

## Community Engagement with People with Disability: Some Specific Advice

*The best general advice is to seek specialist assistance within the local community.*

However, some simple considerations can make a huge difference. In some situations, it is important to organise to meet the needs of specific disability groups rather than a combination of disabilities.

Here are some suggestions.

- Make a concerted effort to ensure access to general participatory processes by people with disability.
- Design strategies specifically for people with disability, organised for specific disability groups and not for a combination of disability “types”.
- Design participatory processes so that they do not devalue the people who participate; in particular, ensure that you do not assume that people are more disabled than they are.
- Design all processes so that the needs of people with more visible disabilities do not assume a greater importance than the needs of those with unseen disabilities.
- Provide opportunities for people with disability to facilitate participatory processes.

Pay specific attention to making processes accessible in the following ways: background material presented in a variety of forms large print plain language (no smaller than 14 point print size), audio tapes, Braille; access to hearing loops, Auslan interpreters, visual aids, interpreters in community languages, and scribes for those unable to write. Where relevant, consider improvements to physical access to venues (for example, in addition to providing accessible parking, set-down areas near any venue are also required for taxi access).

- Recognise that you will have to allow more time for processes as communication is often slowed by visual, speech and hearing impediments.
- Pay attention to the costs which may be incurred by people with disability and decide how to provide assistance with the following: travel; personal care attendants, support persons, accommodation, and professional care of a relative with a disability while the family carer attends the consultation or participatory process.
- Design the length and size of meetings with the needs of people with disability in mind. Large and long meetings may preclude participation because of fatigue and concentration levels. Many people find large or fast paced meetings inaccessible and intimidating; people with cerebral palsy, brain injury, or deafness are particularly disadvantaged.
- Make sure that your processes are not heavily dependent on reading skills.
- Avoid large questionnaires, particularly mail-out, self-complete questionnaires, for people with disability. Find another approach, such as in-depth interviews.
- Use audio material with care: audio tapes are of little use to people with intellectual disabilities. Accompany audio material with appropriate visual support material, like photographs.
- Consider using group discussions, but be careful that the topic is tightly defined and does not range too widely so that people with intellectual disability can participate fully.
- Use existing structures, such as house meetings, where acceptable.
- Make the most of existing networks, especially in urgent cases or where you wish to convene a representative forum.

### Sources

Community Disability Alliance Incorporated. (n.d.). *Checklist for Planning Events that are Accessible to People with Disabilities*. Brisbane: Community Disability Alliance Inc.

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