

# Top Tips for Accessible & Welcoming Spaces

*This resource has been developed by Aberdeen Equalities Participation Network, to help create spaces that people **want** to visit (and return to). We consider both **physical space** and **human interactions**.*

## Different Types of Accessibility

**Sensory:** Well-lit. Clear pathways with contrasting colours. Limited background noise and echoes. Hearing loops and quiet spaces available.

**Physical:** Mobility aids available where necessary (lifts, ramps, railings, etc). Disabled parking. Clear corridors and pavements, without trip hazards. Enough space to move freely. Places to sit down. Accessible toilets and baby changing facilities.

**Practical:** Refreshments available, affordable (or free) and meeting a range of dietary needs. Crèche facilities available.

**Communication:** Clear signage. Straightforward booking processes. Staff or volunteers available to help, giving consistent information, and easily identified by badges or uniforms.

**Financial:** Low/no cost for entry. Affordable for low-income people and families. No requirement for expensive clothing or equipment.

**Geographic:** Close to bus routes or based in communities. Easy to find and navigate.

**Language:** Material presented in plain English. Interpreters or materials in different languages where possible. Subtitles for films or videos.

**Timing:** Considers school and work schedules (including shift work), bus timetables, religious days, and daylight hours for safe journeys home.

## Consider New Possibilities

Think about **your space and what happens there**.

**Who's not coming through your doors?** What are the barriers? Reach out to groups that are missing to find out what needs to change.

Are there **different activities or events** that might help attract new people?

## General Principles

Consider **all types** of accessibility and inclusion, not just physical. Improving access makes a space more welcoming for everyone, often in subtle ways.

If possible, **invite people to participate on their own terms**. Respect their needs and preferences.

**Be as informal as possible.** A relaxed atmosphere is much more inviting and less intimidating.

**Be friendly.** Staff or volunteers should take the first step and speak to visitors, ask if they need help, etc, rather than waiting to be approached. **Don't make people feel like a burden.**

Consider how your activities might encourage people from different communities to **mix and get to know each other** – but don't force it.

**Don't segregate people who are 'different,'** unless that is their preference.

Going into a new space can be intimidating for anyone, and **social rules are not always obvious**. Where possible, **explain expectations**.

**Always challenge prejudice and discrimination in your space.** Not just for the sake of the person targeted, but to show everyone that **intolerance is not welcome**. Seek help from police if necessary.

## Advertising & Representation

**Who sees your leaflets and social media posts?** Consider diverse channels for advertising: ethnic minority shops, places of worship, SHMU radio and magazines, online community forums, etc.

**Consider content and design.** Is the information presented clearly? Are different formats available? (BSL, translations, large print, etc) Are diverse people represented in the images you use?

**Advertise accessibility.** Tell people **how** your space is accessible. Otherwise they'll never know.

## Some Practical Ideas

**Extending the opening hours** and days makes a space accessible to a wider range of people.

**Low-cost and flexible room booking** encourages community groups to host events, classes and meetings. Local artists can create and rehearse. New organisations and projects can take shape.

Being able to **move tables and chairs** can make space for wheelchairs, buggies, or larger groups.

**Introductory events** can help people take the first step. Consider open days, coffee mornings, youth or child-friendly events, taster sessions, etc. Advertise these beyond your usual clientele.

**Activities that meet specific needs** can reduce barriers. For example, film screenings for families with disabled children, women-only swimming or gym sessions, events designed to fit shift work patterns, museum tours in other languages.

**Diversity training** can help staff and volunteers understand physical and cultural differences, and recognise the barriers people face.

**'Trails' and 'treasure hunts'** give people an excuse to go into different spaces for the first time. Statue trails like the dolphins and lighthouses have been popular, and once someone goes through the door, they're more likely to return. In developing a concept for a trail, ensure it appeals to a range of different people (not just families).

## Building Partnerships

**Reach out and invite community groups to visit your space or attend your event.** Ask if there's anything you can do to improve their experience.

**For example:** a tour of the space, refreshments, language interpreters, crèche (or child-friendly activities), vouchers for free or reduced-cost entry, sensory adjustments, different opening hours, etc.

**Include people from diverse backgrounds** in your programme of exhibits, performances, readings, and other events. Showcasing diverse talent will attract a wider range of spectators and improve representation in the wider 'scene.'

## Ideas for Specific Groups & Spaces

**A designated quiet area** (perhaps on specific days or times) would benefit people with sensory needs in many kinds of spaces.

**Arts spaces or cafés** might invite local communities to contribute to exhibitions, or create themed mini-exhibitions with their own art. This would give local people a space to showcase their work, attract visitors from their communities, and build towards normalising diversity.

**A sports or fitness space** might host monthly or quarterly taster sessions of different activities, designed for people of all genders, ages and ability levels. 'Satellite events' held at community centres would allow people to enjoy activities in their local area, reducing barriers for the main space.

**A café, restaurant or pub** might set aside an alcohol-free area on certain days and times, making it more attractive for religious minorities, young people, recovering addicts, families with children, and those who prefer to avoid alcohol.

## Further Resources

**How Fair is North East Scotland?** Information on demographics and inequality: [grec.co.uk/hfines](http://grec.co.uk/hfines)

**Interpreting and translation services:**

- Aberdeen City Council: [tinyurl.com/inter-trans](http://tinyurl.com/inter-trans)
- In-Trans (social enterprise): [in-trans.co.uk](http://in-trans.co.uk)

**Community groups in Aberdeen:** [grec.co.uk/community-directory](http://grec.co.uk/community-directory)

**More on sensory accessibility:** [sensorytrust.org.uk/resources/guidance/access-chain-an-inclusive-design-tool](http://sensorytrust.org.uk/resources/guidance/access-chain-an-inclusive-design-tool)

**Equalities Participation Network:** [grec.co.uk/eprn](http://grec.co.uk/eprn)