

INCLUSIVE ORGANISATION

Contributing to the accessibility of an organisation is an investment in its members and employees and in the quality of its activities. While for many of us it seems natural that an organisation should be accessible to all, we often do not know where to start. Inclusive organisation guidance material helps you start developing the accessibility of the organisation.

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Introductory words

This guide provides an idea of how an organisation can develop its accessibility and become an inclusive organisation that takes into account the needs of different groups of people to participate in the work of the organisation. Accessibility refers to physical accessibility and consideration of the principles of universal design in the design of the physical environment, but also the conscious access to the principles of accessibility in the organisation's communications, services, and events. This means that from the point of view of accessibility, attention must be paid to both the possibilities of movement and the consumption and transmission of information with different senses. This guide also draws attention to aspects that a bilingual organisation should consider.

The general principle that an inclusive organisation should follow is that each student should be able to feel that they are a necessary, valued and natural participant by being involved and contributing. This means deliberately creating the best possible conditions for involving different groups of students. The same principle applies to any involvement in the student movement as well as on a wider scale.

People don't like to ask for additional conditions. The inclusive organisation must automatically take into account the differences as far as possible (and reasonable). It is also necessary to clearly mark any shortcomings and opportunities for making additional exceptions. For example, if a nutritional restriction is already asked about in the form of event registration, it is much more convenient for the participant to express his/her needs. In a situation where a participant should send a separate email to the organiser about his/her nutritional limitations, the participant would probably not take that step, would feel uncomfortable at the event and, at worst, would not take part in the event.

With contributing to an inclusive organisational culture, the organisation has the opportunity to represent not only those whose inclusion is easy to achieve but also those whose input is important to create a diverse and high quality input. Federation of Estonian Student Unions would like to thank the partners who contributed in the preparation of the guidance material. We also wish to thank the following people: Maarja Jõgioja, Sven Kõllamets, Jari Pärigma, Helen Kask, Katrina Koppel.

1. Communicate clearly

Accessible and clear communication is important for all members of the organisation, but it is often essential for people with special needs or low language skills. The way in which an organisation communicates shows both who its members are and what they stand for and what their values are.

a. Well-written language

Well-written text is accessible and understandable. A long and complicated text can be problematic for many people, such as dyslexics, people with intellectual disabilities, or people with low language skills.

Tips for writing text

- Use **simple, understandable words**, that people know well. Avoid foreign words and metaphors.
- For explanation use examples that are familiar to the reader.
- **Start with the most important thing.** This will help the reader understand the text and the writer to bring out the main message. We are often taught to write in the “storytelling style”. In this case, the main message or key is in the middle or at the end of the story. In the case of communicative text, the opposite structure should be used. The most important message should be at the beginning of the text and the least important at the end.
- **Avoid academic and formal sentences.**
- **Don't use indirect speech.**
- **Write shorter sentences and avoid sentences with complex structures.** Complex sentences can confuse the reader. In the worst case, the writer himself/herself gets confused.
- **Consider the clarity of the text.** Try to avoid using pronouns such as ‘it’ or ‘this.’
- **Don't use abbreviations**, including the most common ones.
- **Break down the text.** Use paragraphs, titles, and subtitles.
- Use **bold text** rather than italic, which is harder to read, to emphasize the text.
- **Send out Word documents** rather than PDF files. PDF files may not be readable to all screen readers. Adobe Acrobat has a separate Accessibility tool for this.

- **Use a bulleted list to highlight important points.** It is useful for the purposes of making summaries of a long text so that the reader can get a quick overview of the text, as well as for helping readers who have concentration difficulties and dyslexia.
- Have someone else read your text and edit the text based on it. If there is no one nearby, read the text to yourself in a loud voice.

Based on the above suggestions, an organisation should create a language policy, which describes ways to write documents for internal and external use of the organisation. Language policy helps to maintain a consistent level in case of a staff turnover. In addition to writing suggestions, language policy should also determine which language or languages are used in specific cases in different channels (e.g., when to write in Estonian, when in English and in which cases and where information should be available in both languages). A language policy document can be part of the communication strategy.

b. Accessible presentations

To gain the audience's attention, the presentations must be understandable and easy to follow.

Tips

- At the beginning of the presentation, tell the audience **how long the presentation is and whether questions can be asked at the end or throughout the presentation.**
- Ask the audience if anyone needs **description translation, sound amplifier, or the material on a memory stick.**
- At the beginning of the presentation, give a **brief overview** about what topics you are going to address.
- **Distribute** the audience the presentation **file online or on paper.**
- Make sure that the presentation **would be full of contrasts.** Avoid using multiple colors. Don't use green and red, as people suffering from color blindness have difficulty distinguishing them.
- Follow the golden rule: **up to five points on the slide and five words in the point.**
- **Graphs are good.** Clear graphs help to effectively convey the message and assist people with dyslexia.
- **Always describe what a picture or graph represents** so that people who don't see would know what's going on. Also, follow the use of pronouns in the presentation text or speech, as it makes it difficult for a person with visual impairments to follow the thought.
- Don't leave anything that is present in the presentation unsaid orally.
- Prefer a black marker on the white board.
- If **showing a video**, make sure that the video has **subtitles.** Watch the video before a presentation a) without a voice and b) with the display switched off to see what information is being lost this way.

2. Make your events open

a. Information and invitations

- **Send an invitation well in advance.** According to good practice, the initial invitation should include the agenda, start time and expected duration. Think through or find out what would be the best time for the event to take place so that as many people as possible could participate.
- Ask participants about their specific needs and allergies (including special dietary needs). The participant may also need an induction loop, a translator, a sign language interpreter, or an attendant.
- In the invitation, provide information on the accessibility or inaccessibility of the meeting place. In this case, the recipient of the invitation can take into account the possibilities of their participation.
- If the organisation is bilingual, always mention the working language of the meeting

b. Accessible meeting place

An accessible meeting place is one of the foundations of an open and inclusive meeting. It is important that the meeting takes place in a venue that allows everyone to reach the location (physical accessibility), as well as to participate in the whole meeting (communicative accessibility). We advise you to visit the new venue yourself whenever possible before sending out the invitations to get a better understanding of the actual accessibility and to think about alternative solutions. In addition, it could be taken into account that the meeting place would be as accessible as possible by public transport.

Preferably, accessibility should not always be linked to whether people with special needs have registered for the event, especially if it is possible to join at the last minute or report attendance at the last minute without registering. Think through what you can offer in any case (a lower table for a coffee break, a ramp, an elevator, a disabled toilet).

It is sometimes not possible to ensure full accessibility. In this case, restrictions on accessibility should definitely be noted in the invitation. The different ways to arrive at a meeting place should also be noted on the invitation.

Try to make sure that there is no need to relocate the furniture under the eyes of the participants. Participants should be able to enter the room, leave the room and move to the seat undisturbed (there is enough space between the rows, including for the people moving with a guide dog or wheelchair).

The first meeting organised by the organisation is especially important: if the first meeting is not accessible, it is unlikely that a person will want to attend one of the following events. If the activity includes overnight stays, it is important that overnight accommodations are accessible. Pre-registration allows you to ask about the different needs of the participants and to prepare for them.

Social events should be of variable content. In this case, different social events can be enjoyed by different people.

Accessibility indicators for selecting the venue of the event

- The location is **accessible** for everyone.
 - Clear and contrasting labels guide you there.
 - Within a radius of at least 25 meters from the building, there is a place where public transport and taxi can stop.
 - Entrance to the building is wheelchair accessible (check whether the road leading to the door can be easily accessed by wheelchair or frame, for example, whether it has been cleared of snow, whether the ramp has handrails or whether its sloping angle meets the requirements).
 - On the way to the room, there are no stairs, which could not be avoided by riding on lifts or proper ramps.
 - There are no thresholds higher than 25 millimeters in the door openings.
 - Heavy doors open automatically. If there is a button for automatic opening, it should be at the height of 90-110 centimeters.
 - Doors and openings are at least 90 centimeters wide.
- Both on stage and in the auditorium there is a functioning **induction loop**. If there is no induction loop at the meeting venue, the organization can buy a portable option.
- **Microphones** should be used in larger rooms.
- The meeting place should have a good **audio environment**. This means that the speakers are clearly heard, there must be no echo, and the external noise is minimized.
- Is a meeting place stage **accessible** for a person with a movement disorder?
- Are there places in the auditorium **for wheelchair users and, where appropriate, their assistants?**
- Loose carpets or mats can be an obstacle for wheelchair users. Loose mats and carpets can also be dangerous for people with visual impairment. The slippery floor is a barrier for people moving with the help of crutches or sticks.
- The venue is **well lit**.
- Well-lit places are reserved **for sign language interpreters**.
- **Avoid allergens**, such as heavily scented flowers, tapestries and serving nuts and citrus.
- If you serve food, provide **different options and add labels on ingredients**. If you serve alcohol, always ensure a non-alcoholic alternative.
- If possible, ensure that **all participants see each other**. If not, it is important that everyone sees the presenter. People with hearing disabilities find it easier to understand what is being said when they see the speaker.
- Staff is informed that a **guide dog can enter everywhere**.

c. Inclusive atmosphere

An inclusive meeting environment where everyone feels welcome is the foundation of a strong and creative organisation. Share tasks for everyone to make members feel connected.

The key to the success of an inclusive meeting lies in listening and good leadership skills. It is important to hear the proposals and to consider them, not to say no out of habit. Speaking one by one is important for creating an inclusive and encouraging atmosphere as well as enabling people with hearing impairments to follow the discussion. A good leader is a role model for other participants at meetings: he or she is a good listener and emphasizes the strong arguments of other speakers.

Meeting procedures

- **Precise rules for meeting and election procedures**

The larger the number of people attending the meeting, the more precise the rules should be. Rules should be made clear to all participants before a meeting or meetings.

- **Starting your meeting**

Introducing yourself is important. In an English language environment, a round of prepositions (he / she / they / ze) can be made, where everyone can specify their preferred pronoun.

- **List of people given the floor**

Show the order of the people given the floor on the wall with the projector and read it aloud every now and then. Reading the list aloud is especially important when hearing impaired people attend the meeting.

- **Importance of breaks and adherence to schedule**

A break is often important to ensure the quality of discussion, but for many people with special needs, the absence of breaks is an obstacle to attending the meeting. For example, breaks are essential for people with concentration difficulties and back problems. In addition, an accurate schedule and breaks are important for people who need to use an interpreter to attend a meeting or use special on-demand transportation.

d. Train your people

Provide training on accessibility issues for organisation staff or event organisers. It is a good idea to involve people with special needs as trainers.

3. Put the design to work

a. Text and fonts

Use a font that is clear and simple. Many word processing programs also have a separate dyslexia font, which makes the text more readable and helps to differentiate letters. Avoid very thin fonts and fonts that resembles handwriting. People with visual impairment often prefer a 12- and 14-point font size, but it depends on the font.

Avoid writing in capital letters because it is more difficult to read for people with reading disabilities or visually impaired people.

Use left-aligned text. In addition, pay attention to the line spacing and the distance between the letters.

b. Colours and contrast

Use contrasting colours and avoid using similar shades. Don't use green and red, especially when colours have meanings. When colours have meanings, provide the meanings always in a separate guide.

c. Pictures and background

Avoid writing text on images. If you need to add text to an image, you should prefer a black-and-white image and add the text to the comment on the image. Prefer to place text in a frame rather than on a coloured box.

d. Selection of paper

Prefer uncoated matte paper. The less paper reflects light, the more readable it is. People with reading disabilities find it easier to read black text on yellowish paper than on bright white paper.

The less light and ink shine through the paper, the better.

4. Make the website accessible

a. Build a strong base

Build your website by encoding on the basis of the International Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 (or buying a website making service from a company that uses it). The standard also provides guidelines for the content creator of the page.

Most people who use help to read websites have their own tools and ways, but for them to work, the website must be built with accessibility in mind.

b. Page layout

Do not use a fixed font size. Specify the text size on the website with a percentage. Contrasts and clarity - the same apply here as to the printed materials.

c. Image titles

All the images you use must have Alt headings that describe the content of the image. If there is a substantial text in the image, it should also be included in the Alt text. If the image is added for aesthetic purposes only, use the attribute Alt = "" in the code. In this case, the screen reader ignores the image.

d. Accessible tables

Try to avoid tables on your website as they may be difficult to read for those using reading aids. If you really need to add tables, keep them as simple as possible.

If the information is intended to be read from line-to-line, then the table should be coded in line by line (before each line use <tr>). For forms, use the HTML <label> element for field titles. Headlines must also be associated with the accompanying HTML <input> element. In this case, the screen readers know which title and field match.

e. Add videos to the content

Many people find it easier to obtain information by watching videos rather than by reading. Be sure to include subtitles for each video so that they are accessible to hearing impaired people. If the video contains important text that is not reflected in the audio, add this text to or below the video in the screen reader-compatible format so that the visually impaired viewer can access it.

f. When writing text...

... use an accessible or easy-to-understand language.

g. Readable links

Visually impaired people often use the Tab button to navigate in the web. Therefore, it is important to note the contents of each link exactly on the link, not to mark it in general, such as "Read more here."

5. Accessibility checklist for the organisation

The accessibility checklist is a good starting point to find out what needs to be done and what is already being done well. By answering the questions, you can plan an accessibility action plan. Also popularize your checklist for your new, old, and future members.

Premises of the organisation

- How often are they cleaned? How often are the floors washed?
- Where are the smoking places?
- What is the noise level in the office?
- Is there an audio induction loop in the office?
- What is the lighting in your workplace?
- What are the conditions for people with visual impairments to move around independently and to consume information (tactile tags and markings)?
- Are the rooms accessible? Is it possible to enter using wheelchairs (thresholds and door widths), and are there any disabled toilets nearby?
- Is there easy access to information on the accessibility or inaccessibility of the office? If so, what information do you offer? NB! A person for whom an obstacle is not an obstacle may not notice it (steps over a step without noticing it; does not notice that the ramp is too steep, etc.). Ask a specialist to map the obstacles.
- What are the signs in your organisation and what signs will guide people to your office (what is their size, design, and height)? For signs, the use of clear pictograms for accessibility is very good.
- How do alarms work? Can everyone recognize the alarm despite his or her special needs (use of vibration or light alarms)?

Communication

- When you make videos, do you add subtitles?
- Do you have a language policy?
- Do you have an accessible website?
- Do you use different forms of communication? Text, video, other?
- Do your documents have a uniform form and style?

Events and meetings

- Do you serve nuts or citrus?
- Is the food provided labelled?
- Do you have a versatile food selection that takes special nutritional needs into account?
- What is the noise level at your meeting places?
- Do you have an audio induction loop in your meeting places? If so, where is it and where not?
- Do you know how to book sign language or writing interpreter?
- Is there good sound quality when using microphones or showing videos?
- What are the conditions for reading from the lips?
- What are the lighting possibilities in your meeting places and leisure events?
- Do you use accessible presentation techniques? Do you also keep people with visual impairments in mind?
- What is accessibility at your meeting places? Is it possible to enter using wheelchairs (thresholds and door widths), and are there any disabled toilets nearby?
- Do you share information about accessibility to meeting places? If so, what information do you offer?
- How long before the meetings do you send out the invitation and the materials?
- Describe your typical board meeting and meeting with members. What form of the meeting do you use? How long is your typical meeting? Do you have a definite start and end time? Do you take breaks? What else describes your organisation's meetings?
- Do you offer training to teach meeting procedures? If so, describe the training.
- Describe some typical leisure activities that take place during the year.
- Do you have non-alcoholic social activities?
- Is there an alcohol-free alternative available besides alcohol?
- How do you inform your target groups about your social activities?
- Is there enough money in the budget to take into account the differences?

Additional reading

[Designing and creating an inclusive living environment](#)

Good Estonian-language material to learn about the formation of an inclusive living environment to ensure a living environment that takes into account the needs of as many groups of people as possible and which encourages members of society to be active users of the environment and participants in society.

[Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\) 2.0](#)

Official Estonian translation of website building and content creation guidelines. The English original is located [here](#).

[Special edition of the user-friendly environment of the magazine of Estonian Chamber of Disabled People](#)

In the special issue of the magazine, you can read about the inclusive and accessible environment, the universal design and cultural accessibility.

[A handbook for organising an accessible and diverse cultural event](#)

A comprehensive guide in Estonian for organisers of cultural festivals with practical information on the preparation and organisation of the event.

[Creating information materials: how to avoid stereotypes and prejudices](#)

Guidance on compiling information materials, taking into account the principles of equal treatment and gender equality. The content of the material can also be used to compile other materials.

[English-language guidelines for organising an accessible event \(Inclusive and Accessible Events\)](#)

An English-language guidance material for organisers of events, providing guidelines for organisers of both small and mass events.