# Inclusive Co-design: A how-to guide

Disabled people face a cycle of exclusion: living in a world that was not designed with us in mind, we face barriers every day, in all areas of life. These same barriers stop us from getting involved and having our voices heard, so our lived experience expertise is missing from the process of designing solutions. Barriers persist and multiply each time designs and decisions are made without us. Inclusive co-design can help us break this cycle of exclusion, create services and solutions that leave no one behind – and build a more equal society in the long run.

Inclusive co-design

can break this cycle

Solutions are missed, so barriers persist and get worse

Barriers exclude us from life and decision making

# Involving disabled people: how-to checklist

## Getting started – Project planning

### Ask us!

Involve disabled people from the earliest planning stages.

Ask disabled people what their involvement should look like – and what support they may need to participate.

### Co-design the agenda:

Having clear questions in mind for disabled people to answer is a great starting point – but be aware that the key issues from disabled people’s point of view may differ from priorities you initially identify.

Be flexible and open to developing a shared agenda, so you can encourage and learn from the lived experience expertise. The collaborative sense-making approach should start from the very first contact of engagement.

Be open and honest about your purpose acknowledging power dynamics to build trust.

Demonstrate listening and valuing disabled people’s contributions.

Create a sense of learning all round – emphasise that no one party has all the answers.

### **Reaching out: Disabled people led organisations (DPOs).**

DPOs are a grassroots network connecting disabled people who have invaluable insights and contributions to share (see Appendix 1)

Ask a DPO for advice:

How best to engage and involve disabled participants

How to frame the issues in a way that is most relevant and accessible to disabled people

How best to tap into the lived experience expertise you need

## Getting it right on the day - Planning research events

### Inclusive Communication - Co-design your communications: content, style and channels.

As disabled people led organisations are often over-stretched and under-resourced, make your communications as accessible as you can to begin with, before seeking feedback from the intended audience.

#### Making your documents accessible:

**Plain English** at all times. Avoid acronyms, abbreviations and jargon - if you must use them, explain them.

**San serif** font, **Size 14** font minimum.

**Bold for emphasis** (avoid all caps / italics / underlined).

**Left alignment** at all times – avoid justifying.

**High contrast, solid background** (avoid wording over images or busy backgrounds).

Leave white space.

**Use formatting** (headings, body text) to aid screen reader navigation.

To assist those with lower literacy, learning difficulties, or those learning English:

**Use images which support the text.**

**Avoid contractions** (such as can’t, isn’t):full words aid understanding.

**Avoid using questions as headings** as these can make readers feel as if they are being tested: better to say “About Inclusive Design” than “What is Inclusive Design?”

Other assistance:

**Offer alternative formats:** Braille, BSL, audio, plain text version emailed in advance.

#### Making your Communications Inclusive

Ask what formats or support people may need for communication.

Provide information in advance so people have time to prepare and take part fully.

Verbally described and visuals used, to ensure those with visual impairments are included.

Set aside budgets to provide BSL interpreters / palantypist note-takers if required.

If online, use closed caption or subtitles functions.

Make sure people can contact you via Contact Scotland-BSL video link.

Plan meetings to give enough time for those with communication support needs to understand and participate

Build in breaks – this is important for interpreters or palantypists as well as participants.

### Let people know you are accessible!

Tell people your event, meeting or process is accessible, or we will assume it is not.

Outline what access arrangements are available / in place (such as transport, personal assistance, digital support). (see appendix 2)

Encourage people to get in touch if there are any other adjustments they may need.

Be honest about what you are not able to provide - this will build trust.

### Offer multiple ways to participate:

If people cannot attend face to face, consider ways they can share their views and experiences with you by phone, email, or online chat.

**Ask disabled people what methods have worked for them**; be flexible and offer choices to maximise participation and contributions

**Outreach methods** should include post, phone, in-person, radio/ TV/ print media, as well as email and social media – to ensure you can reach those who face digital exclusion as well as online audiences.

BSL and subtitled videos to promote the engagement will encourage Deaf people to participate and reassure them that their communication needs will be met.

### Offer Support and sign posting

### Topics discussed could bring about stress or painful/sad memories after your event is over. It is good to provide all participants with a contact organisation or signposting to more information/help on a topic.

Provide information people can take away so they can easily contact an organisation that could help them deal with issues related to what they discussed.

# Online Participation: Inclusion Checklist

Online sessions can open your process to more participants.However, many disabled people face digital exclusion, so online engagement is best used alongside other methods i.e. phone calls, face to face. This will help you access lived experience expertise from diverse backgrounds and skillsets as well.

**Digital Inclusion:** Many disabled people lack the technology, connectivity or confidence to access activities and information online. The right access and support can boost disabled people’s digital inclusion, confidence and participation in the process.

## Getting started - Planning for digital

Can you support participants to access a device or connectivity (data top up, mifi?) if they need it to take part?

Check participants have enough data to join a video call. Someone who mostly browses webpages may think they have lots of data, not realising Zoom uses 3GB / hour – check in advance that taking part won’t wipe out their allowance - or worse, cost them a lot of money.

Can you invest time and patience to coach those who lack confidence or experience to get online?

## Getting digital right on the day - Planning digital events

Not everyone has an email address or understands the concept of email; can you support them to set one up so they can receive and open a link?

Encourage prospective digital learner to have a go and persevere - reassure them that you won’t give up on them just because they need a bit longer.

Many things that might seem natural to digitally experienced people can be foreign and overwhelming for a new learner. Are you ready to explain common terms like ‘browser’, ‘data’, ‘wifi’ and ‘link’

Be ready to explain actions like ‘swipe’, ‘short press’ versus ‘long press’. Some people may find these easier with a stylus, or may need support to change the settings and sensitivity.

Make no assumptions about someone’s literacy skills. Describe what an app or icon look like to help them identify and navigate the screen – or ask them to describe what they see.

If someone is struggling to find the ‘unmute’ button, make use of the ‘ask to unmute’ function – this brings up a prompt in the middle of the person’s screen and they can just press ‘agree’.

Some people may need a reminder call or text, or quick refresher on how to access the link to the session.

Reach out by phone or SMS if they do not appear, to offer support with any last minute difficulties connecting.

Preparing someone for their first videocall, explain that participants will be able to see and hear them, their surroundings, and anyone else in the room, so to be aware of privacy and confidentiality concerns. Suggest headphones or earphones if this is helpful.

Some participants may need physical support from someone in their household e.g. to get set up, to mute / unmute. Explore this with them and ensure the pacing and participation allows time for this.

#### Additional considerations for digital events

**Chat function:** can be an enabler for people to share their views – especially for people who are unable to contribute vocally. It can also be distracting if over-used, especially for those using Screenreaders and some autistic people. Agree guidelines around the chat function to accommodate who is attending - remind people to use it sparingly or only if necessary. In larger events, there may be points when it is appropriate to disable the chat function, such as during a speaker or a specific task.

**Access:** Accessibility functions vary with different platforms -Keep up to date on changes with video conferencing apps as functionality and accessibility change frequently. Zoom and MS Teams each have their advantages – while, at the time of writing, Webex is incompatible with screen readers. Above all, ask disabled people what they prefer or find more accessible.

Ask about access needs, to help establish the most appropriate platform and accessibility features that will be needed. Check whether note-takers or interpreters are required, and ensure that whoever you book is familiar with the platform you will be using.

**Flexibility:** Are you flexible in how people can participate e.g. leaving camera switched off, using chat functions rather than speaking. Can people dial in, take part by email or on the phone?

**More info:** Disability Equality Scotland’s[**Webinar**](https://inclusivecommunication.scot/covid-19-how-to-run-accessible-online-meetings-for-disabled-people-working-and-studying-from-home) on running inclusive online sessions.

**Appendix 1**

**Reaching out:**

**National and Regional Disabled People led Organisations (DPOs)**

DPOs are organisations which are **run by and for disabled people** with disabled people making up at least 51% of the Board.

**Disability Equality Scotland** working for access and inclusion nationally; information hubs on travel, hate crime, inclusive communication.

**Deaf Scotland** membership organisation for networks of Deaf Sign Language users, and people who are Deafblind, Deafened and Hard of Hearing.

**British Deaf Association** (BDA) advocacy, policy and capacity building for Deaf communities across the UK.

**Inclusion Scotland** National Policy and DPO umbrella organisation (see [**directory**](https://inclusionscotland.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/DPO-directory-2018.pdf)): runs Access to Elected Office fund and Internship programme for disabled people.

**People First Scotland** led by people with learning difficulties, local branches in Glasgow, Fife and South Lanarkshire

**Self-Directed Support Scotland -** Umbrella supporting [**organisations**](https://www.sdsscotland.org.uk/members/) driving Independent Living and Self-Directed Support.

**VOX** (Voices of Experience) led by people with mental health conditions – [**network**](http://voxscotland.org.uk/local-groups/) of local user-led groups.

**Glasgow Disability Alliance** community development organisation led by 5000+ disabled members – collective voice to influence change; accessible learning, coaching and peer support.

**Glasgow Centre for Inclusive Living:** provides training and support to boost choice and control, through access to SDS, peer support, accessible housing, employability.

**Lothian Centre for Inclusive Living:** supports independent living through SDS, information, training and peer support.

**Local Access Panels** workwith planners to remove barriers in local environment: accesspanelnetwork.org.uk

**Local or thematic community led / self-help organisations** may exist in different areas. Try searching local authority social work pages, groups or networks on social media, or check [**https://www.aliss.org/**](https://www.aliss.org/)

**Appendix 2**

**In-person** **Participation: Inclusion Checklist**

**Venues / Meeting Space**

Visit in advance and/or ask for an access audit/ access statement: share this info with participants in advance.

**Lifts** required, if rooms are not on ground floor. Are all lifts working well, and spacious enough for a wheelchair user and companion?

Is there plenty of turning space outside the lift doors on each floor?

**Toilets:** is there at least one accessible toilet – is it spacious, clean and well-stocked? Are toilets all on one level, close to the room being used? Fewer toilets will require longer breaks. Check whether a hoist or [Changing Places](https://pamis.org.uk/campaigns/changing-places-toilets/) facility is needed – these can be [hired in](https://pamis.org.uk/campaigns/pamiloo/).

**Space:** Think about:

* Level access throughout.
* Distance from car park / entrance to meeting space: let people know.
* Variety of seating: with / without arms, cushioned / supportive for those with chronic pain.
* Are there tables for people to use? Is there plenty of space between tables for wheelchair users to pass each other freely? Are there rest areas with seating, and quiet spaces?

**Lighting and sound**

* Can lighting be adjusted for different visually impaired people’s needs? Is there good contrast for people moving around the space?
* Is there a loop system – can you hire one if needed? Is there a roving mic for speakers, and to assist discussions in a large group?

**Timings**

* Avoid starting meetings too early in the morning – this can be a barrier for many reasons e.g. social care support, impairment or condition.
* Build in breaks to your session or event, factor in extra time for people who need assistance to use facilities / get refreshments.
* Will there be plenty of time and support available to participants for understanding and having their say?

“Meetings need to go at a pace that we can follow.”

**Transport**

Many disabled people will only be able to attend if taxis are provided:

* Ask what kind of taxi they require: ’Black Cab’, TX1, private hire, step or ramp access?
* Cover costs of taxis, mileage or public transport: Reimburse on the day or pay taxis directly if you can.
* Ensure there is accessible parking and space for dropping off at the venue.
* Check if participants need to be met on arrival.

**Support/Personal Assistance** is a vital part of making events accessible. Ask people what their support needs are and think about how you will meet them. Extra staff, or Personal Assistants (PAs) may be needed to help people with:

* Getting in & out of transport.
* Navigating in and around the venue.
* Finding a suitable seat or place at the event.
* Getting refreshments.
* Reading, writing & taking part in activities.
* Personal care (experienced PA required).