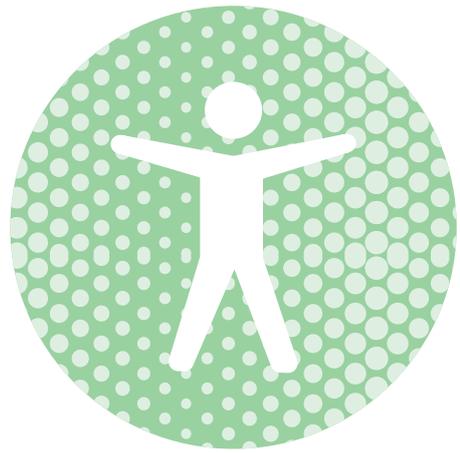


THEATRUM
MUNDI



Accessibility Toolkit

Case Study: PolyVocalCity 2024

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Authors:
Paige Joseph
Lou-Atessa Marcellin
Natalia Marchant-Martinez

Collaborators:
Jordan Whitewood-Neal
Chloe Spiby Loh
Mira Hirtz

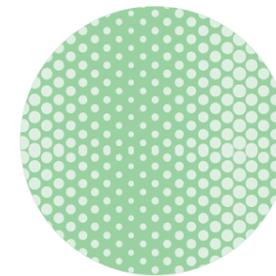
July 2024

Key

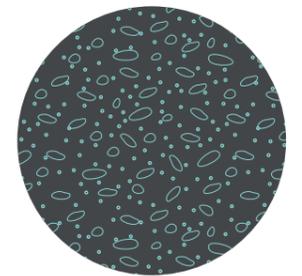
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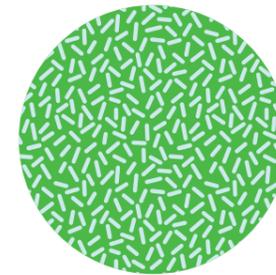
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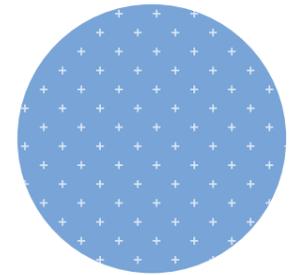
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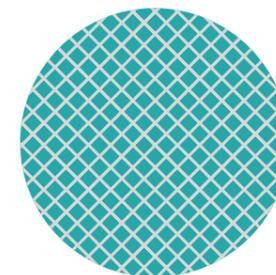
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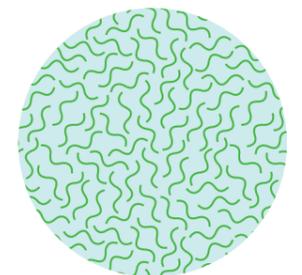
Equipment +
Resources



Mobility



Inclusivity



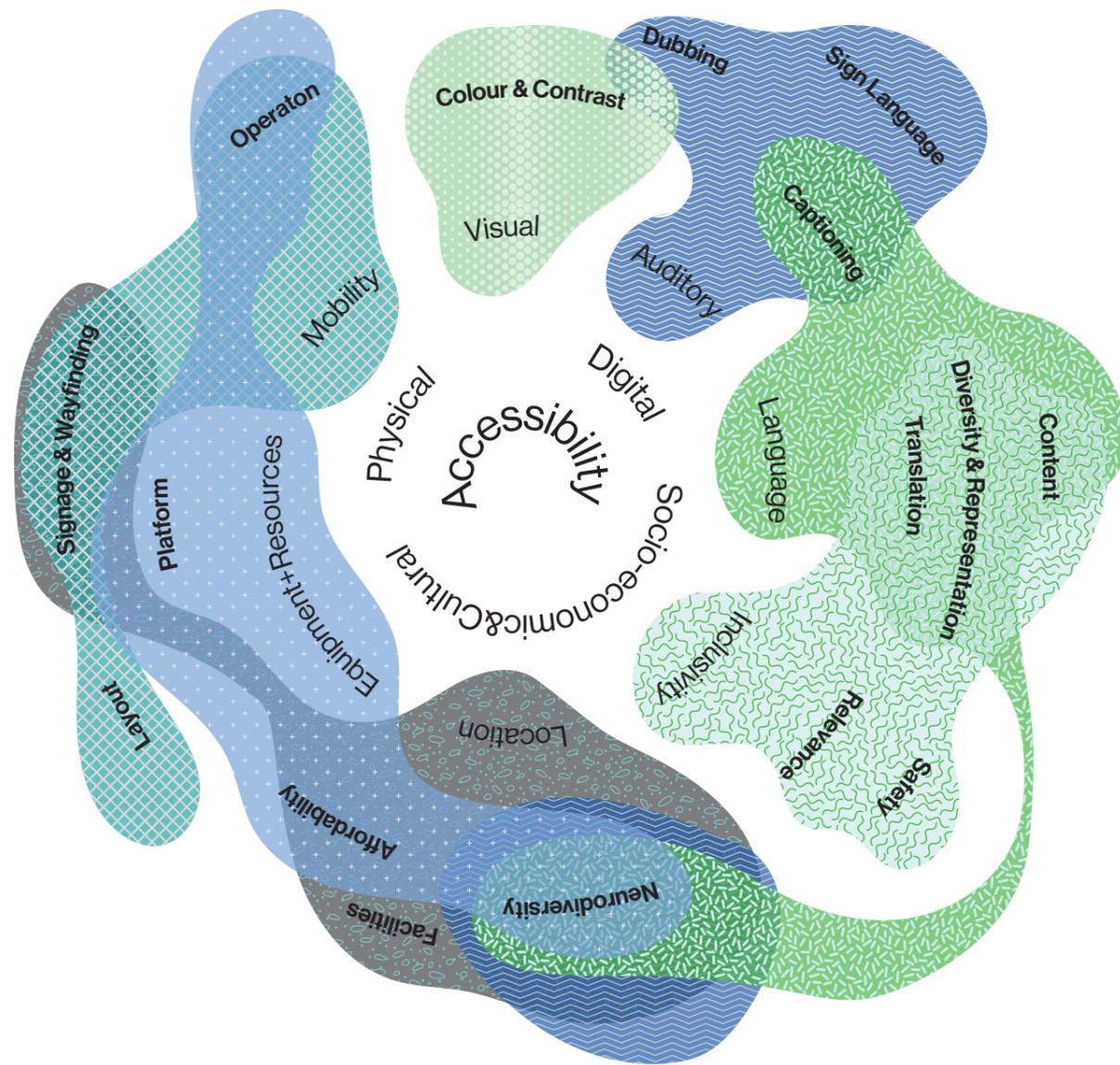


Diagram of Accessibility Considerations

Introduction

What is accessibility in a creative context?

A strong commitment to inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility promotes and diversifies talents in artistic projects. Creating equitable access in the arts means ensuring all individuals, regardless of protected characteristics, has access to art, an opportunity to create art, and an equal chance to share their art with others

We can consider accessibility as as “a set of solutions that empower the greatest number of people to participate in the activities in question in the most effective ways possible” (Sukhai, 2019). This toolkit outlines some of the accessibility considerations when working in a creative context. This extends to amplifying diverse voices, designing for print or screen, operations when producing content, and to the equitable access of work.

“Access Intimacy” is a concept by disability justice activist and writer Mia Mingus. It occurs when all of an individuals access needs are met, and inspires feelings of understanding, trust and intimacy between individuals with

disabilities and their allies. For people with disabilities, access intimacy can contribute to a sense of autonomy and belonging by allowing them to fully participate in activities.

This toolkit focuses on three areas of accessibility; digital, physical, and socio-economic & cultural. Although we have grouped considerations for accessibility this way, it is an expansive and interlinked topic, and the toolkit should be consulted as a whole document for best understanding. This toolkit is by no means a definitive guidebook, and we acknowledge that each person is different and has varying access needs. Readers are encouraged to consult the References listed on Page X which offer comprehensive Accessibility research and guidance.



PolyVocalCity 2024

Case Study: PolyVocalCity 2024

PolyVocalCity is an annual non-hierarchical knowledge exchange workshop ran by Theatrum Mundi. It began in 2022, with the aim of generating knowledge through making, and generating new strands of research informed by lived experiences. The cohort participates in a seven-month curated program of workshops, talks, walks and activities led by a diverse network of collaborators including artists, activists, thinkers and urbanists. Participants develop their thinking and practice through the co-production of knowledge, establishing a platform for sharing cross-disciplinary ideas on city-making.

Since 2023, it has been anchored to Croydon Town, and has formed partnerships with local artists, community groups and organisations. This year, participants have co-produced a TV show exploring how to enact social and environmental justice for Croydon and beyond. The show explores the metaphor of parasitic life, and interrogates symbiotic relationships based on co-dependency and

resilience.

Through using PolyVocalCity as a Case Study, we can show how accessibility has been considered at design, operation and production stages, and consider the practicalities of achieving “Access Intimacy” in a creative context.

Digital



Designing digital content to be accessible is essential to reach a wide audience and ensure work can be enjoyed by all. Accessibility features for digital content such as clear navigation, readability and intuitive interfaces improve the overall user experience, making the material easier to interact with for everyone. Digital content can be made compatible with a range of assistive technologies, such as screen readers, text-to-speech software, and braille displays, making it accessible to individuals with visual or auditory impairments.

Digital content can be viewed 24/7, making it accessible for those with time commitments and irregular working hours. Users can also control how they consume the content; platforms can offer customisable options like adjustable text size, contrast settings, and language preference. Furthermore, users can control the pace at which they consume digital content, pausing, rewinding, and revisiting materials as needed to enhance understanding and retention.

When creating exhibitions or publications with the intention of in-person engagement, it is important to strive to translate the work into a high quality digital version for those who cannot access it physically, whether due to geographic barriers, financial constraints or disabilities. Digital access also reduces the need for travel and will therefore lower the carbon footprint associated with visiting venues.

Prioritising digital accessibility directly benefits the organisations and artists behind the work, as it ensures the art can reach a global audience, safeguards work from being lost or damaged, and preserves it for future generations. It also gives the opportunity to provide supplementary information which enhances the users experience.

Digital / Auditory



Text Content:

1. Break up content with sub-headings, images and videos, do not make users read long blocks of text.

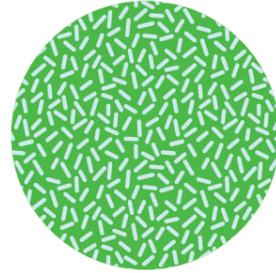
Video Content:

1. Transcripts should be made available. They should include spoken audio as well as on-screen text and descriptions of key visual information that wouldn't otherwise be accessible without seeing the video.
2. Provide open or closed captions.
3. Provide sign language interpreting (SLI) where possible. Not all Deaf are able to understand captioning, and sign languages are the first, native and preferred form of communication of many Deaf people. Bear in mind that a sign language interpreter may need to be booked months in advance.

Communications:

1. Allow multiple ways a user can contact your organisation, such as by email or by post. Do not make telephone the only means of contact.

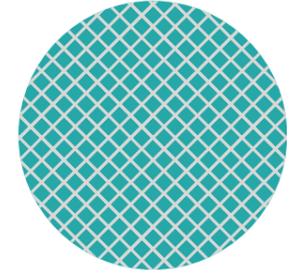
Digital / Language



Video Content:

1. Provide subtitles in foreign languages. They should convey dialogue, on-screen text (insert shots such as letters, web pages, inscriptions, etc) and relay information from the soundtrack (such as song lyrics, or identifying the voices of any off-screen characters).
2. Where possible, provide dubbed video content.
3. Provide transcripts in foreign languages. They should include spoken audio as well as on-screen text and descriptions of key visual information that wouldn't otherwise be accessible without seeing the video.

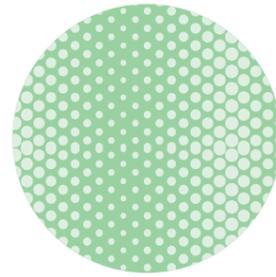
Digital / Mobility



Websites & Text Content:

1. Design for keyboard or speech only use. Do not make dynamic content that requires a lot of mouse movement.
2. Design with mobile and touchscreen in mind.
3. Give users plenty of time to use or view your content, do not have short time out windows.
4. Make large clickable actions, not ones that demand precision.
5. Give form fields space, do not bunch interactions together.
6. Provide shortcuts, do not tire users with lots of typing and scrolling.

Digital / Visual



For users that are visually impaired or deficient in colour vision:

1. Publish all information on web pages, bury information in downloads.
2. Offer customisable options to make web pages clearer for different users. Allow users to adjust text size, contrast and cursor size.
3. Use a combination of colour, shapes and text. Do not only use colour to convey meaning.
4. Put buttons and notifications in context, do not separate actions from their context.
5. Use accessible colour combinations that have enough contrast to make layered elements clearly distinguishable. Colour combinations with a contrast ratio of 7:1 for normal text and 4.5:1 for large text and graphics provide enhanced accessibility.
6. Break up low contrast colours by separating them using white space

or dark space.

7. Apply icons, underlining, labels and patterns to distinguish elements. When in doubt, don't rely on colour as your only indicator alone. It's best practice to add another layer of visual differentiation to the mix, particularly for interactive elements and data visualizations.
8. Provide audio description. Audio description is an accessibility service that provides audio narrations of visual elements in media, such as movies and TV shows, to help individuals with visual impairments. It should include detailed descriptions of actions, gestures, facial expressions, and scene changes, integrated during natural pauses in dialogue. Advancements in technology, such as AI and VR, are enhancing and expanding the capabilities and reach of audio description.

For neurodivergent users:

1. Use simple colours (not bright and contrasting).
2. Make any buttons descriptive, not vague and unpredictable.

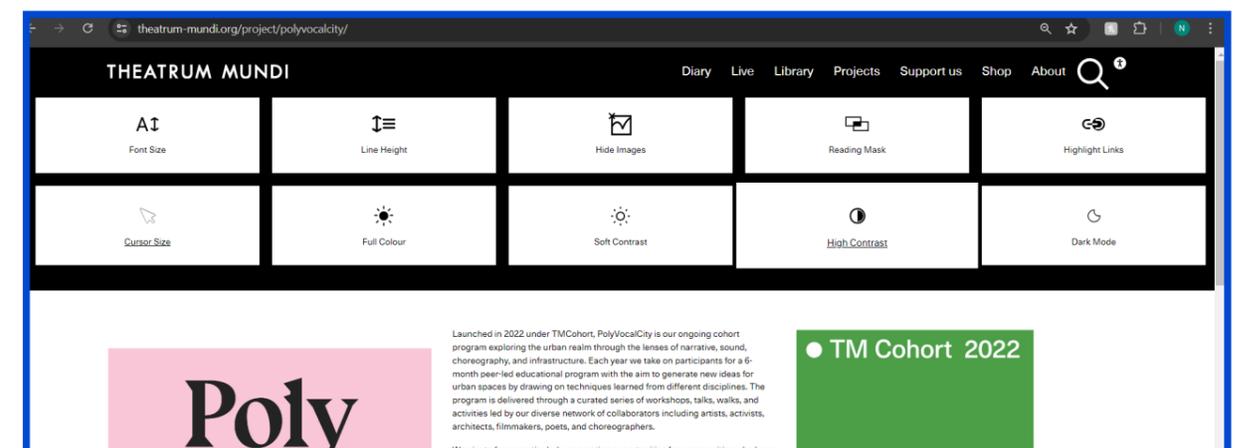
Use simple and consistent layouts.

For users of screen readers:

3. Describe images and provide transcripts for video.
4. Structure content using HTMLs. build for keyboard use only, do not force mouse or screen use.
5. Write descriptive links and headings.

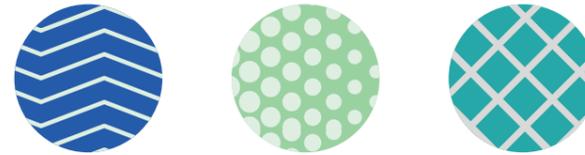
For users with dyslexia:

6. Use images and diagrams to support text.
7. Align text to the left and keep a consistent layout.
8. Do not underline words, use italics or write in capitals.
9. Consider producing material in other formats (for example, audio or video).
10. Do not force users to remember things from previous pages. Give reminders and prompts.
11. Keep content short, clear and simple. Do not rely on accurate spelling, use autocorrect or provide suggestions.
12. Let users change the contrast between background and text.



Case Study: Theatrum Mundi Website's Accessible features allow users to customise the layout and colour contrast of digital content, the High Contrast version can be seen above.

Physical



While digital access is important, in-person events make art accessible to those who may not have the means or inclination to engage with digital platforms. They reach diverse audiences and can be inclusive in ways that digital experiences might not be. Experiencing art in person engages multiple senses. The scale, texture, and spatial arrangement of artworks, along with the ambiance of the venue, contribute to a richer, more immersive experience.

In person events can benefit the local community and the arts organisation hosting. They help to sustain art institutions, galleries, and museums by driving membership, donations, and public engagement. They also create job opportunities for event organizers, artists, and related professionals.

It is best practice to have direct experience of disability in projects, or a disability adviser to offer guidance on accessibility; they can ensure all participants' access needs are met and arrange the layout of the space.

Consider contacting organisations that specialise in accessibility methods for events or exhibitions.

The first thing to do when planning a physically accessible event or exhibition is to contact participants well before the event date to ask about their access needs, so that you are able to provide exactly what they need, such as a ramp, parking, real time captioning, an interpreter, regular resting spaces, etc. Have a dedicated budget for access to venues, and plan with plenty of time. Communicate important details about the event in advance, including accessibility information, schedule, and what to expect, so attendees can prepare and feel more comfortable upon arrival.

Physical / Auditory



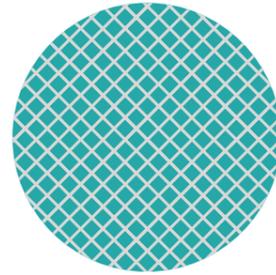
In-person events:

1. Provide Assistive Listening Devices such as hearing loops, Frequency systems, or infrared systems to help users with hearing impairments.
2. For classes, workshops, and presentations, provide CART (Communication Access Real Time Translation) and Sign Language Interpretation. Make sure presenters speak punctually, so that the interpreter has time to catch up, and so that Deaf people have enough time to see the caption/interpretation along with any other visual materials. Give interpreters the materials in advance, so that they have time to prepare. This is especially important for jargon and technical terms that may need time to interpret.
3. Understand the varieties of sign languages. When inviting a Deaf and Hard of Hearing person, ask which type of sign language interpretation they prefer.
4. Venues that use intercom for access are inaccessible for Deaf people, so consider alternatives when planning events or exhibitions.

In an interview with **Jordan Whitewood-Neal**, an architectural researcher and designer whose work addresses disability justice, domesticity and pedagogy, we discussed how considering accessibility can drive designs forward. He explained how, in a recent film exhibition, he and his team had created a seat that vibrated in cohesion with the sounds of the film. This provided a form of conveying an element of the story to Deaf visitors that went beyond captioning to stimulate the senses.

“Because we had [accessibility] at the start and it was part of the creative process, it was much more productive. It felt like it was actually adding to the entire piece rather than being a challenge we had to overcome at the end.”

Physical / Mobility



In-person events:

1. Street level and ground floor venues are preferable, and if not, ensure there is a lift or ramp. Hire ramps rather than building or improvising them. This ensures it meets safety and usability regulations. Any small steps or raised areas, for example in doorways, will require a ramp.
2. At points in exhibitions or events where users are expected to dwell, provide chairs or benches to allow them to engage with the work. It is best practice to provide plenty of chairs for those who would like to sit or rest.
3. Provide a comfortable quiet room or area with seating and lying down furniture.
4. Provide water bowls for guide dogs in the space. Be aware that you may need to point those looking to a spot where they can relieve themselves.
5. Brief all staff (invigilators, front of house, security) of any special requirements of users attending. Inform them on how to evacuate accessibly and safely in case of emergency.
6. Ensure all seating is appropriate for disabled users. High seating and bar stools are not accessible. Ensure the bar is an appropriate height for wheelchair users or people of short stature.
7. Provide options of multiple drinking receptacles, and ensure straws are available.
8. Manage the capacity of the venue wisely. If it is too busy, it will not be accessible for wheelchair users manoeuvres. Consider staggering entry to the event so that you have an accessible, quiet or relaxed viewing which starts earlier.
9. Allow a minimum of 1.3 metres between objects such as plinths, seating and tables.

10. Consider the heights of work displayed on walls and on plinths, they should be easily visible for wheelchair users and people of short stature.
11. Ensure the venue has fully accessible toilets.



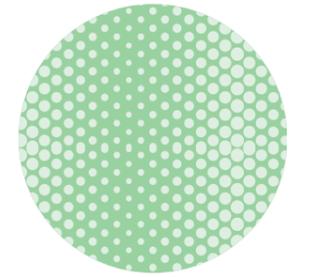
Case Study: Wheelchair Accessible layout of the PolyVocalCity final Screening at Turf Projects, Whitgift Centre, Croydon.

Poly Vocal City

What's On?

Case Study: Accessible colour combinations used in the promotional materials for the PolyVocalCity Callout.

Physical / Visual



In-person content:

1. Provide audio description services for visually impaired viewers, which describe visual elements of the production in real-time.
2. Provide photosensitive warnings in good time for any flickering, blinking or flashing scenes in theatre or film.
3. Use simple sentences and bullet points for any text used in exhibitions or productions.
4. Use accessible colour combinations that have enough contrast to make layered elements clearly distinguishable. Colour combinations with a contrast ratio of 7:1 for normal text and 4.5:1 for large text and graphics provide enhanced accessibility.
5. Break up low contrast colours by separating them using white space or dark space.
6. Apply icons, underlining, labels and patterns to distinguish elements.

Socio-economic & Cultural



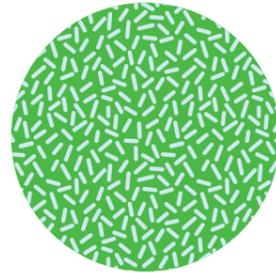
Diversity is an integral part of the artistic process. It is an important element in the dynamic that drives art forward, that innovates it and brings it closer to a profound dialogue with contemporary society. Whether planning an event, organising content or assembling a design team, organisations should strive to create accessibility for those from all socio-economic backgrounds and cultures.

Accessible arts programmes and events provide opportunities for people from different backgrounds to come together and build mutual understanding and respect. Engagement with the arts can significantly contribute to an individuals' personal development, offering ways to explore identity, express emotions, and develop self-confidence and resilience. Participation in the arts can be a means of social mobility, offering individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds opportunities for upward social movement through scholarships, grants, and exposure. Engaging in artistic workshops and initiatives has been shown to improve mental

health and well-being of participants. It can provide a space for emotional expression, reduce stress, and enhance overall quality of life, especially for those who might not have access to other forms of mental health support.

Creating accessibility for all cultures ensures that the arts represent the diverse backgrounds and experiences of all people. Art programmes can build bridges between cultures, encouraging dialogue, collaboration, and facilitate the sharing of cultural knowledge. By bringing together people from different cultural backgrounds, accessible arts initiatives can promote social cohesion in communities.

Socio-economic & Cultural / Language



Fieldwork:

1. Consider providing translations of surveys or interview questions for participants.
2. Share information about the project when asking people to participate. Being transparent and offering a knowledge exchange prevents any exchanges from being exploitative, and people will feel more comfortable with sharing personal information.
3. Offer alternative ways of participation. Some may prefer one-to-one interviews, focus groups, or online communication.
4. Offer participants alternative ways of communicating, whether that is verbally, written on paper, written on a screen, or typed with a keyboard.
5. Avoid giving time limits. If asking participants to complete surveys, offer a link to it online or give a print copy that they can fill out and return later.

Text content & Communication:

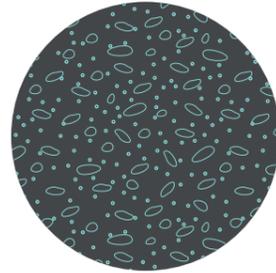
1. Use clear, simple and concise language that avoids jargon, acronyms, or technical terms. If they are used, offer a glossary that users can refer to.
2. Use appropriate terminology, use inclusive language, and avoid heteronormativity and misgendering. Ask people their preferred pronouns respectfully and privately.
3. When discussing peoples families and loved ones, use the word 'partner' rather than 'husband' or 'wife'.
4. Don't dwell on mistakes, apologise and move on, and avoid making the same mistake again.
5. Ask for people's names and ensure you use correct pronunciation.

Workshops:

1. Create opportunities for participants to ask questions, share opinions, give feedback, and collaborate with each other.
2. Use a variety of engaging methods, such as polls, quizzes, breakout rooms, chats, or games.
3. Provide clear instructions and expectations for activities.
4. Acknowledge and appreciate participants' contributions and efforts.
5. Ask for feedback during or after the session. Ask specific and open-ended questions that focus on the content, format, delivery, and accessibility of the workshop.

Socio-economic & Cultural /

Location

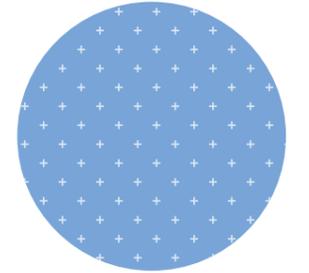


In-person events:

1. When finding venues for events and exhibitions, take into considerations its facilities for diverse users. Consider cultural and religious requirements such as space for prayer, washing facilities or number of rooms. Poor design is more likely to be felt by disabled people, older people, people from minority cultures and faiths and carers with young children.
2. Ensure venues are accessible by affordable public transport.

Socio-economic & Cultural /

Equipment & Resources



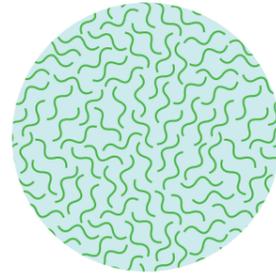
In-person events:

1. Any equipment that users are encouraged to use, during a production or exhibition, should be easily operable by a wide range of users.
2. Where equipment is used, it should support access and inclusivity rather than create barriers or diminish someone's capacity.
3. Use software, applications and hardware that people are used to. If proposing use of an uncommon software or hardware, plan ahead to spend time offering guidance and training to those that need it.
4. Send all materials before key meetings or events, so that all attendees feel prepared and familiar with the content.
5. Be prepared for technical challenges. Where possible, run through events and the equipment beforehand with test groups to get pre-empt any issues that may arise.

Operations:

1. Consider which jobs need to take place in an office, enable remote working wherever possible.
2. If staff are expected to work remotely, ensure their home environment is conducive to working from home. Ask staff if they have the correct equipment, internet, and working conditions. Provide a budget to purchase equipment if needed.

Socio-economic & Cultural / Inclusivity



In-person & online events:

1. Reach out, listen to and involve local communities to inform your work and practice.
2. Be flexible with timings for events, workshops, exhibitions, and meetings.
3. Share resources far ahead of any meetings to allow people to familiarise with the materials.
4. Consider if any scheduled events or meetings can take place online to enable users to join remotely.
5. Offer free events, exhibitions and workshops for maximum engagement and accessibility.
6. Create environments that support diversity by listening to all voices and making sure everyone feels respected.
7. Consider a mixed-methods approach (more than one way to participate) for activities and workshops, to enable the maximum

number of people to engage.

8. When arranging special guests and speakers, aim for a speaker list that represents various backgrounds, genders, ethnicities and abilities.
9. Prioritise hiring businesses owned by minorities, women or those from underrepresented groups as suppliers for events.

Recruiting & Operations:

1. Collect data of the socio-economic background of your workforce in order to highlight the opportunities for action and enable you to measure impact. Compare data against relevant external benchmarks to define your diversity strategy.
2. Provide a budget for reimbursing childcare costs and travel costs. Consider this when conducting interviews in person so all applicants have equal access at recruiting stage. Offer virtual alternatives for in person interviews.

3. Create opportunities for progression through the organisation without the requirement to move to major city centres.
4. Recruit from social mobility 'coldspots' wherever possible.
5. Avoid advertising for specific qualifications, as this can create barriers. Focus on skills and capabilities.
6. Share relevant information ahead of interviews so candidates can prepare.
7. Run open days and webinars for applicants to become familiar with the available roles.
8. Broaden your recruitment pool by reaching out to non-school routes such as community and arts-based organisations for all ages
9. Be ready to offer additional support to recruits from low-income backgrounds. Pay expenses in advance.
10. Train all staff within the organisation on how to avoid exclusive language and how to create an inclusive culture.

In an interview with **Chloe Spiby Loh**, producer and Curator of multi-disciplinary programmes, we discussed how creating options and variety is key when programming events in order to create accessibility. Whilst working with **Wellcome Collective**, she worked on organising **Relaxed** openings for theatre performances and exhibitions that provided less sensorially stimulating experiences.

“The more different kinds of options you can provide, the better. For events, some in the day, some on the weekend, some after hours... you provide different options so that people with different needs or limitations or requirements could pick and choose which suits them as a way to remove barriers to attendance.”

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People & Organisations

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- Eliza Grosvenor
- Scarlett Barclay
- Jamie Hale
- Aimi Hamraie: <https://aimihamraie.com/>
- Chris Laing
- Amanda Cachia: <https://amandacachia.com/>
- Poppy Levinson: <https://www.poppylevison.com/>
- Shape Arts: <https://www.shapearts.org.uk/>
- Unlimited: <https://weareunlimited.org.uk/>
- Touretteshero: <https://www.touretteshero.com/>
- Design Can: <https://www.design-can.com/>
- Wellcome Collection: <https://wellcomecollection.org/pages/Wvm2uiAAAIYQ4FHP>
- Deaf Architecture Front: <https://www.deafarchitecturefront.com/>
- CRIPtic Arts: <https://cripticarts.org/>
- The DisOrdinary Architecture Project: <https://disordinaryarchitecture.co.uk/>
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