Inclusive and Accessible Events Guide

RMIT UNIVERSITY

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Overview

Introduction

Planning inclusive events ensures all people can participate in ways they can feel safe, seen, understood and can be their authentic selves. This allows for the strongest results in ideas, expertise and wisdom being heard.

RMIT's Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access (IDEA) Framework is a blueprint for designing an inclusive and accessible RMIT.

RMIT contacts

The publication of this guide was led by RMIT's equity, diversity and inclusion staff in consulation with RMIT's broader staff and student community and in reference to internal and external resources. Please contact us with any questions or comments.

For matters relating to our students: inclusion@rmit.edu.au
For matters relating to our staff: diversity.inclusion@rmit.edu.au

When planning and delivering inclusive events, diversity considerations can include:
Age
Accessibility
Caring responsibilities
Culture, language, religion
Gender, sex and sexuality
Geographical Location
Indigenous Australians
Socio and financial background

Universal Design

Detailed in RMIT's IDEA Framework is the aspiration to be **"inclusive by design, everyone, everywhere, all the time"**.

When taking a Universal Design approach to planning events, we try to avoid narrow assumptions about the abilities and identities of who might participate, and instead actively plan for a wide range of diverse participants.

Taking a Universal Design approach means planning and designing the event so that:

- Diverse participants are welcomed and included, and no-one is disadvantaged or stigmatised.

- Venues, facilities, digital tools and platforms are inclusive and accessible.

- Event information and content are delivered in multiple and accessible formats.

- There are multiple ways for people to participate.

- In addition to designing for accessibility for all, there are provisions responding to particular needs (for instance, Auslan interpreters where required; parent/ carer rooms etc.).

Use this guide to maximise the diversity and inclusion of events, when planning for:

Meetings
Workshops
Conferences
Seminars
Panelled Events
Lunch and Learns
Morning Teas
Ceremonies

Key considerations and planning ahead

Planning with inclusive and accessible intentions from the start.

Selecting event organisers

Include people with diverse experiences within your planning group to ensure a broad mix of opinions, ideas and perspectives, and help to reduce unconscious bias.

Examples include: people living with a disability, people from culturally, linguistically and spiritually diverse backgrounds, people from Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds, LGBTIQA+ people, equal numbers of female-identifying and male-identifying people, people of varying qualifications and levels of leadership.

Key questions for event organisers

Set clear intentions for your event by asking yourself the following questions:

- Do I have a clear structure or schedule to provide to attendees ahead of the event?

- Are people able to access the venue safely? Depending on the type of event do you require security?

- Is my registration process inclusive? For example: am I using inclusive language in the registration form, am I considering accessibility and diversity during registration by having multiple methods for people to register?

- Have I included a method of contacting the event organiser so any attendees who require adjustments can request these safely, and to feel that their privacy is being respected?

- Does the event consider diverse socio-economic backgrounds? For example, you may provide a variety of registration rates, discounted ticket prices, free access for people from low socio-economic backgrounds, students or volunteers, pay what you can, day only rates for multiple day events/conferences.

Choosing a date and time

- Days of significance should be avoided when planning an event if the event is not acknowledging this day of significance. For example, Global Accessibility Awareness Day is 18 May, International Women's Day is 8 March etc. Check your intended event date to ensure their are no clashes.

- Be aware of days of religious significance and make allowances for participants who may be fasting or require prayer spaces

- Consider those with caring responsibilities. Events held between 10am – 2pm is ideal timing for those with children in school.

- Consider a time suitable for interstate or international time zones. RMIT has global campuses and afternoon events are accessible to Vietnam Campuses.

Event location

Venue selection

Refer to RMIT's Venues 101 document to view accessible options for RMIT's most used spaces. Most options provide images of the venues.

- Ensure there are accessible entry and exits, including accessible pathways and automatic doors and lifts.

- Choose a central location, accessible for public transport and pick up/drop off zones.

- Explain parking around the area and cost of parking including disability parking.

- Ensure that accessible toilets in or close to the venue are provided.

- Ensure that all gender toilets in or close to the venue are provided.

- Pathways for entry are considered, considering, stairs, uneven flooring and narrowness of paths.

Navigational signage

Using clear and simple signage at the event that not only provides direction to move in the space but guidance on what to expect within the space will support all attendees. Ensure signage is accessible in its design and is at appropriate height to be seen. Signage may include:

- Directions to any wheelchair accessible routes, toilets, prayer rooms, quiet spaces or assistance dog area at the venue

- Instructions on how to navigate the space and what is expected. For example, at an event entrance, a sign might say "Come in, take a seat wherever suits you, we will start at 12pm".

Room design

Does the physical layout of the room allow for attendees to hear and see presenters as well as engage in the event without distractions?

If there is an inaccessible entrance or stage:

- Provide clear information ahead of the event about how alternative access can be achieved.

- RMIT's Melbourne Storey Hall has an accessible stage that can be organized in the event one is needed.

Seating arrangements

When planning the seating arrangements, whether it's chairs around tables or chairs all facing one direction, ensure there is enough space around the tables to allow for wheelchairs, mobility aids and assistance dogs, as well as prams.

- Leave some chairs away from the table so someone in a wheelchair and can easily join the table. Avoid making this space at the back of organised seating.

- Appoint staff to help the audience navigate the space and provide information and directions on inclusion and accessibility provisions (For example: give directions to all-gender toilets and accessible seating).

Sensory sensitive spaces

Plan for opportunities for attendees to manage their needs.

Consider an area of the event that could be utilised as a sensory sensitive space. Here's a checklist made by a RMIT student on reviewing spaces considering sensory sensitivities:

"Things to think about include, sounds, smells, visuals, lighting. Can you have any policies for in-person attendees which mitigate these factors, such as a fragrance-free request? Can you give people the option to sit where they want in the room? Always ensure exits aren't blocked and if possible, venue seating allows people to move about the space as required."

Quiet hour

A 'Quiet Hour' is where the event is adaptable to reduce any large stimuli. By reducing the number of people permitted in the event at the one time, the noise is reduced and the expectation is that speaking and communicating is kept to a minimum and the lights are often lowered.

A quiet room for religious or spiritual practice between sessions should also be considered, as well as designated and private spaces for caring for children including breastfeeding. RMIT has purpose built facilities such as the Multifaith and Wellbeing Centre and Childcare and Parenting rooms. You may provide free childcare if appropriate.

Sensory sensitive room plan[1]

Lighting
Aim for soft, dim lighting

Avoid	Use
• Overhead lighting	• Natural light
• Fluorescent lighting	• Warm/yellow lamps and lights

Sound
Create an enviroment with minimal noise pollution

Avoid	Use
• Loud conversations	• Provide earplugs
• Noisy activities	• Consider a choice of soft, soothing music

Smell
Avoid strong and invasive scents

Avoid	Use
• Food in the room	• Signs requesting no food
• Room scents or perfumes	• Signs requesting no scented sprays

Culture
Offer self-soothing options and activities

Avoid	Use
• Limited privacy	• Free fidget toys
• Insensitive language or tokenistic images	• Cosy seating

1   https://www.latrobe.edu.au/students/support/wellbeing/resource-hub/Neurodiversity

Selecting presenters or panellists

Diversity of speakers should be considered when organising an event.

As the most outward-facing aspect of your event, speakers are key in your commitment to diversity and inclusion. An audience that does not feel represented is not likely to come back to your events or recommend your events to others.

Your speakers' lineup should be as diverse as the audience your event is reaching. In practice, ensure an adequate balance in terms of gender, race, ethnicity, ability, sexual orientation, religion, age, and other characteristics.

Alongside making your audience feel included and welcomed, a diverse lineup will contribute to richer conversations, sessions, and events.

Consider the following when developing your event:

- Are the topics diverse enough to appeal to a range of speakers and attendees?

- Is the speaker line-up too heavily weighted towards one gender?

- Have genuine attempts been made to ensure diversity in the speaker panel?

Providing payment

If paying speakers, provide equal payments to all contributors including presenters, panellists and performers.

Briefing event speakers

Name pronunciation

Ensure your event presenters (moderators, guests) know the correct pronunciation of names of guests, speakers or performers. Confirm and record the phonetic spelling for the pronunciation of guest names, and then include in the speaking notes for event presenters. For example: Gianna (Jee-AH-nah) and Ahmed (AHH-med).

Using pronouns

Invite your presenters to introduce their pronouns. With their consent, use their name and pronouns for introductions and/or event communications. For example, first name last name (she/her) or first name last name (they/them).

Invitation to stretch, stand and take breaks

Invite your presenter to set the behavioural expectations for the 'attendees' – welcome the option of standing and stretching in a space that doesn't disturb others view of the event.

Presenters should also coommunicate when breaks will be provided. We recommend when delivering content to break every 50 minutes to accommodate a diverse range of abilities.

Using inclusive language

Language matters. Using inclusive language and abstaining from othering language can create a more welcoming environment and discourse for all. For example:

- Be gender-neutral. Instead of saying, "Welcome ladies and gentlemen", say "welcome all".

- Avoid exclusive language that may be only relatable to certain people.

- Avoiding saying "as you can see on the slide" instead of explaining what is on the slide, as you cannot assume everyone in the room can see and interpret the information.

- Avoid using jargon, slang or acronyms that may alienate your audience.

Using visual descriptions

Invite speakers to introduce themselves including a visual description.

People without vision disabilities take in a lot of visual information about the people and environment around them. To offer context and access for all, provide a brief visual description of yourself.

You may choose to describe your gender identity, race or ethnicity, skin colour, hair colour and style, whether you have facial hair, what clothing and jewellery you're wearing.

For example: "I am a white woman with brown hair, up in a bun on top of my head, round black glasses wearing a blue shirt".

Content of the event

Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country

Taking the time to Acknowledge Country, or including a Welcome to Country at an event, reminds us that every day we live and work on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander lands. As a show of respect, it's important to include at least one of these practices at your event.

An Acknowledgement of Country is an opportunity for **anyone** to show respect for Traditional Owners and the continuing connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to Country.

Welcome to Country is delivered by **Traditional Owners**, or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who have been given permission from Traditional Owners, to welcome visitors to their Country. This usually takes place at a formal event.

To book a Welcome to Country at RMIT, go to: www.wurundjeri.com.au/request-council-traditional-ceremony/

Content to suit your audience

Consider the different learning styles, literacy levels, communication abilities, and/or attention spans of you audience:

- Are the topics diverse enough to appeal to a range of attendees?

- Is the content appealing to a particular cultural framework or societal norms?

- Does the content have any unconscious bias? For example, heteronormativity, ableism, racism or discrimination?

- Have you adopted a diverse range of event presentation styles?
- Do you need to consider content warnings?
- Do you require an Auslan Interpreter?

Working with an Auslan interpreter

If working with Auslan interpreters, provide copies of presentations to Auslan interpreters or live captioners prior to the event to ensure they can correctly spell names, places and specific terminology correctly.

To book an Auslan interpreter, go to: www.auslanservices.com/contact/

Participant engagement and comment platforms

- If attendees can ask questions within the event, have you offered an online and or anonymous platform for these?

- Are you prepared for possible arguments from/between attendees? Consider allocating a comment moderator, equipped with prepared responses.

It is becoming increasingly common for event organisers and presenters to use real-time question, comment, and survey platforms online, such as Sli.do or Mentimeter.

While these are great tools for increasing audience engagement, it is important to ensure they are accessible to all participants.

Digital accessibility

To support the participation of all people, the following points should be considered in relation to the use of media or interactive technology at events or meetings to ensure accessibility and inclusion:

Videos

Any videos included in a presentation, developed in the lead up to or following an event, should include captions and be audio described.

If a video is not going to be audio described, presenters should be reminded to verbalise any important visual elements such as on-screen text.

Images, photos and diagrams

Any images, photos or diagrams included in a presentation (for example, displayed on a PowerPoint slide) should be described by the presenter so that people who are Blind or low vision can understand the context of what is being presented.

Text

Any text used in a presentation should be written in plain English and include appropriate colour contrast (for example, white background and black font, text should also use large enough font sizes so everyone can read it. Fonts no smaller than 16 points are best).

Any text that is specifically referred to on the screen should be read aloud as part of the presentation. That is, presenters should not say "As you can all see or read on this next slide …".

Allow for participants to receive any presentation slides in advance if needed.

Promotion material

Ticketing

To ensure accessible promotions and event registration, offer all promotional and registration information in a variety of accessible formats. This might be a ticketing website, a word document, or the option to RSVP over phone or email.

Signalling accessibility

If your event already has key accessibility features in place, have you advertised this? This is a great way to signal that this is an inclusive event. For example, 'this event will be live captioned, recorded' or 'this event will be live captioned.'

Wayfinding

When advertising or communicating to registrants about an event, event descriptions should also include wayfinding information accessing the event. If possible, provide an image of the building and entrance in any confirmation communications.

Communicate key details

Ensure that all attendees (whether in person or online) have all the key information they need about the event e.g., date, time, location, event links, accessibility information and a key contact if they have additional questions.

Inclusive representation

It's important to reflect the rich diversity of RMIT's student and staff community in any promotional materials. You can do this by selecting diverse and inclusive imagery that includes a positive representation of people from backgrounds.

Communicate your objective to be inclusive across all touchpoints such as the website, registration form, social media, marketing material and media activity.

Consider whether your event would benefit from a diversity and inclusion statement or code of conduct on inclusion that can be easily understood by all attendees including: a code of conduct to ensure your event and associated online spaces provide a harassment-free experience for everyone and are accepting of all cultures, religions, faiths, lifestyles, genders and sexualities.

Catering

Engage a provider from a sustainable and equal opportunity company.

Providers

RMIT has preferred catering providers, please visit: rmit.edu.au/staff/service-connect/payments-purchasing/supplier-panels-and-catalogues/catering-panel

Key considerations

- Labels need to be printed using accessible font and using size 12 font or larger

- Have you asked attendees dietary requirements/requests? Some people may have sensory requirement with catering.

- Have you considered some people may be fasting? Or have cultural or religious food practices or preferences? Eg. chopsticks? No pork, no alcohol, vegetarian, praying before a meal, vegan, food allergies?

Bookings

Welcome to Country requests

Welcome to Country requests should be put through to the Wurundjeri Cultural Heritage Council website:

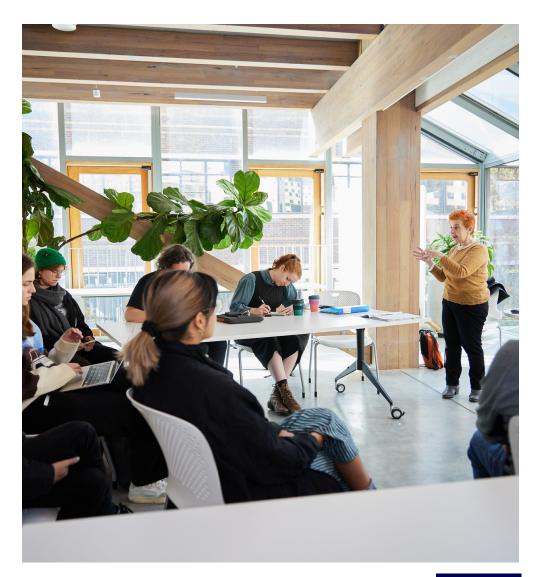www.wurundjeri.com.au/request-council-traditional-ceremony/

Auslan interpreters

RMIT's Equitable Learning Service has a contract with Auslan services. Contact Auslan services here:

www.auslanservices.com/contact/

You'll need to have prepped the following info:

• Purpose of booking

• Location

• Date and start/finish time

• Contact person on the day

• Any content/agenda is also helpful

Equity and Inclusion, Students Group

We thank RMIT staff, students, and external organisations and contacts for their help in developing this resource.

For feedback or to get in touch, please email us at: inclusion@rmit.edu.au