



Citizens **Information** Board
information · advice · advocacy

Research Series

Accessible Information for All

Guidelines on developing
accessible information in
your organisation

September 2009

Introduction

These practical guidelines, based on existing best practice, tell you what you should do as a public body to improve the accessibility of your information and meet the requirements of the Disability Act 2005.

In particular, they offer advice on how to improve your information for people who experience information barriers. These include older people and those with:

- physical disabilities,
- sensory disabilities (for example sight or hearing loss), and
- learning disabilities.

They also include:

- people from new migrant communities,
- people with literacy difficulties, and
- others who may experience social exclusion, such as homeless people, Travellers and people who are isolated or in institutions.

Why is accessible information important?

Information is an important tool in our lives, enabling us to access services and entitlements and exercise our rights. All people need access to accurate information that allows them to deal with everyday issues. Some people, however, may need additional support to access the information they need.

Many agencies and organisations in the public, private and voluntary sectors have a key role to play in providing accessible information and making a real difference to people's lives.

Providing accessible information can help you to reach a larger audience and can enhance the quality and efficiency of your customer services.

What it means to make information accessible

Making information accessible, however it is given – face to face, on a website, in print, on the phone or on DVD - means making sure that the language and format used as well as the images and design are clear, appropriate and understandable.

Different media and formats for different audiences

It is best to see information as something you provide in a range of formats for different:

- audiences,
- uses, and
- delivery channels, (such as telephone, face to face, printed pages or websites)

We use information in different ways today and access it through different media. For example, we access:

- written information from books, leaflets, text messages and websites,
- audio information over the phone or from the radio, the Internet, podcasts and CDs, and
- visual information from television, the Internet and DVDs.

Making information available in as many formats as possible means that we give everyone a choice of how they want to access information. Knowing our clients and asking them about their needs will tell us what formats we need to provide.

Making information accessible to people with disabilities

Finding practical ways to reasonably accommodate the needs of people with physical and sensory disabilities is now required by law, under the Disability Act 2005. As you provide information and consult with those you work with, it will be important to consider the needs of *all* people with disabilities, for example those:

- who are deaf or hard of hearing,
- with mental health difficulties,
- with a vision impairment,
- with learning disabilities, and
- with illnesses that limit their understanding and decision making

The **Disability Act** requires organisations providing services and information to accommodate the needs of people with disabilities. You can find further information on the Disability Act from the **National Disability Authority** website, www.nda.ie.

The **Equal Status Acts 2000 and 2004** require providers of goods and services to reasonably accommodate people with disabilities. Under the Acts service providers must make changes, at reasonable costs, to enable people with disabilities to use their services. You can find further information on the Equal Status Acts from the **Equality Authority's** website, www.equality.ie

Fact Sheet 1: Carrying out an information access audit

An information accessibility audit can help an organisation to establish what it is doing, if information is reaching those who need it, where barriers exist and where there are gaps in your service. This is important as information accessibility is required under the 2005 Disability Act. It is good practice to carry out an audit as part of your approach to improving information accessibility.

How can you carry out an information access audit?

Staff can carry out the access audit but it is better to bring in experts to carry out the audit for you. You can also commission specialists to audit your website and electronic communications (see Fact Sheet 5).

The following are the main areas to cover in an information accessibility audit:

- policies on information accessibility;
- written information and the different formats you provide;
- website and electronic information;
- translation and interpretation services that you provide;
- systems in place to review who uses your services;
- methods for consulting with service users;
- accessibility of your information centre;
- staff training and awareness.

Once you have carried out the audit, draw up an action plan with timescales and responsibilities. Improving information accessibility is a gradual and continuous process.

A key outcome of the audit is to improve information accessibility. This can best be measured if the customer notices that the quality and accessibility of the service has improved. Consulting with customers will help you to measure this.

The Revenue Commissioners' Central Revenue Information Office deals with over 300,000 customer visits each year. In 2007, following major renovations to its central information office, the Revenue Commissioners received an Excellence through Accessibility Award. After consulting with the National Disability

Authority, the Revenue Commissioners organised disability awareness training for staff to improve the service to customers. They also placed Braille signs at eye level and used colour contrast with dark text on a white background to make signs easier to read.

A spokesperson said this resulted in: “much greater awareness throughout the organisation both at management and staff level about people with disabilities and their needs and entitlements... What you have to do to make your buildings, systems and service accessible is not rocket science, it really just needs a bit of thought, a bit of learning and being creative in your solutions... When we learned what we had to do and when we had the right attitude towards doing it, it was amazing how easy it was to do.”

Further resources

National Disability Authority www.nda.ie

Institute for Design and Disability. www.idd.ie

National Council for the Blind of Ireland (NCBI) www.ncbi.ie

Fact Sheet 2: Consulting with service users

It is important to consult with service users when planning, developing, managing and reviewing information services. You should not only know your audience but also work closely with them. To find out if your information is accessible, relevant and easy to understand, consult with and get feedback from your information users.

A transparent and simple feedback and complaints procedure shows that your organisation is serious about providing the best information service possible.

Meaningful and appropriate consultation with service users and local communities is important in identifying how to provide information in the most accessible ways. As the National Disability Authority's Ask Me: Guidelines for Effective Consultation with People with Disabilities (2002) states: "Getting the consultation process right for people with disabilities means getting it right for everybody."

“Monaghan local authorities define social inclusion as a process that aims to enable each individual to have equal opportunity of access to services, facilities and information and to have equality of opportunity to make decisions that affect their lives. They feel, “with regard to social inclusion, if the shoe does not fit, the shoe needs to change, not the foot.” Monaghan local authorities have produced **“Making Monaghan Accessible”**, their “Disability Act Implementation Plan 2007 – 2015”. The plan sets out in detail how they will meet their obligations under the Disability Act 2005. They have, in the plan, committed to ongoing consultation with service users to ensure that they are reaching targets and goals set out within the implementation plan and to providing a range of services that are fully accessible to everyone. The implementation plan can be obtained from their Access Officer and is available in a number of different formats on request.

Involving service users when monitoring and managing your service

There are many levels at which you can involve users in monitoring and managing your service:

- Individual level: individuals are directly involved in providing information. This could be in a one-to-one information session or when an individual uses one of your information services.
- Operational level: service users are involved in planning day-to-day information services.
- Strategic level: service users are involved in planning the future direction of the service.
- Governance level: service users and people from disadvantaged groups are involved in managing the service, for example, on the board of management, working groups or other consultative bodies of your organisation.

How can you get feedback on what you have done?

- Keep a record of the different information formats that people have asked for and used.
- Listen to what people say about the best way to provide information. Encourage people to make suggestions and propose changes.
- Have a system for feedback, for example provide comment cards or allow feedback on your website, so that information users can comment on the accessibility of your information service. Make sure that comment cards and websites are accessible.
- Ask information users to give you feedback on the different formats that you provide and how your existing information could be made more accessible.
- Consider how you can involve service users in the design of your service or the production of a new publication.
- Work in partnership with different organisations and groups to build understanding of the information needs of service users so that this can inform your work.
- Ask your service users what support they need in accessing information.
- Set up a quality circle or a user panel that represents different user groups.
- Involve representative organisations and people from disadvantaged groups in managing your organisation through

membership of your Board of Directors, participation in committees or working groups, organisational reviews and evaluations.

Co. Louth Citizens Information Service has produced an information book for parents of children with a disability. They consulted with the parents of children with a disability and asked them what difficulties they had in getting the information they needed. They also met with support groups and asked them what support they provided. This information, and information from different websites and government departments, was compiled into a book using simple, easy-to-understand language. Contact information for parent support groups was included. The book was launched by a government minister and distributed to support groups, disability groups and Citizens Information Centres across the country.

Issues to consider when organising consultation events and focus groups:

- Are the questions clear and accessible to people with disabilities and to different minority ethnic communities?
- Do the questions posed and methods used make inappropriate assumptions or stereotype particular groups?
- Have facilitators been briefed about the objectives of the consultations?
- Are facilitators trained to be aware of disability and cultural issues?
- Have facilitators been recruited from disability and minority ethnic communities?
- Are consultation materials written in accessible, plain English and translated into relevant languages?
- Have the people who attended the consultations been given copies of the report or notes from the consultations in their preferred accessible formats?

Further resources

National Disability Authority (2002) [Ask Me: Guidelines for effective consultation with people with disabilities](#)

Combat Poverty Agency (2000) [Guidelines on consulting with people who live in poverty](#)

Fact Sheet 3: Working in partnership

Working with representative and advocacy organisations can help you to:

- deliver information where it is needed;
- identify gaps in the information you provide; and
- have a reliable source of referral to more specialist advice and services.

No organisation will have information on or connections with all potential information users. For this reason, it is important to work in partnership to share information, contacts and expertise.

Linking with advocacy and representative organisations

To improve access to information it is important to link with organisations that have trusted relationships with specific groups of information users. This may include specialist information centres, outreach workers, local groups and groups representing service users. Groups which provide outreach services and specialist support might also help to distribute your information. It is useful to have a link worker who is responsible for linking with other organisations and to name a contact person in your information centre.

The **Immigrant Council of Ireland** provides information about the immigration system for people who come to Ireland to visit, work, study or live. This includes written information in English, Arabic, Chinese, French, Portuguese and Russian, and language interpretation in face-to-face contacts or over the telephone. The **Citizens Information Board** has partnered with the Council to provide regular updates for Citizens Information Centre staff on key changes in immigration policy and a special phone line that CICs can call to get specialist information and support.

Sharing information and co-ordinating activities

The best way to make partnerships beneficial is to pool expertise. You can share and exchange information with local area partnerships, community centres, local day centres for older people, groups representing people with disabilities, migrant support organisations, shelters and hostels for homeless people, and community-based projects.

The **National Council for the Blind in Ireland (NCBI)** provides Braille transcription, audio recording, audio description, disability awareness, website accessibility audits and access audits of buildings to groups and organisations that want to make their information accessible to people who are blind and vision impaired.

Co-ordinating training, advice and other activities helps to promote learning among organisations and to avoid duplication of work. You can also publicise information about your services in magazines and e-newsletters produced by community and representative organisations. This is particularly helpful when information is complex and specialised.

Co. Offaly Citizens Information Service has a database of certified community interpreters on its website, put together by the **Tullamore Migrant Centre**. Co. Offaly CIS acts as a broker by linking community and voluntary organisations and individuals needing an interpreter service. The Migrant Centre, which is funded through the **Department of Social & Family Affairs**, helps migrant communities to integrate with local social, cultural and sporting organisations. It provides information and help on issues such as immigration legislation, social welfare and employment rights. The centre has also trained ethnic community interpreters to help others in their community to access local and national supports and services and so increase their integration into Irish society.

The **Citizens Information Board** is working with **Inclusion Ireland** to make its information accessible to people with an intellectual disability. The first step is to produce a leaflet to introduce people to their local Citizens Information Centre. The leaflet describes what information the CIC can provide, that it is free and confidential, and that CIC information officers will take the time to explain the various options. Information providers have received training on how to provide information to people with an intellectual disability. A focus group of people with an intellectual disability will look at the leaflet to see if the information is useful and will help guide the Board in the next steps to take to make its information more accessible.

Fact Sheet 4: Designing information for accessibility

It is important that the content of your information – whether it is written information, an audio tape, a DVD or a video – is clearly structured and that it is produced from a single source. This avoids duplication and lets you update information quickly and easily. (Single source publishing is explained later in this Fact Sheet).

Once information is designed for accessibility, you can then adapt it for different formats and for the web. Fact Sheet 5 explains the different formats you can use and Fact Sheet 6 shows how to ensure your website is accessible.

Easy to read information has many uses. It can be useful to people with intellectual disabilities, to people with aphasia and to people with a low level of literacy in English, among others. A special interest group has formed to agree an approach on how people can make information easy to read in Ireland. It includes speech and language therapists, researchers, policy makers and others with experience of creating easy to read information. Their aim is to produce guidelines by reviewing the literature, discussing their previous experiences and actively engaging with people who will benefit from easy to read information.

What can you do to make your written information accessible?

The guidelines below apply to all information, including electronic publications and websites. They are relevant for word processing files and for other file formats such as PDF and HTML. They will help you to structure, write and design your information so that it can be made accessible in different formats and in Clear Print.

a) Design and layout

- Use simple, clear English so that your publications are accessible to everyone. The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) can provide help in writing plain English texts. (See further resources below).
- Use Clear Print design which takes into account things like font type and size, colour contrast between background and text, and page navigation. Examples of Clear Print design are using at least 14 point font size and aligning paragraphs to the left.

(See further resources below for more guidance on Clear Print design).

Age and Opportunity uses **RNIB Clear Print Guidelines** in its publications. It has also given information on how to make publications clearer and more legible to its Bealtaine festival partners, which include arts centres, cultural institutions and county council arts offices.

b) Structuring your document

- Create a structure so that your written information can be accessed through a screen reader. A screen reader will read aloud information from your computer screen so that you can listen to it.
- Base your structure on Microsoft Word styles and headings. Use the heading style in Word, such as 'Heading 1', 'Heading 2' and so on, to create headings rather than trying to make your text look like a heading by using bold formatting. Using the heading style lets screen readers create an outline of the document.
- Add space around paragraphs by using style formatting options rather than using carriage returns. This is particularly important to people who use a screen reader.

c) Using images and tables in electronic documents

- Describe the information in words as well as in images.
- When creating columns of text, use the built-in table tools. Do not use tabs to create tables.
- Keep the tables simple.

d) Linking your documents to web pages

- Use descriptive text for links.
- Make sure that each hyperlink describes the content to which it links. This is important because hyperlinked text such as 'click here' can be confusing for people who use screen readers.

f) Training your staff

- Train your staff on how to produce accessible written documents.
- Make sure the training addresses equality issues as well as negative stereotypes and attitudinal barriers.

If you provide information in different formats, say this clearly in the original publication. 'Different formats available on request.' It is important to state which formats are available and where to get them.

Inclusion Ireland promotes accessible information for people with intellectual disabilities. Its website provides up to date information on developments in service provision, legislation and social policy. It also produces accessible CDs and booklets in Easy to Read format.

One example is the '**My Voice, My Choice**' advocacy pack, which contains information booklets in Easy to Read format and a CD. The pack helps people with intellectual disabilities to have a better understanding of their rights and how to get their voice heard when exerting their rights.

Single source publishing

A more advanced method for producing a document is single source publishing. This involves publishing information from a single source that can later be transformed into a variety of different output formats, such as HTML for the web, PDF for printing or Braille transcription.

The source document is written in a computer language called XML (Xtensible Markup Language). XML does not use formatting or typesetting which means that the information can easily be changed into other output formats.

The benefit of single source publishing is that it avoids having to edit and produce different versions of the one document. This reduces costs, reduces the possibility of errors occurring and makes it easier to update documents as only the 'master' (single source) file has to be updated.

Single source publishing is particularly useful for organisations that produce information in a variety of formats such as Braille and the web.

Further resources

National Adult Literacy Agency, [Plain English Guidelines](#)

Plain English Campaign, [the Plain English Guide to Design and Layout](#)

Plain English Campaign, [How to Write in Plain English](#)

Plain English Campaign, [Plain English Tips for Clear Websites](#)

National Disability Authority, [First Steps in Producing Accessible Publications](#)

The document is available in HTML, PDF and Word formats.

National Disability Authority, [Code of Practice on Accessibility of Public Services and Information provided by public bodies](#) This gives guidance to public bodies on how to improve access to written information. It is available in HTML, Low Resolution PDF, Large Print, Plain English PDF, and Easy to Read PDF formats.

[Assist Ireland http://www.assistireland.ie](http://www.assistireland.ie) A comprehensive online resource database developed by the Citizens Information Board with information on assistive technology products, suppliers and resources related to daily living and disability in Ireland.

National Council for the Blind of Ireland (NCBI) provides guidance on how to make written documents accessible to all, with particular focus on clear print layout and design. [NCBI Make it Clear](#)

Lighthouse International (USA), Guidelines on Colour and Effective Colour for People with Visual Impairments. www.lighthouse.org

Royal National Institute for the Blind, See it Right: Guidelines on producing accessible information. This includes a book and CD. www.rnib.org.uk

Web Aim, Provides [guidance on how to structure a Word document](#) provides different text for images and save files to HTML.

SAIF, Provides a wide range of resources and checklists on how to make documents accessible for disabled people. <http://www.saifscotland.org.uk/>

Mencap, UK, [Am I Making Myself Clear?](#) (2002). Guidelines for accessible writing, www.mencap.org.uk

Fact Sheet 5: Providing your information in different formats

This Fact Sheet introduces the different formats you can use to make your information accessible to a wide audience. For example, many people access information through audio and video technology, podcasts and sound files on their computers, iPods and MP3 players. Just as providing information in an Easy to Read format helps everyone, not just people with learning disabilities, providing different formats widens choices for everyone. It also helps you to meet the requirements of the Disability Act, 2005.

As Fact Sheet 4 shows, structuring your information correctly makes it easier to transfer information into different formats, including HTML, PDF documents, Clear Print documents, large print, Easy to Read documents, Braille, video and audio.

A master copy will make it more manageable and cost effective if you have a quick method of producing different formats and clearly advertise that these formats are available on request.

Overview of different formats

Braille: Braille is a reading and writing system of raised dots that is read by touch. To transcribe a document into Braille, the Word document must be structured correctly and without complex formatting such as graphs or bar charts. Braille should be produced by a professional Braille transcription agency. For more information on Braille and on making documents accessible to people who are blind or vision impaired, visit the website of the National Council for the Blind in Ireland, www.ncbi.ie or local 1850 33 43 53.

By law, all pharmaceutical packaging and patient information leaflets (PILs) must be available in Braille. Through the **Pharmabaille** initiative, **NCBI** has developed a training course for pharmaceutical companies that teaches the basics of Grade 1 Braille. Interest from pharmaceutical companies across Ireland has been strong. A leading Irish packaging company works with NCBI to produce Braille labels for pharmaceutical companies in Ireland and internationally.

Audio: Audio information is easily stored on CDs, audio cassettes and sound files.

New technology makes it easy to transfer information into an audio format, for example by downloading podcasts or audio files from the Internet onto iPods and MP3 players. In some cases it might be helpful to provide subtitles and / or an Irish Sign Language (ISL) signer along with an audio file.

If you are creating audio files, it is important to use professional and experienced readers and high-quality commercial recording equipment. The NCBI Media Centre has five recording studios and a sound engineering team. It converts hard and soft documents into Braille and audio formats and is the largest centre of its kind in Ireland. For more information, see www.ncbi.ie.

Video: Video is an accessible way of providing information to anyone, not just those who cannot read. You can see this in the popularity of YouTube and video players on iPods. However, video clips do not work well for conveying detailed information such as directories of services.

DVDs and video are particularly helpful for deaf people and those with literacy difficulties. DVDs and videos with subtitles and Irish Sign Language are a preferred format for many deaf people. When creating DVDs and videos, always consider using narration, on-screen text and graphics, and aim for the highest possible sound and video quality. The Irish Deaf Society has facilities for producing signed videos and DVDs. Its website has an example of a video with sign language. For more information, go to www.irishdeafociety.ie.

An example of how video can be used to provide information is a DVD on family reunification policies in Ireland, produced by the **Forum on Migration and Communication (FOMACS)** with the **Immigrant Council of Ireland**. The DVD makes immigration law on family reunification accessible to a large number of people. For more information, see www.immigrantcouncil.ie.

Audio Description: Audio description is the name given to a narrative track on television, movies, the performing arts and the visual arts to communicate the story to people who are blind or vision impaired. Audio description enriches the enjoyment of the

plot or content of visual passages or moments in a programme, performance or film. It is also a relevant format for people with learning disabilities, literacy difficulties and anyone who enjoys listening to information.

NCBI also provides an audio description service for information produced in a video format. See www.ncbi.ie.

Mary has been profoundly deaf since birth and uses Irish Sign Language (ISL) as her main mode of communication. Mary's literacy level is low and she has difficulty understanding most written information. During the last census, the **Central Statistics Office** sent Mary the census information on a DVD with Irish Sign Language translation. This gave Mary the confidence to fill out the census form for the first time. In previous years, she had made excuses to the census officer about why she hadn't filled out the form.

Plain English: Plain English is written to be understood. Using plain English ensures that documents are written clearly and concisely, there is no confusion about meaning and jargon is kept to a minimum. All documents produced to provide information to the public should be written in plain English. [NALA Plain English Guidelines](#)

Easy to read: Easy to Read documents are particularly important for people with intellectual disabilities, people with literacy difficulties and people whose first language is not English. In practice, many of us like an Easy to Read document because the information is short, clear, illustrated and structured around key messages. Easy to Read documents can serve as summaries at the start of a written document or can stand alone. Always make sure that the Easy to Read document has the same structure, message and content as all other formats. A number of organisations can help you to prepare Easy to Read documents. For more information, go to Inclusion Ireland's website, www.inclusionireland.ie

BreastCheck has developed an Easy to Read document on breast screening to improve access to and participation in BreastCheck services by women with intellectual and learning disabilities. BreastCheck found that the document was widely used by women, particularly women with little English. BreastCheck is a free health service, funded by the **Department of Health and Children**, which aims to reduce deaths from breast cancer by finding and treating the disease at an early stage. The booklet, [A Guide to Breast Screening](#) provides information for carers, family, friends, medical guardians and women themselves.

HIQA, in association with **Inclusion Ireland**, produced an Easy to Read version of the draft National Quality Standards for Residential Services for People with Disabilities. This was developed following discussions at focus groups where people with disabilities gave feedback on the standards. The Easy to Read version gives people with intellectual disability information on the standards that they can understand. Because of this they know what to expect of the residential services they use and can make their voice heard if the standards are not met.

Electronic documents: Documents can be published electronically as PDFs, HTML or MS Word documents. The guidelines contained in Fact Sheet 4 on designing your information for accessibility also apply to documents that are published electronically.

PDFs should be structured so that they can be read and navigated using assistive technologies such as the text-to-speech software used by web users who are blind and vision impaired. However, tagged PDFs are not fully accessible to all assistive technologies, so you should provide a fully accessible format, such as HTML, as well.

MS Word documents may not be accessible unless they have been structured using heading styles. Also, images and information in tables are not accessible in MS Word format. For more information, see the National Disability Authority's website, www.nda.ie.

Accessible emails: Emails have become a vital source of communication so it is important that you develop accessible tools

for email use. Use plain English in all emails, write clearly and avoid jargon. Use plain text emails so that readers can see the information in the way you intend. Plain text emails are the most accessible, especially for people using screen readers. A Screen Reader will read aloud information from your computer screen so you can listen to it. If you use HTML emails, follow the accessibility guidelines for web pages, which you will find in Fact Sheet 6.

For plain text emails, use the Text Email Newsletter (TEN) Standard – see www.headstar.com/ten. When emailing to groups you can offer a plain text version, a plain text with the HTML version attached, or you can let the recipient choose which version to subscribe to.

Pictures and symbols: Pictures and symbols can make information easy to understand and are a useful way to communicate information. Symbols are usually simple line drawings that are used to represent words and ideas. They can help to make written information accessible. People with intellectual disabilities and literacy difficulties may find illustrations and symbols a more effective form of communication. In addition, pictures and symbols can be used to communicate with people with mental health difficulties or to approach areas difficult to discuss. Symbols, illustrations, photographs and pictures can all help people to understand the content of the document.

NCBI can tell you how to make pictures and symbols accessible to people who are blind and vision impaired.

It is important to use pictures and symbols appropriately. Various types of symbols have been developed for use by people with intellectual disabilities and literacy difficulties. See the further resources section at the end of this Fact Sheet for details of websites providing pictures and symbols.

The advocate in the **CUMAS** advocacy service in Carlow and Kilkenny used the picture bank from 'Gifts of the Image Bank' Change Picture software in her work with a woman who has a mild intellectual disability and literacy difficulties. The officer used picture-based information to explore the pros and cons of the woman's housing options in a way that was meaningful to her.

The advocate showed a picture of each option (living in the community, living in a Health Services Executive hostel, private rental, and so on) to the woman on separate pages. At the top of the page, the advocate put a 'thumbs up' to record the positives of this option and at the bottom of the page a 'thumbs down' to record the negatives of this option. She also developed a trigger sheet which had pictures of money, medication, cleaning, cooking, friends, keys, day centre and so on to help the client consider all the factors of living independently. The woman found this helpful and the picture format definitely was more meaningful to her.

Text messaging: Text messaging by phone using SMS (short text messaging service) is a very accessible information format for a wide range of information users and is particularly popular among deaf people. You can encourage text messaging by advertising a mobile phone number or by introducing telephone landlines that accept and send text messages.

Kevin used to enjoy going to theatre but his progressive hearing loss prevented him from going any more. Recently, his local theatre started showing captioned productions (displaying the actors' lines on a screen) once a month, offering online ticket booking and email reservations as well as SMS booking requests. This enabled Kevin to renew his theatre passion. He books his tickets by text, using his mobile phone.

Mary's local doctor is willing to communicate information and appointments through text messaging. This is Mary's only way to get help in an emergency (her son has chronic asthma) as there is no 999 or emergency call service for deaf or hard of hearing people.

Information in Irish Sign Language and other languages: Many information providers provide information in other languages. It is important that translation is carried out professionally and is respectful of people's values, religion and culture. Information that is interpreted into Irish Sign Language for deaf people or into other languages spoken in the community can be provided through face-to-face contact or by video links. See the Sign Language Interpreting Service website; www.slis.ie

Where documents are translated into other languages spoken in the community, it is important to use words and symbols that people from minority ethnic groups will be familiar and comfortable with. It is also important to be aware that some minority ethnic people may have difficulty reading their own mother-tongue. If this is the case, you will need to develop other forms of information for them.

One **Citizens Information Centre** has used the skills of the local community by asking local Polish people to volunteer as interpreters for other Polish people who need information. In practice, the CIC has found that this works best if the Polish interpreter has been trained as an information provider and has worked in the CIC.

Be creative about other information mediums that you can use. There is a wide range of inclusive and creative ways in which you can provide information. These include workshops, drama productions, radio, television, newspapers, magazines, audio tapes, CDs, videos, computer-based information, leaflets and booklets.

Traveller women, working through the **Traveller Primary Health Care Project**, use drama to inform other Traveller women of their rights and entitlements. This allows women take ownership of the information and make it culturally appropriate for their community. Many Traveller women do not access written information because of literacy difficulties.

It is important to use an appropriate format and medium for your information. Make sure to use the same information in each format. To achieve this, it is best to use the same design and layout for all of your information. Remember to advertise your different formats in all of your publications.

Further resources

National Council for the Blind of Ireland (NCBI) provides a range of services and resources - Braille transcription, audio recording, audio description, website accessibility audits and advice on clear print layout and design. www.ncbi.ie

The Royal National Institute for the Blind in the UK has an information pack, [See it Right Guidelines](#), with useful information

on making audio recordings and videos for people with vision impairments.

Sign Language Interpreting Service (SLIS) is the national agency for the provision of sign language interpreting services in Ireland.

www.slis.ie

Irish Deaf Society provides a range of resources for providing signed information on DVD. www.irishdeafociety.ie

DeafHear have a range of information on improving access for Deaf and Hard of Hearing people www.deafhear.ie

Kerry Deaf Resource Centre (2004), Providing Information for Deaf and Hard of Hearing People. Not available electronically.

The Immigrant Council of Ireland's website has information on migrants' rights in video and DVD formats.

www.immigrantcouncil.ie

Easy Info has resources to help make information accessible for people with learning disabilities. This includes guidance on how to use symbols and pictures and make documents easy to read.

www.easyinfo.org.uk

CHANGE, The CHANGE picture bank contains over 500 images to help make information accessible. There is a small license fee.

www.changepeople.co.uk

The 'Worth a Thousand Words' website has 1,500 photos that you can use to make information accessible to people with learning disabilities.

www.worthathousandwords.co.uk

Widgit Rebus: Writing with Symbols 2000. www.widgit.com

Makaton Vocabulary. www.makaton.org

[Books Beyond Words](#) These are picture books to improve communications through pictures. They are relevant for a wide range of users, including people with learning difficulties.

The National Disability Authority's easy to read version of its customer action plan 2004-2006 is an example of an easy to read document.

[NDA Easy to read Customer Action Plan](#)

The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) has a range of resources for presenting easy to read documents. www.nala.ie

The Institute for Design and Disability provides professional services on design for all, disability advocacy and consultancy. www.idd.ie

Fact Sheet 6: Making your website accessible

Websites and digital electronic information can be designed to be accessible to a wide variety of information users. Adaptations to an existing website are generally more difficult to do and can be more expensive. Designing for universal access is a better approach. This can enable people with disabilities to access information using assistive technologies, for example text-to-speech software used by web users who are blind and vision impaired.

Making sure that electronic information is accessible to the widest possible audience will help your organisation to reach out to everyone and will raise the organisation's profile and visibility.

What do you need to do to make your website accessible?

- Make sure to build in accessibility from the start.
- Make sure your website conforms to the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) from the [Web Accessibility Initiative](#) (WAI).
- Professional web accessibility auditors can audit your website for accessibility. The National Disability Authority's information technology accessibility guidelines explain WCAG and accessibility requirements for other technologies. See <http://accessit.nda.ie>
- A good resource to use if you are commissioning an external web development company to build your website is the [Accessible Procurement Toolbox](#) from the National Disability Authority (NDA). This gives practical advice and guidance, including how to maintain the accessibility of the website in the future as changes are made to content and functionality.

How can you test the accessibility of your website?

Involve people who will use your website in the planning and testing of the site. Ask people with disabilities to carry out realistic tasks using the website. This will show whether your website or other electronic documents are accessible in practice. It is best to commission a professional user testing company to carry out this work.

Many organisations are unsure if their websites are accessible. **NCBI's Centre for Inclusive Technology** (CFIT www.cfit.ie) has a user testing service. The **Gateway project** in Galway contracted CFIT to make sure its website was accessible. Gateway had created a website, www.gateway2at.org, to show how assistive technologies could help people with disabilities to realise their capabilities in third level education and the workplace. Aimed at educators, employers and young people with disabilities, the brief was to make the information not only accessible but also professional and appealing.

User testing helps to uncover accessibility problems and provide solutions to them. CFIT ran a series of tests involving people with visual and motor impairments carrying out practical tasks on the website, such as searching for information and resources using assistive technologies. According to the Gateway project manager: "Having the site tested by its intended users was an invaluable part of the development process." The Gateway team was relieved to find that the site worked exactly as the designers had intended, although some minor changes were suggested that would make the experience even smoother for people using screen readers.

Accessibility statement

A good practice is to put an accessibility statement on your website. This should include the following:

- your organisation's accessibility policy;
- how that policy is carried out (how input is sought, what testing is done and so on);
- where the website is with respect to this policy;
- any accessibility problems;
- what is being done about these problems, with timescales for remedial work;
- any accessibility problems that cannot be fixed; and
- what alternative arrangements are in place to access the information (for example, telephone support).

Making websites accessible to people who do not have access to computers

Most people today have access to the Internet. Not having access to the Internet is a significant barrier to accessing information. Putting computers into public places, such as libraries and

information centres, and training people how to use the Internet, can help to break down these barriers.

Library Links is a joint initiative between the **Citizens Information Board** and the public library network. Supported by **An Chomhairle Leabharlanna (The Library Council)**, its aim is to make the Citizens Information website, www.citizensinformation.ie, available from Internet terminals in all public libraries. Many people choose libraries as their first port of call when looking for information on rights and entitlements and this initiative will give easy access to the website for those who do not have ready access to the Internet.

Further resources

[Web Content Accessibility Guidelines](#) (WCAG) from the Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI)

National Disability Authority [Accessibility Guidelines](#), including WCAG and accessibility requirements for other technologies.

National Disability Authority [Guidance on commissioning a new Website](#)

National Disability Authority [Guidance on carrying out a web accessibility audit](#)

National Council for the Blind in Ireland (NCBI) [Information on making websites accessible for people who are blind and vision impaired](#)

RNIB, Guidelines and a video, [Websites that work](#), for accessible design for vision impaired people

Maynooth University, [Best practice guidelines and suggestions for producing digital documents](#)

Nielsen, J. & Markes. J., [Writing for the Web](#)

Plain English Campaign (UK), [Plain English tips for clear website](#)

SAIF, [Making websites accessible](#) Guidelines with particular reference to people with learning disabilities

AccessibleNet. An independent, online directory of links and resources about web accessibility. www.accessiblenet.org

Fact Sheet 7: Making face-to-face and telephone-based information accessible

Many people access information by telephone or by visiting local services, such as Citizens Information Centres, Family Resource Centres or local community centres. To make face-to-face and telephone-based information services accessible, staff need to be aware of the different ways in which we communicate to ensure everyone is included.

Making face-to-face and telephone information services accessible is central to quality customer service. Accessible information enables people to access services, rights and entitlements. Some people prefer to get information in face-to-face settings, particularly if the information they need is complex or hard to understand.

How can I make my organisation's face-to-face and telephone-based information accessible?

- Understand the diversity of the individual's needs.
- Be aware of a customer's background, culture, language preference, or disability.
- Think about ways to support your face-to-face information service through video phones, text phones, email, SMS text messaging, the Internet and outreach to socially isolated groups.
- Be aware that people may need different levels of information, ranging from basic information, through detailed interviews and casework, to advocacy and support.

Here are some good practices that can help you to communicate effectively:

- Choose a quiet place to meet with few distractions if possible
- Listen to the customer and identify his or her information needs.
- Treat the customer with dignity, respect and equality.
- Be patient, calm and professional.
- Avoid making assumptions.
- Make the person feel comfortable

- Maintain eye contact, but be aware that some people, for example people with autism, may become uncomfortable with continuous eye contact.
- Do not patronise the person or make judgements about him or her.
- Observe confidentiality.
- Ask the person to tell you the best way you can help. If you are unsure, always ask.
- If you offer help, wait until the person has accepted your offer.
- Advise on options available and take action or make referrals where appropriate.
- Continually check that both of you understand what is being communicated.
- Enable, facilitate or empower the person to make informed choices and take action themselves.

The **Revenue Information Office** in Tallaght, Dublin, has been designed to allow ease of access to customers with disabilities. In 2007, it won an **NDA Excellence through Accessibility** award for this work. Staff were trained to deliver information to people with disabilities and the internal layout and signage were improved so that everyone had access to information and to the office.

As a representative from the office stated: “We learned a lot about accessibility, we learnt a lot about disability, we also learned it transcends the workplace. It impacts people’s personal lives and affects how they look at people with a disability or other minority groups. The office introduced four self-service PCs at counter level and one at a lower level for wheelchair users. One of these terminals has a large roll ball and keyboard to help people with dexterity difficulties. A customer care kit provides magnifiers and pens with grips to assist people in completing forms in the office. Signage has also been made more accessible.”

The language and expressions you use to describe a person’s status, gender, ethnicity, religion, culture or disability are important to inclusive communications. Avoid using stereotypes. Use language that fosters positive attitudes.

It is important also to use ‘people first’ language. For example, use people with disabilities (instead of ‘the disabled’), older people

(instead of 'the elderly'), homeless people (instead of 'the homeless') and so on. Being aware of a person's disability, linguistic or other requirements is equally important. For example, many deaf people communicate through Irish Sign Language and are members of a cultural and linguistic community.

While all customers need the same levels of respect, courtesy and listening skills, in some cases you may have to take extra steps to communicate with people with disabilities. Below are some examples of different approaches that you can take. You'll find more information about communicating with people with disabilities in the 'further resources' section at the end of this Fact Sheet.

Communicating with people with disabilities

a) Deaf people and people who are hard of hearing

- Always ask the Deaf person how they prefer to communicate with you.
- Some Deaf people use Irish Sign Language provided through professional interpretation agencies.
- Others may rely on lip reading and/or hearing aids/ Loop Systems, they may request speed text writing as the main form of communication in meeting/ lecture situations.
- To attract a Deaf person's attention, move into their line of vision and wave a hand or tap them on the arm. Never tap them on the shoulder, head, hand or on the back.
- In a room full of people, switching on/off the lights will get everyone's attention.
- Wait until you have the Deaf person's attention before you begin to speak.
- Speak clearly at a normal tone and pace, avoid exaggerated or slow speech or shouting, which can distort lip movements.
- Face the light and reduce any background noise if necessary
- If the Deaf person does not understand the first time, repeat and/ or rephrase if necessary. Using gestures can help.
- Keep your head still and keep fingers, cigarettes, pens etc away from mouth while talking.
- Use written notes to help communication if requested.
- Offer alternative ways of contacting you e.g. mobile text service (SMS) or email
- Use the correct terms for describing people with a hearing loss (Deaf, hard of hearing or deafened).

b) People who are blind or vision impaired

- Greet the person by saying your name, as he or she may not recognise your voice.
- Talk directly to the person rather than through a third party.
- Try to speak clearly and face the person when you speak.
- In a group situation, make sure that everyone is introduced. Address the person with vision impairment by name and say if someone joins or leaves the group,
- Don't be afraid to use terms like 'see you later'. People with vision impairment use these expressions too.
- Before helping a person who is blind or vision impaired, always ask if they would like help. Do not assume what kind of help the person needs.
- If a person says that he or she would like to be guided, offer your elbow. NCBI can offer practical training in how to safely guide a person with impaired vision
- When helping someone, tell them what is around them. Give clear verbal directions, for example, 'the door is to your left'.
- Don't assume that because a person can see one thing that they can see everything. If necessary, ask the person if they can see a particular landmark or object.
- Don't assume that a person using a white cane or guide dog is totally blind. Many people with some remaining vision use these.
- Never distract a guide dog when it is in harness.
- Always let a person with vision impairment know when you are approaching or leaving.

c) People with speech disabilities

- Allow extra time for communications and be patient.
- Be encouraging rather than correcting and don't speak for the person.
- Use notes where necessary
- Never pretend to understand what you have had difficulty understanding.
- Do not rely totally on speech. Note body language, behaviour and other signs which the person is using to communicate with you.
- Allow the person plenty of time to absorb what you have said and to make their response.
- If you are still finding it difficult to communicate with the person ask the person's supporter, advocate, parent, carer, family

member or someone who knows them to guide you. This should not be done over the person's head.

- Don't ignore the person or walk away if you don't understand. Tell them that you don't understand and that you are going to find some help.
- When you have received pointers try again to communicate directly with the person. Once you understand the person's unique communicating ability it becomes easier.

d) People with learning/ intellectual disabilities

- Get the person's attention before starting to speak
- Avoid difficult words, terms and jargon. There is always an easier way to explain
- Be patient and allow time to make sure that there is clear understanding.
- Don't pretend to understand if you don't.
- Use clear, simple words and if appropriate, use pictures and symbols.
- Verify responses by repeating questions in a different way.
- Give exact instructions.
- Give only one piece of information at a time, in short sentences.
- Speak directly to the person rather than through a companion, assistant or interpreter.
- Never exclude a person from a conversation about an issue that affects them. Involve the person in any decision and respect their right to choose.
- Remember that adults with intellectual disabilities are adults who have lived experiences which will help them to make choices once they understand their options.

e) People with reduced mobility and people who use a wheelchair

- When talking to someone who uses a wheelchair, try and be at eye level. If you can't do this, step back slightly so that the person does not have to strain his or her neck to see you.
- Carry out an audit of your office (including car parking, ramps, space to navigate a wheelchair, physical obstacles, height of leaflet stands, posters and so on).

f) Communicating with people whose first language is not English

- Try and have interpretation in place.

- Be clear and provide exact instructions.
- In some cases it may be important to work with an advocate or a cultural mediator.
- Use pictures and symbols to identify particular situations or to make complex information more accessible.
- Use the resources which have been developed by organisations working with migrants, for example, the multilingual dictionary produced by the Red Cross or the information cards developed by the Health Services Executive for use in accident and emergency care.
- Develop partnerships with migrant led organisations and organisations that provide information and advocacy for migrants, for example the Immigrant Council of Ireland and the Migrants Rights Centre Ireland.

Connolly Hospital in Blanchardstown is a member of the **National Intercultural Hospitals Initiative**, a project of the Irish Health Promoting Hospitals Network. As part of this initiative the hospital produced a multilingual, illustrated communication phrasebook for use by patients and staff. It contains 160 questions translated into 20 languages. It is intended for use prior to requesting the services of an interpreter or while waiting the interpreter's arrival. It is not intended to replace a professional interpreting service.

Telephone information

Telephone services are particularly important for people living in isolated areas, people who are blind or vision impaired and people who have mobility problems. With the large increase in mobile phone use, text messaging and helplines, the telephone has become an accessible and inexpensive way to get information.

Text messaging is widely used by deaf and hard of hearing people as a quick and easy form of communication. You can advertise a mobile number or introduce telephone landlines that accept and send text messages. Video-phones are important for sign language users as they enable direct communication.

Telephone services can be part of an overall information service or can be standalone. The Telephone Helplines Association in the UK is a source of specialist information on setting up and running non-

profit helplines in the UK and Ireland. They have created the following statements about standards for telephone information:

- Finding out about the helpline: There is an effective process that makes existing and potential callers aware of the helpline and what it offers.
- Getting through to the helpline: The helpline is staffed and open as advertised and there is provision for out-of-hours callers and busy times.
- The call – establishing and maintaining interaction: Helpline workers respond to callers with courtesy, establish the nature and content of the call and interact with the caller so that the whole matter can be dealt with in the most effective and appropriate way.
- The call – offering information, advice, signposting and referral. Information and advice that is offered to callers is up-to-date, accurate and appropriate to their enquiry and signposting and referral is made to an appropriate agency.
- Complaints about the service: The help-line has a clear procedure for callers who wish to make a complaint about the service.

The **Citizens Information Phone Service** is a national, lo-call telephone service which provides information on the range of social and civil services to people throughout Ireland. CIPS is committed to a service that is available to all, including those who have difficulty using the telephone or email to access the information they need.

CIPS

- Operates a 60 hour week, Monday to Friday from 9am to 9pm, giving access to those in full time employment
- Trains its information officers (for example through NALA's Plain English course) to provide easy to understand information by telephone or email.
- Provides information through SMS text messaging and Live Advisor (interactive live-time email), both targeted at people with disabilities.

Training and awareness

A quality customer service that takes account of, and is sensitive to, the needs of a wide diversity of information users includes training and awareness-raising.

- Do not reinvent the wheel. Make use of the wide range of training and other resources that have been developed in areas such as anti-discrimination, disability awareness, Traveller awareness, equality and diversity, and quality customer service.
- Develop training in partnership with organisations and groups representing the people who experience barriers in accessing information (such as disability organisations, Traveller organisations, migrant-led and organisations representing migrants in Ireland).
- Provide customer service training for front-line staff, including reception staff. This training should focus on the communication needs of people with disabilities and people from minority ethnic backgrounds.
- Training should include an understanding of diversity, of user-friendly skills, listening skills, and how to treat people with courtesy, dignity and respect.

Waterford City Council Library Service won an **NDA Excellence through Accessibility** award in 2007. The library provides a wide variety of books, magazines, DVDs, music CDs and activities in its three branches. ‘Access to All’ has been established as one of the key values of the library service. The Central Library has been extensively upgraded to accommodate the needs of customers with disabilities.

As a library representative says: “If you can walk in or come into a building and get what you want easily, it creates a much more accessible service to everybody. Having audio books, large print and the accessible technology station close to the front door eliminates a lot of barriers for people. If people have to go straight through a building, up the stairs, up in lifts even, it creates that extra barrier for them that is really unnecessary.”

The library staff have been through an awareness process which has resulted in them building accessibility into their day-to-day work. This means they now think about how to improve the service’s accessibility as part of the whole organisation’s culture.

Develop a customer service plan

Another tool that can help improve customer services in your organisation is a customer service plan. Government departments

are required to draw up Quality Customer Service Plans and some government departments are required to publish Disability Plans. It is important to build accessibility into these plans.

- Set out how equality and accessibility can be integrated into your customer services.
- Draw up a customer service action plan, showing how services will be developed within a framework of equality and accessibility.
- Consult with staff and service users to identify the main principles underpinning quality customer services and how you can apply these to all groups, particularly those you do not currently reach.

Further resources

Citizens Information is provided from 268 locations, 106 Citizens Information Centres (54 full-time and 52 part-time) and 162 outreach services. Citizens Information Services provide free, impartial and confidential information face-to-face to the public. You can locate your nearest Citizens Information Centre at 'Find an Address' on www.citizensinformation.ie

National Council for the Blind of Ireland (NCBI) has [Guidelines on meeting and greeting people with vision impairment](#)

National Council for the Blind in Ireland (NCBI) offers [disability awareness training](#)

Access Ireland has a list of trained cultural mediators to help information providers make information culturally relevant and understandable. www.accessireland.ie

The Citizens Information Phone Service operates Monday to Friday, 9am-9pm (excluding public holidays).

CIPS LoCall number: 1890 777 121

International number: +353 21 452 1600

Fax: 021 452 1604

Email: information@citizensinformation.ie

Telephone Helplines Association in the UK provides specialist information on setting up and running non-profit helplines in the UK and Ireland. www.helplines.org.uk

The Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg) and the National Disability Authority have produced a [Consumer guide to phones and Broadband for older people and people with disabilities](#)

Fact Sheet 8: Making your information centre accessible

The environment in which you provide information affects the overall accessibility of your service. It is an important part of quality customer service and makes good business sense for both service providers and businesses who want to reach out to a wide audience. Making sure that the physical layout of your information centre is accessible is particularly important for people with disabilities.

Accessibility is essential if people are to get around buildings easily and independently. This can be important for public buildings that have offices and services on different floors, such as libraries, health centres, colleges, schools and community centres. Bus stations, railway stations and airports will also benefit from accessible signage and wayfinding. These are equally important for local businesses such as banks, restaurants and shops.

Providing detailed advice on the full accessibility of the built environment is beyond the scope of these guidelines. More information can be found in the further resources section at the end of this Fact Sheet, including a link to the National Disability Authority's 'Building for Everyone'. Groups representing people with disabilities can also offer information and advice on the accessibility of the built environment.

The **Town Centre Pharmacy in Drogheda** installed a loop system at the dispensary counter two years ago. "We were investigating ways of facilitating people who are disadvantaged," explained the pharmacist. "I'd seen the sign for hearing loops* in railway stations and government agencies. Then I went on an ICCPE course given by the **National Association for Deaf People (now DeafHear)**. We got in touch with them afterwards. A deaf person installed the loop and explained everything to us... A control box, placed out of sight behind the counter, indicates if the loop is working correctly and flashing lights come on if there is a problem."

Since the loop was installed the pharmacy has received compliments from many customers. "We don't know how many people use the loop because no one has to identify themselves in order to benefit. As far as we are concerned, it's working perfectly."

This example is from [Accessibility for Customers with Disabilities in Community Pharmacies](#), a joint publication of the Irish Pharmacy Union (IPU) and the Equality Authority.

* Placed on a counter or table top, this unit allows a person with telecoils on their hearing aids to hear conversation or sounds in the vicinity

What can be done to make building accessible?

Many information providers are located in buildings that are not accessible. The first step is to design and plan the location of services so that they are physically accessible. The internal design of your building is crucial so that information users can access information desks, reception desks, toilets, information stands and parking.

Kildare County Council's Leixlip Library won an **NDA Excellence through Accessibility** Award for improving the accessibility of the library and providing signage inside and out. There is a Braille and tactile sign in the lobby which has a colour-coded map to mark out easy routes around the library. In addition, the library has installed a range of relevant technologies for people with disabilities.

As a library representative said: "There are many people walking around today with slight impairments to vision or hearing and the use of technology in a place like this can make their life much easier and their experience as customers of the library service much more rewarding."

The following guidelines explain how to create an accessible information centre.

- Provide dedicated, accessible parking close to the entrance.
- At the entrance, provide ramps, mark steps along the edges, design doors that are either automatic or easy to open, and provide accessible signage (you'll find more information about accessible signage below).
- Locate the information service on the ground floor of your building.
- Adjust the height of the reception desk and information signs.

- Have a buzzer on the door that it is easy to locate and use – a high visibility colour on or around the button is helpful. If possible, the buzzer should include video.
- Install a fire alarm that is both audible and visible.
- Provide effective colour contrast, good lighting and clear signage.
- Use matt finishes, not high gloss paint or shiny surfaces
- Provide space for independent access by wheelchair users inside the building, tables at a height that wheelchairs can fit under and non-slip floors.
- Provide stairs with contrasting colour handrails and marked edges.
- Provide an accessible toilet on each floor with clear signage, an easy to open door (preferably opening out or automatic), and enough room for a wheelchair user to turn an electric wheelchair and to reach rails at appropriate heights.
- Install a hearing loop system in meeting rooms and reception areas.
- Place a 'Guide Dogs Welcome' sign in a prominent place.
- Train staff to respond to the needs of people with disabilities.
- Draw up a disability access plan that identifies how the physical accessibility of your service can be improved.

Joan has a moderate hearing loss and wears a hearing aid. She goes to church regularly and hears the priest clearly through the loop system installed in the church. When she goes to the post office, she always queues for the counter that has a loop system even though the queues for the other counters may be shorter. She gets upset if the installed loop system isn't turned on or isn't working properly. She won't complain to the counter assistant but she ends up not asking for everything she came for as she is afraid to embarrass or draw further attention to herself.

Signage

Signage is important for people to find their way around buildings. It is easier if accessible signage is built into the design of buildings from the start. Many organisations have to find ways of adapting existing buildings to provide better signage. Good signage can prevent information users from getting lost. Poor signage can result in anxiety and confusion.

- Build signage into the design of new buildings.

- Make sure that signs are clear and consistent. Written signs should use a large font size in a clear typeface. The readability of a sign will be influenced by its position, size, viewing distance, colour and the contrast between the lettering and background. As the distance between the sign and reader increases, the size of the lettering must increase proportionately.
- Locate directional signs at every point where a choice must be made about which way to go.
- Ensure that all users of the building can easily identify where the exit is in the event of an emergency.
- There should be good contrast between the text and the background.
- The sign should have a matt finish to avoid glare.
- Use pictures as well as written words on signs to make them accessible to people with literacy or learning disabilities.
- Use consistent colours in all signs and, if there are multiple routes, use different colours in directional signs. For example, hospitals use this system to help people find different departments.
- Integrate Braille and tactile signs into visual signs for people with vision impairments. Audible signs are another option. You can get professional advice on the production of Braille, tactile and audio signage, for example, from the NCBI.
- Train staff to give appropriate assistance to service users in finding their way around your building.

The Guide and Map was compiled and published by **Dublin City Centre Citizens Information Service** in association with **Dublin City Public Libraries** and the **North West Inner City Network**. It provides a map which clearly marks a range of civil and public services relevant to foreign nationals.

Dublin City Centre CIS has been identified as having the highest number of Foreign-National callers at 52%. It is the only CIS where foreign nationals outnumbered Irish clients in the 2008 survey.

Wayfinding

Finding the way to an information centre is a key element of accessibility. For some people, particularly people with literacy or learning disabilities and people who are blind or vision impaired, wayfinding can be complex and difficult.

- Consider the approach to the building and how it is laid out and constructed.
- Make sure the building design integrates wayfinding.
- Have clearly defined paths and landmarks setting out the way to buildings.
- Make sure that reception desks and other services are clearly identified and visible.
- Train staff to be aware of the needs of a wide diversity of people and to provide appropriate help and information.

Cork County Hall won an **NDA Excellence through Accessibility** Award from the National Disability Authority in 2007, with an ‘excellence’ rating for its innovative approach to improving accessibility. This included an accessibility charter, redesign of parking bays, installation of loop systems in meeting rooms and effective disability training.

As a representative from the disability community said at the awards ceremony: “We started with Cork County Hall building itself. I came out and met the staff here and basically I gave my views on what were access issues for blind and visually impaired people, whether they use a long cane or a guide dog as a mobility aid. I’ve lived in this area for the past few years so I’ve had many an occasion where I’ve had to come to Cork County Hall just to get information regarding housing, planning, other benefits and so on but with the recent refurbishments it’s fantastic coming to Cork County Hall now. It’s great that I can come here independently. I can follow the signage and access the area I need to get to for information. It’s much less hassle for me.”

Further resources

National Disability Authority, Information on the built environment can be found in the [NDA's Building for Everyone](#) publication. This gives information about universal design of goods, services and buildings.

Equality Authority, [Reasonable accommodation of people with disabilities in the provision of goods and services](#) this booklet gives suggestions on how service providers can improve accessibility for people with disabilities.

Irish Wheelchair Association, [Access for All](#) (2004): A Guide to Creating a Barrier Free Environment for People with Physical and Sensory Disabilities,

Irish Guide Dogs for the Blind, Fáilte Isteach, Thank You for Making 'Guide Dogs Welcome'. Not available electronically.

National Council for the Blind in Ireland (NCBI) has produced [recommendations for signage](#) which include information on tactile sign suppliers in Ireland.

The Sign Design Guide provides in-depth guidance on accessible signage. Jointly produced by [JMU Access Partnership](#) and the Sign Design Society, it promotes one sign for all, enabling you to include everyone's signage needs.

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, UK (2006). [Final report for signage and way finding for people with learning difficulties](#)

Fact Sheet 9: Making your events and meetings accessible

Many groups and organisations that run events, meetings, seminars and workshops do so with the best intentions of being inclusive to all groups. However, without a planned approach to organising these events, some key areas of accessibility can be overlooked.

Events and meetings put an important public face on the work that you do. Making sure they are accessible to everyone will help connect with groups you target. This makes good business sense for public agencies that want to increase their customer base and profile.

How can I make my events and meetings accessible to everyone? Ask the following questions.

- Is event literature available in different formats?
- If you can provide interpretation, say in the publicity for the event that this is available on request.
- Is there a loop system available in the meeting room?
- Have you taken into account any special dietary, childcare, transport or other needs?
- Check the physical accessibility of the building or room you plan to hold your event in.
- Is the building accessible for wheelchair users?
- Are there lifts and accessible toilets in the building?
- Is the event accessible to the local community, for example on bus routes and in an easy-to-find location?
- Are conference programmes, papers and agendas available in different formats such as Braille, large print or electronic formats?
- Have you asked people who plan to attend the meeting or event what format they would prefer and have you made this available to them before the meeting?
- Are travel and other expenses covered? If so, make sure you have a system in place to pay expenses.
- Have staff at the event received disability awareness training, for example how to guide a blind person safely?

- Is there a 'buddy' who can offer sighted guide help to a participant with vision impairment on the day of the event? The buddy can find out what the participant needs and help him or her on the day of the event.

When planning a meeting or event, it is always good practice to consult with individuals and organisations from the groups that you want to target.

It is also important that the publicity for your event gives clear information about the accessibility of the event. If you cannot provide certain services, such as sign language interpretation, or if the building you are holding the event in is not fully accessible, it is important to say this in your event publicity. Representative groups and organisations can tell the people they represent about your event.

Further resources

Canadian National Institute for the Blind, [Guidelines on making events accessible to participants with vision loss](#)

The HSE [National Intercultural Strategy Consultation Report](#) has guidance on good practice in organising consultations with minority ethnic groups in Ireland.

Fact Sheet 10: Developing an information accessibility policy

An information accessibility policy will give an organisation a strategic framework for ongoing work on information accessibility. A policy is a useful way of setting out a vision and objectives on how a service will be developed and managed. It is an important way of engaging your senior managers and Board and placing information accessibility at the centre of your organisation.

Developing a policy on an accessible information service

Start with a clear statement about the accessibility of the service working within a framework of inclusion and equality. Management should make sure that the information needs of everyone are taken into account when planning, monitoring and reviewing the service.

The following are some steps to take when developing an accessible information policy for your organisation:

- Define the main purpose of your service and the values that underpin it.
- Set out the vision and what the service hopes to achieve.
- State clearly the commitment to meeting the needs of all groups.
- Make sure that all policies and practices are consistent with accessibility policy.
- Describe the standards that you expect to achieve and how these will be measured.
- Highlight how information services will be monitored and reviewed.
- Where appropriate, show how your service involves participation from representative organisations and service users.
- Identify your commitment to training staff, consulting with service users and allocating a budget.

Ballina Library in Mayo has worked hard to create an accessible and welcoming environment for all users and in 2007 received an **Excellence through Accessibility Award** from the National Disability Authority.

An automatic door makes it easy to enter the library, not only for wheelchair users but also for parents with buggies and for delivery people. There are special collections of large print books and books on tape and the staff have received training in communicating across language barriers and in how to safely guide people who are blind and vision impaired around the building. The training has made staff more aware of the barriers that people with disabilities face and how staff can help to overcome these barriers to make the library more accessible.

As a representative of the library said: “Working with the National Disability Authority made us more aware of the issues but also showed us that every issue was surmountable with the enthusiasm and support of staff.”

Another representative stated: “I think people usually associate disability with physical disability. We discovered from our training that there wasn’t just physical disability; there was also intellectual disability, sensory disability, and communicative disability. Staff took the training on board, everybody was involved and we have learned a lot. It has also made dealing with people with disabilities and indeed dealing with our everyday customers much easier for ourselves.”

If possible, involve service users in developing, writing and disseminating your policy. This will make sure the policy is relevant. It will also bring pressure to implement and regularly review the policy.

South Dublin County Council has published a series of Access Guides online at www.southdublin.ie. The Guides highlight features that ensure equal access to services for a wide variety of users with varying abilities. From accessible parking bays, automated doors, loop systems at public desks, to adaptable housing, specialist computer software & Braille and tactile signage.

The key purpose of these guides is to enable disabled people to ‘virtually’ visit key council buildings and customer services, at a time and place suitable to them, in order to find out how accessible the buildings or services are, in advance of any actual visit.

The Access Guides are available in multiple formats. Content has been provided as accessible text documents, mp3 audio and video with closed captions.

Further resources

National Disability Authority. www.nda.ie

South Dublin County Council www.southdublin.ie.

Irish Wheelchair Association (1999). Raising the Standard: A Code of Practice for the Provision of Information Services to People with Disabilities.

Not available electronically.

Scottish Accessible Information Forum (2004), Standards for Disability Information and Advice Provision in Scotland.

www.saifscotland.org.uk

Fact Sheet 11: Rewarding and encouraging good practice

An important part of improving information accessibility is to encourage and reward good practice. You can also learn a lot from the good practices and approaches of other organisations. Being aware of these good practices can build learning and awareness of information accessibility and encourage your organisation to start providing accessible information.

Reward good practice inside your organisation

You can set up an internal award or merit system for staff working to promote information accessibility. This could be an annual award for the staff member who has contributed the most to information accessibility. Creating champions in your organisation is crucial to generating the energy and enthusiasm to increase information accessibility.

Participate in external award schemes

There are a number of award schemes which reward good practices and share the learning from these. Examples include the National Disability Authority's Excellence through Accessibility Awards, the National Adult Literacy Agency's Plain English Awards, the O2 Ability Awards and the MAMA awards for cultural diversity.

NCBI's Media Centre is also in the process of developing a clear print quality mark. The aim of the quality mark is to recognise and acknowledge businesses and other organisations that use clear print design in their written information. Using clear print design will help make information about their services and products easier to read, particularly for people with sight problems.

NCBI's Media Centre also intends to offer an editing and advice service on clear print design for public and private organisations. The quality mark standard and editing service is currently in the process of being set up and hopes to be up and running by the end of 2009.

The **National Disability Authority's** Excellence through Accessibility awards promote and reward organisations that have made a commitment to continually improve the accessibility of their public services. The awards encourage the development of policies, practices and relationships that lead to sustainable and meaningful achievements in accessibility.

Further resources

National Disability Authority [Excellence through Accessibility Awards](#)

The [O2 Ability Awards](#) reward good practice on disability accessibility.

The [MAMA Awards](#) recognise the people, groups, events, companies and institutions that embrace and celebrate cultural diversity in Ireland.

National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) ACE Awards reward innovative and high quality learning opportunities for adults
www.nala.ie

National Adult Literacy Agency [Plain English Mark](#) rewards organisations for using plain English in letters and publications.

Fact Sheet 12: Publicising your service and disseminating your information

Publicising your service is essential so that people can find out about, and use, your information resources. Make sure those organisations representing people who experience barriers know about the range of information and formats you offer.

Putting time and resources into publicising your information service will benefit your profile and visibility. It will also help you to reach out to the people and groups who do not currently use your service.

Publicise the information service locally

Local networks and media are often the most important and trusted ways of sharing information. Having a regular slot on local radio can help reach people living in social isolation or in rural areas. Citizens Information Centres have run information programmes and question-and-answer sessions on local radio and have 'Know your Rights' columns in local newspapers.

Provide open days, coffee mornings and informal clinics in partnership with local organisations to publicise your information sources and formats. The service can also be advertised on the websites of representative organisations and include this information in your written information and publicity.

The **Ballyfermot Advocacy Service** in co-operation with the **Disability Federation of Ireland, Ballyfermot Citizens Information Service** and **Ballyfermot Partnership** organised a Disability Fair in October 2008. The event showcased the information and services available to people with disabilities and their families from local and national statutory, voluntary and private organisations.

Know your audience and work with your audience

There are many ways to disseminate information but knowing your audience is an important starting point. Think about where your audience meets or socialises – libraries, cinemas, community centres, local health centres or at work – and make your information available in those places.

Publicise your information centre through local networks, local groups and local newspapers. Consider inviting representatives of local groups to visit your information centre so that they can see your building, offices and signage and then tell other people about the facilities you provide.

North Kildare CIC has set up an advocacy service and appointed an advocate who has been proactive in giving talks on the availability of the service to service users with an intellectual disability in **Dara Services** and **St. John of Gods**. The CIC also gives talks and organises information days for local groups. These include a local carers' support group for parents of children with disabilities, a group which helps people to return to work and become more independent, and a local dyslexia group.

Let people know about the different formats available

Many people access information locally. By working with local organisations representing service users, you will be able to share your information and disseminate it widely.

Make sure that organisations representing service users know about the different formats you offer and give them copies on request and in a timely way. These organisations can give helpful feedback about the numbers of copies that people ask for and the uptake of the different formats. They can also publicise your information on their website, in their newsletters, to their staff and to their service users.

Make your publications and formats available through Citizens Information Centres, local area partnerships, community groups, Family Resource Centres, day and residential centres, women's centres, GP surgeries, health centres and tenants' and residents' groups.

Advertise the different formats available in the original publication. Develop a strategy to disseminate these formats. Knowing your audience will help you in publicising your different formats.

The **Electronic Assistive Technology Library** www.try-it.ie, has produced business cards with information in print on one side and Braille on the other.

Run specific information campaigns

A themed week or day, such as a Disability Information Awareness Week, promotes access to information for people with disabilities. You could also organise information campaigns that target other specific groups such as homeless people, older people, migrant workers or minority ethnic groups.

Information Age was a **Citizens Information Board** awareness campaign aimed at helping to meet the information needs of Ireland's older people. The initiative was led by a broad working group of relevant community and voluntary and statutory bodies including the **HSE, the Department of Social and Family Affairs** and the **National Council on Aging and Older People**. An Information Age booklet was distributed to the homes of 400,000 people over the age of 65. The convenient pocket size booklet detailed information sources and highlighted areas of special interest to older people such as retirement, health services, income and support and safety and security. A series of factsheets were also produced and Guidelines for providing information to older people were circulated to information providers. A series of specialised training seminars were attended by 400 people around the country and information events aimed at older people were held in a number of venues around the country.

Further resources

The Information Age series included an information booklet, a series of factsheets, a wallchart and a checklist all free of charge and available to download on www.citizensinformationboard.ie Copies of the free booklet and checklist were circulated to thousands of older people in February 2007