.