

# Making your information accessible

An Accessible Information Policy is what you need, suggests Volunteering England Information Officer **Kate Engles**.

Since October 2004, many British organisations have complied with the Disability Discrimination Act by making reasonable adjustments to their premises and reducing physical barriers to access. However, plenty more can be done to reduce less visible barriers to services and information.

In the average working environment, we are surrounded by information and instructions communicated over the phone, in emails and on websites, in print and in person. However, access to the information you want can be very restricted because it's often available in only one of these ways.

For deaf or hard of hearing people who can't use a standard phone, even getting in touch to arrange a face-to-face meeting can pose a challenge. And, since less than 5% of books published in the UK each year are produced in accessible formats, there is a wealth of information which is not available to people with visual impairments or other reading difficulties.

## **What's an Accessible Information Policy?**

This is why developing an Accessible Information Policy can help to ensure your organisation is ready to communicate with its volunteers, service users and customers in a range of different and inclusive ways.

An Accessible Information Policy should complement your organisation's commitment to equal opportunities. It should outline how people can obtain information from you in their preferred format. It should also explain how you aim to cater for people's individual needs in a consistent way. The policy should be accompanied by an Accessible Information Plan, which lists the actions needed to put the policy into practice.

## **Getting started**

You can start by defining how you provide information and how you make it accessible, for example:

- "We aim to give clear and comprehensive information by email, by telephone and in person"
- "We are happy to offer leaflets and books in alternative formats upon request".

These can form the principles which your organisation aims to follow.

## **Developing the policy and plan**

You can then identify areas for improvement. Ideally this should be done through an access audit carried out by a disability advocacy organisation, or more informally by asking disabled people who use your service. If you aren't able to arrange or afford this, you should still aim to get a broad range of ideas by brainstorming

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with colleagues. This will also help you to get an organisation-wide understanding of what accessible information is and why it's important.

You should also consult accessibility guides produced by disability and charity organisations. They can help you with structuring the policy or finding out about ways to improve accessibility through adapting your working methods, producing alternative formats or using special equipment or 'auxiliary aids'.

Once you have developed a list of areas to improve on, you can work out which are easily achievable and which are more aspirational. This will help you to write your policy and to develop an action plan.

### **Examples of short-term considerations**

- If your organisation has a textphone/ minicom, make sure that staff are trained in how to use it and that the number is widely advertised.
- If you don't have a textphone, make sure your staff know about other options, such as using a free telephone relay service like RNID Tynetalk.
- Most people have heard of Braille, but there is a very wide range of alternative formats available, such as large print, audio CD and Moon. If your organisation can offer leaflets or books in alternative formats, you should be aware of the different types which exist and have contact details for transcription agencies ready so that transcription can be arranged as soon as it is requested.
- Look at guidelines produced by organisations like Mencap, the RNIB and the Plain English Campaign. Develop a house style with clear formatting and avoid using jargon. Ensure that your

phone, postal and email contact details are clear on everything you produce.

- Consult web accessibility guidelines to make sure that your website doesn't compromise clarity over fancy design features. Use clear fonts, avoid bright backgrounds and make sure that images are correctly labelled.

### **Examples of long-term aspirations**

- If your organisation doesn't currently have the resources to pay for transcription into alternative formats, you can still get estimates for the cost and add this into a future budget calculation or funding bid.
- Arrange regular staff training in disability awareness.
- Conduct a survey or organise a user-testing group to give you feedback on your provision of accessible information.
- Finally, your policy should also explain how you intend to monitor your provision of accessible information and how you will invite feedback from service users. The Accessible Information Plan can form one key part of monitoring, as you should review and revise it every 6–12 months to ensure that the actions you identified are being completed.

Ultimately, creating and implementing an Accessible Information Policy needn't cost your organisation a lot of money or take a great amount of time. Like all good policies, it should help you to focus on what you are committed to doing and provide a framework for improving on it. You will know when you've succeeded in creating a truly inclusive organisation when providing accessible information becomes part of your routine.

This is an edited version of an article that first appeared in *Volunteering Magazine*.