

Inclusive and insightful events

A practical guide to support speakers with lived experience at your event



#SocialCareFuture

Foreword

The voices of people who draw on care and support, and carers, are too often missing from events about social care. You wouldn't host a conference on women's rights and not invite women, yet it is still the case that disabled and older people and carers are left out of the discussions and debates that directly impact our lives. However, when included and done well, people's lived experiences can bring insight and ideas that have positive implications for the development of policy and practice in public services.



Progress has been made in getting people's voices heard and many organisers are now on-side. There are some excellent examples of event teams – big and small – making this work well. But there's always more that can be done, and In Control and Social Care Future, alongside our partners at Think Local Act Personal, want to help spread this practice, so even more older and disabled people can get involved in publicly sharing their insights and experiences. This means making events more inclusive, and taking steps to support people making an active and positive contribution that's more than just sharing their story.

To help, we have created this short guide for people who commission, plan and deliver events and conferences. It is based on a series of interviews and questionnaires undertaken between May and July 2024, with 38 people who draw on care and support, and 16 organisations that host, commission or organise events in England's health and care sector. The full details are available in the sister publication Organising Inclusive and Insightful Events – report on current experience.

We hope this work will support organisers to go beyond the "usual suspects" or the view that "we all have lived experience" to deliver more inclusive and impactful insights for the delegates that attend their events.

We know this will bring greater benefits to all involved, not least ensuring currently untapped innovations and ideas can be included at events that debate, create and shape the policies and programmes that affect older and disabled peoples' and carers lives.

We'd love to hear what you think. Get in touch at www.socialcarefuture.org.uk

Dr Anna Severwright, OBE, disability rights activist and Social Care Future convenor

A note on the links for further support: for ease, we have chosen a short selection of resources to help you, but for a full list, please see the full report at:

<https://in-control.org.uk/speaker-finder-service/>

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Summary

Top tips for event organisers to support speakers with lived experience of care and support



Plan for inclusion and include older and disabled people and carers in planning

- Involve people with lived experience at the start of your planning.
- Don't be afraid to ask people what support they need.
- Agree and share expectations for accessibility and inclusion with sponsors and exhibitors.
- Build in extra time for appropriate involvement.
- Support people's personal circumstances, which can change quickly.
- Mitigate against digital exclusion.
- Get creative and go to the people who can't come to you.

"I want to come in the same door and be part of things like everyone else"





Build strong relationships through excellent communication

- Research where to find the voices you need and build those relationships.
- Get the full picture of what people can offer – their skills and ideas not just stories.
- Set out clear expectations about the brief and how you will support people.
- Ask upfront about adjustments your speakers might need before and on the day.
- Provide comprehensive, accessible, timely, jargon-free briefing.
- Don't try to control the message – encourage respectful difference in perspectives.
- Ensure clear communications chains before and on the day.
- Don't forget to debrief and say thanks.

"You need to ensure that the ways you are asking people to contribute is good for them. We need to create an environment for them to do what they do best, to be who they are and also have grace with each other"

– **People's Voice Media**





Find the right location

- Consider accessibility to the location through public and private transport, and suitable accommodation nearby so people feel safe about getting involved.
- Personally check venue accessibility, with someone who has experience of barriers and issues.
- Ensure proper emergency contingencies are in place for older and disabled people.
- Choose venues where everyone can use the same entrance.
- Be an ally for accessible and inclusive venues and feedback on issues.
- Ensure access to the right equipment for adaptions that people might need (e.g. adjustable lecterns, accessible stages).
- Set up rooms and stages appropriately before people arrive.
- Ensure meal times and spaces are accessible for all, including serving stations and places to eat.
- Know multiple accommodation providers that have accessible rooms.
- Use name badges that work for all.
- Make reasonable adjustments for online events.



Recognise contributions through payments, reward and public acknowledgement

- Develop an appropriate payment, reward and expenses policy and share up front.
- Offer practical support with booking transport and accommodation.
- Ensure reimbursement of costs isn't a barrier for inclusion.
- Make prompt and timely payments.
- Always ask how to support personal assistants or assistance animals.

"I sometimes feel like I am ticking a box 'cos I am in a wheelchair..."
– person who draws on care and support

"We believe strongly in warm greetings, full introductions, regular check backs, ensuring people are safe and comfortable, thanking people properly and seeking and using their feedback to improve future events"
– The Kings Fund



Principle 1: Plan for inclusion and include older and disabled people, and carers, in planning

"I want to come in the same door and be part of things like everyone else"

- **Start early** – involve people with lived experience in your planning team for their insight and expertise. Get their perspectives on the contribution they can make to your audience.
- **Don't be afraid to ask people what support they need** – many want to get it right, but don't know how or what to ask. As long as respectful, people will be keen to find a way of working together that works for all.
- **Agree and share expectations for accessibility and inclusion with everyone** – sponsors, speakers, exhibitors, delegates.
- **TOP TIP:** Ensure everyone knows the event is an environment where respectful conversations take place and that it's ok to disagree or be appropriately challenged.
- **Build in extra time** so people with lived experience are appropriately invited, briefed and supported on the day. This includes time set aside for greeting, breaks, meals and travel to and from the location.
- **Support people's personal circumstances** – changes in health or caring arrangements can mean last minute changes.
- **Mitigate against digital exclusion** – for example, not everyone can download programmes on smart phones, and not everyone can attend online events.
- **Get creative and go to the people who can't come to you** so you can still share their experiences, insight and ideas (e.g. through film, recordings or other art).

Where to go for more help: **Making your event accessible** – Leeds University <https://equality.leeds.ac.uk/support-and-resources/accessibility-guidance/making-your-event-accessible/>

Also, see the appendix in the sister publication **Organising Inclusive and Insightful Events** – report on current experience – Think Local Act Personal



Principle 2: Build strong relationships through excellent communication

“Organisations need to be aware of the possible benefits issues and other implications of paying people”

- **Research where to find the voices you need** – try speaker agencies, partners in the third sector and build on those relationships.
- **Get a full picture of what people can offer to avoid tokenism** - their skills and ideas for change, as well as their experience of using a service or support.
- **TOP TIP:** In Control has just launched their own speaker agency. Visit: Speaker Finder Service - In Control (in-control.org.uk)
- **Set out clear expectations** about what you want from your speakers. This includes expenses incurred and renumeration (see more on this on page x).
- **Ask upfront about adjustments your speakers might need** – don't assume they will volunteer this information. It could be large text documents for people with visual impairments, or alternatives to touch screens for people who have no sensitivity in their fingers, teleprompters, noise cancelling headphones...
- **Provide comprehensive, accessible, timely, jargon-free briefing on everything to do with the event** including directions, venue information, other invited speakers and who will be in the audience and what they are expecting to gain from being there, so the person can prepare content appropriately.
- **Don't try to control the message.** Value the person's experience and what they bring and encourage an event where respectful differences in points of view are welcome.
- **TOP TIP:** Asking people with lived experience to co-chair can be a way to share power.
- **Ensure communication before and on the day** so no one is left without the information they need, or any support that might be required thereafter. Greet people on arrival, make them feel welcome and valued.
- **Don't forget to debrief and say thanks.** Check in at the end of their session or event. Recognise their contribution through thanks, renumeration, public acknowledgement and follow up after the event.
- **TOP TIP:** Sharing lived experiences can bring up lots of feelings. Acknowledge this and if there's anything that might need to change.

For more help: **Engaging with Disabled People** – Equality and Human Rights Commission
<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/housing-and-disabled-people-engaging-with-disabled-people-event-planning-guide.pdf>

Principle 3: Find the right location

- **Consider accessibility to the location.** Check if there is disabled car parking or accessible public transport, including accessible taxis and suitable accommodation options nearby so people feel safe in coming.
- **Personally check the venue's accessibility** with someone who has personal experience of barriers and issues. Look for accessible rooms, stage, options for different seating configurations, hearing loops, screen readers, space for a BSL signer, good lighting, large and accessible changing places and toilets, big lifts, quiet spaces and ability to cater for dietary issues. Consider trip hazards, stairs, long corridors or distances between rooms or event areas.
- **Ensure there are proper emergency contingencies for older and disabled people** at the venue
- **Choose venues where everyone can use the same entrance.** No one feels good about having to use goods lifts or tradesman entrances.
- **Be an ally for accessibility and inclusion.** Feedback to venues what you expect of them.
- **Ensure access to the right equipment for adaptions** – e.g. adjustable lecterns, ramps for stages, a variety of microphones (lapels, hand held, desk-based), hoists.
- **TOP TIP:** Ensure everyone who is speaking is on the same level and that everyone who is participating is on the same level. Don't have people standing around people in wheelchairs.
- **Set up rooms and stages appropriately before people arrive** so people in wheelchairs or with assistance animals don't have to move chairs, tables or sit up the back.
- **Ensure meal times and spaces are accessible for all** – build in enough time to eat for people who need support, in places that are inclusive and served at accessible levels.
- **TOP TIP:** consider that not everyone can stand to eat.
- **Know multiple accommodation providers that have accessible rooms.** If you find an area that is particularly limited, let the regional or city convention/ events/tourism teams know to raise awareness. Some people may need a hospital profiling bed and most hotels do not have one.
- **Use name badges that work for all** – lanyards can turn the wrong way; avoid small print and find ways of sharing contact details without having to write things down.
- **Make reasonable adjustments for online events** – things like font sizes, avoiding flashing screens, offering subtitles or text including that the person with lived experience has support at their end to participate well.

"My lived experience ... provides first hand insight and perspective on navigating challenges, coping strategies, resilience, and overcoming adversity"
– person who draws on care and support

For more help, see:

Checking Event and Venue Accessibility – SCOPE <https://www.scope.org.uk/advice-and-support/checking-event-venue-accessibility>

Venue Accessibility Checklist - Shaping our Lives <https://shapingourlives.org.uk/report/venue-accessibility-checklist/>

Making events accessible – Social Care Institute for Excellence <https://www.scie.org.uk/co-production/supporting/making-events-accessible/>

Principle 4: Recognise contribution through payment, reward and public acknowledgement

- **Develop an appropriate payment, reward and expenses policy** for people and their personal assistants (if relevant) and be upfront about how much you can offer, the terms and expectations. Ensure your budget includes money set aside for this.
- **Offer practical support with booking transport and accommodation.**
- **Ensure reimbursement of costs isn't a barrier for inclusion.**
- **Make prompt and timely payments.**
- **Always ask how to support their personal assistants or assistance animals.**
- **TOP TIP:** always work towards rewarding and recognising contribution – especially if your other speakers are paid professionals attending in their "day jobs".

For more help:

Statement on involvement payments - Shaping Our Lives <https://shapingourlives.org.uk/report/shaping-our-lives-statement-on-involvement-payments/>

Our Co-producer Payment Policy - Co-Production Collective, University College London
https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/5ffee76a01a63b6b7213780c/66f57cea72fa41ca36e8a809_CoProCo_PaymentPolicyFULL_Sept24_v2.0%20FINAL.pdf

"We help venues get into the right (accessibility) mindset. If needed, we educate them. We might ask for extra catering staff on the day if we know our delegates might need a bit more help"
– event organiser



The final word:

“It’s not always easy and it takes time, effort and money. We need to be honest about that...but it is really worth it... it’s the only way we get to a socially just world”

– People’s Voice Media



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