



Version 1.0, Feb 2008

## Access and Equality Issues

Every Action Counts (EAC) has a strong commitment towards ensuring equality of opportunity and developing diversity within its work. It aspires to reflect diversity as appropriate in all working practices and communications. Discrimination on the grounds of race, religion, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, disability or age is unacceptable.

## Minimising Inequalities

Working practices are an important part of the governance of an organisation. Access and equality issues should form part of induction and training programmes, whether for Trustees, staff or volunteers. Good practice in developing and promoting equality of opportunity and inclusion in activities generally means going beyond the levels of equality required by law. Funders' increasingly want to see equality and diversity policies actively in place.

On 1<sup>st</sup> October 2007 the 3 equality commissions merged into the new Equality and Human Rights Commission. More information is available at [www.equalityhumanrights.com](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com). Material from the websites of the former Commission for Racial Equality; Disability Rights Commission and Equal Opportunities Commission has been incorporated into this new body. Information relevant to your locality, including other Third Sector groups providing services on race, disability, age, gender issues etc can usually be found via your local authority or CVS. This will include legal requirements on access. Guidance on meeting duties under the Disability Discrimination Act (1995) is also available from specialist organisations such as the Centre for Accessible Environments.

## Using Volunteers

Big or small organisations all depend upon volunteer help. The National Trust is no exception. As well as recognising that people have different cultural, ethnic, racial and gender identities, different religions, beliefs, nationalities, ages, sexual orientations, physical, sensory and mental disabilities, the Trust's work is also about respecting the general differences between people, such as their family background and education experience. Volunteers are encouraged to challenge how the Trust operates and suggest ways of improving diversity.

## Within the Office

Access and equality issues should be an integral part of how an organisation works, not an afterthought. This includes internal working arrangements, event planning and external communications.

As a matter of good practice, does your organisation clearly publicise facilities that help people to participate in or use your services more fully? These include: access ramps; hearing loop systems; assistive technology especially IT, and various means of publicising activities. If your building has unavoidable restrictions for those with impaired mobility, are there alternative arrangements?

Check that proposed work programmes or activities adhere to guidelines required by funders (e.g. Lottery guidelines). If you need more help, do you know where to access this locally? Your local authority or local advocacy groups may be the best starting point.

If you have the opportunity to update your building or to influence others planning any renovation or new build, it's important to remember that good design, including the use of appropriate materials, can help to create a safe and accessible space for all. Seek advice on things like choice of colours, lighting, layout and signage. Sources of help include CABE and the Centre for Accessible Environments.

It may also be necessary to address cultural requirements linked to people's faith or ethnicity. Issues include: dietary requirements at events; language issues (not just translation) and provision of a quiet space for prayer. Ask local faith groups or a local interfaith organisation for guidance if necessary.

## Publicity and Communications

There is a legal requirement under the Disability Discrimination Act to ensure that websites, along with many other services, are accessible to disabled people. Website accessibility refers to the practice of making websites usable by people of all abilities and disabilities.

If you have a website has it been checked to ensure it is accessible to those with visual impairments? A clear and well signposted site, with appropriate colours, font size and layout helps everyone.

Does your organisation offer different ways of disseminating information? Can people request information in a different format - large print; Braille; audio CD or cassette, or in translation?

When planning events or consultations, check access arrangements well in advance – see **Running greener events**. If you are working with some cultural or faith groups there may be other considerations to ensure widest participation e.g. timing of events, gender specific or separate space.

Do you try other outlets to publicise your organisation's work (e.g. faith-based organisations, community notice boards in places of worship, day centres, and local library

Sharing information about what works well may help others, particularly smaller or less-resourced groups. Good practice doesn't necessarily cost money.

## Faith-based Organisations

Using the faith-based sector as a channel for promoting more environmentally-aware behaviour makes sense. Linking up with local groups can add direct experience to your work on equalities. Many run Fair Trade stalls within their community buildings or places of worship. Can you incorporate a faith-based or cultural element into a local project? Ideas include: a sensory garden that is also a space for quiet reflection; peace or cultural garden, local food growing, a community allotment, food at events; arts and crafts activities.

## Examples of Inclusive Projects and Who They Particularly Benefit

- Community transport schemes – disabled, older people
- Sensory gardens and raised bed gardening – older people, people with visual impairment; people with degenerative illnesses including dementia
- Local gardening and horticultural therapy projects – those with mental health difficulties and people in recovery (addiction)
- City farms & community gardens – offer access to social networks, training and skills for vulnerable people
- Environmental improvements (clean-ups, green space, woodland) – welcoming volunteers from all walks of life can help social inclusion, build people's confidence, improve social skills and, on a sustained basis, contribute towards community cohesion.
- Furniture re-use schemes – vulnerable people
- Faith-based social action e.g. drop-in centres, meals, befriending – vulnerable people

## Further information

Equality and Human Rights Commission: [www.equalityhumanrights.com](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com).

Web Accessibility Initiative: [www.w3.org](http://www.w3.org)

Centre for Accessible Environments: [www.cae.org.uk](http://www.cae.org.uk), a key information source on design and improvements to the built environment for disabled people.

Design and Access statements: CABE (Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment) the government's adviser on architecture, urban design and public space. Has information on Design and Access statements. [www.cabe.org.uk](http://www.cabe.org.uk).

Further local help will be available through your local CVS, specific advocacy/self-help groups (national and local) and the local authority