

COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY ASSOCIATION

**DISABILITY INCLUSIVE
COMMUNICATIONS
GUIDELINES FOR
PARLIAMENTS**

About the CPA

The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) connects, develops, promotes and supports parliamentarians and their staff to identify benchmarks of good governance and the implementation of the enduring values of the Commonwealth. The CPA collaborates with parliaments and other organisations, including the intergovernmental community, to achieve its statement of purpose. It brings parliamentarians and parliamentary staff together to exchange ideas among themselves and with experts in various fields, to identify benchmarks of good practices and new policy options they can adopt or adapt in the governance of their societies.

About the CPwD

Recognising the need to increase representation of persons with disabilities in political institutions, the Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities (CPwD) network was established to facilitate activities and programmes to champion and increase the representation of persons with disabilities in Commonwealth parliaments and to work towards the mainstreaming of disability considerations in all CPA activities and programmes. Its mission is *'to encourage Commonwealth Parliaments to enable effective and full participation of persons with disabilities at all levels.'*

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Introduction to the Guidance

In collaboration with Leonard Cheshire Disability, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) under the auspices of the Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities (CPwD) network has developed this guidance, emphasising the importance of inclusive language and communications in parliaments.

Accessible and inclusive communications are essential for ensuring equitable participation for all individuals, including those with disabilities, in democratic processes.

The need for disability-inclusive language and communications resonates with the CPwD's commitment to upholding values of equality, accessibility, and non-discrimination in parliamentary institutions across the Commonwealth. Aligned with the principles outlined in the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), we remain dedicated to eliminating barriers and fostering an environment where people with disabilities can fully engage in parliamentary affairs.

Disability is not simply an individual characteristic, but is profoundly influenced by societal and environmental factors. Recognising and addressing these influences are crucial for creating an inclusive environment. By striving to remove physical, informative, or attitudinal barriers, we can create spaces where all people, including those with disabilities, can meaningfully participate in the parliamentary process.

This guidance primarily focuses on promoting disability-inclusive language and communications. It acknowledges that language can negatively perpetuate stigma and barriers or positively facilitate inclusivity and understanding. This guidance is designed to assist parliamentary institutions in adopting practices encouraging respect, dignity, and equal participation for people with disabilities.

This guidance seeks to supplement the existing CPwD Disability Inclusion Guidelines which were published in 2020ⁱ which collectively seeks to enable parliamentarians to adopt best practice approaches.

The following guidance is divided into five sections. Section 1 provides a background context on inclusive communication centred around commitments outlined in the CRPD and a change in the discourse around disabilities. Section 2 provides a useful list of terms and identifies key considerations when undertaking work around inclusive communications. Section 3 focuses on the role of parliaments in developing strategies around inclusive communication. Section 4, which is divided into four parts provides the main element of this publication providing resources, advice, tips and case studies in implementing inclusive communication. Finally, Section 5 provides some further sources of information from leading international entities.

ⁱ CPwD Disability Inclusion Guidelines - Facilities of Inclusion https://www.cpahq.org/media/u2rgizem/disability_communication_guidelines_facilities-1.pdf and the CPwD Disability Inclusion Guidelines - Linguistic Principles https://www.cpahq.org/media/jwgnejlo/disability_communication_guidelines_linguistic-1.pdf

Section 1: Background - a Framework for Inclusivity

Parliaments have a key role and responsibility in changing the discourse around disability and in championing and implementing international commitments around human rights.

MOVING BEYOND THE MEDICAL MODEL

While medical support remains vital, the historical tendency to view disability through a purely medical lens, as an inherent individual trait to be “fixed” or “cured,” often misses the broader societal factors that create disabling barriers and marginalise disabled people.



EMBRACING THE SOCIAL MODEL

The social model challenges this traditional view. It shifts the focus to the environment itself, identifying inaccessible infrastructure, discriminatory attitudes, and inadequate accommodations as the true obstacles to full participation. Imagine a building without a ramp: the medical model sees the wheelchair as the issue, while the social model highlights the missing ramp as the barrier.



ANCHORING EQUITY THROUGH THE HUMAN RIGHTS MODEL

The human rights model complements the social model by anchoring disability rights in legal frameworks like the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)². This treaty underscores the equal rights and access for people with disabilities across all aspects of society, including participation in political processes.



1. Department of Economic and Social Affairs. (2022). The Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Retrieved from <https://social.desa.un.org/issues/disability>

COMMUNICATION AS CORNERSTONE: THE CRPD AND ACCESSIBLE PARLIAMENTS

The CRPD’s emphasis on accessible communication holds particular significance for parliamentarians. It compels nations to prioritise inclusivity in legislative frameworks, with accessible communication practices and procedures within parliaments serving as a key catalyst.



This translates to using accessible technologies², employing clear and concise language³, and deploying diverse communication methods like sign language interpretation, captioning, and alternative document formats. By ensuring no one is excluded from parliamentary processes due to disability, the CRPD empowers people with disabilities to participate fully in political life.

LANGUAGE AS THE BRIDGE

By embracing the principles of both the social and human rights models, parliamentary communication can become a force for inclusion. Here are some key principles to guide this:

- **Person-centred language:** Shift the focus to the individual, recognising their unique skills, experiences, and contributions.
- **Respectful and accurate language:** Avoid outdated, demeaning terms, and opt for inclusive descriptions that reflect the diversity of the disability community.
- **Breaking down barriers:** Ensure information and communication are accessible in multiple formats, catering to different sensory needs and abilities.
- **Active listening and engagement:** Create a space where diverse voices are heard and valued, fostering open dialogue and collaboration.

BEYOND NATIONAL BORDERS

The CRPD's principles resonate globally. As more countries ratify the convention, parliaments worldwide are adapting their communication strategies to foster full participation for people with disabilities. This collaborative effort, driven by shared learning and best practices, is paving the way for genuinely inclusive and accessible parliamentary spaces.

By aligning communication with the guiding principles of the social and human rights models, and with the support of initiatives like the CPA and its CPwD network, parliaments can create truly inclusive spaces where everyone can participate and thrive. Ultimately, the CRPD's vision of accessible communication within parliaments holds the key to unlocking equitable political participation for people with disabilities worldwide.

WHAT IS THE UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES (UN CRPD)?



2. Paragraph 21 of the General Comment No. 4 on Article 9 (Accessibility) of the CRPD. Link: <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/CRPD/GC/RighttoEducation/CRPD-C-GC-4.doc>

3. Page 8 of the IPU's "Towards inclusive parliaments: A toolkit for action". Link: <https://www.ipu.org/promoting-inclusive-and-representative-parliaments>

The following brochure gives a snapshot of what the UN CRPD is and how it is implemented in the parliamentary context. This brochure can be adapted to local contexts and shared by translating it into local languages. The format of the brochure can be made more accessible by providing it in accessible formats such as in Braille and having an online version of the brochure on respective Parliament websites.

UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES (UNCRPD)

Key Points

- The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is a landmark international treaty that sets out the rights and freedoms of persons with disabilities.
- It is the first human rights treaty to be specifically dedicated to persons with disabilities and is based on the principles of respect for dignity, self-determination, non-discrimination, and full and effective participation and inclusion in society.
- The principles of the CRPD encourage the implementation of frameworks that foster a more participatory environment within parliamentary structures.
- To date, 188 countries have ratified the convention.

Get Involved

There are many ways to get involved in the movement for the rights of persons with disabilities. You can:

- Learn more about the Convention and its provisions
- Advocate for the rights of persons with disabilities in your community
- Support organisations that are working to promote the rights of persons with disabilities
- Share your story and experiences as a person with a disability
- Collaborate with persons with disabilities. Collaborative efforts foster knowledge sharing, best practice exchange, and collective problem-solving, ensuring that you can learn from other's experiences and advance disability inclusion collectively.

***TOGETHER, WE CAN CREATE A MORE INCLUSIVE AND
EQUITABLE WORLD FOR ALL.***

What does the Convention say?

The Convention covers a wide range of rights, including:

- The right to life, liberty, equality, nondiscrimination and security of the person, the right to education, work and access to justice, the right to social security and healthcare and to participate in cultural life and recreation.
- The UN CRPD defines people with disabilities as “[persons] who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others”.

How is the Convention being implemented?

Countries that have ratified the Convention are required to take steps to implement its provisions. This includes:

- Enacting laws and policies to protect the rights of persons with disabilities
- Providing reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities
- Raising awareness of the rights of persons with disabilities
- The CRPD promotes the use of accessible technologies and communication methods to ensure that people with disabilities can fully participate in parliamentary processes.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) asserts the right of people with disabilities to accessible information, necessitating that parliaments ensure their communications are accessible to all, including those with disabilities.



Section 2: Key Considerations and Terminology

When speaking about disabilities, the importance of language and tone cannot be underestimated. Take time to consider what you are saying and why, and equally important, to whom. Keep in mind context, cultural considerations and appreciate that people are unique individuals not labels.



MAKING COMMUNICATIONS INCLUSIVE

CONSIDERING YOUR AUDIENCE

When communicating with someone, consider the barriers they face, including whether they have a disability that may affect how they understand or respond. For example, some people get more out of reading, some from doing and others from writing, so provide multiple formats if you are giving a presentation to a large group of people. If communicating with an individual, you may need to tailor your communication to that specific individual. For example, provide a sign language interpreter, written materials, or captioning for a person who is deaf or has a hearing impairment.

LANGUAGE AND TONE

When talking about disability, consider how your language reflects your assumptions and understanding. Do not let the fear of saying the wrong thing prevent you from having good conversations.

First, consider why you are talking about disability. Is it relevant to the conversation? In most cases, it will be more relevant to talk about barriers, accommodations or adjustments, and ways of working.

When communicating to and about people with disabilities, be mindful of your tone. Avoid language that defines them as frail, weak, or objects of sympathy. For example, avoid terms like “suffers from,” “victim of,” or “dementia sufferer,” which encourage negative stereotypes. Also, avoid describing people with disabilities as brave or inspirational simply because they are disabled. Where appropriate, reflect the language that people use to describe themselves. If you are not sure, ask them.

TERMINOLOGY

The key terms below are consistent with the social and human rights models of disability. These terms may be helpful, but it is important to remember that language evolves and that countries are diverse with many cultures and nationalities and with their own colloquialisms, and dialect.

People with disabilities vs disabled people

‘People with disabilities’ is the preferred term internationally, particularly in the context of the United Nations. This is because of the strong belief that people with disabilities are people first, irrespective of their “impairments” or any other characteristics that they may have. This aligns with the CRPD’s emphasis on inherent dignity and equal rights for all individuals, regardless of their “impairments” (Article 1).

However, some countries, such as the United Kingdom (UK), prefer the term ‘disabled people.’ This stems from the social model of disability and the belief that disabled people are disabled by barriers in society, not by their “impairments.” This perspective resonates with the CRPD’s call for removing such barriers and promoting inclusive societies (Articles 9 and 21).

While the CRPD does not explicitly mandate a specific term, its focus on empowering people with disabilities and dismantling discriminatory barriers aligns with both “people with disabilities” and “disabled people” when used respectfully and thoughtfully. Ultimately, the most appropriate term depends on context and individual preferences.

The UN CRPD defines people with disabilities as “[persons] who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others”

Impairment

This is often used to describe someone’s long-term condition, such as a mobility, visual, hearing or speech impairment. However, some people may view the word ‘impairment’ as negative, implying that something is broken or defective. In those instances, someone may prefer to refer to themselves as having ‘hearing loss’ or ‘visual loss.’

Long-term condition

This term is often used instead of “disability” to describe someone’s “impairment.” People may prefer this term to “disability” as they see it as more “friendly” or “familiar” language. Some people use “long-term health condition” but not all long-term conditions relate to health as some are more mental (e.g. autism, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and dyslexia).

Non-disabled/able-bodied

Whilst some people with disabilities use the term “able-bodied,” others may find this term inaccurate or offensive. The term “able-bodied” can imply that disability relates to the body, but not all disabilities relate to the physical body. This terminology may also not align with the social or human rights models of disability that believe societal barriers disable people.

The term “non-disabled” can therefore be used instead of “able-bodied.”



Non-visible disability

This is a preferred term for a disability or long-term condition which cannot be seen. In some countries, persons with disabilities may use the terms “invisible disability” or “hidden disability.” However, the term “hidden disability” can imply disability is a “secret” or “big deal,” whilst the term “invisible” can imply something is not seen at all. Using non-visible is more appropriate as whilst we may not see the impairment, the impact of an impairment can often be seen.

Neurodiversity/neurodivergence/neurotypical

These terms are often conflated or used interchangeably. “Neurodiversity” was originally used to describe the neuro-difference of all humans. “Neurodivergence” is used to describe people that have a condition related to the mind like autism, dyslexia, dyspraxia, and ADHD. “Neurotypical” is a term used to describe people without neurodivergence. However, “neurodiversity” is now also commonly used to describe people who have a condition related to the mind.

Wheelchair user

This is often a preferred term when describing someone who uses a wheelchair. Avoid phrases such as “in a wheelchair,” “confined to a wheelchair” or “wheelchair bound.” These terms imply that a wheelchair is limiting and permanent when many people use wheelchairs part-time, and wheelchair users are often empowered by using a wheelchair.

Person with a mental health condition/ experiencing mental ill-health*

Avoid terms such as “mental health problems” or “difficulties.” Instead, use more neutral language like “mental health condition” or “experiencing mental ill-health.”

Avoiding the word “disorder”

Be mindful that some individuals prefer to avoid the term “disorder” to describe their conditions, finding it dehumanising. Instead, they may use more neutral or positive language like “condition,” “experience,” “difference,” “variation,” “diversity,” “neurodiversity,” or “cognitive diversity.”

Do not define someone by their disability

Avoid terms such as “a diabetic” or “an epileptic” to describe or define a person. Preferred terms many people choose to use include “having,” “living with” or “having experience of” a particular condition. However, some people may choose to define themselves as “dyslexic” or “autistic,” as they see it as a part of their whole self, rather than something they have.

Using common expressions

Do not worry about using appropriate common expressions such as “see you later,” “take a seat,” “you’re on mute,” or “speak soon.” People with visual impairments, speech impairments, hearing impairments, and wheelchair users are unlikely to take offence!

Sharing, not “disclosing,” information

It is good to use terms like “share” information or “tell” someone about disability. This is neutral and friendlier language compared to “disclose” and “declare,” which imply that disability is something negative, a big issue or best kept secret.

***MENTAL HEALTH TOOLKIT FOR COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTS**

In 2022, the CPA and CPwD published its Mental Health Toolkit for Commonwealth Parliaments to guide, advise and educate parliaments on how to improve their response to mental health issues experienced by Members of Parliament and parliamentary staff.

The toolkit addresses the unique mental health stressors that parliamentarians and parliamentary staff face in their working lives, including long working hours, intense public scrutiny and online abuse via social media. It provides practical approaches, tailored to parliamentary workplaces, that can be employed to protect and promote good mental health and wellbeing. Download a copy here. https://www.cpahq.org/media/cczlingr/mentalhealth_toolkit_final_web.pdf



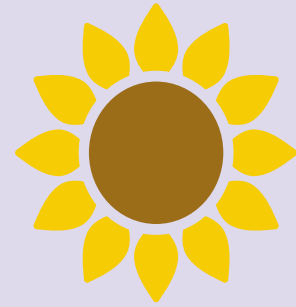
CASE STUDY: HIDDEN DISABILITIES SUNFLOWER SCHEME

Millions navigate life with “hidden” disabilities – conditions impacting daily life that aren’t readily apparent. These non-visible disabilities encompass chronic pain, mental health conditions, learning disabilities, and neurological disorders. Individuals often face barriers due to a lack of understanding and support in public spaces, workplaces, and daily interactions.

Launched in 2016, the **Hidden Disabilities Sunflower Scheme** offers a simple yet powerful solution. A discreet sunflower lanyard or badge worn by people with hidden disabilities silently communicates their need for understanding, patience, or potential assistance without disclosing the specific nature of their disability.

KEY FEATURES:

- **Voluntary Participation:** Individuals choose to wear the sunflower, empowering them to share their disability or need for accommodations on their own terms.
- **Universal Symbol:** The sunflower transcends language barriers and cultural differences, fostering international recognition.
- **Training and Awareness:** Partner organisations train staff on disability awareness and offer relevant accommodations.
- **Diverse Support:** Accommodations cater to the varied needs of individuals with hidden disabilities, from priority queuing to quiet spaces.



IMPACT AND RESULTS:

- **Raising Awareness:** The Sunflower Scheme promotes public understanding and reduces stigma surrounding hidden disabilities.
- **Increased Confidence:** Individuals feel empowered to navigate public spaces with greater confidence and independence.
- **Improved Accessibility:** Partner organisations provide concrete support, making daily life easier for individuals with hidden disabilities.
- **Global Reach:** The Scheme’s international expansion facilitates support across borders, fostering inclusivity worldwide.

CASE IN POINT:

Recognising the challenges faced by its citizens with hidden disabilities, New Zealand’s Parliament became one of the first national institutions to officially recognise the Sunflower Scheme in 2021, setting a precedent for other organisations and public spaces to follow. The Scheme’s impact extends beyond Parliament, with businesses, universities, and transportation authorities embracing the sunflower and providing support.



Find out more about the New Zealand Parliament adopts the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower Scheme: <https://www.parliament.nz/mi/get-involved/features/hidden-disabilities-sunflower-lanyards-now-available/>



CASE STUDY: “PERSON FIRST” VS. “IDENTITY FIRST” NAVIGATING THE TERMINOLOGY

Within the disability community, there is a divergence between preferred terminologies in relation to “person with a disability” vs. “disabled person.” While seemingly nuanced, the choice carries significant meaning, reflecting differing perspectives on disability and identity.

“Person First” proponents embrace language that emphasises the individual’s inherent personhood, decoupling them from their disability. This approach seeks to combat negative stereotypes and societal stigma often associated with disability labels. It’s generally favoured by advocacy organisation.

“Identity First” advocates, on the other hand, believe embracing disability as a core part of their identity empowers them. They argue that the “person first” focus can minimise or erase the lived experiences and challenges faced by disabled individuals. This perspective finds strong support in Australia and Ireland, where disability pride movements are prominent.

The debate is often complex and context-dependent. Some individuals within the same disability group may have differing preferences, and specific situations may call for different language choices. Recognising and respecting individual preferences is crucial.

Here’s a brief overview of how some countries navigate terrain:



Canada: The Canadian Human Rights Commission advocates for “person-first” language in formal communications. However, individual Canadians and advocacy groups may use either term, with growing recognition of “identity-first” preferences among certain communities.



Australia: The National Disability Strategy promotes “identity-first” language, acknowledging disability as a central aspect of individual identity and experience.



New Zealand: Similar to Canada, New Zealand’s official stance leans towards “person-first” language, while also respecting individual preferences and recognising the growing acceptance of “identity-first” terms.



United Kingdom: The UK government generally uses “person-first” language, but acknowledges the validity of both approaches and encourages inclusive communication that respects individual preferences.

Disability is a spectrum of experiences, and language preferences vary greatly. The most important thing is to be respectful, ask individuals how they prefer to be addressed, and prioritise open communication above rigid terminologies.

CULTURAL SENSITIVITY

At the core of disability-specific communication lies the imperative of cultural sensitivity. Parliaments worldwide must recognise the multifaceted nature of disability experiences within diverse cultures, adopting approaches that respect and understand these diverse perspectives. This not only builds trust but ensures that parliamentary messages are relevant and effective.

Examples of cultural sensitivity in communications include:



The UK Parliament provides information in Easy Read format for people with cognitive disabilities, providing information on topics such as 'how laws are made'⁴.



Similarly, the **Disability Royal Commission in Australia** actively incorporates diverse perspectives in its communications, ensuring that the unique experiences of different communities are acknowledged and respected⁵.



In **New Zealand**, parliamentary information is made available in various formats, including Te Reo Māori, the language of the indigenous Māori People. Communications are also available in New Zealand Sign Language⁶ and Braille, ensuring accessibility for people with sensory disabilities.

INTERSECTIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Intersectionality is crucial to consider when addressing disability inclusivity because it acknowledges that individuals may experience multiple forms of discrimination simultaneously, such as those related to race, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and disability.

It is important to recognise that individuals with disabilities may belong to various marginalised groups and that their experiences are shaped by the intersections of these identities. For example, a disabled person, who is also a woman, and a woman of colour may face unique challenges that differ from those experienced by a disabled white man.

A way to overcome this may involve consulting with diverse groups and ensuring that initiatives are designed to address the specific challenges faced by different communities. In addition, it is worth considering that disability inclusivity efforts include diverse representation and visibility of individuals with disabilities from various backgrounds. This can help challenge stereotypes and misconceptions while amplifying the voices of those who are often marginalised within disability advocacy movements.

In terms of this publication, it is essential to provide accessible resources and support that cater to the specific needs of individuals with disabilities across different intersecting identities. This might involve offering culturally competent services, language accessibility, and accommodations tailored to diverse needs.

MULTILINGUAL COMMUNICATION

Multilingual communication in the context of disability extends beyond spoken languages. It encompasses alternative communication methods such as sign languages, tactile languages, and easy-to-read formats. Parliamentary communication strategies must integrate these diverse communication channels to ensure comprehension for people with disabilities.

4 UK Parliament, Easy Read Resources

5 Disability Royal Commission, Realising the human rights of people with disability, 2023

6 New Zealand Parliament, Sign Language goes permanent at Parliament



PARLIAMENTARY LANGUAGE AND ETIQUETTE

Taking into consideration some of the suggestions above, the following is a guide on the proper terms to use in a parliamentary, and especially chamber settings when debating in a way that is respectful and not derogatory towards persons with disabilities.

- Recognise the importance of using **respectful** and **inclusive language** in debates
- **Outline the terms that are considered derogatory** and should not be used, as well as appropriate translations into official languages of the jurisdiction.
- Emphasise that using derogatory language is unacceptable and can have negative consequences in terms of **public perceptions and public trust**.
- **Consider employing punishments** for breaches of these rules/guidelines as outlined in Standing Orders.
- **Provide a list of preferred and respectful terms** that should be used in official and wider local languages when referring to persons with disabilities. Encourage the use of person-centred language that focuses on the individual rather than the disability.

EXAMPLES OF PREFERRED TERMINOLOGY

- **Person with a disability:** This term emphasises the individual's humanity and recognises that disability is one aspect of a person's identity, not a defining characteristic.
- **Person with X disability:** This term specifies the person's disability, such as "person with autism" or "person with a visual impairment."
- **Person with lived experience of disability:** This term acknowledges the unique insights and perspectives that people with disabilities have gained from their personal experiences.
- **Individual with a disability:** This term is often used in formal or legal contexts.
- **Disabled person:** This term is becoming increasingly accepted, but it should be used with caution⁷ and only when the person has explicitly stated that they prefer this term.

TERMS TO AVOID

- Derogatory terms commonly used that perpetuate negative stereotypes and prejudices towards persons with disabilities.
- Any terms that objectify, demean, or belittle individuals based on their disability.

AVOID THE FOLLOWING TERMS⁸

- **Handicapped:** This term is outdated and considered offensive.
- **Invalid:** Again, outdated and offensive.
- **Differently-abled:** This term is often seen as patronising and implies that people with disabilities are somehow "different" or "less than" people without disabilities.
- **The disabled:** Though the term disabled person is appropriate, this term treats people with disabilities as a monolithic group, which is inaccurate and dehumanising.
- **Special needs:** This term is often used to describe people with disabilities in a way that implies that they are not capable of taking care of themselves and need special treatment.

⁷ The CPA understands that there is no one universally agreed definition of disability and preferred terminology varies across different communities, cultures, and countries. However, it is generally accepted that shifting the focus from the disability to the individual, recognising their personhood, identity, and capabilities is the norm rather than putting their disability first.

⁸ This is not exhaustive list. The terms to avoid must be expanded upon by the respective Commonwealth Parliament in respect of the local context and must also take into account derogatory terms in local languages and ensure that they are not used by Members of Parliament.

Section 3: Inclusive Parliaments - Providing Strategic Leadership

Parliaments must show leadership in the development and implementation of inclusivity both at an institutional and at a national level. This should be prioritised to ensure the full participation of all individuals, especially in holding elected representatives to account.



ROLE AND IMPORTANCE OF PARLIAMENTARY LEADERSHIP

According to the CPA Recommended Benchmarks for Democratic Legislatures: *'Legislatures shall be accessible and open to persons with disabilities'*. What this means is that parliaments have an obligation, at the very minimum, to ensure that there is a strong ethos of accessibility, openness and engagement. Those in charge of parliaments, whether it be the Speaker, a parliamentary services commission, or an overarching government department should be developing strategies, policies and practices for inclusivity. Such strategic leadership may also be guided by a PwD parliamentary caucus, a relevant standing or select parliamentary committee or a government-based information office who can assist in shaping a high-level policy or strategy that provides measurable goals, objectives, outcomes and outputs. A Disability Inclusive Communications Strategy maybe an example of this output, but it could also be toolkit, or other resource.

Whatever approach is taken, parliaments, which stand at the apex of democracy within a country, must set a very high standard for other governmental institutions and wider national entities on adopting best practice around inclusivity. They should be held accountable to ensure any policy or strategy is implemented successfully.

Accessible parliamentary communication is not merely a formality; it is a cornerstone of inclusive governance. It ensures the voices and decisions shaping society reach all citizens,



regardless of their abilities. However, achieving this ideal requires navigating significant barriers. Outdated infrastructure, technological hurdles, and complex parliamentary language pose formidable obstacles, particularly for people with disabilities⁹. Budgetary constraints can further hinder the implementation of comprehensive accessibility measures¹⁰.

Overcoming these barriers necessitates a multifaceted approach embracing a range of solutions and best practices. Technology integration stands as a key enabler. Leveraging assistive technologies like screen readers and captioning services creates inclusive parliaments for people with visual or hearing impairments¹¹. Inclusive design principles, advocating for accessibility considerations from the outset of communication strategies, play a crucial role. This involves ensuring parliamentary materials are not only compliant with accessibility standards but also thoughtfully crafted with diverse abilities in mind.

ADOPTING BEST PRACTICES AND FRAMEWORKS: LEADING BY EXAMPLE

Effective communication within parliaments necessitates the adoption of best practices and frameworks that prioritise accessibility. The Council of Europe and the Inter-Parliamentary Union provide comprehensive insights into these strategies, emphasising the crucial role of universal design principles in shaping parliamentary communications. These principles go beyond physical accommodations, extending their influence to encompass a broader spectrum of communication. The goal is to ensure that the information disseminated by parliaments is not only accessible but also comprehensible and usable by people with diverse backgrounds¹².

RESEARCH

Recent research findings contribute valuable perspectives to the discourse on accessible parliamentary communication. Studies highlight the transformative impact of technology in making parliamentary spaces more accessible. Tools like text-to-speech software and screen readers empower people with disabilities to engage actively in parliamentary processes. Evidence-based strategies, such as those highlighted in research by Evans and Reher (2020), offer deeper insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by legislative bodies navigating the terrain of accessible communication¹³. By drawing on research and experiences from across the globe, parliaments can tailor their approaches to effectively address the needs of people with disabilities, fostering a more inclusive and vibrant democratic dialogue.

EXPERTISE

Scholars specialising in disability studies offer valuable insights that can guide parliaments in establishing accessible and inclusive parliaments.

- Dr. Aimi Hamraie emphasises the integration of universal design principles and accessible communication methods within parliamentary processes. This encompasses sign language interpretation and accessible documents, breaking down communication barriers and fostering parliaments where people with disabilities can actively participate¹⁴.
- Dr. Lennard Davis's examination of the Americans with Disabilities Act underscores the legal obligations that shape accessible communication practices, urging parliaments to actively foster inclusive parliaments¹⁵.

9 Lannon, M. (2012). "Democracy, Accessibility, and Technology: The Role of Parliamentary Libraries." *The Journal of Information, Law & Technology*

10 Amado, A., et al. (2013). "Accessibility of Parliaments: The Case of the Portuguese Parliament." *Parliamentary Affairs*.

11 Chadwick, A. (2017). "Digital Politics, Digital Participation, and the Case of Brexit." *Political Quarterly*.

12 Council of Europe – Achieving full participation through Universal Design (2020)

13 Ibid

14 "The Universal Design for Learning Toolkit" by Aimi Hamraie and Scott Fleischman (2020)

15 "Disability and the Politics of Exclusion" by Lennard Davis (1997)

- Dr. Sara Hendren’s research on adaptable communication tools highlights the transformative impact of technology in making parliamentary spaces more accessible. By emphasising tools like text-to-speech software and screen readers, Hendren encourages parliaments to actively embrace evolving technology, ensuring equitable access for all members¹⁶.
- Dr. Paul Darke’s emphasis on the moral and democratic imperative of accessible communication in political contexts adds another dimension to the discourse. His argument posits inclusive communication not merely as a preference but as a necessity for safeguarding democratic ideals, emphasising the duty to create an environment where diverse voices are heard, valued, and included¹⁷.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Investing in accessibility requires striking a balance with fiscal responsibility. Insights from the Inter-Parliamentary Union highlight the economic benefits of accessible communication, empowering parliaments to make informed decisions that prioritise both accessibility and sound financial management¹⁸.

PUBLIC CONSULTATION AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Public consultation becomes a linchpin in this process. Actively involving people with disabilities in identifying specific needs and preferences fosters informed and effective communication strategies. Parliaments must also actively involve constituents in decision-making processes, providing avenues for their voices to be heard. Entry points for this engagement can be varied. It could take the shape of informal surveys or more formal committee inquiries. It can be led by parliamentary institutions or via parliamentarians directly in their communities.

Example strategies include:



The Scottish Parliament’s Access to Politics Scheme outlines measures to actively involve disabled people in parliamentary activities¹⁹.



The Norwegian Parliament’s use of inclusive town hall meetings, providing accessible venues and communication aids for people with disabilities²⁰.

FEEDBACK MECHANISMS

Establishing robust feedback mechanisms is crucial for ensuring that parliamentary communication is responsive to people with disabilities. Platforms for feedback must be accessible and actively seek input from constituents with disabilities.



The Danish Parliament’s use of online accessibility surveys, specifically designed to gather feedback from people with disabilities²¹.

¹⁶ “Adaptable Communication Tools for People with Disabilities” by Sara Hendren (2022)

¹⁷ “Accessible Communication in Political Contexts: A Moral and Democratic Imperative”, Darke (2022)

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Access to Politics, Inclusion Scotland (Accessed: 27 November 2023) <https://inclusionscotland.org/disabled-people-become-a-leader/civic-participation>

²⁰ The Storting (Norwegian Parliament) <https://www.stortinget.no/en/In-English/>

²¹ The Danish Institute for Human Rights. <https://www.humanrights.dk/our-work/our-work-denmark/equal-treatment/publications?page=3>



TRANSPARENT DECISION-MAKING

Transparent decision-making processes are integral to building trust among constituents, including those with disabilities. Parliaments should prioritise clear communication about legislative processes, decisions, and their potential impact on people with disabilities²².

REGULAR ACCESSIBILITY AUDITS/ASSESSMENTS

Periodic accessibility audits of parliamentary communications platforms, both physical and digital, are essential to identify and address barriers to access. This proactive approach ensures ongoing improvement in the inclusivity of communication methods²³.

Key takeaways:

- **Inclusive communication is fundamental:** Inclusive communication is not an add-on but a fundamental aspect of democratic governance. It ensures that all citizens, including those with disabilities, can actively participate in the democratic process.
- **Diversity demands nuanced approaches:** Diverse parliaments require nuanced communication approaches that address various communities, including people with disabilities. A one-size-fits-all strategy is inadequate for fostering true inclusivity.
- **Collaboration is key:** Successful communication strategies necessitate collaboration with disability advocacy groups, community organisations, and people with disabilities. These collaborations bring authenticity and effectiveness to communication initiatives.
- **Continual improvement through feedback:** Establishing robust feedback mechanisms is crucial for continual improvement. Actively seeking input from people with disabilities ensures that communication strategies evolve to meet changes.
- **Transparency builds trust:** Transparent decision-making processes build trust among constituents. Clearly communicating legislative procedures and decisions, especially those that impact people with disabilities, fosters a sense of inclusivity.

TRAINING

Ensuring that parliamentary staff are adequately trained in disability awareness and communication is paramount. Investment in ongoing training programmes fosters a culture of inclusivity and equips staff with the necessary skills to communicate effectively with people with disabilities²⁴. Parliaments may also offer technical support to Members of Parliament and their staff in creating accessible materials. A good example of this is the CPA Parliamentary Academy Online Course on “Making Parliaments Accessible to Persons with Disabilities” Course which is freely accessible to all CPA member-parliaments.

INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT

Parliaments should be able to engage both regionally and internationally with a range of organisations who can provide support on things ranging from information, advocacy, funding or training. As mentioned above, entities like the CPwD network is unique in its role in focusing on persons with disabilities. The network functions as a knowledge hub, facilitating the exchange of best practices, and offering training and resources. This enables continuous learning and improvement in disability inclusion efforts. Also of notable importance is the CPwD Capital Investment Fund which is designed to enable parliaments to become more inclusive and accessible. Since its establishment it has made many real-world impacts. For example, the Isle of Man’s Tynwald Parliament received a vital accessibility audit and the Montserrat Legislative Assembly has received funding support to procure digital broadcasting equipment to produce video and audio live-streaming. These transformative changes demonstrate the fund’s tangible impact in creating barrier-free parliamentary spaces.

22 Disability Justice, Access to public engagement and consultations. <https://www.disabilityjustice.org.uk/take-action/access-to-public-engagement-and-consultations/>

23 Commonwealth Parliamentary Association: Why your parliament should conduct an accessibility audit. <https://www.cpahq.org/knowledge-centre/blogs/accessibility-audit-isle-of-man-case-study/>

24 The CPA Parliamentary Academy. <https://www.cpahq.org/parliamentary-academy/>



CONSULTATION ON POLICIES AND LAWS: INCLUSIVE DECISION-MAKING

Fostering the active participation of people with disabilities in shaping policies and laws is fundamental to crafting legislation that genuinely embodies inclusivity. A proactive commitment by parliaments to engage with the public during critical decision-making processes is paramount, whether in the development of new policies or the significant alteration of service delivery methods.

Embracing the globally recognised slogan in the disability rights movement, “nothing about us without us,”²⁵ underscores the importance of involving people with disabilities directly in decisions that impact their lives. This principle aligns with Article 4.3 of the UN CRPD, emphasising the need to address disability issues in decision-making. Decision-makers include governments, the UN, and funding organisations, all responsible for shaping disability-inclusive policies .

In the pursuit of inclusive policymaking, parliaments must proactively anticipate and address potential barriers that people with disabilities may face in the engagement process. This proactive approach involves implementing measures such as providing materials in alternative formats, such as Braille or sign language, offering communication support at public meetings, selecting venues with accessibility features, and ensuring financial or logistical assistance for those requiring support. By taking these steps, parliaments can effectively mitigate unintentional exclusion and foster a truly accessible and participatory decision-making environment that embraces the diverse abilities of all constituents²⁶.

ENGAGEMENT, EDUCATION AND OUTREACH HANDBOOK FOR COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTS

In 2021, the CPA published its Engagement, Education and Outreach Handbook for Commonwealth Parliaments to guide legislatures on how to increase public engagement and outreach, to ensure the public get a greater say in how they are governed. In particular, it focuses on offering considerable practical support in stakeholder awareness, digital engagement, and overcome key challenges in communicating with harder to reach stakeholders.

Download a copy here. https://www.cpaHQ.org/media/sbif14kt/engagement_education_outreach-handbook_final.pdf



²⁵ Nothing about Us, Without Us, International Day of Disabled Persons 2004. <https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/enable/iddp2004.htm>

²⁶ Article 4.3,” UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2006 Website. <https://treaties.un.org/pages/treaties.aspx?id=4&subid=A&lang=en>



SAMPLE COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

The following information should help in developing a comprehensive communication strategy, including sections for goals, target audiences, key messages, channels, and evaluation methods.

Develop a Comprehensive Parliamentary Communication Strategy

- The elements and skills needed by a parliament's Department of Communication and Outreach for effective communication to the public

Goals

- Clearly define the overall objectives of the communication strategy.
- Identify the specific outcomes you aim to achieve, such as enhancing public trust, increasing awareness of parliamentary activities, and promoting civic engagement.

Target Audience

- Identify the primary and secondary target audiences for your communication efforts.
- Understand their interests, concerns, and preferred communication channels.
- Tailor your messages and strategies to resonate with each target audience effectively.

Key Messages

- Develop concise, clear, and compelling key messages that align with your goals and resonate with your target audiences.
- Ensure that your key messages are consistently communicated across all channels and platforms.

Communication Channels

- Select the most appropriate communication channels based on your target audiences' preferences and the nature of your messages.
- Utilise a mix of traditional (e.g., print media, broadcast media) and digital channels (e.g., social media, websites, mobile apps).
- Consider creative ways to engage audiences and convey your messages effectively.

Evaluation Methods

- Establish measurable indicators to assess the effectiveness of your communication strategy.
- Continuously monitor and evaluate the performance of your communication efforts.
- Analyse audience engagement, reach, and perception to identify areas for improvement and adapt your strategy accordingly

Professionalism and Transparency

- Communicate with professionalism and integrity, adhering to ethical standards and legal requirements.
- Provide transparent and accurate information, addressing public concerns and fostering accountability

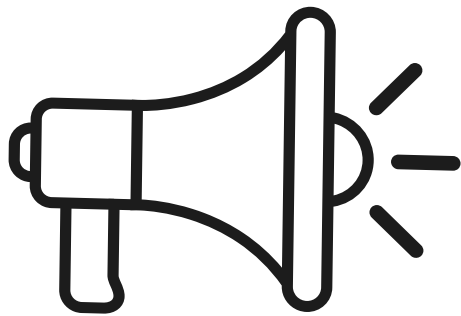
Additional Considerations

- Ensure consistency in the messaging, tone, and visual identity across all channels and platforms.
- Maintain a unified voice that reflects the values, mission, and vision of the parliament.
- Deliver information in a timely manner, addressing current issues and responding to public concerns.
- Tailor your communication to reflect local and national contexts.
- Presentations are Create opportunities for public input and feedback.
- Encourage active participation and dialogue with citizens to foster trust and transparency

Collaboration and Partnerships

- Collaborate with other government agencies, civil society organisations, and community groups to amplify your communication efforts and reach a broader audience.

By using this approach, parliaments can develop a comprehensive and effective communication strategy that enhances their transparency, accountability, and engagement with the public.



Crisis Communication Plan

As well as having a general Communications Strategy, parliaments should also consider developing a

Crisis Communication Plan. The following is a guide for such a plan, ideally for Communication teams within Parliaments to adapt and translate to local languages if a

COVID-19. This guide will help crisis occurs, such as during Parliaments effectively communicate with all its citizens, including steps to take during a crisis, key messages, designated spokespersons, and communication channels to be utilised.

Crisis Communication Team: Establish a dedicated crisis communication team comprised of representatives from disability advocacy groups, government agencies, emergency management organisations, and persons with disabilities.

Crisis Communication Plan: Develop a comprehensive crisis communication plan that outlines roles, responsibilities, and procedures for communicating with persons with disabilities during a crisis.

Key Messages: Determine key messages to be communicated to persons with disabilities during a crisis, such as:

- Safety instructions
- Evacuation procedures
- Accessibility information
- Resource availability
- Emotional support contacts

Designated Spokespersons: Identify designated spokespersons authorised to communicate on behalf of the crisis communication team and provide consistent messaging.

Communication Channels: Utilise multiple communication channels to reach persons with disabilities, including:

- Social media
- Email
- Text messaging
- Emergency alert systems
- Accessible websites
- Radio and television broadcasts

Accessibility Considerations: Ensure that all communication materials are accessible to persons with disabilities, including:

- Providing closed captions for videos
- Offering transcripts for audio recordings
- Using easy-to-understand language
- Providing information in multiple formats

Evacuation and Sheltering Plans: Develop evacuation and sheltering plans that take into account the needs of persons with disabilities, such as:

- Accessible evacuation routes
- Designated shelters with accommodations
- Transportation assistance

Emotional Support: Provide emotional support resources for persons with disabilities affected by the crisis, including:

- Mental health hotlines
- Counselling services
- Online support groups



Training: Have a designated parliamentary team and point of contact for Crisis Communication. Conduct training for crisis communication team members and other relevant personnel on effective communication with persons with disabilities.

Regular Communication: Ensure that the parliamentary point of contact maintains regular communication with persons with disabilities before, during, and after a crisis to keep them informed about relevant developments.

Feedback and Evaluation: Collect feedback from persons with disabilities on the effectiveness of the crisis communication efforts and use it to improve future plans.

CASE STUDY: NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF PAKISTAN



The National Assembly of Pakistan has been at the forefront of reforms to increase accessibility and inclusion for persons with disabilities. For instance, they undertook a comprehensive ‘accessibility audit’ of the Parliament House building and the National Assembly’s website. The Audit, resulted in the installation of ramps where required, ensuring disability-friendly restrooms were present on every floor of the Parliament building, reserving parking spaces for persons with disabilities, creating accessible navigation paths for people with low vision, as well as making electric wheelchairs accessible at all entrances of the Parliament.

The website of the National Assembly of Pakistan was revised to ensure that visually impaired people and people with a hearing disability are able to access information related to parliamentary business. Furthermore, to guarantee that accessibility is ensured for all citizens of the country, they have translated the Constitution of Pakistan into braille. This ensures that all people of Pakistan can comprehend their rights and obligations as stated in the constitution.

The National Assembly have also prioritised gathering data on persons with disabilities. This has enabled the Parliament to have a clearer indications of who it needs to serve and where.²⁷

27 How can parliaments be more accessible to persons with disabilities? A View from Pakistan, The Parliamentarian 2021 Issue Four - <https://issuu.com/the-parliamentarian/docs/par-12021iss4finalsingle/s/14210088#:~:text=The%20website%20of%20the%20National,seats%20for%20persons%20with%20disabilities.>

Section 4: Putting it into Practice - How to Tailor Communications for Inclusion

To be fully effective in implementing an inclusive communications strategy, techniques and approaches should be fully integrated into all communications outputs, from websites to hard-copy versions of parliamentary Hansard/official records. This takes time and effort, but its value and importance cannot be underestimated.

The following section is divided into four parts. Part 1 looks at the development of communications materials, such as the production of documents and materials. Part 2 focuses on digital communications from social media to website designs. Part 3 covers communications around in-person and virtual events. Part 4 showcases promotional outputs on inclusivity. If applied collectively, these guidelines and resources can enable parliaments to be better able to engage with persons with disabilities to ensure they can be fully part of the democratic parliamentary process.



PART 1: DEVELOPING COMMUNICATIONS MATERIALS

PRESENTING PARLIAMENTARY MATERIALS IN ACCESSIBLE FORMATS

Creating welcoming parliaments requires accessible materials for all. The advice outlined in the following sections will provide a guide in crafting documents, presentations, emails, and more that are inclusive for people with disabilities.



USE THE ACCESSIBILITY CHECKER

The Accessibility Checker is a tool available in Microsoft Word, Excel, Outlook, and PowerPoint. You can find this in the top ribbon, under 'Review.' The Accessibility Checker finds accessibility issues and explains why each might be a barrier for someone with a disability. It also gives you step-by-step fixes. The Accessibility Checker can also be used when drafting email communications.

Alongside the Checker, consider applying the following suggestions below:

- Make the font and typeface accessible
- Use a 12pt or larger size for body copy.
- Align text to the left.
- Use sans serif fonts, such as Arial, Comic Sans, Verdana and Calibri.²⁸ as using sans serif fonts can make letters appear less crowded.
- Try to avoid more decorative serif fonts such as Times New Roman.
- Use the same font consistently.
- Avoid italics and underlining (except for links).
- Use bold for emphasis.
- Write in sentence case.
- Avoid writing in capitals, as screen reader software can read out each letter.
- Use plain straightforward language wherever possible. Plain language is reader-friendly because it is clear, concise, and precise; it uses short, action-driven sentences free of jargon.
- Avoid overuse of jargon or acronyms to make language accessible and easy to understand.

CREATE A HEADING STRUCTURE

For screen reader users, headings become signposts. A logical hierarchy – Heading 1 for the main theme, and Heading 2 for subtopics and Heading 3 for further detail – mimics how humans naturally navigate information. This lets readers grasp the overall structure, jump to specific sections, and avoid the frustration of linearly listening to the entire document.

Many readers who prefer keyboard navigation rely on headings to quickly navigate complex content. A clear hierarchy provides distinct targets for keyboard shortcuts, turning scrolling line by line into a smooth, efficient journey through your text.

For readers with dyslexia, headings act as visual cues, breaking down information into manageable chunks and making it easier to grasp the relationships between ideas. This clarity reduces cognitive load and fosters a more enjoyable reading experience for everyone.

DESCRIBE IMAGES AND CHARTS

- Describe images, charts, and tables so that people who cannot see them can understand them. To do this, add alt text to images and descriptions to charts and tables.
- Alt text should be a brief description of the image that conveys the meaning of the image to someone who cannot see it.
- Descriptions of charts and tables should be clear and concise and should explain the data in the chart or table.

GET THE COLOUR CONTRAST RIGHT

- Use dark text against a light background.
- Avoid using colour for emphasis or using images that rely on colour for meaning.
- Use high-contrast colours for links.
- Avoid using images as background to text.
- Use a colour contrast checker, such as the one available from Accessible Web, to ensure that your colour contrast meets accessibility requirements.

²⁸ British Dyslexia Association: Dyslexia Friendly Style Guide (accessed 26 January 2024)

HIGHLIGHT LINKS

- Make sure links stand out from regular text by using a different colour and underlining.

INCLUSIVE IMAGES

- Showcase the full range of disabled experiences through your images, not just wheelchairs.
- Avoid using images that are tokenistic or that portray people in a negative way.

SOCIAL MEDIA

- Make it easy to follow the discussion. As X (formerly known as Twitter) limits the length of messages, you can create a thread to link together several tweets on the same subject.
- When writing hashtags and mentions, use a capital letter to mark the beginning of each word. It is easier for the eye to work out where one word ends, and another begins. It will also affect how a word is read out by a screen reader.
- Limit emoji use. Screen readers can read out emojis, but it can be distracting for the user if the software must read out a long list of emojis.
- Using alternative text (alt text) allows screen readers to capture the description of an object and read it aloud, for those with visual impairments.
- Ensure any videos have captions and audio description if appropriate. A definition of audio description is provided later in this toolkit.
- Put hyperlinks at the end of the text. Describe any linked text and shorten any long links using a USL shortener tool (e.g. <https://tinyurl.com/app> or <https://www.shorturl.at/>). This will make it easier to read.

**COMMUNICATION ACCESS SYMBOL(S)**

Above are an example of a symbol to indicate that materials are accessible. This can be used on documents and online content. A parliament's comms/outreach department may design their own symbol relevant to the local context and garner feedback from persons with disability in their community to be used on parliamentary documents and online content released by the parliament to signify accessible material²⁹.

²⁹ Alt Text can be added to the symbol for online content so that is accessible to people with visual impairments.



CASE STUDY: INCLUSIVE CANADIAN COMMUNICATIONS



The Government of Canada is steadfast in its commitment to building an inclusive society, and this extends to its communication practices. Recognising the paramount importance of accessibility, the Government has taken proactive measures, such as implementing the **Communications 101 Boot Camp for Canadian Public Servants**³⁰ to ensure that Government communications are readily accessible and comprehensible to a diverse audience, particularly people with disabilities. This aligns seamlessly with the Government's broader objective of creating a barrier-free Canada.

KEY FEATURES

- **Plain language emphasis:** The boot camp strongly focuses on using plain language in communication materials. This involves simplifying complex language, using clear and concise sentence structures, and avoiding jargon and technical terms. This approach is crucial for people with cognitive disabilities, ensuring that they can effectively grasp the information being conveyed.
- **Accessibility integration:** Recognising the barriers its audience may face, the Government integrates accessibility features into its communications. This includes providing alt text for images, using clear headings and subheadings, and offering transcripts for audio and video content. These measures help make communication materials accessible to people with disabilities.
- **Inclusive communication strategies:** The boot camp actively promotes inclusive communication strategies, encouraging public servants to adopt practices that consider the barriers audiences might face. This includes avoiding ableist language, using gender-neutral terms, and ensuring that communication materials and images are culturally sensitive. These strategies foster a more inclusive and welcoming environment for all Canadians.
- **Training and capacity building:** The boot camp serves as a comprehensive training platform, equipping public servants with the necessary skills and knowledge to implement plain language and accessibility practices. Participants gain firsthand experience in developing accessible communication materials and receive guidance on incorporating inclusive language strategies. This training ensures that public servants are well-equipped to create communications that effectively reach and engage all Canadians.

IMPACT AND RESULTS

The Communications 101 Boot Camp has yielded significant positive outcomes:

- **Improved citizen engagement:** By adopting plain language and accessibility standards, the Government has enhanced citizen engagement. People with disabilities can now engage with government communications more effectively, leading to increased participation in public consultations and decision-making processes. This promotes a more inclusive and participatory democracy.
- **Positive public perception:** The initiative has contributed to a positive public perception of the Government's commitment to transparency and inclusivity. Clear and accessible communications demonstrate a dedication to serving the needs of all citizens, fostering trust and confidence in the Government.
- **Compliance with accessibility standards:** The efforts align with broader accessibility standards and legal frameworks, such as the Accessible Canada Act. This demonstrates the Government's commitment to meeting or exceeding regulatory requirements related to communication accessibility.

It is clear, that by adopting plain language, integrating accessibility features, promoting inclusive communication strategies, and providing comprehensive training, the Government of Canada is setting a standard for other institutions to follow in creating a more accessible and inclusive society. Braille Template Format

³⁰ Government of Canada, Communications 101 Bootcamp, Accessed: 27 November 2023



BRaille FORMAT

The following checklist provides guidance for creating accessible materials in Braille. It covers essential considerations for ensuring that Braille materials are inclusive and user-friendly for individuals with visual impairments.

Material Format:

- Braille pages should be produced using standard Braille embossers.
- Braille embossing on paper or plastic sheets is recommended.
- The Braille material should be sturdy and easy to handle.

Page Layout:

- The page layout should follow a consistent and logical structure.
- Clear margins should be maintained on all sides of the page.
- The Braille text should be centred on the page.

Font and Size:

- Use a clear and easy-to-read Braille font.
- The size of the Braille dots should be appropriate for the intended audience.
- Ensure that the Braille dots are well-formed and evenly spaced.

Text Organisation:

- Divide the text into logical sections and paragraphs.
- Use headings and subheadings to structure the content.
- Include page numbers for easy navigation.

Navigation Aids:

- Provide tactile markers or raised lines at the top or bottom of each page to help users identify the beginning and end of the Braille text.
- Include tactile markers or raised dots to indicate the start of new paragraphs.
- If the material includes illustrations, diagrams, or charts, provide tactile representations or descriptive text to convey their meaning to Braille readers.

Illustrations and Diagrams:

- For complex graphics, consider using tactile graphics or raised images to enhance understanding.

Use of Colour:

- Avoid using colour as the primary means of conveying information.
- Use tactile or text-based cues to convey colour-related information.

Testing and Feedback:

- Involve individuals with visual impairments in the testing and evaluation process to ensure the material is accessible and easy to use.
- Collect feedback and make necessary improvements to enhance the accessibility of the material.



Continuous Improvement:

- Regularly review and update the material to incorporate new accessibility standards and best practices.

By following the above template, legislatures can create accessible Braille materials that support the inclusion and empowerment of individuals with visual impairments. Accessible Braille materials enable equal access to information, education, and other essential resources, promoting a more inclusive society.

**DOCUMENT FORMAT³¹****PDF Accessibility:**

- Ensure PDF documents are tagged and structured for accessibility.
- Add bookmarks and metadata.

HTML Format:

- Provide an HTML version of documents for web accessibility.
- Ensure the HTML version follows best practices.

Legislation and Bills:

- Plain Language: Use clear, plain language to enhance understanding.
- Avoid unnecessary jargon and complex terminology as far as possible.

Hansard:

- **Transcripts and Captions:**
 - Provide accurate and comprehensive transcripts for audio content.
 - Include captions for videos and multimedia.
- **Speaker Identification:**
 - Clearly identify speakers in the transcripts.
 - Use consistent formatting for speaker interventions.

Definitions and Explanations:

- Include definitions or explanations for specialised terms.
- Offer supplementary materials for further clarification.

³¹ Individual Commonwealth Parliaments can tailor documents to align with specific guidelines and regulations applicable to the respective Commonwealth Parliament. These formats should be regularly update and adapted to practices based on emerging accessibility standards and technologies.



INFOGRAPHICS

The following is a checklist for creating visually appealing infographics and other visual content. These can be used to convey complex information in an easily understandable format for either digital or printed format.

Accessible Visual Content Template for Persons with Disabilities:

- Title of the Infographic/Visual Content
- Clearly state the purpose and key message of the visual content

Design Principles for Accessibility:

- Use high-contrast colour combinations for text and background.
- Avoid relying solely on colour to convey information.

Text Legibility:

- Choose a clear and easily readable font.
- Ensure font size is adjustable and text is large enough for comfortable reading.

Visual Hierarchy:

- Prioritise important information with clear headings and a logical flow.
- Use consistent formatting for similar types of content.

Inclusive Imagery:

- Include descriptive alt text for all images.
- Use alt text to convey the essential information of the image.
- Ensure diverse representation in images reflecting various abilities, ages, ethnicities, and genders.

Interactive Elements:

- Ensure all interactive elements are navigable using a keyboard.
- Provide clear focus indicators for interactive elements.
- Use descriptive link text instead of generic terms.
- Clearly indicate where a link will lead.

Audio and Video Content:

- Include captions for all video and audio content.
- Ensure captions are accurate, synchronised, and readable.
- Provide audio descriptions for visual content to assist users with visual impairments.



Clear Navigation:

- Use descriptive headings and labels.
- Ensure a logical and easily navigable structure.
- Include a “Skip to Content” link for users navigating with screen readers.

Test and Iterate:

- User Testing - Conduct usability testing with individuals with various disabilities.
- Gather feedback and make necessary improvements.
- Ongoing Accessibility Check: Regularly review and update content to maintain accessibility standards.
- Stay informed about evolving accessibility guidelines.

Additional Resources:

- Provide links or references to additional resources on web accessibility, inclusive design, and assistive technologies.

PART 2: DIGITAL INCLUSION

DIGITAL INCLUSION: BRIDGING THE DIGITAL GAP

Digital inclusion for people with disabilities is imperative. Parliaments need to proactively address barriers and provide accessible digital content, from captioning videos to designing websites with universal design principles.

The availability of resources and funding significantly influences a parliament's ability to address disability inclusion. Industrialised nations, including the UK, allocate more resources toward disability-related initiatives, enabling investment in accessible parliamentary facilities and support for parliamentarians with disabilities³².

CASE STUDY: ENHANCING DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN INDIA



The Government of India, through its Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), has taken significant steps to enhance the accessibility of digital communications for people with disabilities. Recognising the importance of bridging the digital divide and promoting inclusivity, MeitY has implemented various measures to ensure that people with disabilities can fully participate in the digital landscape³³.

Key initiatives undertaken by MeitY's "Accessible India" campaign include:

- Developing guidelines for making digital communications accessible to people with disabilities, outlining recommendations for providing alternative text descriptions for images, utilising clear and simple language, and ensuring compatibility with assistive technologies³⁴.
- Striving to ensure websites and social media platforms have features like closed captions for videos, audio descriptions for images, and keyboard navigation options, enabling people with disabilities to fully engage with digital content³⁵.
- Actively engaging with disability advocacy groups and organisations to gather feedback and insights on improving the accessibility of communications, including digital communications³⁶.

These efforts demonstrate the Government of India's commitment to bridging the digital divide and promoting digital inclusion for people with disabilities. By making digital communications accessible, MeitY aims to empower people with disabilities to connect with others, access information, and participate in the digital world, fostering greater inclusivity and equal opportunities.

32 The Parliamentarian 2021 Issue Four <https://issuu.com/the-parliamentarian/docs/parl2021iss4finalsingle/60>

33 Kumar, N. (2022, January 25). India moves towards a more accessible digital world. *The Hindu*.

34 Government of India, Ministry of Social Justice, and Empowerment. (2019). *Disability Statistics of India, 2016*.

35 Ibid

36 Chandrasekhar, C. S., & Sharma, V. (2021). Accessibility for persons with disabilities in the digital age: India's journey. In *Digital disability: A global perspective* (pp. 241-264). Routledge.



DIGITAL ACCESSIBILITY GUIDELINES:

To ensure digital accessibility, the following guidelines should be adhered to:

- Use clear and concise language, avoiding jargon and technical terms.
- Provide alternative text for images and graphics.
- Structure documents logically using headings and subheadings.
- Ensure that links are descriptive and meaningful.
- Use accessible colour contrast ratios to ensure text is easily readable.
- Provide keyboard navigation options for all interactive elements.
- Ensure that documents are compatible with assistive technologies such as screen readers.

TEMPLATE EXAMPLES:**Easy-to-Read Template**

Font: Arial, Verdana, or Calibri, 14pt

Margins: 1 inch on all sides

Line spacing: 1.5

Simple language, avoiding complex sentence structures and jargon

Use a standard Braille translation table, such as the Unified English Braille (UEB) table.

Example: Easy-to-Read

Iquas et faccum verferrum quam aut volestis ducitio.
Edicid ma corersperum a quam fugiam non

Example: Large Print

Iquas et faccum verferrum quam aut volestis
ducitio. Edicid ma a quam fugiam non

Large Print Template

Font: Arial, Verdana, or Calibri, 18pt or larger

Line spacing: 1.5

Margins: 1 inch on all sides



SOCIAL MEDIA

The following tips are guidelines to tailor social media communication to be more accessible, transparent, open, and effective. The sections include best practices, content types, frequency recommendations, and tips for engaging with the public.

Accessibility:

- Ensure that all social media content is accessible to persons with disabilities. Utilise alt text to describe images, add captions to videos, and provide transcripts for audio content.
- Employ clear and concise language to make content easily understandable. Avoid jargon and technical terms.
- Offer alternative formats for content, such as audio descriptions for videos and text-based transcripts for info-graphs.

Content Types:

- Create a mix of engaging content that caters to various disabilities and preferences.
- Share news, updates, and information about parliamentary activities in diverse formats. Include text posts, images, videos, infographics, and live streams.
- Use storytelling to connect with the audience on a personal level. Share stories of people with disabilities who have overcome challenges or made significant contributions to the Parliamentary process.

Frequency:

- Maintain a consistent posting schedule to keep the audience engaged. Aim to post several times a week, balancing the need for regular updates with avoiding overwhelming your followers.
- Consider scheduling posts at different times to accommodate the varying needs of the audience.

Engagement:

- Encourage interaction and participation from the audience. Ask questions, conduct polls, and host live Q&A sessions.
- Respond promptly to comments and messages. Show that you value feedback from your audience and are willing to have conversations.
- Acknowledge and celebrate the achievements and contributions of persons with disabilities. Share their stories and highlight their successes.

Collaboration:

- Partner with organisations that advocate for the rights of persons with disabilities. Co-create content that raises awareness and promotes inclusivity.
- Invite guest speakers with disabilities to share their perspectives on Parliament's work and the issues affecting their communities.



Evaluation:

- Regularly review the performance of your social media channels' performance and measure your content's reach and engagement.
- Use analytic tools to track the accessibility of your content and identify areas for improvement.
- Seek feedback from your audience through surveys and engagement metrics.

Training:

- Provide for Parliamentary staff on best practices for social media communication with persons with disabilities.
- Ensure that all staff involved in social media management understand the importance of accessibility and inclusivity.

Stay Updated:

- Keep abreast of the latest developments in accessibility and inclusive communication technologies. Adapt your social media strategies accordingly.

CASE STUDY: SOCIAL MEDIA INCLUSION - THE NORWEGIAN PARLIAMENT

The Norwegian Parliament, commonly known as the Storting, has taken significant steps to ensure that its social media platforms are accessible and inclusive for people with disabilities. Recognising the importance of equal access to information and communication technologies for all citizens, the Parliament has implemented various measures to enhance digital inclusivity.

Key measures undertaken by the Norwegian Parliament include:

- Providing alternative text descriptions for images to cater to people with visual impairments³⁷ and ensuring that videos posted on social media are accompanied by closed captions for people with hearing impairments.
- Adhering to the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1 to make its website accessible to people with disabilities using assistive technologies³⁸
- Establishing a contact form on its website specifically designed for people with disabilities to report any accessibility issues they encounter.
- Striving to make all links descriptive and easy to understand for people with cognitive disabilities.

These measures reflect Norway's commitment to fostering a digital space that embodies the inclusive values of its democracy. By prioritising accessibility in the digital realm, the Norwegian Parliament ensures that democratic discourse extends to every citizen, fostering a more inclusive and participatory online environment.³⁹

37 Larsson, A.O. and Kalsnes, B., 2014. 'Of course, we are on Facebook': Use and non-use of social media among Swedish and Norwegian politicians European journal of communication, 29(6), pp.653-667.

38 Inal, Y. and Ismailova, R., 2020. Effect of human development level of countries on the web accessibility and quality in use of their municipality websites. Journal of Ambient Intelligence and Humanized Computing, 11, pp.1657-1667.

39 Domínguez Vila, T., Alén González, E. and Darcy, S., 2020. Accessibility of tourism websites: the level of countries' commitment. Universal Access in the Information Society, 19, pp.331-346.



WEBSITE DESIGN GUIDELINES

Materials in accessible formats should be available on parliamentary websites and provided by the administration upon request. These should include:

- Easy-to-read documents with clear font, simple language, and concise sentences
- Braille templates for converting text to Braille format.
- Large print templates for creating documents with larger font sizes.

Creating an accessible parliamentary website or upgrading your current website to be more accessible, even with limited resources, is achievable by focusing on key areas that significantly impact user experience for individuals with disabilities. Following is a checklist for some practical and cost-effective ways to design or upgrade a parliamentary website for accessibility⁴⁰:

Choose an Accessible Platform:

- Select a website platform or content management system (CMS) that inherently supports accessibility.
- Many modern CMS platforms have built-in features or plugins that aid in creating accessible content.

Prioritise Textual Content:

- Provide descriptive alt text for images to assist users with visual impairments.
- Use clear, simple language for content to enhance understanding for all users.

Implement Clear Navigation:

- Use a logical and consistent navigation structure.
- Include headings, lists, and proper HTML markup to aid screen readers in interpreting content.

Colour Contrast:

- Ensure high contrast between text and background colours.
- Avoid relying solely on colour to convey information; use other visual cues as well.

Readable Fonts and Sizing:

- Choose readable fonts and maintain a reasonable font size.
- Allow users to adjust text size without affecting website functionality.

⁴⁰ This template is based on a case-study of the Sri Lanka Parliament's upgrading of their parliamentary website to be more accessible, including to persons with disabilities.



Keyboard Navigation:

- Ensure all website features and functions are accessible via keyboard navigation.
- Test and improve the tab order for logical navigation.

Closed Captioning for Multimedia:

- Include closed captions for videos and multimedia content.
- Utilise free or low-cost online tools to generate captions.

Responsive Design:

- Ensure the website is responsive and adapts to different devices and screen sizes.
- Consider mobile users and those who rely on different types of devices.

Simple Forms:

- Create simple, well-labeled forms with clear instructions.
- Ensure form fields are programmatically associated with their labels.

Provide Transcripts:

- Offer transcripts for audio content and podcasts.
- Transcripts can be simple text documents, making them cost-effective.

Regular Accessibility Audits:

- Conduct regular accessibility audits using free online tools or browser extensions.
- Address identified issues promptly.

Educate Staff:

- Train website content creators and maintainers on basic accessibility principles.
- Encourage the use of accessibility features in the chosen platform.

Seek Community Assistance:

- Leverage the support of the community, including volunteers or local organisations focused on web accessibility.
- Tap into the expertise of local disability advocacy groups for feedback.

Documentation and Resources:

- Develop and share a simple accessibility guide for website contributors based on this template, that is adapted to the local context of the relevant Commonwealth Parliament.
- Provide links to free online resources and tutorials on web accessibility.

User Feedback:

- Encourage users to provide feedback on website accessibility.
- Act on reported issues and continuously improve the site.

Prioritise High-Impact Areas:

- Focus efforts on high-traffic and critical sections of the website first.
- Gradually extend accessibility improvements to other areas.

By adopting these strategies, even a parliament with limited resources can take significant steps toward creating an accessible website, fostering inclusivity, and ensuring that parliamentary information is accessible to a broad audience.

PARLIAMENT WEBSITE DESIGN GUIDELINES

User-Friendly Navigation:

- **Intuitive Structure:** Craft a straightforward navigational structure that allows users to quickly locate the desired information.
- **Menu Consistency:** Maintain a constant menu layout across all pages, ensuring uniformity and ease of navigation.
- **Clear Labels:** Employ concise and descriptive labels for navigation items, avoiding jargon and using commonly understood terms.
- **Breadcrumbs:** Incorporate breadcrumbs on each page, enabling users to easily trace their navigational path and return to previous locations.
- **Search Functionality:** Implement a robust search feature that provides accurate and comprehensive results, assisting users in finding content effortlessly.

Accessibility:

- **Screen Reader Compatibility:** Ensure the website is fully accessible to screen reader users, including navigation, content, and multimedia elements.
- **Responsive Design:** Adopt a responsive web design approach that adjusts the website's layout and content based on the user's device, ensuring an optimal browsing experience across various platforms.
- **Colour Contrast:** Adhere to recommended colour contrast guidelines to ensure text is legible and accessible to visually impaired individuals.
- **Alt Tags:** Provide descriptive alternative text (Alt tags) for images and graphics, conveying their content to users unable to view them.
- **Closed Captions and Transcripts:** Include closed captions and transcripts for audio and video content, making them accessible to individuals with hearing impairments.

Content Organisation:

- **Homepage Clarity:** Design a clear and informative homepage that provides an overview of the parliament, its key functions, and the latest news and announcements.
- **Categories and Subcategories:** Organise content into logical categories and subcategories, enabling users to navigate topics efficiently.
- **Content Hierarchy:** Establish a clear hierarchy for content, with primary information displayed prominently and supporting details arranged in a logical flow.
- **Consistency in Presentation:** Maintain consistency in the presentation of information across different sections of the website, using uniform formatting and layout.
- **Breaking News and Announcements:** Highlight breaking news and important announcements on the homepage or in a dedicated section, ensuring they are readily visible to users.



PART 3: INCLUSIVE EVENTS MANAGEMENT

DISABILITY INCLUSIVE PARLIAMENTARY MEETINGS AND EVENTS (PHYSICAL)

Creating an inclusive environment for parliamentary meetings and events is essential for ensuring active and meaningful participation by all individuals. This section outlines practical steps to guarantee effective communication and information sharing for everyone.



BEFORE

- **Planning:** Consider accessibility at the outset.
- **Partnerships and expertise:** Partner with representatives from Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) throughout the planning process.
- **Anticipatory adjustments:** The obligation to ensure accessibility contained in Article 9 of the CRPD is ‘generalised and anticipatory (not triggered by an individual request). Organisers should, therefore, seek to remove barriers proactively, ensuring inclusive participation. Enable video call captions, use accessible fonts, and choose venues with accessibility features. Ask before a meeting or event, if you can make any “accommodations, adjustments or changes”. Not everyone will be familiar with the legal language of “accommodations” or “adjustments,” so it is helpful to include “changes”.
- **Venue selection:** Research potential venues, prioritising those with accessibility features which can include accessible parking, accessible toilets, ramps, lifts and induction loops. Consider whether your meeting or event needs to be in person – could it be held online or in hybrid format instead? This could enable more people to participate and access information.
- **Booking and registration:** Offer alternative registration methods besides online, such as paper forms or telephone contact. Clearly communicate how people with disabilities can request specific adjustments or accommodations.
- **Budgeting:** Allocate adequate funding for adjustments or accommodations, including sign language interpreters, captioning services, and accessible materials.
- **Accessibility Information:** Ensure accessibility features, timings, breaks, and support services are readily available and prominently published in advance.
- **Materials and Website:** Utilise accessible formatting (e.g., large font, sans serif fonts, good colour contrast) for all materials and information online. Include details on requesting adjustments or accommodations on the event website.

- **Social Media:** Employ inclusive language, image descriptions for photos, and captions for videos in all social media postings related to the event.

DURING

- **Welcome and Introductions:** Welcome all participants and introduce yourself and your team. Clearly explain the event or meeting format and available accessibility features.
- **Registration Desk:** Ensure the registration desk is accessible and staffed by personnel trained to assist people with disabilities. This will aid communication and interaction.
- **Only use one form of communication at a time:** Most people cannot do multiple things at once. An person with disabilities who lip reads or has difficulty processing information may find it difficult to follow a conversation and read a presentation at the same time. Only ask participants to absorb one form of communication at a time (for example, listen, watch, write etc.).

Presentations: Encourage presenters to:

- Provide materials in advance.
- Verbally describe visual content.
- Utilise microphones and speak clearly.
- Mute microphones when not speaking and to eliminate background noise.
- Take turns to contribute to the discussion.
- Activate captions for any videos, presentations or video calls.
- Repeat questions from the audience before responding.

AFTER

- **Feedback:** Gather feedback from participants about the event or meeting accessibility to inform future improvements.
- **Distribute post-meeting materials:** Share transcripts, notes, or minutes within days to ensure everyone, including people with disabilities, has complete access to information.



DISABILITY INCLUSIVE PARLIAMENTARY MEETINGS AND EVENTS (VIRTUAL)

Virtual meetings and events can be a fantastic way to connect with people from all over the world. However, it is important to make sure that virtual meetings and events are inclusive and accessible to everyone, including people with disabilities.



Planning and Preparation

- **Share information in advance:** Send out agendas, event brochures, and previous minutes well before the meeting or event. Consider offering multiple formats like text documents, audio recordings, or video summaries.
- **Flexible and accessible registration:** Provide various ways for people to register, such as online forms, telephone registration, or email contact. This caters to different abilities and technological access.
- **Regular breaks for longer meetings:** Schedule breaks at appropriate intervals, especially for meetings exceeding an hour. This helps prevent fatigue, eye strain, and physical discomfort.
- **Asking about adjustments:** At the start, ask if anyone needs adjustments or accommodations. This creates a welcoming environment where people feel comfortable requesting changes.

Communication and Accessibility Features:

- **Enable captions and transcription:** Utilise built-in or third-party services to provide real-time text access to the spoken content. This benefits people with hearing impairments, and anyone who prefers visual information.
- **Diverse engagement methods:** Encourage participants to communicate in ways that align with their preferences. This can involve using microphones, typing in the chat box, contributing to Q&A forums, or utilising assistive technologies like screen readers.
- **Meeting recordings:** Consider recording the meeting for later access by those unable to attend live. This also allows participants to refer back to information and supports notetaking. However, always obtain informed consent before recording.

Time Management and Technical Considerations:

- **Meeting length and attention span:** Keep shorter meetings to maintain focus and limit eye strain. Longer sessions may require more frequent breaks and varied activities.
- **Headset and microphone usage:** Encourage the use of headsets and microphones by participants to improve audio quality and reduce background noise. This also aids in accurate captioning and benefits attendees with hearing impairments.

Remember:

- **Respect individual preferences:** Not everyone is comfortable using cameras, so make camera use optional. Be mindful of individuals who may face barriers related to camera use.
- **Accessibility comes first:** Always prioritise accessibility when choosing video platforms, and features for your online meetings.
- **Continuous improvement:** Gather feedback after each meeting to identify areas for improvement and ensure future gatherings are even more inclusive and accessible.

By implementing these tips, you can create online meetings and events that are welcoming, engaging, and accessible for everyone, fostering a more inclusive and productive environment for all.

INCLUSIVE EVENT PLANNING CHECKLIST:

The following are checklist templates for planning inclusive parliamentary events and meetings. These templates cover venue accessibility, technology considerations, and accommodations and can be incorporated in line with the resources available to the respective parliament.

Venue Accessibility (it has):

- ✓ wheelchair accessibility and has ramps or elevators.
- ✓ wide doorways and pathways to accommodate wheelchairs and mobility devices.
- ✓ accessible restrooms with grab bars and wide stalls.
- ✓ accessible parking spaces close to the entrance.
- ✓ good signage to direct attendees to accessible features.
- ✓ a quiet room or space for attendees who need a break from the noise.
- ✓ a water fountain or water cooler that is accessible to people with disabilities.
- ✓ a first aid kit and staff trained in first aid.

Technology Considerations:

- ✓ presentations and documents should be provided in accessible formats (e.g. large print, braille, or audio recordings).
- ✓ videos and audio recordings should have closed captioning or transcripts.
- ✓ computer stations and other technologies are accessible to people with disabilities.
- ✓ assistive listening devices are available for people with hearing impairments.
- ✓ live streaming or webcasting of events is available for people who cannot attend in person.

Accommodations (providing):

- ✓ interpreters for people who do not speak the primary language of the event.
- ✓ childcare for attendees who require it.
- ✓ transportation for attendees who need it.
- ✓ scholarships or other financial assistance to attendees with disabilities.
- ✓ a designated contact person to assist attendees with disabilities.
- ✓ changes to the event/meeting to accommodate the needs of attendees with disabilities.



GUIDE FOR PARLIAMENTS: CONDUCTING AN INCLUSIVE WEBINAR

Webinars are powerful tools for engaging with the public, and it's crucial to ensure that they are accessible to everyone, including persons with disabilities. The following guide is designed to help parliamentary staff, Members and Member's staff organise an inclusive webinar that accommodates the needs of persons with disabilities.

Your parliament's communication/outreach team can organise a webinar series featuring academic experts and local practitioners, including disability-focused civil society organisations discussing their insights on inclusive modes of communication with the respective parliament. Topics for discussion may include best practices and case study reflections on how other parliaments have included persons with disabilities in the parliamentary process and about areas for improvement in transparency and accessibility of the respective parliament as a whole. The session could be recorded for future reference, showcased on the respective parliament's website and where resources are available transcripts and captioning can be provided for the video.

Understanding Accessibility:

- Familiarise yourself with the various disabilities and their specific needs, such as visual, hearing, motor, and cognitive impairments.
- Ensure your webinar platform complies with accessibility standards (e.g., WCAG 2.0⁴¹ or higher).

Pre-Webinar Planning:

- Registration and Communication: Provide an option for participants to indicate if they require specific accommodations.
- Clearly communicate the accessibility features available, such as closed captioning, sign language interpretation, or alternative formats for materials.

Accessible Materials:

- Ensure all pre-webinar materials (invitations, agendas, etc.) are accessible, following accessibility guidelines.
- Provide materials in various formats (PDF, Word, HTML) to accommodate different needs.

⁴¹ WCAG 2.0, or the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0, is a set of guidelines developed by the Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) of the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C). The W3C is an international community that works to develop standards and guidelines to ensure the long-term growth of the World Wide Web. WCAG 2.0 provides a framework for creating accessible web content that is more inclusive and user-friendly for people with disabilities. These guidelines are designed to make web content accessible to a wide range of people, including those with visual, auditory, cognitive, and motor impairments.

Selecting an Accessible Platform:

- Choose a webinar platform with built-in accessibility features, such as screen reader compatibility, closed captioning, and keyboard navigation.
- Test the platform beforehand to identify any potential issues and find solutions.

Providing Real-time Accessibility:

- Utilise real-time captioning services or integrate automatic captioning features within the webinar platform.
- Arrange for sign language interpreters and communicate their availability to participants in advance.
- For visual content, provide audio descriptions to convey visual information to participants with visual impairments.

Engagement and Interaction:

- Encourage participants to ask questions in multiple formats (e.g., chat, audio, written) to cater to diverse communication needs.
- Use accessible polling features within the platform and ensure they are compatible with assistive technologies.

Testing Accessibility:

- Conduct accessibility tests on the webinar platform with individuals who have various disabilities to identify and address any potential barriers.
- Create a test session for speakers and moderators to practice using accessibility features.

Post-Webinar Follow-up:

- Provide post-webinar materials in accessible formats and make them available on your website.
- Collect feedback on accessibility from participants to continually improve the accessibility of future webinars and other online events.

Training and Awareness:

- Train speakers, moderators, and technical support staff on how to use accessibility features within the webinar platform.
- Raise awareness within the Commonwealth Parliament about the importance of accessibility and its integration into all digital communication efforts.

Legal and Ethical Considerations:

- Familiarise yourself with relevant accessibility laws and regulations to ensure compliance.
- Adhere to ethical considerations related to the privacy and dignity of persons with disabilities.

Resources:

- Compile a list of resources and tools for creating accessible content and hosting inclusive webinars.
- Provide contact information for technical support and accessibility assistance during the webinar.



INCLUSIVE PARLIAMENTARY CALENDAR

Below is a calendar template highlighting key dates related to disability awareness and inclusion, including suggested activities, events, and milestones for parliaments to participate in⁴².



January 24
International Day of Education
Highlight the fact that education is a Human Right, public good, and public responsibility, and persons with disability should therefore be afforded the right to an education.



February 20
World Day of Social Justice
Host an event at to promote this day and to engage with Persons with Disabilities and Disability-focused CSOs, to ensure that they are not excluded from society and can equally participate in parliamentary processes and parliamentary business.



February 29
Rare Disease Day
Raise awareness of rare diseases and the challenges faced by people living with them. Encourage parliamentarians to learn more about rare diseases and support organisations working to find treatments and cures.



March 8
International Women's Day
Highlight the intersection of gender and disability. Consider hosting an event or activity that celebrates the achievements of women with disability and addresses the unique challenges they face.



April 2
World Autism Awareness Day
Raise awareness of autism spectrum disorder and advocate for the rights of people with autism. Encourage parliamentarians to learn more about autism and how they can support people with autism in their communities.



May 3
World Press Freedom Day
Advocate for the rights of people with disability to access information and express their views. Encourage parliamentarians to support policies that promote inclusivity in the media and ensure that people with disability have a voice in society.



⁴² The list is not exhaustive. The calendar template can be customised to reflect local and country-specific events of individual commonwealth Parliaments.



Celebrate the diversity of the disability community and advocate for the full inclusion of people with disability in society. Consider hosting an event or activity that brings people with disability together and celebrates their achievements.



Recognise the contributions of people with disability to humanitarian work and advocate for their inclusion in disaster preparedness and response efforts. Encourage Parliamentarians to support policies and programs that ensure that people with disability are not left behind in times of crisis.



Promote the participation of people with disability in democratic processes. Encourage Parliamentarians to take steps to make elections and other democratic institutions more accessible to people with disability.



Raise awareness of mental health issues and advocate for the rights of people with mental illness. Encourage Parliamentarians to support policies and programs that promote mental health and well-being for all.



Celebrate the achievements of people with disability and advocate for their full inclusion in society. Consider hosting an event or activity that brings people with disability together and celebrates their contributions to society.

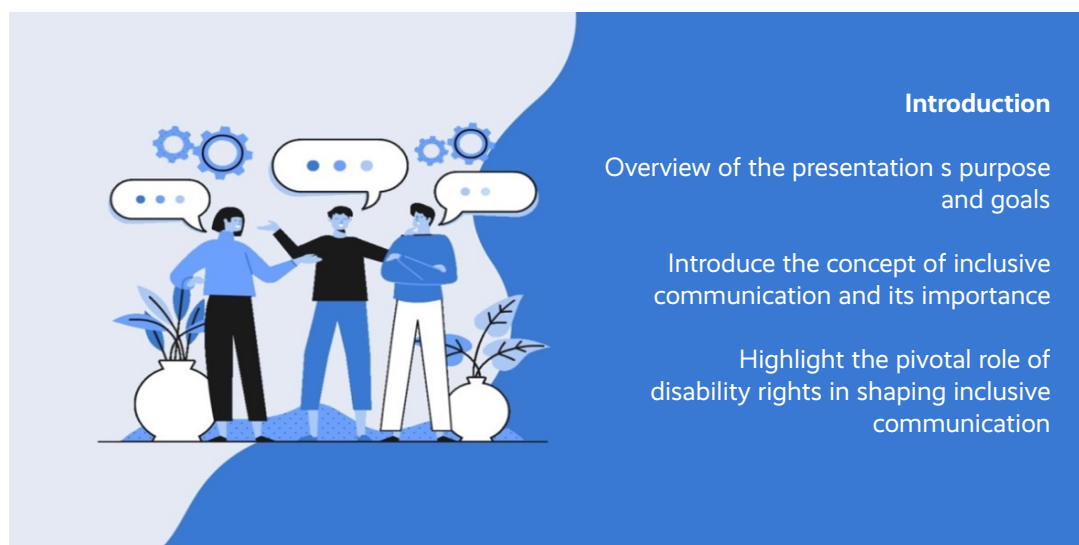


PART 4: TOOL FOR PROMOTING INCLUSIVITY

SHORT VIDEO ON INCLUSIVE COMMUNICATION

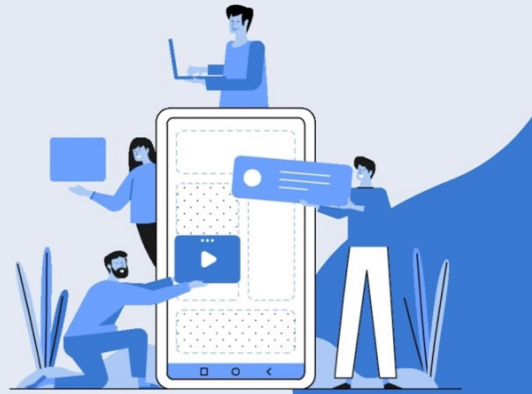
Create a short video featuring Members and Staff discussing the role of disability rights in shaping inclusive communication. Depending on the resources available, the video could be made more accessible by providing subtitles, in-built speech recognition software and sign language interpretation.

The following is a template on content that can be included in such a video:



Inclusive Communication

- Define inclusive communication and its principles
- Explain the importance of clear, accessible, and respectful language
- Discuss the role of inclusive communication in promoting understanding and reducing discrimination



Play a short video featuring the Parliamentarians discussing the following topics:

- The importance of disability rights in shaping inclusive communication
- How inclusive communication can be promoted in parliamentary proceedings
- The challenges and opportunities associated with promoting inclusive communication



Context

- Discuss the parliament's role in the relevant country in promoting disability rights and inclusive communication.
- Highlight specific initiatives and policies that support these efforts

Concluding Summary

Summarise the key points discussed in the presentation

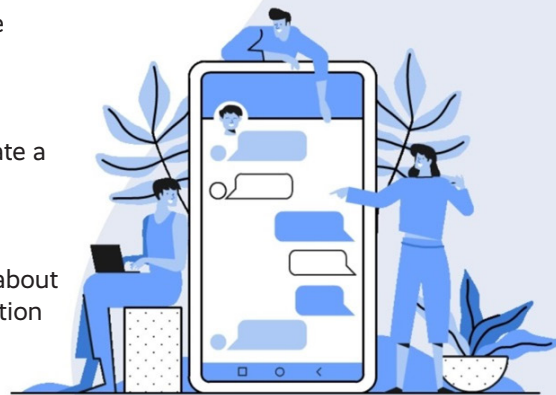
- Emphasise the continued importance of disability rights and inclusive communication
- Encourage parliamentarians and all stakeholders to work together to create a more inclusive society

Call to Action

Encourage viewers to learn more about disability rights and inclusive communication

Contact Information

Provide contact information for the Department of Communications of the relevant parliament and other relevant resources



Section 5: Additional Sources of Information

In the endeavour to cultivate inclusive and accessible parliamentary communications, it is imperative to tap into a diverse array of perspectives and expertise. The sources highlighted in this section go beyond the information provided in the main guidance, offering valuable insights, practical guidance, and a global perspective on disability inclusion in parliamentary contexts.

Leonard Cheshire

Leonard Cheshire⁴³ is a non-profit organisation working to promote the rights and inclusion of persons with disabilities, with a history of working within Commonwealth countries in Africa and Asia. The organisation, and its website offers resources, case studies, training and consultancy, and news on disability inclusion.



Global Disability Innovation Hub

The Global Disability Innovation Hub (GDI Hub) reframes the conversation, rewriting a narrative of boundless potential, not insurmountable limitations. Through pioneering assistive technologies, championing inclusive design principles, and advocating for equitable policies, GDI Hub bridges the gap between disability and societal participation⁴⁴.



Global Business and Disability Network (ILO GBDN)

The Global Business and Disability Network (ILO GBDN)⁴⁵ serves as a unique platform for business-to-business support and peer-to-peer learning on disability issues. It facilitates knowledge exchange through meetings, working groups, and joint publications, supporting national-level business initiatives on disability inclusion, especially in developing countries.



European Disability Forum (EDF)

The European Disability Forum (EDF)⁴⁶ is a prominent umbrella organisation representing over 100 million persons with disabilities in Europe. It works across various domains, including employment, education, social protection, and accessibility, providing a platform for persons with disabilities to participate in decision-making processes.



43 Leonard Cheshire Disability. <https://www.leonardcheshire.org/> (Accessed: 28 November 2023)

44 Global Disability Innovation Hub. <https://www.disabilityinnovation.com/> (Accessed 30 January 2024)

45 ILO: Global Business and Disability Network (Accessed: 28 November 2023). <https://www.businessanddisability.org/mission/>

46 European Disability Forum. <https://www.edf-feph.org/the-future-will-be-accessible-parliament-votes-on-accessibleeu-centre/> (Accessed: 28 November 2023)

World Bank

The World Bank's Social Protection and Labor Global Practice⁴⁷ focuses on promoting inclusive development and social protection for persons with disabilities in the Commonwealth. It offers research, case studies, and guidance on effective disability inclusion strategies, providing technical assistance to Commonwealth governments.

**CBM International**

CBM International⁴⁸ is a leading non-profit organisation advocating for inclusive development. Its website offers news, stories, and resources on various aspects of disability inclusion, including parliamentary communications. CBM Africa⁴⁹ focuses specifically on disability inclusion in African Commonwealth countries.

**Sightsavers International**

Sightsavers International⁵⁰ is dedicated to preventing avoidable blindness and has a section on its website addressing disability inclusion in the Commonwealth. The website provides resources, case studies, and advocacy materials on promoting disability rights and inclusion in Commonwealth countries.

**Disability Rights Fund (DRF)**

The Disability Rights Fund (DRF)⁵¹ is a global grant-making foundation supporting disability rights organisations. It provides information on DRF-funded initiatives in African Commonwealth countries, promoting disability inclusion in various sectors.



47 World Bank: Disability Inclusion (Accessed: 28 November 2023). <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/disability>

48 CBM International. <https://www.cbm.org/> (Accessed: 28 November 2023)

49 CBM Worldwide. <https://www.cbm.org/worldwide/> (Accessed: 28 November 2023)

50 SightSavers International. <https://www.sightsavers.org/> (Accessed: 28 November 2023)

51 Disability Rights Fund, gov.uk. <https://www.gov.uk/international-development-funding/disability-rights-fund#:~:text=The%20fund%20operates%20in%20Africa,between%20USD%205%2C000%20and%2020%2C000> (Accessed: 28 November 2023)



A series of 25 horizontal blue lines spanning the width of the page, providing a template for writing.





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