Cyswllt Amgylchedd Cymru | Wales Environment Link

Mewn Partneriaeth â Llywodraeth Cymru
In Partnership with Welsh Government

Diversity workshop: Engagement and campaigning

Attendees

Kit Stoner	Bat Conservation Trust
Joe Nunez-Mino	Bat Conservation Trust
Clare Dinham	Buglife
Llinos Humphreys	Coed Cadw/Woodland Trust
Claire Holmes	Cymdeithas Eryri/Snowdonia Society
Jo Golley	Keep Wales Tidy
Maria Wilding	Llais y Goedwig
Zena Wilmott	Llais y Goedwig
Jayne Hunt	Llais y Goedwig
Rebecca Brough	Ramblers Cymru
Roger Thomas	WEL
Liz Smith	WEL
Rory Francis	WEL
Karen Whitfield	WEL
Susan Evans	WEL
Llinos Price	WEL

This session was led by Ele Hicks, Policy, Engagement and Research Manager at Diverse Cymru.

Ele started the session by going through some of the key things to consider when designing accessible places and services (please see accompanying slides).

The following discussion picked up on a range of considerations as participants were involved in a mix of on the ground project work and more policy focused work. For ease I have themed the issues as much as possible.

Processes and planning for inclusive spaces, projects and services

- Members were interested in learning more about Equality Impact Assessments, how to prepare and use these and this was identified as a subject for possible further training.
- Later, equality, diversity and inclusion monitoring and evaluation were also raised as possible future training topics that would be helpful.
- Members discussed the provision of quiet spaces on their sites/at events. Llais y Goedwig already does this with their groups and ensures visitors are told that there is a quiet space available and it is clearly signposted as such. Quiet spaces can be used to give people chance to reflect and "step away" and get some space/reduce sensory overload if they need to, as well as being a place where people could pray.
- There were several questions about how best to start engagement for new projects and how to reach out to communities in that area.
- Ele recommended starting by contacting local Community Voluntary Councils (CVCs) to identify which main community groups are active in the area that the project or site focuses on. Wales Council for Voluntary Action (or National Council for Voluntary Organisations in England) should be able to provide this information at a national level too.
- Next, engagement with representatives from the communities in the area is key, to understand how those communities like to engage, what they might get out of the project and any communications methods or event spaces that are preferred or are best avoided when undertaking initial engagement or scoping exercises. Whilst not definitive, this should give a good basis to start with, and will also help identify any barriers to engagement, e.g. the need for expenses, transport issues, interpretation, that need to be considered and resolved.
- Building trust and relationships with your target audience/communities is very important and time should be spent on this. It won't happen overnight.
- Transparency is very important: if it is discovered that a barrier cannot be removed, the reasons for this must be clearly communicated and further discussions given time in case other solutions can be suggested.

Lack of affordability by itself is not necessarily a good enough reason and is likely to result in frustration and loss of trust from the community.

- Recognising the extremely tight funding situation that most projects are subject to, it is important to build an accessibility budget into funding bids to cover things that may come up, like expenses or interpretation.
- Ele reassured members that practical environmental projects would not be required to take actions that would compromise the environmental requirements of the project to provide accessibility. For example, it may not be possible for all parts of every nature site to be made fully accessible to everyone. But every effort should be made to consider how communities can participate in different aspects of the project. If disabled volunteers can't access one part of a site, can they access a different part, or could there be a digital aspect to the project, for example?
- Monitoring and evaluation for accessibility is an important part of the project and should be planned for at the beginning of any project or event.
- The group also discussed the importance of asking people if they have any accessibility or dietary requirements when they are invited to attend an event. Frame this as a positive question: "Do you have any requirements… or What are your requirements?" Don't just say, "if you have any requirements let us know" because this can make people feel as though they are being difficult. Getting refreshments wrong or not providing refreshments can make people feel excluded and can seem ungrateful, particularly if people have travelled to an event.
- Checklists are a useful way of making sure all accessibility requirements are covered.

Print and digital communications

The group discussed some good practice standards for written communications. These include:

- Use a minimum of 14-point font size, though there are a wider range of options for electronic materials if approached correctly. Websites can re-size fonts using screen readers and Word/PDF formats have zoom functions that can be used. Providing text only format can also be

helpful for those with assistance software. See the Learning Disability Wales website for a good example of how they have approached web accessibility.

- Formatting such as italics, bold and words written all in capital letters can make it difficult for people with dyslexia or visual impairments to read. Underlining should only be used for hyperlinks and bold should only be used for headings and titles, unless the document is a leaflet or poster that isn't text heavy.
- Text should not be justified as the artificial spacing between words can again cause problems for those with visual impairments.
- Clear and simple language is key – plain English courses are available to develop these skills, which include using active voice and removing unnecessary words.
- Microsoft Word provides readability statistics and checks accessibility in general. In recent versions of Word these functions are under the "Review" tab. You can check how clear and concise your text is (under "Editor") and add in alternative text descriptions of images used (using "Check Accessibility"), so that a screen reader can understand and describe them. Please remember that Microsoft Word editorial tools can be customized, which can cause errors if they've been customized badly at organisational level. There are other things to be aware of, for example, the tool checking for "formality" may not be appropriate if your audience is a local community, and you're trying to use less formal, relatable language.
- Some organisations, particularly when responding to government consultations, feel they need to use more technical or academic language. This is ok if government officials are your audience, but if you want members of the public to read and understand what you have said to government, provide a plain English summary or key points at the start of the document.
- Written communications can be tested with the communities they are aimed at before being launched, to ensure they are engaging and easy to read for their intended audience.

Remote communications and videoconferencing

- Members noted that there is no substitute for face-to-face communications in building trust and engagement. Not all communities have equal access to digital communications options.
- Covid-19 means that organisations have to communicate mainly or wholly through videoconferencing at the moment so some tips were shared in relation to using platforms such as Zoom and Teams.
- Ele advised that Zoom is currently better than Teams for engaging with individuals and community representatives that do not work for an organisation. This is because Teams requires an (often expensive) Microsoft 365 subscription and may not be affordable for individuals. Anyone with access to the internet and a device can use a Zoom link.
- Zoom also has good interpretation options for different languages, including the option to use a British Sign Language interpreter. You need an upgraded business package to access these features, but Zoom does allow free trials and you can upgrade and pay monthly, so this doesn't necessarily mean upgrading permanently.
- Teams is due to release a free simultaneous translation function and is improving its accessibility offer.
- It is important to remember that even a Zoom call may not be free to the user. Organisations should ask whether expenses would be helpful to pay for data usage when inviting community participants to engage via videoconference.

Resources

Information on accessible communications from Learning Disability Wales (particularly recommended by Ele):

https://www.ldw.org.uk/resources/

UK Government advice on accessible communications:

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inclusive-communication/accessible-communication-formats#:~:text=A%20minimum%20size%20of%2016,size%20is%20suitable%20for%20everyone.

W3C – website for the main web accessibility standards used in the UK and countries around the world:

https://www.w3.org/WAI/tips/designing/

UK Association for Accessible Formats:

https://www.ukaaf.org/

Plain English information and courses:

http://www.plainenglish.co.uk/services/training/in-house-courses-available.html

UK Government guidance on inclusive language relating to disability:

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inclusive-communication/inclusive-language-words-to-use-and-avoid-when-writing-about-disability

Language Creates Reality – helpful cards from a project to help people understand the importance of language when talking about Down's Syndrome:

https://www.languagecreatesreality.com/#main-header