

Accessible Communication for All

Introduction

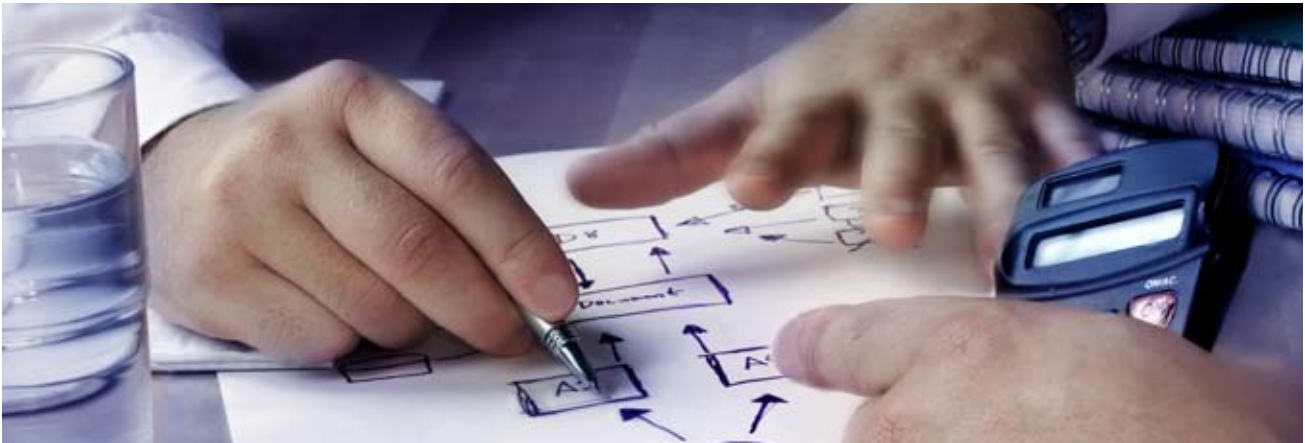
This toolkit is based upon activities which took place in Gent, Belgium as part of the Tackling Social Exclusion (TSE) project. In Gent, activities focussed upon 'Full access for all' eliminating all physical and non physical barriers to buildings and services.

How can this toolkit help you?

The project has shown that communication should be universally understandable and accessible. The Accessible Communications Working Group in Gent developed the following principles and checklists for all staff to use when communicating with individuals or groups, and as a tool for accessible meetings / presentations. The toolkit contains a set of principles for accessible communication, and four separate checklists for spoken communication; written communication; accessible presentations; and accessible meetings and events.

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Principles for accessible communication

For accessible communication, it is especially important to take into account your target audience. Depending on your target you should then choose the most appropriate communication channels. When putting your message across, keep in mind the target group and the possible different communication channels. The message should be the same for everybody and be applied in a logical and transparent way.

1. Defining audience

Decide and analyse your target audience and address any communication needs, take into account the physical environment and ensure that the information needs are met. There may be more than one target audience to analyse. Make sure your communication is suitable for its intended target. Ask for advice when appropriate from experts, agencies, target organisations and services, opinion leaders, internal audiences. Always choose respectful language.

2. Choosing communication channels

To communicate accessibly, there are a number of different channels and media that it is possible to use. Choosing the correct channels should be based on an analysis of both the target audience and also the type of project.

- Choose channels that the audience is familiar with (Internet, television, digital media, social media, radio, brochures, advertisements in newspapers)
- Choose media that the target audience is familiar with (facebook, twitter)

- Use recognizable imagery that supports the text (icons, drawings, photographs)
- Recognize the need for personalised, focused communication (keeping diversity in mind: age, male, female, different backgrounds, different languages, physical disability, learning disability)
- Choose one or more suitable communication channels
- Be prepared to monitor your communications activities so that they can be measured for success, and changed if necessary

3. The basics

- Assess the information needs of the target population (e.g. young people vs. academics)
- Be careful with metaphors, puns and humour
- Avoid multiple messages
- Use as few abbreviations, acronyms and jargon as possible
- Use active, short sentences
- Structure your information, making sections, and arranging content
- Build your message step by step so it flows in a logical and attractive way
- Attempt to view things from your audience's perspective
- Recognise and limit intellectual and mental barriers
- Recognise and reduce material / financial barriers
- Approach the target audience in a positive way by looking at the options instead of the limitations

Avoid figurative and old-fashioned language, expressions and metaphors, and avoid imagery and wordplay

Checklist for accessible spoken communication

(Begin by reading the principles of accessible communication)

- Introduce yourself and explain what you do (the format, what to expect)
- Check what knowledge your audience already has
- Check whether there are individuals who will need extra support / guidance
- Provide an orderly, safe and accessible environment
- Avoid background noise
- Ensure that there is adequate time
- Establish eye contact where appropriate
- Be aware of people in the group who may struggle to keep up
- Provide participants with time to think of and ask questions
- Create an open and confidential atmosphere

Using language for explanations

- Speak directly to the participants
- Speak in a calm and clear manner
- Adapt the information
- Choose a personalised, direct approach
- Articulate and avoid dialect
- Build communication and logically structure your message
- Use short, clear and simple sentences
- Use natural language and as little difficult, or complex jargon and abstract words as possible
- Try to avoid using abbreviations and acronyms
- Avoid figurative and old-fashioned language, expressions and metaphors, and avoid imagery and wordplay
- Avoid literal translations
- Speak in the present tense and use active sentences
- Use visuals (icons, drawings, graphs, symbols) to give your message strength
- Repeat important information
- Make sure the message is understood
- Provide key information on paper either in advance or afterwards
- Use closed instead of open questions



Checklist for accessible written communication

(Begin by reading the principles of accessible communication)

Language

- Determine in advance what the purpose of your message should be (clearly distinguish primary and secondary issues)
- Build your communication step by step, in a logical and structured way
- Group what belongs together into paragraphs and discuss one theme per paragraph
- Use short, clear and simple sentences with a message (or vary in length, but try to use less than fewer than 12 words per sentence)
- Use a natural, easy style. Choose a minimum of difficulty – aim to write for a reading age of 14
- Speak directly to the reader as much as possible
- Preferably use the present tense and active sentences (avoid sentences with “be”)
- Use as little difficult or complex jargon and abstract words as is possible
- Avoid abbreviations and acronyms where possible. If used, make a note of the meaning with the first full use and put the abbreviation in brackets next to it
- Avoid figurative and old-fashioned language, phrases and metaphors and avoid imagery and wordplay
- Avoid literal translations
- Consider the emotional value of words and use the correct terminology for disadvantaged groups
- Avoid noun style (for example, it is clearer to say something with a verb instead of a noun. i.e. “the project failed”, instead of “the failure of the project”)
- Use reference words (the, he, who) only when the meaning is unequivocal and use sparingly
- Avoid double negatives
- Use proper punctuation
- Repeat important information
- Use open rather than closed questions

If giving a presentation in a dark room, choose a dark background and a lighter colour of text with a bold font.

Lay-out/Typography

- Build your text and logically structure it
- Use titles and subtitles
- Separate paragraphs and sections from each other with sufficient white space
- Use a sans serif font like Arial and Verdana, both on paper and digitally
- Use a sufficiently large font, the minimum point size is 12 to 14
- Do not use too many fonts together (preferably 1)
- Be careful with capital letters
- Use half line spacing
- Use less than 12 words per line and less than 15 lines per paragraph
- Enter the text to the left
- Use a plain background
- Note colour combinations and colour contrast
- Use bold to emphasize a word to explain, no italic and no underline
- Use Arabic numerals (1,2,3) instead of words and numbers or Roman numerals (I, II, etc.)
- Use bullets (bullets with short dashes, dots, points, etc., and long lists of letters or numbers)
- Use visual aids, without backgrounds (icons, drawings, graphs, symbols)
- Use sufficiently thick, non-glossy paper

Checklist for an accessible PowerPoint presentation

(Begin by reading the principles of accessible Communication)

Content of your slides

- Make your text as concise and clear as possible
- Use lists where appropriate. If you use lists, end each item with the correct punctuation: commas, semicolons, or full-stops. This allows screen readers to distinguish clearly between the different ideas or concepts. Otherwise there is no pause between the items
- Use a minimum font size of 24 pt
- Support your text with images, symbols, icons, graphs, tables

Use of colour

- The contrast between the text and the background is one of the most important aspects of your presentation. With a clear contrast, your audience will be able to read well without being distracted
- The venue for giving the presentation is important. If giving a presentation in a dark room, choose a dark background and a lighter colour of text with a bold font. In a better lit room you should choose a lighter background with dark, bold letters. Do not choose a too light background: sometimes this will give a flickering effect



Images

- Make sure that every image, graph or diagram has a text description. You can customize it by selecting the image

Notes

- Use the notes pane. Here you can add descriptive content to the information on your slides
- Notes are an anchor for the speaker when giving the presentation. They can also provide the reader of online presentations with more information on the content of the presentation

Make sure all your materials (handouts, slides) are accessible to all users

- Formats such as RTF or Html are most useful for users with visual impairments. If possible, plan the materials available in advance
- PowerPoint presentations can be placed online in different ways. You can publish them as;
 - PowerPoint Presentations .ppt
 - As a slide show .pps
 - Portable Document Format .pdf
 - As a webpage/html document .htm (When saving as html, ensure the text of the slides displays as text in the html document, and not an image)

Checklist for organising an accessible conference / seminar / event

(Begin by reading the principles of accessible Communication)

Accessibility of times, places, buildings

- Assess your location beforehand to ensure that it is physically accessible
- Make the event at an appropriate time for your audience
- Check whether your location is accessible by public transportation and if so, give directions, preferably with several options. Make yourself available to support / meet at an appropriate location
- Communicate in advance and reserve parking if available
- Use billboards, and easy to read signs (with a large enough font on a contrasting background)
- Place the signs in an obvious, logical and clearly visible place. Check the height of the signs and do not place under glass if this affects visibility
- Indicate where facilities such as public toilets are located. Ensure that the facilities are accessible to all

Do not just distribute
written or digital
documents without
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what they are

Accessibility of communication

- When sending the invitation, ask the participant to inform you of their accessibility needs in good time
- Use a personalised approach both before and during the study. If possible, have a person who is responsible for accessibility
- Provide a clear overview of what attendees can expect (schedule, performance speakers, useful information)
- Always state clearly the details of the person responsible
- Do not just distribute written or digital documents without describing verbally what they are
- Make sure you have an interpreter or sign language interpreter if required
- Give people the opportunity to sit at the front
- Use simple, clear and direct language, and show only key information
- Use as much visual and / or auditory support during workshops, presentations as possible. for example, video with narration and subtitles, approved / universal icons, symbols, characters and logos to support the message
- Note the readability of presentations. For example the height of the text, uniform background, sufficient (colour) contrast
- It is possible to simultaneously text into Braille. If this is needed, it is preferable to use a specialised service

Accessibility of the facilities

- Provide a logical and easy setup, and enough space, seating, furniture that can be adjusted / customised
- Provide an orderly and safe environment. Identify any obstacles in the room. For example, cables should be out of the way
- Ensure good lighting
- Ensure good acoustics and sound where possible
- Ensure that speakers are in good light so that lip-readers are able to follow
- Ensure that the presentation space is appropriate for speakers who have additional needs. For example, providing a table and a microphone at the correct height and that any papers are within reach
- Reduce as much ambient and background noise as possible (fans, air conditioning etc.)



Special adjustments

- If there is a lot of visual information presented during the presentation / seminar, it is possible to make it more accessible to people with visual disabilities through audio description
- Provide an audio guide or mobile loop. A loop allows people with a hearing aid to receive a direct audio feed. In order for this to work, the speaker should use a microphone connected to the hearing loop
- If using a sign language interpreter, they should be available from arrival at the reception area so that everyone is received on an equivalent basis. The sign language interpreter must be clearly visible during the presentation
- Make sure your information on paper is also available in large print or Braille upon request
- If necessary, use tactile (tangible) media such as Braille texts, sound recordings or models
- Sometimes disabled people will be accompanied by an assistant and / or an assistance dog. Make sure that the accompanying adult can also participate in the event. An assistance dog should always be permitted