

Guide to Inclusive and Accessible Events



Delivering the NDIS in your community

What is an inclusive and accessible event?

An inclusive and accessible event is one that makes every effort to cater for all attendees.

With organisers, staff and volunteers working together to create a welcoming and inclusive environment for everyone.

Who is this guide for?

This guide is designed for event organisers and community members to support event planning and inclusive practices.

The information and tips provided will support event planners to build capacity and wayfinding activities.

While this will ensure the full inclusion of people with disability, families, and carers, it will also help create enjoyable and memorable events for everyone.

This guide can also be used by people with disability and their support networks for an overview about what accommodations can be made or enquired about, when attending events.



About APM Communities

APM Communities delivers NDIS Partners in the Community services in parts of Western Australia, Queensland, and the Northern Territory.

Our Local Area Coordinators (LACs) help people with disability, National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) participants, families and carers to identify and access the support they need.

About Partners in the Community

NDIS Partners in the Community deliver Local Area Coordination (LAC) and Early Childhood Approach Partner services (ECA) as part of the NDIS on behalf of the National Disability Insurance Agency.

They help people with disability, NDIS participants, families, and carers to identify and access the support they need to enable participants to realise their individual goals and aspirations.

LACs and ECA also work with community services and organisations to help them be accessible, inclusive, and welcoming to all people with disability.

Thank you to NDIS Partners in the Community APM Communities and Mission Australia (WA) and Early Childhood Approach Partner Wanslea for their collaboration in creating this guide.



Delivering the NDIS in your community

For contact information of the Partners in the Community please see end of this guide.

Have you thought about...



How people with disability will get to your event?



How accessible is your venue for people with physical disabilities?



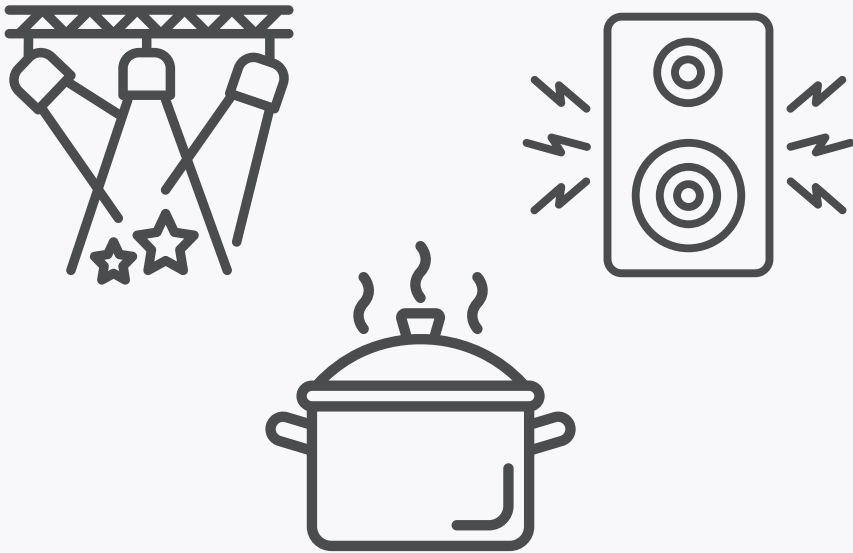
What facilities will you provide with people with disability in mind?



What is required so people with different needs can participate in event activities?

If you answered “no” or “not sure” to any of the above questions, this guide will help you set up an inclusive and accessible event.

You’ll get these answers, and more – so you can have the most successful event possible.



Making events sensory-friendly

Audio sensitivity and other sense-based triggers are commonly experienced by people with disability, especially prevalent for people on the autism spectrum and/or people with sensory processing issues.

Sensory overload may be triggered by:

- **Loud noises**
- **High smell areas (usually associated with food or animals)**
- **Bright colours and lighting (such as strobe effects or flashing lights)**

Event organisers want their events to be enjoyed by as many people as possible, and when there are more events with these sensitivities in mind, more people can enjoy their wider community.

For forward-thinking groups, the good news is these accommodations are often simple, straightforward, and low-cost.

We've put together some recommendations to assist event organisers and staff to accommodate people with sensory processing sensitivities at your next event.

Physical environment

Designated areas to support people with sensory processing needs are appearing at public events around Australia in recent years.

They include:

- Quiet spaces created at community events run by local councils
- Sensory rooms and zones at Marvel Sports Stadium and GMHBA Stadium in Victoria
- Fremantle Football Club has partnered with Autism WA to provide a quiet space during Fremantle Dockers games at Perth's Optus Stadium

These spaces provide a safe and calming environment isolated from the busy crowds and allows a person both a location and time to regulate their emotions.

“ Absolutely SAVED our family day. Our child had a trigger and needed this space. If this wasn't here, we would have had to go home with a screaming child. We loved the space, and the staff SAVED OUR DAY! ”

– Parent of children that used Perth Royal Show Chill Out Zone



Making space

If you're setting up a quiet or sensory friendly space, consider:

Location - in a calmer area, preferably with low foot traffic and not close to food vendors

Opening hours - available during the main hours of the event, particularly in noisy and high activity times e.g., fireworks

Quiet space area - large enough to accommodate at least 4 people plus carers plus two staff (larger for large events)

Sensory tools - recommended sensory stock items to have on hand for any event organised (see Appendix 1 - Inclusive Events Items Checklist)

Internal layout - a variety of comfortable seating, for example beanbags, yoga mats and/or floor cushions (see Appendix 2 - Example Quiet Space Floor Plan)

Low lighting, lamps or fairy lights (for events targeted at younger attendees), blinds/curtains can help reduce strong daylight

Instructions for use of the space clearly and prominently displayed

Copies of schedule of events/program

A user sign in sheet with terms of use and a liability release form for the attendee or families and carers. Please note that your organisation should obtain need to obtain their own legal advice on terms of use and liability release form



Event consultation and co-design

Where possible, it is also important to consult with people with disability, their families, and carers in the planning stage of your event.

This will give you the best insight into how the space should be set up to ensure it meets their needs.

You can do this via surveys, face to face meetings and/or establishing a working group which meets quarterly.

Consultation and partnering with allied health professionals and organisations can assist in planning and resourcing e.g., for activities or sensory items to use in a quiet space.

Staffing

Event briefing and processes

- Quiet spaces require staff or volunteers who understand sensory processing sensitivities
- Volunteers should have suitable police and working with children clearances
- Volunteer roles are a great opportunity for university students studying allied health, education or social work seeking a volunteer position to gain more knowledge, skills and experience
- Their role is to make sure visitors are welcomed and feel safe in the space, as well as to support if de-escalation is required during emotional dysregulation, sensory overload, or a meltdown
- It is recommended two staff attend the space, particularly as safety for all is of paramount importance in the event of heightened emotions and behaviour

External training

Specialist training provided to staff and volunteers can assist to upskill individual capacities and develop a deeper understanding of access and inclusion such as de-escalation training, psychosocial safety, or mental health first aid.

An inclusive and accessible event is one that makes every effort to cater for all attendees.

With organisers, staff and volunteers working together to create a welcoming and inclusive environment for everyone.

10 tips from people with disability to help you provide a wonderful day.

1. Treat a person with disability the same as anyone else. Say hi, introduce yourself and make sure you talk to the person with disability (don't just talk to their support worker if they have one).
2. If someone looks like they need help, ask them what they need - don't assume you know what they need.
3. Don't jump into help straight away – they may want to do it themselves, even if it takes a little longer.
4. No two people with the same disability are the same, so treat everyone as individuals – we are all unique and different.
5. Empathise but do not feel sorry for a person with disability. Show empathy and understanding with your actions and words, rather than sympathy.
6. A wheelchair is an extension of a person. Don't lean on it or push it without asking.
7. Companion/assistance/guide dogs are working animals – never pat, feed or distract them.
8. Know where all the accessible places are including rest spots, accessible toilets, easy access food vendors.... and of course, the Sensory Space.
9. Use respectful, disability-friendly, person-first language, such as 'a person with disability', 'a wheelchair user'.
10. Most of all – treat anyone as you would like to be treated. We are all individuals.

Quiet/relaxed sessions

An event may offer a low-sensory quiet session promoted to people with sensory processing sensitivities so they can plan the best time to attend the event.

It is recommended during the quiet session, music and announcements are turned off and lighting is reduced where possible.

Successful examples include retail low-sensory hours adopted by Woolworths, Coles, and Kmart and relaxed performance sessions at WA Ballet and the Blue Room Theatre.

The WA Royal Agricultural Show also had a two-hour morning quiet period where stall and activity vendors ensured loud noises and lighting were minimised.



Communication

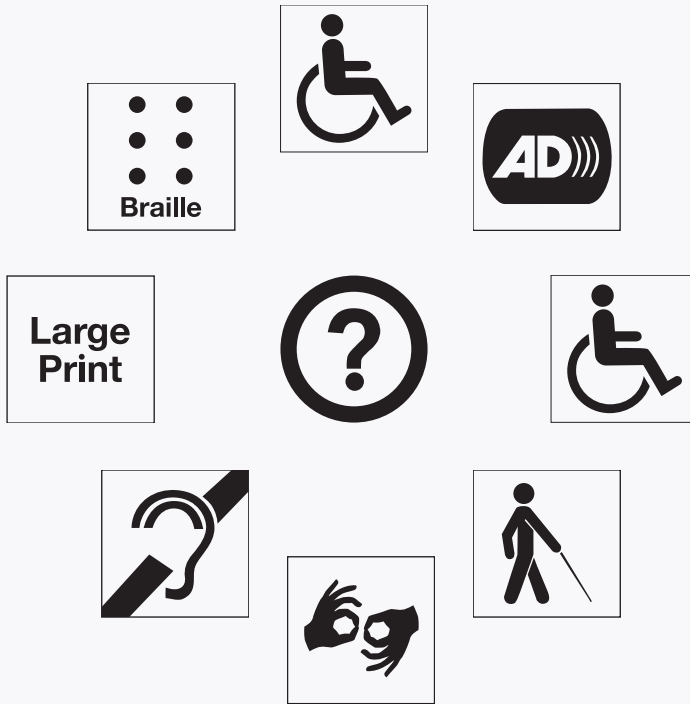
Providing as much information as possible prior to the event can reduce anxiety for people with disability.

For successful attendance, events can provide information through online event promotion, social media, email, and SMS promotion, along with word of mouth and community channels. Some recommendations for this include:

- A sensory map to outline high sensory areas due to smell, noise, and lighting. This allows attendees to clearly map out their plan prior to arriving at the event. The map can be colour coded to identify the sensory zones easily as well as showing the ACROD parking bays zones
- An event activity list indicating which activities may impact on people with sensory processing sensitivities e.g., fireworks
- A Social Narrative Story developed in consultation with an allied health professional such as an occupational therapist or speech pathologist so children and adults with a disability and family members can understand and navigate the site and times based on the sensory levels of activity
- Information about the location and use of the quiet space provided online as part of the event promotion before the event as well as at the event upon entry and at information stations
- Easy-read principles informing graphic design for printed and online marketing materials can increase access and inclusion of marketing as well individually reaching out to disability social outing groups and programs

“ The Social Narrative Story was so valuable. We used it with our son before attending the show. It was fantastic having the social story available on the website. ”

- A parent who attended WA Royal Agricultural Show



Inclusion for all

Running an event which is inclusive and accessible for more people is possible.

Not all disability is visible, and by planning and running an event with disability in mind is opening up your event to whole new groups of event attendees.

The solutions are there, and they are often inexpensive, have existing providers and widely benefit your local community.

You won't do it perfectly the first time - making a start is the best place to build from.

Beyond your event, inclusion helps make disability more visible and helps break down remaining stigma about people living with disability.

How people with disability will get to your event?

In your event promotion, include:

- Information about accessible public transport options
- Accessible parking
- Expected busy times
- Options for people with disability to enter before the official opening time



How accessible is your venue for people with physical disabilities?

This applies to:

- Ticketing entry
- Inclusive seating for food areas
- Pathways and flooring to even out the ground for ease of physical access
- Lifts, ramps and viewing areas for wheelchair and mobility aid users
- Easy to read signage on bathrooms, maps and directional signs
- Your staff, who can certainly benefit from disability awareness training
- Notice of where or who to contact for feedback on accessibility

What facilities will you provide with people with disability in mind?

Examples include:

- Information stations
- Event maps
- Accessible toilets that can be used for people with disability and carers who are the same or different gender
- Quiet spaces
- Medical stations
- Water stations



What is required so people with different needs can participate in event activities?

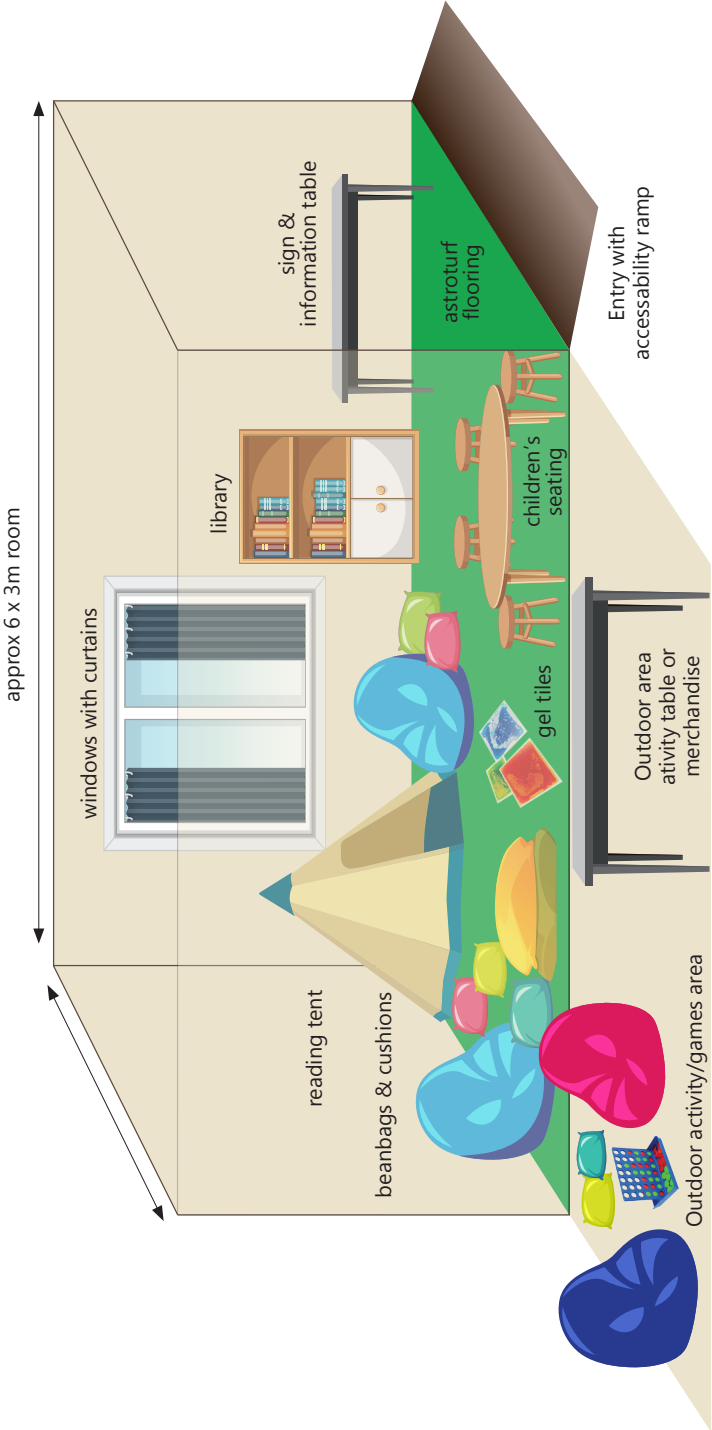
For people of different and all abilities to participate in your event, think about:

- Elevated areas for a clear line of sight for people who use wheelchairs or mobility aids
- Captions for audiovisual displays or announcements
- In the event of an emergency, having lights and noise to indicate this to patrons
- Providing earmuffs or headphones for sound-based activities, or the ability to manually adjust volume on headsets
- Ushers to assist patrons to seating
- Alternatives to stairs
- Directional and wayfinding signage on the ground, barriers or set up around the venue
- Sign language interpreters, where required
- Braille materials, where required
- Written and audio descriptions of different displays or sections
- Presence of power points or charging points for devices and motorised wheelchairs
- People with disability often come with a companion, family member or carer who may need to be with them at all times
- In changing weather conditions, is the ground safe enough? Will it have enough stability and grip?
- Is there enough space for people to be comfortably spread out?

Appendix 1 - Inclusive Events Items Checklist

Resources for Quiet Spaces	Tick
Equipment	
Temporary ramps for wheelchair users access	
Tables	
Bean Bags, cushions, soft seating	
Astroturf/foam flooring/playmats	
Window curtains	
Soft play and sensory items	
Gel sensory tiles	
Children's reading tents	
Children's books	
Mindfulness colouring in	
Colouring pencils and crayons	
Chalk board and chalk	
Scratch art	
Etch art sensory toys	
Ear muffs	
Bubbles/ bubble machine/ DIY bubble mix	
Bunting/colourful tassel bunting	
3 x fairy lights set & batteries	
Sensory nature play resources, sand play	
DIY sensory jars	
Bean bag fidgets	
Jenga large blocks or sandbags or outdoor activities	
Laminated choice board resource for nonverbal children/young people	
Information sheets	
Hardcopy sensory maps	
Social narrative story	
Information about quiet spaces	
Signage	
Quiet space signage including opening hours	
Other items	
Water dispensers or water bottles	
Bins	
Hand sanitiser and sanitising wipes	
First aid kits	
Working with children cards/names badge/ID	
Public liability insurance certificates	
Sign in sheets	

Appendix 2 - Example Quiet Space Floor Plan



Inclusive event planning checklist

While it doesn't cover everything, this checklist is a valuable starting point for planning inclusive and accessible events.

Invitations and promotional materials	Tick
Text/Design	
Is the font easy to read?	
Is the text at least 12-point type size?	
Is the information on the invitation easy to read?	
Content	
Are attendees encouraged to notify the host if they need help with accessibility, like an audio loop or a sign language interpreter?	
Does it include accessibility information about parking and transportation to get to the event, such as bus stop and train station details, as well as the parking address?	
Does it include various options for attendees to RSVP such as email, phone, face-to-face?	
Does it include information about accessible facilities at the venue such as disabled toilets, ramps, drop off point?	
Does it include allowing attendees to bring a support person if needed?	
External environment and path of travel	
Infrastructure	
Does the venue have enough accessible parking bays to accommodate all the attendees who require access?	
Is the distance from the car park to entrance accessible?	
Is there a ramp available for wheelchair users?	
Are the automatic doors at the entrance operational?	
Do all the steps have handrails?	
Is there a contrasting strip on the edges of the steps?	
Internal environment the venue	
Is the reception counter at a height suitable for a wheelchair user?	
Do all doors have a clear space of 800mm to 850mm?	
Does the venue have a non-slip floor surface or firm carpet?	
Are the acoustics of the venue sufficient, with minimised noise from external sources?	

Does the venue have accessible facilities such as disabled toilets, ramps, and a drop-off point?

Visibility

Do the facilities in the venue have clear signs in large font?

Is the venue well-lit enough for easy movement?

If there are areas with high reflection or glare, are they closed off?

Toilets

Does the venue have a unisex accessible toilet available, functioning, clear of clutter, and easily accessible?

Is the toilet situated on the same floor as the event?

If the toilet door opens inwards, is there enough space for the person in a wheelchair to shut the door once they are inside?

Is there a grab rail next to the toilet at 800mm – 810mm high?

Signage

Does the venue have a signage with clear directions to functions room and the toilet?

Communication

Is there a position where the interpreter will stand, so people with hearing difficulties can see both the person speaking and the interpreter’s facial expressions and hand movements?

Does the venue have an audio loop installed?

Layout

Are there sufficient walkways of at least 1000mm?

Are there at least 900mm space between tables?

Is there at least 700mm – 840mm space under the table to allow a wheelchair to slide underneath comfortably?

Catering

Is there staff available to help people with disabilities, including those with mobility and vision impairments, with their food choices and carrying their food to the eating area if self-service is the only option?

Is the menu printed in large easily readable font to make it more accessible?

Do the table heights cater to wheelchair users and people with mobility aids, ensuring easy access to catering?

Is there accessible cutlery, crockery and drinkware options?

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