**CIPR**

DIVERSITY
& INCLUSION
NETWORK

# Inclusive Events

A guide from the CIPR's
Diversity and Inclusion Network

**CPD** ⭐5

# Foreword

A core pillar of the Chartered Institute of Public Relations' (CIPR) strategy is to champion lifelong learning, and as public relations (PR) professionals we understand that continuous professional development (CPD) is essential to keep our skills sharp and apace as the practice of PR evolves.

That same commitment to continuous learning is required within the area of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI), because like PR practice, this is also a landscape which isn't static – it shifts as cultures evolve and as a society we better understand perspectives which are different to our own lived experiences.

As we live our lives, whether in a professional context or in our day to day living, our views, choices and decisions are hugely influenced by our own unconscious bias. To respond to this challenge, first we need to recognise that unconscious bias plays a factor in our decision making and, secondly we need to commit to understanding the perspectives of people outside our own sphere of experience. Committing to this approach will ensure the actions we take broaden inclusion and lead to better solutions. Significant data demonstrates that diverse teams perform better, so we all benefit if we work harder to ensure everyone's included and we've removed the barriers that may have prevented participation in the past.

Personally, I'm grateful to the many people, particularly within the CIPR community who have shared their experiences of walking through life in different shoes to my own. I've learnt an awful lot in recent years and I've also appreciated the time given by people to be better informed about my perspective as someone identifying as being within the LGBTQ+ community.

I don't consider myself to be an expert in EDI, but I'm committed to my own continuous personal understanding and being an ally for communities outside my lived experience. I'm privileged to Chair the CIPR's newly created Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Committee, formed with the purpose of ensuring the CIPR is accessible and welcoming to new members, that ours is a culture that is inclusive and that we demonstrate our own good faith and standing when commenting on D&I issues.

The CIPR's own EDI journey has been hugely shaped by the many volunteers who have contributed to our Diversity & Inclusion Network (CIPR DIN). This group seeks to develop an inclusive culture within the public relations industry by raising general awareness of diversity issues, by pursuing an inclusive approach which can improve communications and by increasing the numbers of public relations practitioners from diverse backgrounds.

This guide has been produced by the CIPR DIN and is one of the many resources available to support CIPR members to be better informed around many aspects of EDI. We are extremely grateful to those who have given their time to create this resource and I wish to thank Sara Thornhurst and Vickie Cox in particular for leading this work, together with CIPR DIN Chair, Avril Lee and Vice-Chair Cornelius Alexander.

**Rachel Roberts**
CIPR 2023 Vice-President and Chair of the CIPR's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee

# Introduction

For most PR and communication organisations and teams, improving diversity, both internally and in client work, is deemed a priority but often falls down the list as other daily pressures take hold. This can result in mounting pressure and a feeling of being stuck when it comes to Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI), leaving organisations unsure where to start. This series of guides from the CIPR is a toolkit to inspire action and progress wherever you are in your EDI journey. Each guide focuses on a different area of inclusive communications and together they form a versatile and practical resource suitable for people at any level within an organisation.

These guides align with and are written from the perspective of the Social Model of Disability, a model designed and created by and for disabled people. The Social Model takes the view that people are disabled by barriers in society, not by their impairment or disability. Further reading on the Social Model can be found on the Scope website.

Each guide is worth 5 CPD points.

# How to use this guide

The events we plan and deliver, whether for clients, our own organisations or the PR industry, need to be as inclusive as possible. This guide and the resources it references can be used in the planning process and as a checklist in the run up to events. We have covered online, in-person, and hybrid events in this guide to ensure members have access to best practice regardless of the format of their event.

You can use this guide:

⊕ as an onboarding tool for new employees
⊕ as a foundation to build inclusive processes and systems
⊕ as a guide to make sure that your organisation's inclusion work aligns with the core values of EDI within the CIPR.

# What makes events inclusive?

When we think about events, particularly in-person events, we tend to focus on accessibility and primarily physical accessibility. However an accessible event isn't necessarily an inclusive one. That might feel contradictory, but everyone experiences the world differently, and the number of disabilities and impairments that exist in the world is vast. An inclusive event, irrespective of format recognises this and takes steps to remove as many barriers to participation as possible.

It's also important to know that events, like other areas of disability inclusion, are covered as a service within the UK's Equality Act, and the Americans with Disabilities Act in the US. That means taking steps to remove barriers is a legal and integral part of the process.

An inclusive event is one where all attendees can participate in an equitable way. For further information on what we mean by equity, download our EDI Basics Guide.

# Planning inclusive events

# Planning inclusive events

The planning stage is the point at which inclusion needs to be raised. It's at this stage you need to identify barriers and consider the ways in which they can be removed for your event, this includes factoring in any costs as part of your overall overheads. As disability has a statistically low level of representation in public relations and communications, this can result in too narrow a scope around access and inclusion. Below is an example list of where inclusion needs to be considered, this applies to online, in-person and hybrid events.

## Speakers

- How diverse and representative are your speakers/panellists?
- Where are you searching for speakers/panellists?
- Are you paying speakers a fair market rate?
- Will they be able to participate in every aspect of the event?

## Cost

- Are tickets affordable for historically marginalised groups?
- Is there a pay-it-forward scheme, are you providing discounted or free tickets or a sliding scale for tickets?
- Which is the right option for your event?

## Accessibility

- What barriers to participation exist?
- What accessibility measures will be in place?
- Have you created an accessibility checklist?
- Choose your online event platform carefully. Not all online platforms offer the same accessibility options. Zoom is consistently voted the most accessible platform by disabled people.

## Venue accessibility

- Choosing an accessible venue can be challenging and there is a lot to consider. From routes to, from, into, and around the venue, to the suitability of bathrooms, lifts and lighting. Resources to venue checklists and tips can be found in the Resources section of this guide.

## Event timings

- Consider when to hold your event. If it's early morning or evening, can people travel there and back safely and cost-effectively, will it impact caring responsibilities?

## Event promotion

- Be proactive about telling potential attendees about the inclusiveness of the event. What accessibility is there as standard and how can people submit accommodation needs. Signpost clearly to this information and make event promotion (e.g. social posts) accessible. Our Inclusive Communication Guide has more information on this.

## Presentations and in-event materials

⊕ Make sure presentations and in-event materials are accessible and all speakers know how to deliver inclusive presentations (we cover this later in the guide).

## Workshops and group activities during the event

⊕ What potential barriers exist for any breakout or workshop sessions during the event?

⊕ How can you make these as equitable as possible?

⊕ If you're using tools like Slido for audience participation, or online whiteboards like Miro, make sure they are accessible to disabled people.

⊕ Can everyone reach and access materials?

## Post-event socials and activities

⊕ Consider the impact of any post-event socials. For example, would someone who is unable to participate in post-event networking be placed at a disadvantage to those who go?

⊕ Can disabled people access and use the venue (e.g. can someone get in, navigate around and use the facilities?)

# Accessible presentations

A major element of a lot of events is the presentation or slide deck. Again, because of the underrepresentation of disabled people, and our own biases, it's easy to assume everyone attending is non-disabled or without impairment and build a deck accordingly. This can lead to inaccessible presentations, both in terms of design and delivery.

Here are factors to consider when creating and delivering your presentation:

- If you have charts, graphs, gifs and images make sure they have alt-text (links to how to do this for PowerPoint and Canva are in the resources section).
- Describe images, charts, graphs and gifs for your audience in addition to the alt-text. This includes image only slides.
- Make sure any documents to be shared are run through an accessibility checker.
- Ensure the contrast between the text and images is high enough. The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines recommend a contrast between text and background colours/images of 4.5:1.
- Text should be a minimum of 16pt.
- Read the text on your slides as well as talking around them.
- Use dyslexia-friendly fonts, our Inclusive Communication guide covers formatting and creating accessible documents in more detail
- Where will you be positioned, can people see your face clearly? For lip readers this is important.

- Be aware of how quickly or slowly you're speaking. The average person speaks between 150-200 words a minute. Try to aim for the lower end of this at around 110-150 words per minute. More information on this can be found in the Resources section of this guide.
- If you are holding a mic, make sure you're comfortable using it and remember to keep the mic in line as you turn and move.

Additionally, it's helpful to tell people at the start of your session or presentation what accessibility and inclusion factors are in place. For example, explaining how to turn on captions and introducing your captioner/stenographer and/or BSL interpreter. If you are hosting or chairing an event, do this at the start of the event as part of your introduction and remind people of these periodically for anyone joining later sessions.
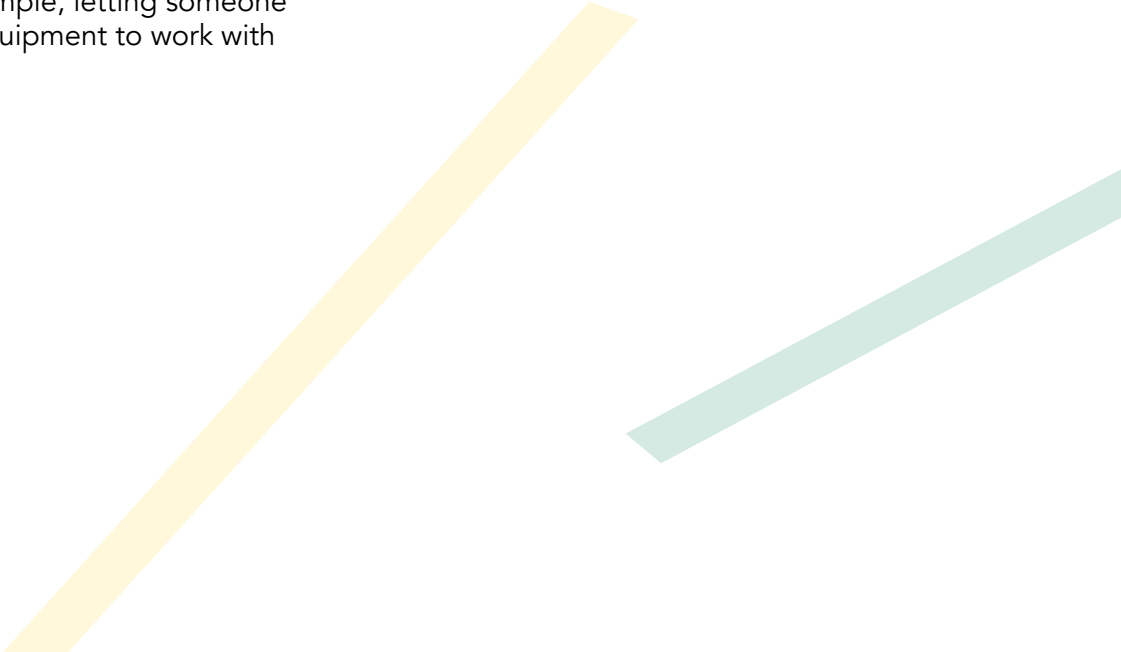
# Inclusive event promotion

# Inclusive event promotion

A common approach is to put general text in place about venue accessibility, or link to a hired venue's own accessibility statement and requesting that anyone who needs accommodations fills out a contact form or sends an email. However, best practice around inclusion means being proactive about broadcasting the steps you've already taken and also inviting people to let you know about individual accommodation requirements. Whilst some disabled people will ask when they need accommodations and assistance, not everyone will feel comfortable doing this. The more information you can provide about the measures in place ahead of time the more likely it is that disabled people will want to attend your event.

**Tips for inclusive event promotion**

- Create a separate section on your event promotion page or website, with a detailed breakdown of your inclusion and accessibility efforts. You can use the planning list at the start of this guide to design a helpful FAQ.

- When planning and creating content promoting the event, create both image and alt-text descriptions and send these along with the creative assets to the speakers or panellists involved in your event. Remind them to include both when sharing their participation.

- Make it as easy as possible for someone to let you know about their accommodation requirement. For example, a Google Form is accessible and simple to use. And make sure that any requests are replied to and followed through, passing any necessary information back to the requestee. For example, letting someone know where to pick up equipment to work with a hearing loop.

- Provide as much information as possible in joining instructions to reduce social anxiety.

- Provide agendas ahead of the event and stick to them. If a change needs to be made, ensure it is communicated clearly and ahead of the change being made. Make sure it's clear what the next steps will be to reduce anxiety for attendees.

# Running inclusive events

# Running inclusive events

Whilst a lot of inclusive planning should already be done by the time of your event there are still plenty of opportunities to champion inclusion in the run up to and during the event itself. The following suggestions are split into three categories; online events, in-person events, and hybrid events. There will be some overlap, but it's important to consider as many of these points as possible.

## Online events

### Audio

- Speakers should be using stand alone mics, if possible, with quiet backgrounds.
- Captions should be provided, preferably by a stenographer/closed captioner, as automated captions are not yet good enough quality to create an equitable experience.
- Sign language interpreters should be introduced and information given about what sign language interpretation involves (e.g. interpreters will often sign for a specific period of time, then swap over).
- Anyone providing captioning or signing services should have been briefed with names, scripts, slides prior to the event.
- Avoid using hold-style music or background music as this can be overwhelming and make it more difficult to hear the voices of speakers.
- If speakers are playing videos within presentations, these also need to be accessible with captions and sign language and audio description.

### Visual

- Have large print slides ready to send ahead of the event and ensure these are accessible (e.g. can be read by screen readers).
- If any videos will be played during the event are there audio description versions available?
- Chat boxes on platforms like Zoom and Microsoft are often inaccessible which can exclude blind and visually impaired people. Ensure questions are in the Q&A box and that hosts either respond verbally, or by typing a response in the box.

### Speakers

- Speakers should describe what they look like and what they're wearing as part of their introductions.
- All speakers should announce their name before speaking - especially on a panel.
- Keep background noise to a minimum - avoid people talking over each other, especially for panel events.
- It can be more difficult to understand body language or gestures online, try to be aware of movement and gestures.

### Timings

- Ensure regular breaks for whole session days. Ideally 5 minutes for every 45 minutes.
- Keep spaces between presentations to give people a chance to take a screen break.

## In-person events

### Audio

- Hosts and speakers should have microphones.
- Live captioning should be in place, do not rely on automated captions - they won't be sufficient.
- Sign language interpreters should be introduced and information given about what sign language interpretation involves (e.g. interpreters will often sign for a specific period of time, then swap over).
- Hearing loops should be available - either installed in the venue or a portable loop in place for the event. Provide clear instructions on how to access and use the hearing loop.
- Anyone providing captioning or signing services should have been briefed with names, scripts, slides prior to the event.
- Provide quiet spaces, where people can take a break from noise overwhelm.
- Consider providing headphones or earplugs.

### Visual

- Have clear and large print signage, and if possible, Braille signage, covering routes to all relevant locations.
- Provide spaces and water for assistance dogs.
- Consider providing a buddy who is familiar and confident with Sighted Guiding Techniques.

### Speakers

- Follow the same guidance for speakers at online events.

### Timings

- Consider including rest sessions for full day sessions. Try to keep sessions under an hour or over with a break to enable people to move around, head to a quiet space or attend to any medical needs.
- Consider start and finish times. For example, events which start early in the morning can be inaccessible due to lack of provision of support on public transport and space at peak times.

### General

- Provide a contact email or phone number for people with accessibility requirements so they can share any concerns or needs they may have.
- Let people know in joining instructions for physical events that they can reserve a space at the front or near to the front to enhance their experience.
- Ensure someone has time to arrive earlier if necessary so they can familiarise themselves with the room.
- Provide personal whiteboards / tablets so that people who cannot speak can communicate - this should be in addition to an interpreter.
- Consider having badges or stickers that they can wear to make others aware of how comfortable they are with interaction. This is particularly helpful for networking events.
- Can attendees reach any provided materials such as whiteboards?
- Is there a selection of different seating available? For example, can people lie down and listen to sessions?
- Ensure catering is inclusive of allergy, cultural and accessibility needs.

# Hybrid events

### Audio

- Where are mics positioned in the room? Can those participating online hear clearly.
- Will the acoustics of the room make it more challenging for people participating online to hear what's being said by people in the room?
- Is a hearing loop installed, working and do event organisers know how to inform and obtain any equipment for this to give to attendees?
- Captioners and sign language interpreters should also be provided for hybrid events. Similarly, the guidance for online events and in-person events should be followed for scripts and slides.

### Visual

- Follow and combine the guidance for in-person and online events.

### Speakers

- Follow and combine the guidance for in-person and online events.

### Timings

- Again, ensure regular breaks for those attending in person and online and time sessions accordingly.

# Conflicting access needs

There is a common phrase in the disability community which is 'disability is not a monolith'. This means no disability presents the same way, impacts someone in the same way, and that disability is complex and multi-faceted. Because of this, conflicting access needs can often occur. This is when the accommodations of one individual or group clash with the needs of another. A simple example of conflicting access needs is Person A requiring bright lighting and Person B requiring dimmed lighting.

The process of making our industry inclusive is not perfect and the solution may not be clear cut or obvious. In terms of events there are ways we can try to mitigate conflicting access needs. One way is by fostering open dialogue around accommodations and discussing the individual accommodations with the people involved. This can help establish whether a compromise is possible, or whether another solution is viable. It's not advisable to ignore a situation of conflicting access needs or make a unilateral decision based on what you're prepared or not to do. The Resources section has further examples of conflicting access needs and how to bridge these gaps.

# Resources

**Web Accessibility Initiative –** Making Events Accessible

**Gov.uk –** Advice for Making Events Accessible

**Bright Carbon –** Presentations for People with Colour Blindness

**Microsoft –** How to make PowerPoint accessible to disabled people

**Scope –** Checking venue accessibility

**A Leader Like Me –** Underrepresented speakers list

**Microsoft –** Making slides easier to read by using the Reading Pane function

**TheBroadcat.com –** Adding alt-text to PowerPoint

**Canva –** Adding alt-text to images and elements

**Virtual Speech –** How to calculate your speaking rate

**Find a BSL Interpreter –** The Regulatory Body for Sign Language Interpreters and Translators
Association of Sign Language Interpreters

**British Institute of Verbatim Reporters –** Find a professional

**The National Registers of Communication Professionals working with Deaf and DeafBlind People –** Find a registered communication professional

**Inspire Me –** Event and venue accessibility for blind and visually impaired people

**Hearing Loop –** A selection of loop options for commercial purposes

**Healthcare Improvement Scotland –** Event participation checklist

**PEAT –** Bridging different access needs

**Autistic Self Advocacy Network –** Conflicting access needs

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