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INCLUSION TOOLKIT

ANDE ASIA ACCESS & OPPORTUNITY
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About this Toolkit

The Inclusion Toolkit is a practical and operational entry point that helps organizations embed inclusion into everyday systems, policies, and practices. It supports teams working across HR, operations, communications, and program delivery to strengthen internal approaches to inclusion across gender, LGBTQIA+ communities, disability, neurodiversity, ethnicity, age, and socio-economic diversity.

Designed as a flexible, dip-in or dip-out resource, the toolkit draws on established global guidance and evidence-based practices. Information contained in this toolkit is collated from publications of various domain experts and organizations. It offers simple, usable frameworks that organizations can adapt to their context, with links to deeper materials for those who want to explore inclusion more comprehensively.

You can navigate directly to sections of the toolkit using the content guide.

Inclusion Toolkit Map

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Key Definitions

Clear and shared definitions help organizations build a consistent understanding of what inclusion means in practice. These terms provide a common foundation for policy development, staff training, communication, and program design. The definitions used in this toolkit draw from internationally recognized frameworks and standards, ensuring alignment with global good practice while keeping language practical and usable for day-to-day work.

Inclusion

Creating environments where all people can participate fully, feel valued, and access opportunities on an equal basis. Inclusion goes beyond representation to ensure systems, processes, and behaviors actively remove barriers and promote meaningful participation.

Adapted from United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNPRPD)(n.d.), The preconditions necessary to ensure disability inclusion across policies, services, and other interventions, Briefing paper to support UNPRPD Fund Strategic Operational Plan 2020–2025.

Accessibility

Designing physical, digital, and communication environments so that they can be used independently and safely by as many people as possible. Accessibility addresses barriers related to mobility, vision, hearing, cognition, language, and technology.

Adapted from United Nations(n.d.), Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) Article 9; World Wide Web Consortium (W3C)(2023), Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.2.

Representation

Ensuring that diverse identities, experiences, and communities are visible and accurately reflected across imagery, messaging, leadership roles, staffing, and program participation. Representation includes both who is present and how they are portrayed.

Adapted from UN Women (n.d.), Guidelines on gender-inclusive language.

Reasonable Accommodation

Necessary and appropriate adjustments or supports that enable an individual to participate on an equal basis without imposing disproportionate or undue burden. Reasonable accommodation is responsive to individual needs and applies to workplaces, programs, events, and services.

Adapted from Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) Article 2.

Universal Design

The design of products, environments, programs, and services so they are usable by all people to the greatest extent possible without the need for adaptation. Universal Design anticipates diversity from the outset rather than relying on retrofitting.

Adapted from United Nations (n.d.), Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) Article 2.

DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion)








A collective framework that promotes fair treatment, representation, and participation of diverse groups, while addressing structural barriers that create unequal outcomes. DEI work focuses on transforming organizational systems rather than placing responsibility on individuals.

Adapted from International Organization for Standardization (2021) ISO 30415:2021 Human resource management – Diversity and inclusion.

Use of Icons and Color Palette

Icons and color play a functional role in this toolkit, helping users navigate complex information quickly and consistently across sections. Each icon corresponds to a specific inclusion focus area - such as gender, disability, LGBTQIA+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, + indicates identities that are not covered by these terms), or rural access - allowing organizations to immediately see which communities are most affected by the policies or practices being discussed. The color palette has been intentionally designed to be accessible, high-contrast, and aligned with global inclusion norms, ensuring readability while supporting intuitive visual grouping.

These visual cues reinforce clarity, reduce cognitive load, and provide a coherent structure that users can follow throughout the toolkit.

Icon	Group
	Women & Gender
	LGBTQIA+
	Disability
	Neurodivergence
	Ethnic minorities
	Rural or Remote
	Age Diversity

Why Organizational Inclusion Matters

The Case for Inclusion

Inclusion strengthens organizational performance by creating environments where people can fully participate, contribute, and thrive. When individuals from diverse backgrounds feel recognized and respected, they are more likely to engage meaningfully in programs, collaborate effectively with colleagues, and build long-term relationships with the organization. This contributes to stronger trust, improved communication, and better decision-making - factors that directly influence program quality and institutional reputation.

Embedding inclusion also aligns organizations with global human rights frameworks and development standards, including CRPD, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Funders, partners, and regulatory bodies increasingly expect organizations to demonstrate credible and transparent inclusion practices, not only in program delivery but also in internal systems and culture. By integrating inclusion into operational routines, organizations reduce risk, enhance accountability, and position themselves for stronger partnerships and long-term sustainability.

Why Internal Policies Matter

Internal policies transform inclusion from good intention into consistent, reliable practice. They reduce reliance on individual judgement and prevent uneven or ad-hoc approaches across teams, ensuring that decisions about recruitment, communication, accessibility, safeguarding, and program delivery are grounded in shared expectations. Clear policies also help new staff understand organizational commitments from the outset, creating a predictable environment where rights, responsibilities, and support pathways are transparent to everyone.

As organizations grow, internal policies become essential tools for accountability and risk mitigation. They support alignment with national regulations, donor requirements, and international frameworks such as the CRPD and CEDAW, while providing mechanisms for reporting, escalation, and continuous improvement. By embedding inclusion into policy infrastructure, organizations protect both participants and staff, strengthen institutional credibility, and ensure that inclusion is not dependent on personal motivation or leadership turnover but sustained through formal systems.

Multidimensional Inclusion

Inclusion requires recognizing that people experience barriers differently depending on their gender identity, sexuality, disability, neurodivergence, ethnicity, age, or geographic location. A multidimensional approach enables organizations to understand these intersecting realities and design systems that work for a wide range of participants, rather than defaulting to assumptions based on dominant groups. This ensures that policies, communications, and programs do not unintentionally create exclusion for those already facing structural disadvantage.

By considering the needs of diverse groups - women and gender-diverse people, LGBTQIA+ communities, persons with disabilities, neurodivergent individuals, ethnic minorities, rural participants, older and younger people - organizations can create more responsive, equitable, and culturally safe environments. This approach reflects international best practice on intersectionality and aligns with guidance from United Nations Development Program (UNDP), UN Women, and global disability frameworks. It also supports stronger outcomes by ensuring that programs are designed for real-world diversity rather than one-size-fits-all assumptions.

Inclusion Maturity Model

Organizations benefit from regularly stepping back to assess whether inclusion is truly embedded in systems rather than carried by individual champions, and whether practices create consistent, equitable experiences for all groups. They also vary widely in how inclusion is understood, prioritized, and embedded into daily work.

The Inclusion Maturity Model provides a simple pathway that helps teams identify where they are today and what steps will meaningfully move them forward.

The Three Levels of Inclusion

Level 1 Inclusion-Aware



Level 2 Inclusion-Integrated



Level 3 Inclusion-Focused





Level 1 – Inclusion-Aware

This level reflects organizations with foundational awareness and early commitment to inclusion, but without formal systems or routines to support it. Actions are often ad-hoc or champion-driven, with good intentions but limited structure, consistency, or organization-wide application.

- Inclusion is recognized as important, but approaches are informal or reactive.
- The organization has basic non-discrimination statements; limited staff training.
- Actions may rely on individual champions rather than systems.
- No consistent tracking, policies, or procedures yet.



Level 2 – Inclusion-Integrated

At this level, organizations have begun embedding inclusion into formal policies, processes, and day-to-day operations. Practices are becoming more consistent across teams, staff capability is growing, and early data or feedback is used to identify areas for improvement and reduce unintentional barriers.

- Policies, guidelines, and day-to-day practices explicitly address inclusion.
- HR, communications, and program teams begin adopting inclusive processes.
- Staff receive periodic training; expectations are clearer and more consistent.
- Basic data is collected (e.g., gender, disability, or participation indicators).
- Inclusion becomes visible in operations, not just values.



Level 3 – Inclusion-Focused

Organizations at this stage treat inclusion as a strategic organizational priority, with clear leadership accountability and dedicated resources. Systems are intentionally designed for accessibility and equity, progress is measured and reported, and inclusion is embedded across governance, operations, partnerships, and organizational culture.

- Leadership actively drives inclusion and allocates resources to sustain it.
- Systems are designed using universal design principles and accessibility standards.
- Data is disaggregated and informs decision-making and program adaptation.
- Inclusion appears in organizational KPIs, reporting, partnerships, and procurement.
- Clear accountability mechanisms are used across departments.

Inclusion Maturity, Systems Change, and Organizational Capability

This selection of resources provides deeper context for organizations seeking to understand how inclusion becomes embedded within systems, governance, and day-to-day operations. Each document offers established frameworks, maturity models, or international standards that complement the toolkit's practical approach. These references allow users to explore underlying principles, benchmark their progress, and connect organizational practice to global rights-based guidance.

- [UN Country Team Accountability Score Card and Disability Inclusion](#)

The document outlines maturity stages and organizational capacity benchmarks.

- [UNDP \(2021\). Gender Equality Seal for Public Institutions – Guidebook](#)

pp. 17–22 describe maturity levels from foundational to transformative equality.

- [World Bank \(2022\). Disability Inclusion and Accountability Framework](#)

The document outlines organizational actions and accountability.

Maturity Reflection Points

Reflection points reveal gaps between intention and implementation, highlighting where policies, culture, or operations need strengthening as organizations move across maturity levels. They also encourage teams to evaluate whether decision-making, accountability, and resource allocation genuinely support long-term, systemic inclusion instead of one-off or reactive actions.

Women and Gender Equity	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are decision-making processes and leadership roles gender-balanced? • Are there safety, safeguarding, and anti-harassment mechanisms addressing Gender Based Violence (GBV) risk? • Are program or workplace schedules compatible with caregiving responsibilities? • Are gendered barriers (mobility, safety, norms, digital access) explicitly addressed? • Are gender-disaggregated data collected and used to adjust programs? 	<p>Signals of maturity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender analysis informs operations and programming • Gender is integrated into HR, procurement, representation, and partner selection • Women-led organizations and suppliers are intentionally included

LGBTQIA+ Inclusion

- Are confidentiality, name or pronoun use, and identity disclosure handled safely?
- Do policies explicitly prohibit harassment and discrimination on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, and Sex Characteristics (SOGIESC) grounds?
- Are communications and imagery inclusive without stereotyping or tokenism?
- Are facilitators trained to manage bias, microaggressions, and harmful language?
- Are programs adapted for contexts where LGBTQIA+ participants face legal or cultural risk?

Signals of maturity

- LGBTQIA+ safety is embedded in safeguarding and reporting
- Staff know how to create safe participation environments
- Representation appears respectfully across channels

Disability Inclusion

- Are physical and digital barriers systematically identified and removed?
- Are reasonable accommodations standardized, cost, and normalized?
- Are programs designed using universal design principles?
- Do policies reference CRPD-aligned commitments?
- Are staff trained in accessible communication and respectful interaction?

Signals of maturity

- Accessibility is embedded in budgets, procurement, events, and digital products
- Disability-led organizations or advisors are engaged
- Accessibility is monitored and measured, not assumed

Neurodiversity or Neurodivergent staff and participants

- Is information delivered in clear, structured formats?
- Are meetings or events designed with reduced sensory load options?
- Are expectations explicit - deadlines, instructions, communication channels?
- Can staff or participants choose alternative ways to engage or demonstrate progress?
- Are neurodiversity-aware performance and HR practices in place?

Signals of maturity

- Predictability and flexibility embedded into culture
- Managers and facilitators trained in neurodiversity-supportive practices
- No productivity or professionalism assumptions about neurodivergence

Ethnic Minorities

- Are materials available in relevant languages or plain-language formats?
- Do program norms reflect dominant cultures, excluding others unintentionally?
- Are staff aware of cultural protocols and power dynamics?
- Are community organizations involved in design and decision-making?
- Are harmful stereotypes avoided in communications and data collection?

Signals of maturity

- Culturally safe practice is visible across facilitation and hiring
- Representation aligns with the communities served
- Translation/interpretation is treated as a core requirement, not an extra

Rural or Remote

- Are programs accessible without requiring constant travel to urban centers?
- Are online formats inclusive for low bandwidth environments?
- Are participation costs (transportation, childcare, connectivity) addressed?
- Are eligibility criteria inadvertently urban-biased?
- Are rural organizations represented in decision-making processes?

Signals of maturity

- Rural participants can access programs on equal terms
- Outreach and partnership strategies intentionally include rural actors
- Digital access and hybrid models are designed with constraints in mind

Age Diversity

- Are communication styles suited to different age groups?
- Are assumptions made about ability based on age?
- Do programs consider mobility, energy levels, and life stages?
- Are multigenerational teams supported with structured collaboration norms?
- Are leadership pipelines open to both youth and older professionals?

Signals of maturity

- Age-inclusive hiring, facilitation, and program design
- Avoidance of ageism in expectations and representation
- Participation barriers for older people or youth proactively reduced






Policy Foundations

Strong policy foundations ensure that inclusion is applied consistently across the organization rather than left to individual interpretation. Clear policies help prevent harm, reduce bias, and provide shared expectations for behavior, decision-making, and accountability. They also signal organizational commitment to safe, respectful, and accessible environments for staff and participants. Policies form a stable anchor that supports continuity, transparency, and inclusion across all teams.

Areas that are covered in this section

- Core Policies - Inclusion & Non-Discrimination, Anti-Harassment and Safe Conduct, Code of Conduct, Safeguarding, Leadership duties and accountability
- Starter templates and policy drafting guidelines

Practical Considerations

Group		Key Considerations
	Women & Gender	Ensure policies address gender-based harassment and safety.
	LGBTQIA+	Explicitly prohibit discrimination based on SOGIESC.
	Disability	Include clear, actionable reasonable accommodation provisions.
	Neuro divergence	Support flexible communication and ways of working.
	Ethnic minorities	Make policies available in relevant languages or plain language.

Core Policies

Strong, inclusive organizations enable safe, accessible and equitable experiences for everyone involved, including staff, volunteers, partners, and participants across the program cycle. At an international level, key frameworks such as the International Labour Organization's Equality of Treatment conventions and the United Nations' core human rights principles provide a framework for organizations to protect individuals from discrimination, harm, and exclusion. These standards are not just for large institutions; they apply wherever people gather, work, or receive services.

The inclusion policies become fundamental to everyone, not only to leadership but also to frontline staff, to have a shared understanding of what is acceptable and what is not. Global guidance, such as the United Nations, highlights that clear workplace policies help define expectations, reduce ambiguity, and provide mechanisms for addressing harmful incidents. For organizations working with diverse groups, this is especially important in creating trust and psychological safety.

International standards increasingly recognize that a minimum policy set should cover non-discrimination, safeguarding, codes of conduct, and accessibility. The CRPD (Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities) and CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women) both call on organizations and governments to embed these principles in their operating procedures, not just their mission statements.

Cited from International Labour Organization (ILO)(2019) International Labour Organization's Equality of Treaties; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)(2006) The Core International Human Rights Treaties; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)(1979) Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

We have briefly explained a few policy areas below:

- **Inclusion and non-discrimination:**

Inclusion and non-discrimination policies ensure that everyone engaging with the organization is protected from discrimination, provided with necessary affirmative action, and granted equal opportunities. At the basic level, this often involves declarations of equal opportunity employment. As organizations approach inclusion maturity, they can develop specific policies to institutionalize inclusion and anti discrimination. This can involve having dedicated policies for inclusive communication and accessibility and reasonable accommodations. In addition to the socio-economic categories mentioned in this document such as gender, race, sexual orientation, age, ability, etc., organizations should also be mindful of potential discrimination arising from regional contexts they operate in. For example, color and caste in South Asia. Organizations can promote inclusion through active steps to include people and groups who have historically been left out.

- **Anti-harassment and safe conduct:**

These policies aim to ensure a positive and safe work environment for everyone involved. Harassment here can include physical abuse, bullying, stalking as well as sexual harassment. These themes along with anti discrimination and safeguarding can also be addressed under code of conduct.

- **Safeguarding policies:**

These policies aim to safeguard vulnerable populations from harm. These populations can include children, elderly, at-risk youth and other populations that are physically or emotionally vulnerable. For example, if your organization regularly works with children, it is necessary to have a policy for protection and safeguards for children.

- **Leadership duties and accountability:**

These policies fix responsibility and accountability as well as provide transparency. These can cover areas such as data protection, whistle blower protection, prohibition of bribery and corruption. At the basic level, organizations are encouraged to have whistle blower policy and data protection policy.

Please note that themes covered by policy documents often overlap with each other. For example, organizations can combine anti-discrimination and anti-harassment policies or opt to have separate policies. They can also choose to have a single code of conduct that defines standards of behavior and professional conduct expected from all the staff and collaborators covering diverse policy areas in line with the organizational ethics and aimed at achieving the organizational goals.

Adapted from International Labour Organization (ILO)(2023), Guidance on Inclusive HR Practices; United Nations (2006), Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; United Nations (1979), Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).







Practical Framework for Organizations

Four key steps for organizations to develop and adopt inclusive policies.

Steps	Practical Actions
Step (1)	<p>Foundational Policies</p> <p>Organizations should ensure the following core policies are in place:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusion & Non-Discrimination <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Clear commitment to equal opportunity and zero discrimination • Code of Conduct <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Defines respectful behavior and consequences for misconduct • Safeguarding <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Protects participants from harm, abuse, or exploitation • Accessibility Commitments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Reduces physical, digital, and communication barriers

Steps	Practical Actions
Step (2)	<p>Designing Inclusion Measurement</p> <p>Organizations should apply additional measures based on relevant needs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Gender-based violence (GBV) - safe design • LGBTQIA+ individuals: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Explicit protection and safe participation • Persons with disabilities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Accessibility and reasonable accommodation aligned with CRPD • Neurodivergent individuals: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Flexible participation formats and processes • Ethnic minorities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Multilingual and culturally responsive communication • Rural/remote communities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Regional inclusion and access support
Step (3)	<p>Implementation</p> <p>To ensure policies are effective:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate policies clearly to all involved • Train staff to apply policies consistently • Provide safe and accessible feedback or complaint channels • Regularly review and improve policies based on feedback
Step (4)	<p>Quick Self-Assessment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> All foundational policies are in place <input type="checkbox"/> Relevant targeted measures are applied <input type="checkbox"/> Staff understand and implement policies <input type="checkbox"/> Participants can safely provide feedback <p>If all are met, baseline inclusion is in place.</p>

Practical Considerations

Group	Key Considerations	
	Women & Gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design policies, especially gender-based violence (GBV), as a safeguarding risk. • Ensure the complaint process remains confidential to prevent it from becoming a burden on reporting.
	LGBTQIA+	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classify sexual orientation and gender identity as protected categories. • Avoid vague language that could be interpreted as exclusionary.
	Disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on removing barriers, not just providing "special" options. • Use disability-affirmative language.
	Neurodivergence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include flexibility in how people engage with policies - for example, verbal briefings alongside written documents. • Avoid overly complex or jargon - heavy language.
	Ethnic minorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer policies in relevant languages to your community where possible, or at a minimum in plain, simply worded text. • Avoid assumptions of shared cultural norms.
	Rural or Remote	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure policies are accessible offline. • Provide printed versions or phone-accessible formats for people who may not have reliable internet access.

Adapted from [International Labour Organization \(1958\), Discrimination \(Employment and Occupation\) Convention, 1958 \(No. 111\)](#); [International Labour Organization \(2022\), Promoting diversity and inclusion through workplace adjustments: A practical guide](#); United Nations (2006), Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; United Nations (1979), Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

Sample Templates

A basic policy should have the following components at the minimum:

- Date issued and Date revised if applicable as policies are not static documents and must change to respond to socio-economic and cultural changes.
- Purpose of the policy
- Scope of the policy - who is covered, what activities and spaces are covered (example, extended workplace)
- Key definitions as per international or national law. For example, definition of child as per national law in the policy for safeguarding of children.
- Implementation including reporting process, authority and how to respond to policy violations

We have also included some sample templates that you can use to design your own policies.

- [Tufts University Non Discrimination Policy](#)
- [The AFL - CIO Anti Discrimination and Anti harassment policy](#)
- [Ohio University Digital Accessibility Policy](#)
- [Catholic Relief Services Example Safeguarding Policy](#)
- [Transparency and Accountability Policy Oxfam Canada](#)

For more policy templates ranging from beginner to mid to deep dive, please see [ANDE Inclusion Resource References](#).

Operationalizing Inclusion

Operationalizing inclusion involves translating policies and commitments into everyday actions across people management, communications, procurement, and accessibility. It focuses on creating predictable and supportive routines that enable diverse staff and participants to engage fully.

In practice, this means turning policy commitments into the everyday experiences people encounter - in how organizations hire, onboard, communicate, and foster a culture of belonging. Small, repeatable shifts in work planning and delivery can strengthen inclusion in organizations of any size. This section helps teams identify where unintentional barriers may appear and how simple changes can improve everyday practice.

Areas that are covered in this section

- Daily operations
- Safeguarding
- Inclusive HR systems







Daily Operations

Change toward inclusion only happens when policy is translated into routines and embedded in daily operations and practices. Internationally, organizations such as the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) and the UN's operational guidance highlight the requirements of inclusion in routine processes, not just as an add-on or one-off training.

Policy considerations governing daily operations should include ensuring access and inclusion in meetings and events, creating inclusive workflows, holding individuals accountable for follow-through, and providing clear responsibilities. The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), although written for digital environments, provide useful principles for all operational levels: content and processes should be perceivable, operable, understandable, and robust for the widest possible range of people.

Adapted from [United Nations \(2020\), Operational Guidelines, UN Statistics Division](#); [United Nations \(2020\), Guidelines on Legal Identity and Civil Registration for Inclusive Development, UN Statistics Division](#); [World Wide Web Consortium \(W3C\) \(2008\), Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\) 2.0](#).

Practical Considerations

Group		Key Considerations
	Women & Gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be mindful of scheduling: avoid early mornings or late evenings, which can conflict with caregiving responsibilities or create safety risks during commutes.
	LGBTQIA+	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use inclusive signage and language in all communications (e.g. gender-neutral toilets, inclusive greeting conventions). • Small cues signal that everyone is welcome.
	Disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check the space to see whether it is accessible physically, including entrance, toilets, seats, before every in-person activity • Do not assume it has been checked before.
	Neuro divergence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain predictable routines where possible. • Give advance notice of changes. • Provide written summaries of verbal discussions so people can process information at their own pace.
	Ethnic minorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use plain, clear language in all communications. • Avoid idioms, slang, or culturally specific references that may not translate well.
	Rural or Remote	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design digital tools and processes to work on low bandwidth. • Provide offline or phone-accessible alternatives wherever possible.

Inclusive HR systems

This section focuses on the structural and operational side of the human resources while human and relational side of the work place will be covered under HR, People & Culture.

ISO 30415:2021, the International Standard on Human Resource Management for Diversity and Inclusion, highlights that HR systems are not neutral; they either reinforce existing inequalities or actively counteract them, depending on how they are designed.

HR functions such as recruitment and onboarding are common points of exclusion. Thus, organizations should put a monitoring process in place to catch and reduce bias in how they select candidates – this keeps decisions fair and consistent. It includes practicing bias-aware recruitment tools, formalizing assessment criteria, and supporting necessary accommodations for needed candidates throughout the recruitment process.

When it comes to an inclusive HR system, it is also important to consider having inclusive performance management and active attention to psychological safety. Inclusive performance management guarantees fair, transparent, and unbiased evaluation processes, with clearly defined criteria consistently applied across all employees. Meanwhile, psychological safety should be actively measured and reinforced through continuous listening mechanisms, such as engagement and inclusion surveys, as well as upward feedback on leadership.





Leaders must be held accountable for modeling inclusive behaviors and fostering environments where diverse perspectives and respectful dialogue are encouraged. Without such measures, written policies remain symbolic rather than transformative.



Cited from [International Organization for Standardization \(ISO\) \(2021, ISO 30415:2021 Human resource management - Diversity and inclusion.](#)

Key practices

- Collect accommodation assessment since before the first day, specifically before the role begins.
- Provide materials in advance and in accessible formats, including screen-reader compatible documents and plain language versions where relevant.
- Send detailed agendas in advance so participants and new joiners understand the level of interaction expected.
- Proactively flag accessibility features such as live captions, rather than waiting for individuals to discover or request them.
- Assign a named contact responsible for following up on any outstanding accommodation arrangements before the start date.
- Ensure physical and digital workspaces meet accessibility standards before a new employee's first day.
- Introduce inclusive workplace norms explicitly during induction – including how to request accommodations, how to report concerns, and what safe disclosure options exist.

Practical Considerations

Group		Key Considerations
	Women & Gender	Ensure onboarding clearly covers parental leave, flexible working policies, and pay equity mechanisms from the start.
	LGBTQIA+	Provide clear, confidential options for how individuals can share or choose not to share, their identity; ensure HR systems allow for preferred names and pronouns from day one.
	Disability	Provide and implement accommodations such as ramps, elevators, and accessible restrooms.
	Neuro divergence	Provide structured schedules and clear written summaries of onboarding processes; avoid information-dense induction sessions without adequate breaks or processing time.

Group		Key Considerations
	Ethnic minorities	Offer culturally aware onboarding that acknowledges different professional norms and communication styles without making assumptions or othering differences.
	Rural or Remote	Ensure remote joiners have full and equal access to all onboarding activities, introductions, and materials; avoid creating a two-tier experience between in-person and remote staff.

Adapted from [Ezeafulukwe et al.2024, Best practices in human resources for inclusive employment: An in-depth review. International Journal of Science and Research Archive, 11\(1\), pp.1286-1293.](#)

Safeguarding

Safeguarding within an inclusion context is protecting people, especially vulnerable individuals from harm, abuse, and exploitation. It is recognized as a fundamental responsibility for any organization.

Adopted from the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) on Quality and Accountability, this framework provides a globally recognized approach to ensuring organizations prevent harm, protect people's dignity, and respond to concerns safely and responsibly. It emphasizes accountability, safe reporting, and survivor-centered responses. CHS helps organizations create safeguarding systems that are practical, ethical, and trusted by participants.

Cited from [Core Humanitarian Standard \(CHS\)\(2024\), Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability \(CHS\), 2024 edition.](#)

Nine Core Commitments



Participate in decisions that affect them



Receive support that meets their needs and priorities



Feel safe and protected from harm



Report concerns or complaints safely and have them addressed



Access support that is respectful, inclusive, and well-coordinated



Receive support that improves over time based on feedback



Interact with staff who are respectful, competent, and accountable









Be supported in ways that strengthen their resilience



Trust that resources are used ethically and responsibly

Practical Considerations

Group		Key Considerations
	Women & Gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design reporting processes with gender-based violence (GBV) risks in mind. • Ensure that female participants can report to a woman if they prefer and that GBV referral pathways are known to staff.
	LGBTQIA+	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guarantee confidentiality at every step. • Disclosing an LGBTQIA+ individual's identity without their consent during a safeguarding process may heighten their risks.
	Disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure reporting channels are physically and digitally accessible. Train staff to receive disclosures from people who communicate differently, including those who use assistive technology or non-verbal communication.
	Neuro divergence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide predictable, clearly explained processes. • Let people know in advance what will happen after they report a concern so there are no unexpected steps.
	Ethnic minorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Handle all cases in a culturally safe and sensitive way. • Be aware of community dynamics that may affect willingness to report – including fear of stigma, family response, or community exclusion.
	Rural or Remote	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be aware of power dynamics in small or tight-knit communities where the safeguarding focal person may be known to all parties. • Consider an external reporting option for rural areas.

Inclusive Program & Service Delivery




Inclusive program delivery ensures that services and learning environments work equitably for participants with diverse needs and experiences. It emphasizes designing programs that actively remove barriers rather than assuming one standard way of participating.




This includes attention to safety, trauma-informed practice, and respectful facilitation. It supports organizations to use participant feedback and co-design to strengthen accessibility and relevance. This approach aligns with global good practices on accessibility, safeguarding, and participation, including guidance from the United Nations, development agencies, and human-centered design approaches.

Areas that are covered in this section

- Inclusive Programming
- Barrier Identification and Removal
- Trauma Informed Practice
- Co-Design with participants

Practical Considerations

Group		Key Considerations
	Women & Gender	Assess safety, mobility, and caregiving impacts.
	LGBTQIA+	Protect anonymity and ensure safe participation spaces.
	Disability	Provide accessible venues, materials, and formats.

Group		Key Considerations
	Neuro divergence	Reduce sensory load and provide multiple formats.
	Ethnic minorities	Honour cultural norms and include community voices.
	Rural or Remote	Reduce travel burden; offer offline/local access options.

Inclusive Programming

Designing inclusive programs has increasingly been recognized as a standard of quality, not just as an addition or extra. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the International Disability Alliance both highlight that programs must be intentionally designed for inclusion to avoid excluding people, especially those who need support the most. A meaningful, accessible program requires designing from the beginning, not adjustments at the end.

The CRPD specifically calls for the inclusive participation of persons with disabilities in all aspects of life to get equal access to others. The standard of “full and effective participation” has been adopted across humanitarian and development contexts with the aim of including all marginalized groups; it is more than participation but also removing barriers actively.

Cited from [United Nations Development Programme \(UNDP\)\(2022-2026\), Disability Inclusive Development Strategy of UNDP Thailand; International Disability Alliance \(IDA\)\(2022\) Applying CRPD standards to programmatic processes: A look at inclusive programming in practice.](#)

Barrier Identification & Removal

The first step in inclusive program design is to identify who may face barriers to participation. A simple way to begin is to ask:

- Who could potentially face exclusion or inadequate service from this program?
- What barriers exist across access, participation, and completion of the program?
- How can these barriers be removed early in the design process?

This approach reflects principles from the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and inclusive development guidance from organizations such as the World Bank and USAID, which emphasize removing systemic barriers rather than adapting individuals to fit existing systems.

Access Point Review

Stage	What to check
Reach	<p>Who hears about the program?</p> <p>Common Barriers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited networks, language barriers <p>Practical Actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare to use diverse outreach channels and platforms, and using simple and clear messaging is effective.
Apply	<p>Who can apply?</p> <p>Common Barriers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using complex forms, such as long ones, or requiring too much information. The limitation of only providing digital forms is also a barrier. <p>Practical Action</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a simple form, which only needs a short answer, and offer an alternative format, such as a hardcopy version or online application, which does not require internet access.







Stage	What to check
Select	<p>Who gets selected?</p> <p>Common Barriers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The selection result or outcome is biased or unclear criteria. <p>Practical Actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using transparent criteria, invite a diverse selection committee from different backgrounds and use the same structure to evaluate.
Participate	<p>Who can engage fully?</p> <p>Common Barriers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Considering the time, cost, or format of the programs, can participants fully participate? <p>Practical Action</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In order to participate fully, providing stipends can enhance participation, as well as flexible delivery options can lead to engagement by diverse people.
Complete	<p>Who finishes and benefits</p> <p>Common Barriers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Due to several reasons, dropout rates and unequal access to outcomes could be predicted. <p>Practical Action</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tracking the participant throughout the program and providing adaptable support can increase participation.

Practical Framework for Organizations

Adopted from the UN and disability-inclusive development practice, this approach provides a practical way to design programs that are inclusive from the start while recognizing that not everyone's needs can be met through one design. It combines mainstream inclusion with targeted support to ensure all participants can access, engage, and benefit meaningfully.

Approach	Example	How it fosters accessible programs
Mainstream Inclusion (design for everyone)	Training is conducted both in-person and online and uses simple language and flexible participation, such as discussion, chat, and small groups.	Makes the program accessible to a wide range of participants from the start, reducing the need for individual adjustments
Targeted Support (additional support when needed)	Prepare sign language interpretation, transportation support, translation, or allow anonymous participation for sensitive topics.	Ensures individuals or specific groups who still face barriers can fully participate safely and meaningfully

Practical Considerations

Group		Key Considerations
	Women & Gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schedule program activities at safe times and locations. • Inform women participants in advance to make arrangements. • Avoid requiring overnight travel without providing adequate safety.
	LGBTQIA+	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect participants' identities and avoid requiring people to disclose personal information to access the program. • Use private sign-up processes where relevant.
	Disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure materials are available in accessible formats (large print, audio, Easy Read). • Check the physical accessibility of venues before confirming them.
	Neurodivergence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer low-sensory options where possible, such as reduced noise, predictable structure, and clear visual cues. • Allow people to participate in ways that suit their processing style.
	Ethnic minorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Align program content and examples with participants' cultural contexts. • Avoid assuming shared reference points. • Where possible, involve community members in design.
	Rural or Remote	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Factor in travel time, cost, and connectivity limitations from the earliest design stage. • Do not add rural access as an afterthought; build it in from the start.

Trauma-Informed Practice

Inclusive programs should be delivered in ways that are safe, respectful, and responsive to participants’ lived experiences. A simple guide is to ask:

- Is the program predictable and transparent?
- Do participants have choice and control over engagement?
- Are facilitators equipped to handle sensitive situations safely?

This approach reflects trauma-informed principles outlined by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and safeguarding guidance from agencies such as UNICEF and UN Women. This guide provides six core principles of trauma-informed practices according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (U.S.).

By following six core trauma-informed principles, programs can create safe, respectful, and inclusive environments that support meaningful and equitable participation.

<p>Safety</p>	<p>Ensure participants feel safe both physically and emotionally throughout the program. Consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environment: Foster a respectful and inclusive space with clear agreements with the program. • Language: Use non-judgmental and inclusive language at all times to ensure the common understanding of all the participants. • Content: Avoid or issue warnings for potentially harmful topics where possible and provide acknowledgement letters if needed.
<p>Trust and Transparency</p>	<p>Build trust through clear and consistent communication. Consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expectations: Share agendas, timelines, and program expectations in advance to build trust. • Clarity: Understanding clearly how participant information will be used and stored in a professional way. • Consistency: Avoid sudden changes or clearly communicate when they are necessary.

<p>Choice and Consent</p>	<p>Respect participant consent and control over their engagement. Consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation: Allow participants to opt in or out of activities throughout the program. • Sharing: Avoid pressuring participants to share personal experiences; otherwise, make sharing optional. • Flexibility: Offer various methods for individuals to give their consent (e.g., speaking, writing, small groups).
<p>Empowerment</p>	<p>Recognize and strengthen participants' abilities and confidence. Consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengths-based approach: Acknowledge participant skills and experiences, which make them feel empowered. • Encouragement: Support participation without forcing it and ensure they understand that participation can foster empowerment within the team. • Feedback: Make sure to provide a concise feedback form in a way that is both constructive and positive.
<p>Cultural and Context Sensitivity</p>	<p>Respect diverse backgrounds and lived experiences. Consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusion: Use culturally appropriate and inclusive approaches where non-discrimination practices are found. • Awareness: Understand power dynamics and social differences to avoid the context's sensitivity. • Adaptation: Adjust the program delivery to local context and participant needs, such as by providing examples and case studies, which make them easy to understand.

Support and Referral	<p>Be prepared to respond when participants need additional support. Consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resources: Identify available support services even if they do not ask for them (e.g., counseling, hotlines). • Boundaries: Be clear about facilitator roles and limitations as well as roles and tasks beyond them. • Response: Respond calmly and appropriately to participant needs.
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Adapted from Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (2014), SAMHSA's concept of trauma and guidance for a trauma-informed approach (HHS Publication No. SMA 14-4884). U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Co-Design with Participants

Program shaping with participants through active participation and shared decision-making. It involves engaging diverse participants in designing, testing, and improving programs. This helps ensure programs are relevant, inclusive, and responsive to real needs.

Enable collaborative design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage with participants early in program planning to ensure their needs and perspectives shape the program from the beginning. • Prioritize engaging underrepresented groups to include and ensure diverse voices are represented. • Create safe, inclusive, and accessible spaces where participants feel comfortable contributing ideas since designing the program.
Use iterative feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gather feedback at multiple stages, before, during, and after the program, to continuously improve design and delivery • Refine and develop the program elements based on participant feedback rather than fixed assumptions • Clearly state how the participant feedback will influence decisions by communicating transparently.

Ensure fair compensation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Recognize participants' time, knowledge, and lived experience as valuable contributions to consider compensation.• Provide stipends, reimbursements, or other forms of value exchange to enable equitable participation.
Facilitate inclusively	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use multiple engagement formats (e.g. verbal, written, visual) to accommodate different communication styles.• Facilitate discussions in a way that prevents dominance by a few voices.• Actively invite and support participation from quieter or marginalized individuals.

HR, People & Culture





HR, people practices, and team culture shape how staff experience inclusion every day. This includes how people are recruited, onboarded, supported, and progressed within the organization, as well as how psychological safety and respectful communication are maintained. An inclusive HR approach recognizes diverse needs and removes barriers that can affect participation or performance.



This section brings together practical ways of strengthening recruitment, feedback, performance management, and everyday team interactions.

Areas that are covered in this section

- Inclusive recruitment and onboarding
- Inclusive performance management
- Team culture & psychological safety

Practical Considerations

Group		Key Considerations
	Women & Gender	Reduce bias in hiring and promotion.
	LGBTQIA+	Ensure HR systems respect identity and confidentiality.
	Disability	Normalize and streamline accommodation requests.
	Neurodivergence	Provide clarity on expectations and communication styles.

Group		Key Considerations
	Ethnic minorities	Recognize diverse communication norms in feedback.
	Rural or Remote	Offer remote-friendly onboarding and learning pathways.







Inclusive Recruitment & Onboarding

Recruitment systems often carry unintentional bias - not through deliberate exclusion, but through design choices that favor particular communication styles, educational backgrounds, or networks. Addressing this requires changes to both process and criteria.

Key practices

- Shift to skills-priority hiring by defining role requirements and competencies rather than credentials or prior pedigree.
- Use structured, evidence-based scorecards with consistent criteria applied to every candidate - Seedstars' Global Experience shows this approach is associated with significantly higher acceptance rates for underrepresented candidates.
- Introduce blind review at early application stages to remove name, gender, and other identity cues from initial assessments.
- Offer multiple application formats, such as written, video, and voice notes, to accommodate different communication styles and accessibility needs.
- Assemble diverse hiring panels drawing from different backgrounds, regions, and levels of seniority to counter single-perspective bias.
- Standardize pay bands and remove individual salary negotiation from early hiring stages to prevent systemic pay gaps from compounding over time.
- Actively review job descriptions for exclusionary language, gendered terms, unnecessary qualification requirements, or cultural assumptions embedded in how roles are described.

Identity-specific considerations

Group		Key Considerations
	Women & Gender	Prepare job descriptions for gendered language; ensure hiring criteria do not unintentionally penalize career gaps linked to caregiving.
	LGBTQIA+	Use inclusive language in all recruitment materials; avoid assumptions about pronouns, family structures, or relationship status in interview processes.
	Disability	Proactively ask all candidates whether they require any adjustments for the interview process; do not wait to be asked; provide materials in accessible formats in advance.
	Neuro divergence	Offer alternative assessment formats where possible; structured interviews with questions shared in advance allow candidates to demonstrate capability without being disadvantaged by the format itself.
	Ethnic minorities	Review whether networks and channels used for recruitment systematically exclude certain communities; consider partnerships with organizations that reach underrepresented or marginalized groups.
	Rural or Remote	Ensure that application and interview processes are accessible remotely; avoid requiring in-person stages that create unnecessary geographic barriers.

Adapted from [International Labour Organization \(2022\), Promoting diversity and inclusion through workplace adjustments: A practical guide](#); [International Labour Organization \(2019\), General principles and operational guidelines for fair recruitment and definition of recruitment fees and related costs](#).



Inclusive Performance Management






Performance systems can unintentionally disadvantage people whose working styles, life circumstances, or access needs differ from an assumed norm. Inclusive performance management focuses on outcomes and growth rather than visibility or conformity.

Key practices

- Track attendance and performance data disaggregated by demographic group to identify patterns that may reflect design barriers rather than individual capability.
- When performance issues emerge, ask first whether the system or format is creating the barrier - not whether something is wrong with the individual.
- Adapt formats and tasks when accessibility barriers are identified – performance often normalizes when the design barrier is removed.
- Use monitoring and evaluation as a real-time adaptation tool rather than an endpoint measurement – spot patterns early and adjust accordingly.
- Shift from activity-based metrics to outcome and barrier-based metrics that reflect real change rather than mere participation.
- Use engagement and inclusion surveys disaggregated by identity group to track whether inclusion is experienced equally across the organization.
- Collect and track data regularly and review organizational progress annually.
- Apply accountability tools such as gender markers to track progress against inclusion commitments.

Identity-specific considerations

Group		Key Considerations
	Women & Gender	Track promotion and progression data disaggregated by gender; investigate and address patterns where women are progressing more slowly than peers despite equivalent performance.
	LGBTQIA+	Ensure performance processes do not inadvertently expose individuals who have not chosen to disclose their identity; be cautious with peer feedback structures that could be misused.

Group		Key Considerations
	Disability	When staff or participants appear to underperform, investigate whether the format or system is creating an accessibility barrier before drawing conclusions about capability; adapting the format has been shown to normalize performance outcomes.
	Neuro divergence	Consider whether standard performance formats such as lengthy written self-assessments or high-pressure review meetings accurately capture contribution; offer alternative formats where possible.
	Ethnic minorities	Examine whether informal networks and sponsorship systems that support progression are equally accessible to staff from minority backgrounds.
	Rural or Remote	Ensure remote workers have equal access to visibility, development opportunities, and progression pathways; actively counter proximity bias where in-person staff are more likely to be noticed and promoted.
	Age Diversity	Ensure performance criteria do not favor particular career stages; recognize the value of both experience and adaptability across different age groups.

Team Culture & Psychological Safety







Psychological safety - the sense that one can speak up, ask questions, make mistakes, and be oneself without fear of punishment or humiliation - is a foundational condition for inclusion. Without it, policies and practices have limited impact. Research by Amy Edmondson (1999) emphasizes the role of psychological safety in creating inclusive, high-performing teams. Similarly, frameworks from the International Labour Organization and the International Organization for Standardization (ISO 30415) highlight the importance of structured, inclusive HR practices.


Cited from Edmondson, A., 1999. Psychological safety and learning behavior in work teams. Administrative science quarterly, 44(2), pp.350-383.

Key practices

- Establish multiple channels for raising concerns – anonymous surveys, peer advocates, one-on-one meetings, and written feedback options – recognizing that not everyone feels safe giving direct feedback.
- Offer multiple ways to provide input such as written responses, voice messages, and one-on-one calls, recognizing that people may feel unsafe giving direct feedback through standard channels.
- Send meeting agendas and materials at least 48 hours in advance with clear objectives, allowing participants to prepare and engage meaningfully.
- Use multiple communication methods during meetings – verbal discussion, chat functions, written responses – to accommodate different participation styles.
- Rotate facilitation and speaking roles in meetings to distribute airtime and signal that all voices are valued.
- Establish clear timelines for addressing concerns raised and provide regular updates on progress.
- Create structured processes that actively seek diverse perspectives before making decisions.
- Build in specific checkpoints to identify whose voices are missing and create pathways for meaningful participation.
- Respond visibly and consistently to reports of exclusion, discrimination, or harassment – the speed and seriousness of organizational response shapes whether people feel safe to raise concerns in future.
- Make decision-making systems visible and accessible to people from different backgrounds and identities.

Identity-specific considerations

Group		Key Considerations
	Women & Gender	<p>Address cultures of interruption, credit-taking, and informal exclusion from decision-making networks that can undermine women's sense of belonging even in formally inclusive organizations.</p>
	LGBTQIA+	<p>Create explicit signals – such as visible ally networks, inclusive language in communications, and clear anti-discrimination policies – that the organization is safe for LGBTQIA+ staff; do not assume safety is felt without actively building it.</p>
	Disability	<p>Ensure that requesting accommodations or disclosing a disability does not carry career risk; this requires both policy protection and visible cultural normalization; provide materials in advance and in accessible formats to allow extra processing time.</p>
	Neurodivergence	<p>Recognize that standard professional norms around eye contact, small talk, or meeting participation may not reflect neurodivergent communication styles; create space for different ways of engaging and contributing.</p>
	Ethnic minorities	<p>Acknowledge and address experiences of microaggressions, tokenism, and cultural erasure; ensure that staff from minority backgrounds are not expected to represent or educate on behalf of their entire community.</p>
	Rural or Remote	<p>Guard against remote workers feeling invisible or excluded from informal culture and decision-making; intentional inclusion in team communications and social rituals matters significantly.</p>

Group		Key Considerations
	<p>Age Diversity</p>	<p>Ensure that both younger and older staff feel equally empowered to speak up; avoid cultures where seniority silences junior voices or where younger staff dismiss the contributions of more experienced colleagues.</p>

Inclusive Communications

Communication is the fundamental way for organizations to illustrate their values and commitment. Inclusive communications ensure that messages, visuals, and language respect the diversity of the communities an organization works with. This includes accessible formats, balanced representation, and non-stigmatizing language.

Organizations such as UN Women emphasize that gender-responsive communication should actively challenge harmful norms while promoting diverse identities and roles. UN Women's Guidelines for the use of language as a driver of equality and inclusivity and the Washington Group on Disability Statistics both prioritize that languages and communication must represent communities authentically and provide information in various formats.

Representation matters too. Guidelines by UN Women and others show that stereotyped or under-representative imagery reinforces exclusion even when the accompanying text is inclusive. Communications that show only certain types of people, or that consistently portray women, people with disabilities, or ethnic minorities in narrow or stereotyped roles, communicate an implicit message about who belongs and who does not. Indeed, communication workflows help prevent harm and ensure that content aligns with ethical and inclusive standards.

The WCAG standard for digital accessibility has become a globally recognized benchmark, requiring that online content be perceivable (can be seen or heard), operable (can be navigated), understandable (written in clear language), and robust (works across assistive technologies). While WCAG was developed for websites, its core principles translate directly to all communication - print materials, social media, presentations, and verbal communications.







This section supports more intentional, respectful messaging across channels and materials.

Cited from [UN Women \(2025\), Gender mainstreaming guidance: Guidelines for the use of language as a driver of equality and inclusivity](#); [United Nations Statistical Commission \(2022\), The Washington Group on Disability Statistics: Data collection tools and their recommended use](#).

Areas that are covered in this section

- Accessible messaging
- Balanced imagery and visual assets
- Content writing practices
- Authentic and intersectional storytelling
- Addressing mistakes
- Social Media Practices







Practical Considerations

Group		Key Considerations
	Women & Gender	Avoid tokenistic or stereotyped imagery.
	LGBTQIA+	Use inclusive language; avoid stigmatizing references.
	Disability	Provide alt-text, captions, and accessible layout.
	Neuro divergence	Use plain language and lower cognitive load.
	Ethnic minorities	Represent cultural groups accurately.
	Rural or Remote	Ensure messaging is relevant for non-urban contexts.

Accessible Messaging

Respectful, accurate, and accessible communication ensures that information reaches everyone—regardless of language, ability, connectivity, or background. How an organization communicates signals who it considers part of its audience.

Practical Considerations







Group		Key Considerations
	Women & Gender	Apply flexible scheduling recognizing care responsibilities.
	LGBTQIA+	Protect confidentiality around names, pronouns, and identity.
	Disability	Ensure accessibility is budgeted and integrated routinely.
	Neuro divergence	Offer predictable workflows and clear instructions.
	Ethnic minorities	Adapt communications and meeting norms to cultural contexts.
	Rural or Remote	Provide hybrid or low-bandwidth participation options.

Key practices

- Use plain language - write clearly and simply, avoiding jargon, acronyms, or overly technical terms that may exclude readers with lower literacy levels or those reading in a second language.
- Offer multiple formats for all key communications - written, audio, video, and visual - so information reaches people regardless of how they best receive it.
- Apply accessible structure to all documents and digital content - including clear headings, sufficient color contrast, alt text for images, and logical reading order.

- Conduct regular representation reviews of communications materials to ensure the people shown and the stories told reflect the diversity of your audience.
- Share materials in advance to allow extra processing time for those who need it.
- Embed accessibility into the design of communications from the start - retrofitting is always more costly and less effective than building it in.

Identity-specific considerations

Group		Key Considerations
	Women & Gender	Avoid gendered language in all communications; use gender-neutral terms where possible and ensure visual representation reflects women in leadership and non-stereotypical roles
	LGBTQIA+	Use affirming and up-to-date terminology; avoid assumptions about gender or family structure in communications; include pronoun options in email signatures and registration forms
	Disability	Ensure all documents are screen reader compatible; provide alt text for all images; use sufficient font size and color contrast
	Neuro divergence	Use clear layout with consistent formatting; break information into short sections with clear headings; avoid busy or cluttered visual design
	Ethnic minorities	Provide translation of key materials where possible; use culturally relevant examples and avoid language that reflects only one cultural context
	Rural or Remote	Develop low-data versions of digital content - such as text-only emails or downloadable offline materials - for participants with limited or unstable internet connectivity

Adapted from global accessible communications standards, including: W3C (2023), [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\) 2.2](#); [PRCA \(2023\)](#), [Accessible Communications Guidelines](#); [UN Women \(n.d.\)](#), [Guidelines for Gender-Inclusive Language](#).

Representation







Balanced Imagery and Visual Assets

Images communicate who belongs and who does not. Tokenistic or stereotyped visual representation, for example, including a person with a disability only to signal diversity, or showing women exclusively in supporting roles can reinforce the very exclusion organizations are working to address. Balanced imagery goes beyond visible diversity to reflect how people live, participate, and interact in real situations. It ensures that no group is overrepresented, underrepresented, or shown in a stereotypical way.

Key practices

- Be clear about why you are using an image and what message it communicates before selecting it.
- Use photos of actual participants, teams, or community members where possible to reflect real experiences.
- Do not include individuals solely to represent their identity group; consider whether their presence reflects genuine participation.
- Engage diverse participants early in program design – not only when you need images.
- Always ask permission and explain clearly how visuals will be used, where they will appear, and for how long.
- Avoid editing images in ways that change meaning, remove context, or misrepresent reality.
- Have a diverse team review visual content before publication; consult community members when unsure.
- Regularly review materials to ensure they remain accurate, current, and respectful.

Identity-specific considerations

Group		Key Considerations
	Women & Gender	Avoid tokenistic or stereotyped imagery; show women in leadership, technical, and decision-making roles
	LGBTQIA+	Avoid imagery that exclusively assumes heterosexual or gender-normative relationships and family structures
	Disability	Show people with disabilities as active participants, not passive recipients
	Neurodivergence	Avoid imagery that relies on visual metaphors that may not translate across cognitive styles
	Ethnic minorities	Represent cultural groups accurately; avoid imagery that flattens or exoticizes cultural identity
	Rural or Remote	Ensure imagery reflects non-urban realities, not only urban or institutional settings

Adapted from [Odgers Berndtson \(2024\), 4 Ways to Make Your Imagery More Inclusive](#); [Inclusive Employers \(2023\), Avoiding a Tokenistic Approach to Inclusion and Diversity](#); [University of Wisconsin–Madison. \(n.d.\) Inclusive Communications Guide](#).





Content Writing Practices



Language shapes how communities are perceived. Words and framing that seem neutral often carry assumptions about who is “normal,” who needs help, and whose experiences count. Inclusive content writing actively challenges these assumptions.

Key practices

- Avoid words or phrases that stereotype, stigmatize, or reduce people to a single identity – for example, “the disabled” or “the poor”.
- Emphasize actions, contributions, and strengths; mention identity only when it is directly relevant to the content.
- Ask people how they identify and respect their preferences before writing about them or on their behalf.
- Refer to inclusive language and diversity style guides regularly; what was acceptable previously may no longer be appropriate.
- Share content with the people featured before publishing and be open to corrections.
- Highlight perspectives from people across different backgrounds, experiences, and seniority levels.

Identity-specific considerations

Group		Key Considerations
	Women & Gender	Use gender-neutral terms; avoid language that assumes professional or domestic roles based on gender.
	LGBTQIA+	Use inclusive and current terminology; avoid language that assumes binary gender or heterosexual norms.
	Disability	Use the language the individual or community prefers; be aware that both person-first (“person with a disability”) and identity-first (“disabled person”) language are used and respected in different contexts.
	Neuro divergence	Avoid deficit framing; describe neurodivergent traits in neutral or strengths-based terms where appropriate.

Group		Key Considerations
	Ethnic minorities	Avoid generalizations; use specific, accurate terms for communities rather than broad or regional categories.
	Rural or Remote	Ensure examples and case studies reflect non-urban contexts and do not assume urban infrastructure or norms.

Adapted from [SALTO Inclusion \(2023\), Inclusive Communication Manual](#); University of Wisconsin–Madison (2024), [Inclusive Communications Guide](#).

Authentic and Intersectional Story Telling

Authentic stories in inclusive communication reflect real lived experiences by recognizing that people's identities shape how they experience opportunities, barriers, and power. Intersectional representation recognizes that people hold multiple, overlapping identities that shape their experiences in different ways. Together, these approaches help organizations move beyond surface-level diversity toward communications that are genuinely honest and respectful. It is important to include these as a communication strategy to

- Avoid oversimplified or unrealistic storytelling
- Build trust and credibility with audiences
- Ensure programs reflect real needs, not assumptions

Before publishing any story, use the following checklist:

Question	What to look for
Is the story realistic?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shows both challenges and progress in a balanced way • Avoids "perfect or flawless success" narratives
Does it reflect real context?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Includes factors like location, access, culture, or resources • Avoids general or generic storytelling, which may mislead
Are multiple experiences recognized?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoids "one story fits all." • Reflects different pathways and outcomes
Is the voice authentic?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses direct quotes or real perspectives where possible • Does not speak for communities without input
Is it free from bias or stereotypes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoids "victim" or "hero" framing • Does not exaggerate or simplify experiences
Does it reflect intersecting identities?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shows people as complex individuals shaped by more than one aspect of their identity
Who is visible – and who is missing?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensures representation is not limited to a single demographic or experience type
Are visuals and language consistent?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confirms that images and text together communicate an inclusive and accurate message

Adapted from [Sustainability Directory \(2025\), Inclusive Storytelling](#); [Black Ops Consultancy \(2024\), Inclusive Storytelling: Sharing Narratives that Embrace Differences](#); [Prosper Strategies \(2023\), How to Respectfully Engage Your Stakeholders in Nonprofit Storytelling](#).

If a Mistake Happens

Mistakes in inclusive communications, particularly those that cause harm to marginalized groups, require a prompt, accountable, and non-defensive response. How an organization responds to a mistake often matters as much as the mistake itself.

- Identify what went wrong and what harm may have been caused, particularly to which group or community
- Acknowledge the feedback and thank the person who raised the issue; do not dismiss or minimize their concern
- Apologize clearly and directly; avoid vague, defensive, or conditional statements such as "if anyone was offended."
- Research the issue yourself rather than asking the affected community to educate you
- Take concrete steps to prevent it from happening again: update processes, review materials, retrain staff if needed
- Address the issue quickly and visibly to demonstrate accountability
- Ensure someone is clearly responsible for responding to and resolving the issue
- Shift sensitive conversations offline to support better understanding and resolution

Adapted from Odgers Berndtson (2024), *4 Ways to Make Your Imagery More Inclusive*; University of Wisconsin–Madison (2024), *Inclusive Communications Guide*, Strategic Communication Department.

Social Media Practices







Social media trends change quickly. Before managing organizational social media accounts, build sufficient understanding of current trends, platform norms, and community-specific language, particularly for communities your organization works with or represents.

Key practices

- Do not use terms, phrases, symbols, memes, GIFs, or emojis that originate from or represent specific communities without clear understanding of their meaning and context.
- Be aware that trending hashtags may carry meanings rooted in specific community experiences.

- Avoid humor, irony, or casual language that may land differently across cultural, linguistic, or identity groups.
- Form a diverse review team before posting, including people from the communities represented in the content where possible.
- Work collaboratively with visual designers to ensure images reflect real, diverse, and non-stereotyped representation.
- Ensure captions match the photo, provide clear information, and do not contradict or oversimplify the story being told.

Identity-specific considerations

Group		Key Considerations
	Women & Gender	Avoid casual or dismissive framing of gender-based issues; be aware of how algorithmic trends may amplify or suppress women’s voices
	LGBTQIA+	Use current, affirming terminology; be aware of platform-specific risks of content suppression for LGBTQIA+ creators
	Disability	Avoid inspiration-framing (“despite their disability”) and ensure content about disability is developed with disabled contributors
	Neuro divergence	Use plain language and avoid overwhelming post formats; limit use of emojis and flashing visuals
	Ethnic minorities	Be alert to cultural appropriation risks in trend participation; consult community members before using culturally specific content
	Rural or Remote	Consider whether content assumes digital access, urban context, or connectivity that may not be available to all audiences

Adapted from University of Wisconsin–Madison (2024), Inclusive Communications Guide; SALTO Inclusion (2023), Inclusive Communication Manual.

Accessibility of Social Media Content

Accessible social media content ensures that everyone including people with disabilities, neurodivergent individuals, those with lower digital literacy, and those using devices in challenging environments can access, understand, and engage with what you share. Accessibility is not an add-on; it should be built into every post from the start.

Images and Graphics

- Add descriptive alt text to every image; describe what is happening, not just what objects are present
- Never leave alt text blank – screen readers will announce it as “image,” which excludes blind and visually impaired users
- Avoid embedding important text inside images; if text must appear in an image, repeat it in the caption or alt text
- Ensure sufficient color contrast between text and background in all graphics
- Do not use flashing, strobing, or rapidly changing visuals, which can trigger seizures in people with photosensitive epilepsy

Videos and Audio

- Add captions to all videos; never rely on auto-generated captions alone – always review and correct before posting
- Include audio or visual descriptions in the caption for any important content not described in the spoken audio
- Provide transcripts for audio-only content such as podcasts or voice messages
- Avoid videos that play automatically; users should be able to choose when to start content

Text and Language

- Write in plain language; avoid jargon, acronyms, and complex sentence structures
- Use CamelCase for hashtags so screen readers can identify individual words – for example, #InclusiveLeadership, not #inclusiveleadership
- Limit emoji use; screen readers read every emoji aloud – place emojis at the end of sentences, not in the middle
- Avoid special Unicode fonts or decorative text, which screen readers cannot process correctly

Adapted from [Disability:IN \(n.d.\), Creating Accessible Social Media Content](#); [Access Living \(2024\), Guide: Basic Accessibility on Social Media](#); [Hootsuite \(2024\), Social Media Accessibility: Inclusive Design Tips](#).

Platform-Specific Considerations

The following practices apply across all platforms:

- Research hashtags and trending content before using; misuse can cause harm to specific communities
- Maintain a clear comment moderation policy and apply it consistently
- Never tag or identify individuals without their explicit consent

Platform	Best Used For	Unique Inclusion Risk	Unique Accessibility Feature
Facebook	Community groups, program updates, events	Weak hate speech moderation	SRT caption upload; auto-captions for Live
Instagram	Visual storytelling, program imagery	Algorithm suppression of disability and minority content	Caption sticker for Reels and Stories
LinkedIn	Professional networking, thought leadership	Gendered professional language norms; narrow definitions of success	Custom alt text for images
X or Twitter	Hashtags, real-time updates	High harassment risk; fast-moving trend misuse	SRT caption upload
Youtube	Training videos, testimonials	Inaccessible thumbnails; no audio descriptions by default	Closed captions; transcripts; audio descriptions
TikTok	Short-form video, youth engagement	Cultural appropriation risk; algorithm suppression of minority content	Auto-captions with manual editing
WhatsApp or Telegram	Direct messaging, program coordination	Privacy and identity exposure risk in group chats	Text summaries for voice messages

Adapted from Disability:IN (n.d.), *Creating Accessible Social Media Content*; GLAAD (2024), *Social Media Safety Index*; Hootsuite (2024), *Social Media Accessibility: Inclusive Design Tips*.




Handling Comments Practices


Marginalized groups are more likely to experience harassment, discrimination, and silencing in online spaces, and organizations have a responsibility to create safer environments. Therefore, this session provides an organization with practices for responding to comments, especially negative ones.

Key practices

- Respond within 24 hours where possible, using a friendly and respectful tone.
- Be open and non-judgmental, especially with negative feedback; try to understand concerns and turn them into constructive conversations.
- Do not tolerate hate speech, discriminatory language, or targeted harassment; maintain a clear moderation policy and apply it consistently.
- Hide or remove content that involves personal identity or is off-topic, harmful, or inappropriate.
- Acknowledge mistakes, apologize clearly, and commit to concrete improvement.
- Moderate fairly and consistently across all posts and identity groups.

Identity-specific considerations

Group		Key Considerations
	Women & Gender	Take misogynistic or gender-based harassment seriously; do not minimize it as banter or opinion
	LGBTQIA+	Apply consistent moderation to homophobic or transphobic content; do not treat identity-based harassment as “debate”
	Disability	Be alert to ableist language in comments and apply moderation policy consistently

Group		Key Considerations
	Ethnic minorities	Address racial slurs and discriminatory generalizations promptly and visibly

Adapted from GLAAD (2024), Social Media Safety Index; University of Wisconsin–Madison (2024), Inclusive Communications Guide, Strategic Communication Department.

Inclusive Social Media Metrics and Evaluation

Measuring whether social media content is genuinely reaching and resonating with diverse audiences is an important part of inclusive communication. Without evaluation, organizations risk assuming their content is inclusive without evidence.

What to track:

- Reach and engagement across different content, are posts featuring diverse communities performing differently from others?
- Audit key insights from the dashboard with a focus on gender ratio, demographics, age range, and many more.
- Actively invite feedback from community members on whether the content feels representative, respectful, and relevant
- Comment monitoring: track whether certain posts attract discriminatory or harmful responses that require moderation

How to improve:

- Use feedback and data to make concrete changes to content strategy, not just to report on it
- Build representation reviews into regular communications planning cycles
- If certain groups are consistently absent from your content, identify why; is it a gap in outreach, content, or visual assets?

Adapted from SALTO Inclusion (2023), Inclusive Communication Manual; University of Wisconsin–Madison (2024), Inclusive Communications Guide, Strategic Communication Department.

Community Engagement and Co-Creation

Genuinely inclusive social media communication goes beyond avoiding harm; it actively involves the communities being represented in creating and shaping content. Speaking about communities rather than with them reinforces the power imbalances that inclusion work seeks to address.

- Involve community members in content creation from the start, not only to review content after it has been drafted
- Amplify existing voices from the communities you work with; share, repost, and credit community-led content where possible
- Compensate community members fairly for their time and contribution to content creation
- Be transparent about how community input will be used and review content before it is published
- Do not engage communities only during awareness days or campaigns; build ongoing relationships
- Be honest about the limits of your organization's knowledge; and seek guidance when you do not have the lived experience to represent a community accurately

Adapted from SALTO Inclusion (2023), *Inclusive Communication Manual*; [Inclusive Employers \(2023\), *Avoiding a Tokenistic Approach to Inclusion and Diversity*](#).

Accessibility & Reasonable Accommodation

In CRPD, particularly, Articles 2 and 9 establish that organizations must take appropriate steps to ensure individuals with disabilities can access physical environments, information, communications, and services on an equal basis with others. The international standard on reasonable accommodation ensures that adjustments are made for an individual's specific needs, serving as a legal obligation under many national laws and a recognized good practice standard globally.

"Accessibility" refers to ensuring persons with disabilities can live independently and participate fully in all aspects of programs, and "reasonable accommodation" means making meaningful adjustments that remove a specific barrier for a specific person without placing a disproportionate burden on the organization. For inclusion policies, this often means creative, low-cost solutions rather than expensive infrastructure changes.

Importantly, when it comes to accessibility, it also includes digital accessibility, communication accessibility, and the design of information. An organization that provides accessible venues but sends out communications in inaccessible formats has only partially met its obligations.

Cited from [United Nations \(n.d.\), Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Optional Protocol.](#)

Areas that are covered in this section

- Types of reasonable accommodations
- Venue access and mobility considerations
- Digital tools that meet WCAG 2.2
- Accessible documents and slides







Types of Reasonable Accommodation with Practical Actions

Job design, recruitment or selection, and onboarding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share job announcements in accessible formats • Collaborate with Organizations of Persons with Disabilities for outreach • Ask shortlisted candidates about access needs in a respectful way • Provide interpretation (e.g., sign language) or alternative interview formats • Allow extra time or flexible onboarding support
Flexible Working Arrangements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer remote or hybrid work options where possible • Being flexible with working hours • Adjust schedules based on individual needs • Reduce unnecessary travel requirements
Assistive Technology & Equipment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide basic assistive tools (screen readers, captions, text-to-speech) • Allow staff to use their own assistive devices • Consult the individual on what works best • Explore local suppliers or low-cost alternatives
Accessible Documents & Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use clear formatting (large font, simple layout) Share materials in advance • Provide accessible file formats (e.g., readable PDFs, Word) • Use plain language and avoid complex jargon
Interpretation & Communication Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrange sign language interpretation when needed • Provide captions for online meetings • Use visual, written, and verbal communication together • Confirm preferred communication methods with participants

<p>Personal Assistance Support</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow a support person or assistant if needed • Be flexible with roles and responsibilities where appropriate • Respect confidentiality and autonomy of the individual
<p>Accessible Premises & Environment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choose venues with ramps, accessible toilets, and clear pathways • Avoid spaces with stairs, narrow doors, or heavy access barriers • Keep spaces uncluttered and easy to navigate • Provide quiet or low-sensory areas where possible
<p>Accessible Transportation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Select venues that are easy to reach by public transportation • Provide transport support where needed • Allow alternative travel options (e.g., car instead of flight if needed) • Reduce travel requirements through online options
<p>Accessible Housing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support staff in finding accessible accommodation • Consider proximity to the workplace • Offer remote work if accessible housing is limited
<p>Medical & Wellbeing Needs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow time for medical appointments or care needs • Provide flexibility in workload during health-related situations • Support access to local medical or well-being services where possible

Adapted from [UN Women \(n.d.\), Accessibility and Reasonable Accommodation.](#)

Practical Considerations

Group		Key Considerations
	Women & Gender	Ensure safe navigation to and from venues - well-lit areas, safe transport options, and the option to attend without disclosing personal travel details publicly.
	LGBTQIA+	Provide discreet pathways for accommodation requests so people do not need to publicly disclose their identity or needs to access support.
	Disability	Proactively check physical facilities: step-free access, accessible toilets, clear signage, adequate lighting, and quiet spaces for sensory needs.
	Neuro divergence	Offer sensory adjustments as a standard option – not just when someone specifically asks. This normalizes access and reduces the burden on individuals to self-identify.
	Ethnic minorities	Provide multilingual signage and translated materials in key languages relevant to your community. Plain language versions are valuable for everyone.
	Rural or Remote	Develop offline alternatives for digital accommodation processes. Ensure people in remote areas can make requests by phone and receive responses in accessible formats.

Adapted from United Nations (2006), Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Optional Protocol; UN Women (n.d.), Accessibility and Reasonable Accommodation.

Accessibility

Accessibility moves organizations from reactive adjustments to proactive design that anticipates diverse needs. This section delves deeper into essential, achievable accessibility practices that strengthen participation across programs and operations. It provides practical routines that most organizations can apply with low or no cost.

- **Physical Accessibility**

Physical accessibility means ensuring that all individuals can safely and easily use physical spaces. This includes accessible entrances, ramps, clear signage, and safe movement within the venue. Planning ahead helps everyone participate fully and comfortably.

- **Digital Accessibility**

Digital accessibility means making sure all online content - such as websites, videos, and documents is easy for everyone to use, including people with disabilities. This includes using captions, clear text, and accessible formats so no one is left out. It should be considered from the start when creating digital materials.

Given below are frameworks for physical and digital accessibility based on Reach, Enter, Circulate, Use and Exit (RECUE). Please note the following while using this guide:

- This is a general framework. Adaptation can be made based on the specific needs of your workplace or venue.
- Involve people with disabilities in the assessment process for a more comprehensive understanding of accessibility barriers.
- Continuously monitor and improve accessibility measures to ensure inclusivity for everyone.

Physical Accessibility Assessment

One of the simplest strategies to begin your inclusive workplace is to ensure your venue is accessible. A very simple guide is to ask:

1. How do we access the venue?
2. How do we move around when inside and use the facilities?
3. How do we get out?

This guide provides a simplified framework for assessing physical accessibility in workplaces and event venues, considering a diverse range of disabilities.

Key Area	Practical Considerations
<p>Reach</p>	<p>This refers to how easily people with disabilities can get to and find the location. Consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parking: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Availability of designated accessible parking spaces close to the main entrance. Ensure adequate width for car transfers and van-accessible spaces. • Public Transportation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Proximity to accessible public transport stops. Consider drop-off and pick-up zones close to accessible entrances. • Signage: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Clear and prominent signage with directions from drop-off points. Signage should be at an appropriate height, with large fonts and contrasting colors for visual impairments. Consider tactile maps for visually impaired visitors.
<p>Enter</p>	<p>This focuses on how easily people with disabilities can enter the building. Consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entrance: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Accessible main entrance with automatic doors or a lowered threshold for easy access. Consider wider doorways to accommodate wheelchairs and mobility aids. • Level Changes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Ramps with proper handrails on both sides for navigating any level changes between the entrance and the rest area or primary venue space. Ensure appropriate gradients and non-slip surfaces. • Elevators: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Elevators with accessible controls and clear signage indicating floor levels with Braille and audio announcements.

Key Area	Practical Considerations
<p>Circulate</p>	<p>This assesses the ability of people with disabilities to move around comfortably and safely within the space. Consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corridors: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Wide corridors with enough space for wheelchairs and mobility aids to maneuver comfortably. Ensure clear pathways free from clutter and obstacles. • Flooring: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Non-slip, even flooring surfaces without sudden changes in texture or height. Consider avoiding carpeting in high-traffic areas. • Restrooms: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Accessible restrooms with grab bars near toilets and sinks. Ensure adequate space for maneuvering wheelchairs and ample turning radius. Consider lowering sink heights and providing accessible stall doors.
<p>Use</p>	<p>This evaluates the accessibility of features and amenities within the space. Consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workstations or Seating: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Adjustable workstations for people with varying physical needs. Provide a mix of fixed and movable seating with armrests for those with balance or mobility challenges. • Doors: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Lever handles on doors instead of knobs for easier opening. Consider automatic door openers for high-traffic areas. • Signage: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Signage for rooms and facilities should be in clear, large fonts with contrasting colors and Braille for visually impaired visitors. Consider audio announcements for floor levels.

Key Area	Practical Considerations
Exit	<p>This assesses how easily people with disabilities can leave the building. Consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exits: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Clearly marked and accessible exits with wide doorways and proper signage. Ensure exits are free from obstacles and have functioning alarm systems with visual and auditory alerts. • Stairs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ If stairs are present, ensure they have sturdy handrails on both sides, with contrasting colors for better visibility. Consider providing accessible alternative exits like elevators for multi-story buildings.

Adapted from [Médecins Sans Frontières \(MSF\) \(2021\), Physical Accessibility Assessment Form](#); [Presentation by Ian Jones at the ANDE Asia Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion \(DEI\) Learning Series session 2: Mainstreaming Physical Accessibility](#).

Creating Accessible Physical Environments

Creating inclusive workspaces requires careful consideration of design elements. It is advised that you consider prioritizing accessible features in offices, meeting rooms, restrooms, and common areas, including sufficient space, clear signage, appropriate assistive technologies and color contrasts.

Key Area	Practical Considerations
Offices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Doorways: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Ensure doorways are wide enough (at least 32 inches) for wheelchairs and have automatic door openers or levers. • Flooring: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Use slip-resistant, level flooring with clear pathways free from clutter. • Workspaces: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Provide adjustable desks or workstations with ample knee space for wheelchair users. • Lighting: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Offer adjustable lighting controls to accommodate different visual needs.
Meeting Rooms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seating: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Include accessible seating with armrests and good back support, with some at tables and others along the walls. • Assistive Technology: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Consider installing assistive listening systems and projection screens for presentations. • Space: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Ensure adequate space for wheelchairs to maneuver around the table and throughout the room.
Restrooms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sinks: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Install sinks with lever handles that are easy to operate from a seated position. Provide space for wheelchairs users to roll under the sink. • Mirrors: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Mount mirrors at a lower level to be accessible for wheelchair users. • Signage: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Use raised lettering or Braille signage for doors and fixtures. • Stalls: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Provide accessible stalls with grab bars, a call button, and a clear floor space for wheelchairs.

Key Area	Practical Considerations
<p>Common Rooms</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Signage: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Implement clear and concise signage with high contrast colors and Braille for easy navigation. • Elevators: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ensure elevators have accessible buttons, audio announcements, and enough space for wheelchairs. • Break Rooms: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Provide accessible counters and appliances in break rooms. • Water Fountains: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Install water fountains with push-button or sensor operation at varying heights. • Fire Safety: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ensure fire alarms have both audible and visual components and provide accessible evacuation routes.
<p>Others</p>	<p>Accessibility tools and areas that can be taken into consideration.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make the outdoor walking path detectable and safe • Make the main entrance easy to reach and to recognize • Make sure access control system is accessible • Make your reception easy-to-access and detectable • Make indoor navigation easy and safe • Make your signage visible and readable • Specific provisions for equipment and materials accessible to the public

Adapted from Presentation by Ian Jones at the ANDE Asia Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Learning Series session 2: Mainstreaming Physical Accessibility.

Digital Accessibility Assessment

By following these RECUE principles, you can create a more welcoming and digitally accessible environment for people with a diverse range of disabilities.

Key Area	Practical Considerations
Reach	Clear website address or app download link, discoverability through search engines and relevant directories.
Enter	Easy login process, compatible with different browsers and assistive technologies.
Circulate	Logical layout, keyboard accessibility, clear navigation menus.
Use	Clear content, alternative text descriptions for images, screen reader compatibility
Exit	Logical logout process, ability to easily exit the platform.

Designing and Delivering a Disability Inclusive Webinar

Ensuring a disability-inclusive webinar is not just a nice to have as it directly affects how many people including people living with different types of disabilities can fully access, understand, and benefit from what your webinar is sharing. You may consider incorporating the suggested key areas and Practical Considerations into the design process and the delivery in order to make your webinar more accessible for everyone.

Key Area	Practical Considerations
Event accessibility	Begins with understanding how to make events digitally accessible, including platform and venue selection and tech infrastructure, online registration options, presentations, and materials.

Key Area	Practical Considerations
<p>Before the webinar</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotion: Clearly state the accessibility features of your webinar in all promotional materials. This could include details on closed captioning, transcripts, and alternative formats for presentations. • Registration: Offer an option for attendees to disclose any accessibility needs during registration. <p>This could include preferred formats for materials, sharing of presentation materials in advance or requests for assistive listening devices (if applicable for online platforms with a physical component). For example, you can consider including the following in the registration form: "To support your full participation, do you require any specific accessibility accommodation or assistance that you would like us to be aware of?"</p>
<p>Webinar platform</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choose an accessible platform: Select a platform with built-in accessibility features like keyboard navigation, screen reader compatibility, and live captioning options such as built-in AI tools (Android, Windows/Chrome), web-conferencing features (Zoom, Teams), and specialized AI services (Wordly) etc. • Test functionality: Test all functionalities beforehand, ensuring smooth operation of features like closed captioning and screen sharing.
<p>Hearing accessibility</p>	<p>While accommodations are individualized, some commonly used accommodations include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assistive listening devices • Captioned media • Extended time • Glossaries or dictionaries • Individualized (case by case) support • Frequent breaks • Sign language interpreters • Scribes to record signed or dictated responses

Key Area	Practical Considerations
<p>Content and delivery</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation Design: Use high-contrast colors and clear fonts for slides. Include alt text descriptions for all images and graphics. Avoid excessive text and focus on key points. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Preferred fonts: Arial, Helvetica, Verdana, and Tahoma (commonly used) ○ Font size: Minimum 16 or 18 (preferred) ○ Use sufficient contrast for text and background color: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ For normal text, which is less than 24 px or less than 18pt, Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) level AAA requires a ratio that's equal to or more than 7:1. ▪ For large text, which is equal to or more than 24 px or equal to or more than 18pt, WCAG level AAA requires a ratio that's equal to or more than 4:5:1. ○ Sample contrast checker (WebAIM: Contrast Checker) ○ Use meaningful and accurate hyperlink text ○ For graphs and tables, please provide a text description for screen reader users ○ For images, use alt-text ○ For audio and videos, please provide captions or transcriptions for users with low hearing ○ For image-heavy social media posts, use alt-text or text description ○ Use proper descriptive texts and alt text for the QR code. For more information about accessible QR codes, please see USE Accessibility Bytes No. 8: Accessible QR Code Implementation Section508.gov ○ If you are using MS PowerPoint, you can refer to the following: Make your PowerPoint presentations accessible to people with disabilities - Microsoft Support • Delivery: Speak clearly and at a moderate pace. Briefly describe any visual content you are sharing. Consider offering a transcript of your presentation beforehand or including it as a download after the webinar. • Q&A: Allow for multiple ways to participate in the Q&A session, such as typing questions in a chat box or using a designated phone line for voice questions (if applicable for hybrid webinars).

Key Area	Practical Considerations
Others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Record the webinar: Record the webinar with captions and make the recording available afterwards. This allows people who cannot attend the live session or require multiple viewings to access the content later. • Offer additional resources: Provide links to relevant resources for people with disabilities, such as information on assistive technologies or disability rights organizations. • Seek feedback: After the webinar, solicit feedback from attendees regarding the accessibility features. Use this feedback to improve your future webinars. <p>Remember:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessibility is an ongoing process. • Continuously strive to improve your webinars based on feedback and best practices. • There are many online resources available to help you design accessible webinars. • Look for resources from disability rights organizations or accessibility experts.

Assistive Technologies

Assistive technologies are tools, equipment, or systems that enhance the capabilities of individuals with disabilities. They help people with impairments to perform tasks that would otherwise be difficult or impossible. These technologies can be:

- Low-tech: Simple devices like pencil grips or magnifiers
- High-tech: Complex systems like screen readers or voice recognition software.

Additional examples include:

- For vision: Screen readers, braille displays, magnifiers
- For hearing: Hearing aids, cochlear implants, captioning
- For mobility: Wheelchairs, prosthetics, mobility aids
- For cognitive function: Speech-to-text software, memory aids

Alt text (Alternative text)

Alternative text, also called "Alt text", is a textual description for non-text content that explains the presence or function of an image on a webpage. It is inserted in HTML (Hypertext Markup Language) documents, which is very important for screen readers used by blind and visually impaired people. This is because screen readers read aloud this alternative text as a description of the image, so users with disabilities can understand what is on the website or document they are using.

- Low and / or impaired vision: Alt text describes the appearance or function of an image on a web page.
- Use of screen readers : Alt text is read aloud by programs called screen readers which are used by people with visual impairments and low vision.
- Image load issues: Alt text displays in place of an image if it fails to load, and is indexed by search engine bots to better understand image and page content.

Adapted from Publications Office of the European Union (2023), Alternative text.

Alt Text Guidelines

Alternative text should be both concise and meaningful to the listener. It conveys the purpose of an image, not every detail. Consider the following when writing alt text:

- Be concise – no longer than 120 characters.
- If the image is also a link, the alt text should describe the link target.
- If there is text in the image, include it in the alt text.
- Avoid redundant statements like "Image of" or "This is a picture of." A screen reader will announce that it is an image.
- If the image is already described in the surrounding text, the alt text can be very short.
- If an image is purely decorative, mark it as such (various methods depending on software).
- What is the context of the image? What meaning does it add to the page? Describe only what you expect visual users to get out of the image.
- Who is the audience? How much knowledge are they expected to have of the topic

Adapted from Colorado State University (2024), Accessibility Best Practices: Alternative Text.

Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.2

WCAG 2.2 covers a wide range of recommendations for making web content more accessible. Following these guidelines will make content more accessible to a wider range of people with disabilities, including accommodations for blindness and low vision, deafness and hearing loss, limited movement, speech disabilities, photosensitivity, and combinations of these, and some accommodation for learning disabilities and cognitive limitations; but will not address every user need for people with these disabilities.

These guidelines address accessibility of web content on any kind of device (including desktops, laptops, kiosks, and mobile devices). Following these guidelines will also often make web content more usable to users in general.

WCAG is primarily intended for:

- Web content developers (page authors, site designers, etc.)
- Web authoring tool developers
- Web accessibility evaluation tool developers
- Others who want or need a standard for web accessibility, including for mobile accessibility

WCAG 2.2 consists of thirteen guidelines organized under four principles. Websites must be perceivable, operable, understandable, and robust.

If any of these are not true, users with disabilities will not be able to use the web.

<p>Perceivable (Easy to see)</p>	<p>Information and user interface components must be presentable to users in ways they can perceive. This means that users must be able to perceive the information being presented (It can't be invisible to all of their senses)</p>
<p>Operable (Simple to use)</p>	<p>User interface components and navigation must be operable. This means that users must be able to operate the interface (the interface cannot require interaction that a user cannot perform)</p>

Understandable (Clear to understand)	Information and the operation of the user interface must be understandable. This means that users must be able to understand the information as well as the operation of the user interface (the content or operation cannot be beyond their understanding)
Robust (Strong)	Content must be robust enough that it can be interpreted reliably by a wide variety of user agents, including assistive technologies. This means that users must be able to access the content as technologies advance (as technologies and user agents evolve, the content should remain accessible)

Adapted from World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) (2023), Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.2.

Inclusive Procurement

Inclusive procurement strengthens equity across supply chains by embedding inclusion, accessibility, and representation into purchasing decisions. It helps organizations reduce risk, expand opportunities, and align suppliers with organizational values. Practical prompts support due diligence, supplier selection, and ethical sourcing.







The approach aligns with inclusive procurement that engages with small and medium enterprises to maximize economic, social, and environmental benefits in an equitable manner. In practice, organizations can also promote inclusion while engaging with suppliers, which prioritizes accessibility and employment equity.

Adapted from [European Commission \(2021\), *Buying Social: A Guide to Taking Account of Social Considerations in Public Procurement*](#); [United Nations Procurement \(2023\), *Advancing Inclusion with Disability-Inclusive Suppliers*](#).

Areas that are covered in this section

- Supplier inclusion criteria
- Diversified Vendor Pool
- Supplier due diligence
- Opportunities for disability-led or women-led enterprises

Practical Considerations

Group		Key Considerations
	Women & Gender	Prioritize women-owned suppliers
	LGBTQIA+	Review suppliers' anti-discrimination commitments
	Disability	Source accessible venues/platforms/materials
	Neuro divergence	Select intuitive, simple tools
	Ethnic minorities	Engage local or community providers
	Rural or Remote	Procure from regional businesses when possible

Supplier Inclusion Criteria

These are the standards used to select suitable suppliers based on efforts and commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. It also helps to consider inclusive practices such as accessibility, fair employment, and representation. These criteria help organizations to create more equitable and resilient suppliers.

- Demonstrates diverse sense of ownership or leadership (e.g., women-led, minority-owned, disability-inclusive businesses)
- Perform non-discrimination and inclusion policies in the organization
- Support through accessible products, services, or environments
- Shows commitment to fair employment and equal opportunity
- Holds relevant certifications or verified status (where applicable)
- Engages in ethical supply sourcing and responsible practices
- Ensures supplier information in a transparent way
- Supports local, small, or underserved businesses

Diversified Vendor Pool

A diversified vendor pool refers to the inclusion of suppliers from diverse backgrounds, sizes, locations, and ownership types to ensure equitable participation in procurement. It helps organizations encourage new ideas, stay competitive, and strengthen their supply chain by focusing on diversity, fairness, and inclusion in their purchasing practices. Building a diverse vendor base also contributes to broader economic development by expanding opportunities for underrepresented businesses.

Six Key Steps to Build a Diversified Vendor Pool



1. Assess Current Suppliers

Conduct a review of current vendors to understand the diversity profile, such as ownership, size, and geographic representation. It is also important to assess whether those vendors have shared goals, culture, and policies in order to understand the alignment. The international certification or accreditation to demonstrate commitment to diversity can also be checked. The most effective way to access this information is using scorecards or dashboards to track and compare these criteria and identify any gaps or opportunities.



2. Define Diversity Goals

Then, set clear and actionable goals for vendor diversity, including benefits and challenges. The measurement of progress, performance, expectation, and requirements while communicating strategically and enforcing diversity practices.



3. Expand Sourcing Channels

Actively seek new suppliers through diverse channels such as specialized directories, local networks, and partnerships with inclusion-focused organizations. Then, attending trade shows, events, and networking events can also help to cater to different groups and sectors as an active source.



4. Ensure Fair Evaluation and Selection

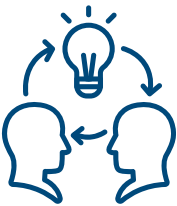
Once you have a list of potential vendors, implement standard criteria and goals to select them while avoiding bias or stereotypes.

Standardized procurement processes such as Request for Proposal (RFP), Request for Information (RFI), and scoring systems can be used to minimize and compare vendor rankings while involving multiple stakeholders in the selection process.



5. Build and Maintain Relationships

For the final step, develop long-term partnerships with diverse suppliers by providing feedback, support, and opportunities for growth. Involving them in planning can also enable the improvement of the vendor diversity program through innovation and improvement initiatives.



6. Share Organizational Understanding

For inclusive procurement to be institutionalized in an organization, awareness has to be created in all the departments including HR, procurement or supply chain, compliance and CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility). In the absence of a shared organizational wide understanding and coordination between departments, inclusive procurement risks remaining an aspiration.

Adapted from LinkedIn Community Contributions, [You're in charge of vendor management. How can you ensure a diverse pool of vendors?](#)

Supplier Due Diligence

Based on the Commonwealth Procurement Framework (Department of Finance, 2023), this section adapts due diligence principles for organizational use, with a focus on practical application and inclusive procurement.

Supplier due diligence is the process of accessing potential and existing suppliers to understand the capabilities, ethics, and alignment with values within an organization. It involves verifying claims and identifying risks, as well as ensuring procurement decisions are aligned with operational goals and commitments such as inclusion, transparency, and accountability.

Organizations benefit from effective due diligence in the following ways:

- Ensure suppliers can deliver quality goods and services
- Reduce legal, financial, and reputational risks
- Promote ethical and responsible business practices
- Strengthen transparency and accountability in procurement
- Align purchasing decisions with inclusion and social impact goals

Rather than being a one-time check, due diligence should be applied throughout the procurement lifecycle, from planning and selection to contract management and delivery.

Practical Areas

Capability and Performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can the supplier realistically deliver what they promise? • Do they have relevant experience and a track record?
Financial and Operational Stability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are they financially viable? • Do they have the systems and staff to deliver consistently?
Legal and Regulatory Compliance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are they properly registered and licensed? • Do they comply with relevant laws and standards?

Ethical and Labour Practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do they avoid harmful practices (e.g. exploitation, unsafe work)? • Do they demonstrate fair labor and inclusive employment practices?
Inclusion and Equity Considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are they owned or led by underrepresented groups (e.g. SMEs, women-led, Indigenous businesses)? • Do they demonstrate inclusive hiring or supplier diversity practices?
Supply Chain Transparency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do they rely on subcontractors? • Are risks present deeper in the supply chain?

Organizations do not need complex systems to start. Simple, repeatable actions include:

- Ask for evidence: registration documents, past work, references
- Verify key claims: don't rely only on self-declaration
- Use a risk-based approach: higher-risk procurements require deeper checks
- Document decisions: keep records of how and why suppliers were selected
- Include expectations in contracts: embed ethical, inclusion, and performance requirements
- Monitor over time: check performance, not just at selection stage

Adapted from [Australian Government \(2023\), Due Diligence in Procurement](#).

Opportunities for Disability-led or Women-led Enterprises

Procurement represents a crucial role in advancing inclusive economic growth. UN Women Headquarters Office highlights governments are the largest buyer in any economy, and their procurement decisions shape market access, business sustainability, and enterprise growth opportunities.

The procurement system fosters inclusion and participation among underrepresented groups such as women-led enterprises and disability-led enterprises while considering addressing structural barriers in access to markets, finance, information, and institutional networks. Evidence from initiatives led by UN Women and the Open Contracting Partnership shows that inclusive procurement reforms can significantly increase participation when supported by clear targets, transparent systems, and supplier-focused capacity building.

Cited from UN Women & Open Contracting Partnership (2021), Empowering women through public procurement and enabling inclusive growth.

Barriers & Challenges - 5 Cs Framework

One of the practical frameworks by IDRC called the 5 Cs framework also provides the limitations and barriers for women-led and other underrepresented enterprises from accessing public procurement opportunities.

<p>Capacity</p>	<p>Refers to limited skills, experience, and organizational readiness to compete in procurement processes. This includes gaps in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • proposal writing • financial management • understanding procurement rules • business formalization
<p>Complexity</p>	<p>Refers to overly complicated procurement systems and procedures that are difficult to navigate, especially for small businesses.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • long documentation requirements • unclear rules • technical language • fragmented systems

Cost	<p>Refers to the financial burden of participating in procurement.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • registration fees • compliance costs • bid preparation costs • cash flow constraints due to delayed payments
Communication	<p>Refers to poor access to clear, timely, and accessible information about procurement opportunities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lack of awareness of tenders • unclear eligibility criteria • inaccessible digital platforms • weak outreach to rural or marginalized groups
Corruption	<p>Refers to informal and unethical practices that distort fair competition.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • bribery • favoritism • sexual harassment or “sextortion” • lack of transparency in award decisions

Cited from [International Development Research Centre \(IDRC\) \(2025\), Landing government contracts: Boosting women-led businesses through procurement.](#)

Opportunity Area	What it Means in Practice	How It Supports Inclusion	Practical Actions
Inclusive Public Procurement	Government and large organizations intentionally source from women-led and disability-led enterprises	Expands market access and creates stable demand for excluded groups	Set supplier diversity targets; include inclusive eligibility criteria; simplify bidding processes, and ensure accessible procurement platforms
Supplier Diversity Programs	Structured initiatives that identify, register, and support underrepresented suppliers	Reduces structural exclusion from formal supply chains	Create certified supplier lists; run outreach campaigns, and partner with business associations and disability networks
Simplified Procurement Procedures	Reducing complexity in bidding requirements and documentation	Lowers barriers for small and emerging enterprises	Use simplified tender forms, reduce paperwork, allow alternative documentation formats, and provide step-by-step guidance
Accessible Digital Procurement Systems	Online platforms designed to be usable by people with disabilities	Ensures equal access to procurement opportunities	Follow accessibility standards (e.g., screen-reader compatibility, keyboard navigation, plain language interfaces)

Opportunity Area	What it Means in Practice	How It Supports Inclusion	Practical Actions
Capacity Building & Supplier Development	Training and mentorship for enterprises to meet procurement standards	Builds readiness and competitiveness of women- and disability-led businesses	Offer proposal writing training; mentorship programs; procurement readiness workshops, and coaching partnerships
Access to Finance & Pre-financing Mechanisms	Financial tools that support businesses in delivering contracts before payment is received	Addresses cash flow barriers that disproportionately affect marginalized entrepreneurs	Provide advance payments and guarantee schemes, and partner with microfinance institutions and impact investors
Prompt Payment Policies	Ensuring suppliers are paid within a fixed and predictable timeframe	Reduces financial strain on small and vulnerable enterprises	Enforce payment timelines; publish payment performance; include penalties for late payments
Inclusive Data Systems & Tracking	Collecting disaggregated data on suppliers by gender and disability	Makes inclusion visible and measurable	Track procurement participation, publish supplier diversity dashboards, and include disability and gender indicators

Opportunity Area	What it Means in Practice	How It Supports Inclusion	Practical Actions
Targeted Outreach & Market Engagement	Active engagement with underrepresented entrepreneurs	Improves awareness of opportunities and reduces information gaps	Conduct supplier fairs, partner with women’s networks and disability organizations, and run local outreach campaigns
Inclusive Policy Alignment Across Sectors	Coordinating procurement with labour, enterprise, and social protection policies	Creates enabling ecosystem rather than isolated interventions	Align procurement policies with SME development, gender equality strategies, and disability inclusion frameworks

Adapted from [UN Women & Open Contracting Partnership \(2021\), Empowering women through public procurement and enabling inclusive growth.](#)





Monitoring, Learning & Data



Monitoring inclusion helps organizations understand whether systems and programs create equitable experiences for different groups. It focuses on ethical, safe, and meaningful data practices that enable better decisions without causing harm. This section encourages learning-driven approaches to track progress and improve inclusion over time.

Areas that are covered in this section

- Ethical and safe data collection
- Meaningful disaggregation (gender, disability, location, etc.)
- Participant feedback loops
- Learning integration and adaptation
- Risk mitigation and consent

Practical Considerations

Group		Key Considerations
	Women & Gender	Collect gender data safely and respectfully.
	LGBTQIA+	Ensure confidentiality and voluntary disclosure.
	Disability	Track accommodation needs and responses.
	Neuro divergence	Offer multiple data formats (visual, verbal, written).

Group		Key Considerations
	Ethnic minorities	Provide translated or culturally relevant tools.
	Rural or Remote	Offer offline or phone-based feedback options.

Ethical and Safe Data Collection

According to the EU Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), there are two broad categories of compliance organizations need to understand: data protection and data privacy.

- Data protection means keeping data safe from unauthorized access.
- Data privacy means empowering your users to make their own decisions about who can process their data and for what purpose. This involves explaining why data is collected, how it will be used and the people's rights over their data in a simple, easy to understand manner and obtaining consent before collecting data.

GDPR lays out the data privacy rights and principles that all living humans are guaranteed under EU law. Organizations are obligated to facilitate these rights. To facilitate this, they must transparently and openly provide people with the information they need to understand how their data is collected and used. You can find a simplified version of the GDPR principles and practical purposes in the resources section.

In addition to GDPR, the organizations engaging in data collection should be mindful of the following:

- **Ensure representation of diverse perspectives:**
 - It is important to ask whose voice is heard and whose perspective is not sought. If required, undertake targeted outreach. Translate data collection instruments into local languages wherever needed.
- **Allowing diverse forms of data collection:**
 - Data can be collected in an anonymous or identified manner. Design data collection tools with accessibility in mind. Allow for multiple forms of engagement including in-person, online, text based or voice based (voice notes or Interactive Voice Response (IVR) based data collection).
- **Cultural sensitivity:**
 - The MEL team should be educated about the cultural context of the communities they work with and must be trained to engage in a sensitive and respectful way.
- **Sharing of learnings:**
 - The learnings must be shared back with participants wherever possible
- **Freedom to express identity:**
 - Provide multiple-select checkboxes or open-ended questions so that participants are able to express the full complexity of their identities. Also provide the choice of not answering.

Adapted from [GDPR.eu \(n.d.\), Guide to Data Privacy and Protection under GDPR](#); [Kaplowitz, R. & Laroche, J. \(2020\), More than numbers: A guide toward diversity, equity and inclusion \(DEI\) in data collection](#), Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Philanthropies; [Rella Kaplowitz \(2020\), 5 Best Practices for Equitable and Inclusive Data Collection](#).

Meaningful Data Disaggregation

The term “disaggregated data” refers to data that can be used to generate statistics and indicators for population groups defined by (or disaggregated by or broken down further into) one or more dimensions or characteristics (commonly sex, geographic area, and/or age). The results are referred to as disaggregated statistics or indicators. The entire process is referred to as data disaggregation.

Disaggregation involves breaking down data into smaller information units. When data are sufficiently disaggregated, multidimensionality and intersectionality of inequalities are better brought to the surface and analyzed. It is also used to understand who is being included or excluded. It ensures that programs can identify gaps and respond to the needs of different groups, rather than treating all participants as the same.

Adapted from global practice on disaggregated data and inclusive programming, including insights from the Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery (GFDRR), this section provides how data can be used beyond reporting but as a tool for continuous learning, adaptation, and decision-making towards program design and implementation progress.

However, collecting disaggregated data for inclusion may unintentionally lead to risks or exclusion, particularly in contexts where identity-related information (such as gender, disability, ethnicity, or sexual orientation) is sensitive in terms of social or political situations. In addition, many assessments focus on economic data or asset-based data, which ignore the lived experiences of women and other marginalized groups.

To address these gaps, organizations should integrate the data with participatory and context-sensitive approaches. It includes local communities' engagement to identify needs, using various methods to understand marginalized groups, and preparing actionable practices such as community mapping, need assessment, and local organization partnership to foster inclusion.

Adapted from [Asian Development Bank \(ADB\) \(2023\), Guidebook on Data Disaggregation for the Sustainable Development Goals](#); [Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery \(GFDRR\) \(2024\), Inclusive Community-Based Risk Assessment Practices](#).

Participant Feedback Loops

Feedback loops play a crucial role in supporting diversity and inclusion efforts by providing a platform for employees to share their experiences, perspectives, and suggestions for improvement. By collecting and acting on feedback from diverse groups of employees, organizations can create a more inclusive work environment and drive positive change.

An effective feedback loop is a continuous process where you collect feedback, analyze it, take action, and close the loop by communicating what you have done with the input. Organizations that do this well see measurable results: higher retention, more innovation, and teams that feel safe enough to truly say what is going on. Feedback can be positive in the form of compliments or negative in the form of critiques. Regardless of the sentiment of the feedback, organizations should always aim to close the loop.

Feedback loops can be conducted in different formats. What makes each format unique is who is providing the feedback and what changes the organization is going to make based on that feedback.

Organizations should keep in mind the following to ensure an effective and inclusive feedback process:

- **Set clear expectations:**
 - Explain the types of feedback you want, such as ideas for efficiency or safety, and clarify what you will not consider.
- **Ensure anonymity when needed:**
 - Many employees will only share honest feedback if they know their identity is protected. Provide anonymous options, especially for sensitive topics.
- **Communicate regularly:**
 - A suggestion box should not feel like a place where feedback is ignored. Share updates, highlight implemented ideas and thank employees for participating.
- **Act quickly on submissions:**
 - Review feedback on a set schedule and assign ownership for follow-up. Prompt action demonstrates accountability. This requires adequate leadership support as well.
- **Recognize contributions:**
 - Acknowledge even anonymous ideas in team meetings or company newsletters. Recognition encourages ongoing participation.

Adapted from [SurveyConnect \(2024\), How can feedback loop support diversity and inclusion?](#); [Deepler 2026, Creating effective feedback loops within organizations](#); [SurveyMonkey \(2026\), What is a feedback loop?](#); [Indeed 2026, Suggestion box](#).

Feedback Loop Formats & Considerations:

- **Survey:**
 - Surveys can be anonymous or identified. Anonymity can empower stakeholders to provide honest feedback. However, anonymous feedback must be balanced with open dialogues in meetings and check-ins. Researchers should choose survey platforms and tools that ensure data security. These platforms should be accessible as well. For example, data can be collected via Google Forms as well as text-based surveys. Keep questions clear and unbiased.
- **Semi-structured interviews:**
 - The data collection team must be trained in cultural sensitivity. The team must also be aware of the power dynamics between the researcher and the participants. Obtain consent before recording.
- **Focus Group Discussions:**
 - Be Mindful of the power dynamics within the group and design groups accordingly. For example, in a conservative context, young participants might feel hesitant about speaking up in front of elderly participants.
- **Suggestion Boxes:**
 - This is a form of non-oral feedback. This can be made anonymous as well.

Implementing Changes Based on Feedback

- **Prioritize the issues:**
 - Create a priority list and tackle the most critical issues first.
- **Develop a plan:**
 - Define specific actions, assign responsibilities to team members, and set deadlines.
- **Involve your team:**
 - Collaboration leads to more creative solutions and ensures that everyone is aligned with the goals.
- **Test and Iterate:**
 - Implement the changes and then test them to ensure they resolve the issues identified. Document the learnings.

- **Track Progress and Outcomes:**
 - Regularly review feedback metrics and make necessary adjustments.
- **Foster a feedback culture:**
 - Recognize and reward efforts to gather and act on feedback, reinforcing its importance within your organization.

Adapted from [Pixel Free Studio 2024, How to improve UX with feedback loops, Pixel Free Studio](#).

Learning Integration and Adaptation

Learning integration and adaptation refers to the process by which organizations use monitoring data and feedback to enhance the programs and activities. It also approaches an ongoing reflective method where adjustments could be made through the program cycle instead of assuming data collection as a one-time exercise.

Adapted from IRIS+ and UNDP guidance, this section encourages organizations to treat monitoring not as a compliance activity but as a continuous learning engine that drives more equitable and effective programming.

Developed by the Overseas Development Institute, the adaptive management approach provides organizations with structured methods to respond to complexity by integrating real-time learning, iterative decision-making, and flexibility in program implementation.

Adapted from [Pasanen, T. & Barnett, I. \(2020\), Supporting adaptive management: monitoring and evaluation tools and approaches \(Working Paper 569\), Overseas Development Institute \(ODI\)](#).

Making Learning and Adaptation Work in Practice

There is no shortage of tools and approaches to measure learning and adaptation. Moreover, applying specific tools alone does not guarantee that learning and adaptation will happen. The important part is how these approaches are applied in practice to inform decisions.

In practice, organizations can strengthen learning and adaptation by focusing on three key areas:

- **Apply tools with purpose:**
 - Select and adapt learning and adaptation approaches based on the specific learning needs of the program, rather than using them as standard requirements.
- **Design for reflection, not just data collection:**
 - Ensure that data collection and analysis processes are structured to generate insights, encourage discussion, and surface diverse perspectives, including those of participants.
- **Link learning to decision-making:**
 - Create clear pathways for insights to inform both day-to-day operations and longer-term strategic choices, ensuring that learning leads to visible changes in programs.

Beyond understanding the approach's method, it is also crucial to choose it. There is rarely a single “best” approach; thus, using different methods to receive different strengths is useful in different contexts. The organizations should focus on choosing a mixed approach that depends on programs’ needs and constraints rather than looking for the perfect tool.

The choice of methods or approaches depends on several things, including:

<p>Evidence and learning needs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the program's key learning priorities, evaluation questions, and accountability requirements? • What type of data is needed to support informed adaptation?
<p>Program characteristics</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What type of program is being implemented? • How long will it run? • Do its design and timelines align with the requirements of different MEL approaches?
<p>Available resources</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What time, staff capacity, and technical expertise are available for data collection, analysis, reflection, and decision-making?

Overview of MEL Approaches for Learning and Adaptation

Start simple. Not all programs need complex methods; choose approaches that match your capacity, timeline, and learning priorities.

Approach	When to use it?	What does it help?
<p>Applied Political Economy Analysis (PEA)</p>	<p>Start of program; revisit when context changes</p>	<p>Understand context, power, and stakeholders</p>
<p>Theory of Change (ToC)</p>	<p>Design stage and ongoing reflection</p>	<p>Map how change is expected to happen</p>
<p>Scenario Planning</p>	<p>Planning or “pause and reflect” moments</p>	<p>Prepare for different possible futures</p>
<p>Outcome Mapping</p>	<p>Throughout implementation</p>	<p>Track changes in stakeholder behavior.</p>

Approach	When to use it?	What does it help?
Nimble Randomized Controlled Trials (RCT)	Pilot or testing phases	Test what works best between options
Outcome Harvesting	Review points or program end	Identify intended and unintended results
Contribution Analysis	Mid-term or end	Assess the program's contribution to outcomes

Risk Mitigation and Consent

When working with participants from marginalized or vulnerable groups, organizations have a responsibility to collect, store, and use data safely and ethically. Conversely, poor data practices can lead to real harm such as exposure, discrimination, or even loss of trust within an organization.

Risk mitigation means identifying and reducing potential harms before they happen. Consent means ensuring participants understand and freely agree to how their information will be used - before it is collected.

What to Collect and What Not to Collect

Collect	Do Not Collect
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Name or identifier only if necessary for program delivery • Participation preferences and accommodation needs • Gender identity using self-identification options • Location (general, e.g. region) • Stories or quotes with explicit consent • Feedback on program experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full personal details unless strictly required • Medical diagnoses or health history unless directly relevant • Sexual orientation unless voluntarily disclosed • Precise home address unless essential • Photos or videos without signed permission • Immigration or legal status

A simple rule: if you cannot explain why you need it, do not collect it.

Adapted from [European Parliament and Council of the European Union \(2018\), General Data Protection Regulation \(GDPR\), Article 5](#); [Inter-Agency Standing Committee \(2023\), Operational Guidance on Data Responsibility in Humanitarian Action](#); [International Committee of the Red Cross \(2020\), Handbook on Data Protection in Humanitarian Action](#).

Before Collecting Any Data or Stories, Ask:

- Do participants clearly understand what is being collected and why?
- Have they given informed, voluntary agreement?
- Do they know how their information will be stored, used, and shared?
- Can they withdraw consent at any time without consequences?
- Have consent forms or processes been made available in the right language and format?
- Have staff been briefed on respectful and confidential data handling?

Types of Consent

Types	What does it mean and when to use it?
Informed consent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The participant is fully explained what data is collected, why, how it will be used, and who will see it before agreeing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Use it always; this is the minimum standard for any data collection
Explicit consent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A clear, active agreement - signing a form, ticking a box, or verbal confirmation that is recorded. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Required for sensitive data such as photos, stories, disability, gender identity, or financial information

Types	What does it mean and when to use it?
Opt-in consent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participant actively chooses to participate - nothing is assumed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Recommended for all program data collection involving vulnerable groups
Ongoing consent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consent is reconfirmed at key stages, not just at the start <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Use when stories, photos, or data will be reused over time or in new contexts

Important: Consent must always be freely given; participants should never feel that refusing will affect their access to the program or services.

Adapted from [European Parliament and Council of the European Union \(2018\), General Data Protection Regulation \(GDPR\), Article 7](#); [ICTworks \(2019\), How to Add Informed Consent to Your Responsible Data Practices](#).

What Valid Consent Looks Like in Practice

At a minimum, participants should always be clearly told:

- That providing data is voluntary and they can withdraw consent at any time without penalty
- That refusing or withdrawing consent will not affect their access to the program, services, or support
- What information is being collected and why, in simple, everyday language, not technical or legal terms
- What types of data are involved, for example, name, location, photo, financial details, personal story, or health information
- Who will see or have access to their data, including whether it will be shared with donors, partners, or government bodies
- How long their data will be kept and how it will be stored or archived
- What the benefits are for them or their community from sharing their data
- What risks exist, such as loss of privacy or confidentiality, and what steps are being taken to reduce those risks

For consent to be legally and ethically valid, organizations must also ensure the following:

- Consent is presented in clear, plain language, separate from other information, easy to read and understand
- Participants have the right to withdraw at any time, and withdrawing must be just as easy as giving consent
- Withdrawing consent does not affect anything that happened before the withdrawal; participants should be reassured of this
- Organizations must be able to demonstrate that consent was obtained and keep simple records of when and how consent was given
- Consent must never be made a condition of accessing a service, program, or support

Adapted from ICTworks (2019), How to Add Informed Consent to Your Responsible Data Practices; European Parliament and Council of the European Union (2018), General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), Article 7.

Context Matters When Seeking Consent

Consent processes must be adapted to the people and communities involved.

Consider:

Language and literacy	Use plain language, local languages, or visual formats where needed
Power dynamics	Be aware that gender, age, cultural background, or community status can affect whether consent is truly free and voluntary
Vulnerable groups	Provide extra support to individuals who may face discrimination or harm if their identity or information is disclosed
Digital risks	Ensure data collection is transparent when collecting digitally, as there might be some risks such as data breaches, re-identification, or even digital tracking
Safe spaces	Choose safe, private, and accessible settings when approaching some individuals or groups for consent

Adapted from ICTworks (2019), How to Add Informed Consent to Your Responsible Data Practices; Inter-Agency Standing Committee (2023), Operational Guidance on Data Responsibility in Humanitarian Action.

How to Respond When Someone Does Not Consent

Non-consent must always be respected immediately and without question.

Situation	Response
Participant declines to share personal information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accept without question. • Do not ask again to change their mind. • Do not offer incentive to answer again.
Participant does not want their photo or story used	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a sticker or mark that they do not want so other teams (such as the media or PR team) can understand quickly. • Remove or do not collect the material. • Confirm with them that it will not be used.
Participant withdraws consent after data is collected	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delete or anonymize the data as soon as possible. • Inform the participant that this has been done. • Double-check again with team members .
Participant is unsure or needs more time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give them space. • Provide information in their language and allow them to decide without pressure. • Accept and respect their decision.
Participant cannot provide written consent due to literacy or disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer verbal consent with a witness or an accessible alternative format. • Never skip consent entirely.





Adapted from ICTworks (2019), How to Add Informed Consent to Your Responsible Data Practices; Prosper Strategies (2024), How to Respectfully Engage Your Stakeholders in Nonprofit Storytelling.



Potential Risks and How to Overcome Them

Potential Risks	Practical Actions
Identity exposure	<p>Sharing someone's name, photo, or story reveals their identity without full understanding of consequences.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider: Always use explicit consent. Offer anonymity as a default option. Explain clearly where and how content will be published.
Re-traumatization	<p>Collecting sensitive stories or experiences without proper support in place.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider: Training staff in trauma-informed practice. Give participants the right to stop at any time. Avoid probing for painful details unnecessarily.
Data breach	<p>Personal data is accessed, stolen, or shared without authorization.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider: storing data securely, such as with two-step authentication or two factors, to make it secure. Limit access to relevant staff only. Use password protection and encrypted storage.
Misrepresentation	<p>Stories or data are edited or used out of context in ways that harm or misrepresent participants.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider: Share content with participants before publishing. Obtain approval for how their story or image will be used.
Language and literacy barriers	<p>Participants sign or agree to consent without fully understanding what they agreed to.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider: Provide consent information in plain language and local languages. Use verbal explanation with a witness as an alternative to written consent.

Adapted from Inter-Agency Standing Committee (2023), Operational Guidance on Data Responsibility in Humanitarian Action.

Practical Considerations

Group		Key Considerations
	Women & Gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow self-identification rather than assuming gender. • Explain clearly why gender data is collected and how it will be used. • Ensure stories or photos are not shared in ways that could affect safety or reputation.
	LGBTQIA+	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Never collect or disclose sexual orientation or gender identity without explicit, informed consent. • Ensure all data is stored confidentially. • Disclosing someone's identity without consent can place them at serious risk.
	Disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus data collection on participation needs and accommodations, not medical diagnoses. • Provide accessible formats for consent forms and data collection tools. • Include "prefer not to answer" options.
	Neuro divergence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep consent processes clear, simple, and jargon-free. • Allow extra time and offer alternative formats such as verbal explanation alongside written forms. • Avoid overwhelming participants with lengthy documentation.

Group		Key Considerations
	Ethnic minorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Translate consent forms and data collection tools into relevant local languages. • Be aware of cultural contexts where certain questions may feel intrusive or carry stigma.
	Rural or Remote	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide offline or paper-based consent options for participants without reliable internet access. • Use simple language and avoid technical terms. Be mindful of digital literacy gaps.

Adapted from Schusterman Family Philanthropies (n.d.), *More Than Numbers: A Guide Toward Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Data Collection*; Inter-Agency Standing Committee (2023), *Operational Guidance on Data Responsibility in Humanitarian Action*.

Consent Readiness Checklist

Use this before any data or story collection activity:

- I know exactly what data I need and why
- I can explain this clearly in plain language to participants
- Consent forms or processes are available in the right language and format
- Participants have been told they can refuse or withdraw without consequences
- Sensitive data has been identified and extra protections are in place
- Staff involved have been briefed on respectful and confidential data handling
- A record will be kept of how and when consent was obtained
- A process exists for participants who want to withdraw consent later

Adapted from ICTworks (2019), *How to Add Informed Consent to Your Responsible Data Practices*; European Parliament and Council of the European Union (2018), *General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), Articles 5 and 7*.

Data Privacy and Security

When designing digital products or programs, organizations should assume that security risks exist and proactively embed privacy and security throughout the design and implementation process. This involves collaborating with cybersecurity experts and regularly reviewing and improving systems.

Dos	Don'ts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct independent security audits (e.g. third-party reviews of code and infrastructure) • Align with established data principles, such as those from United Nations Development Program • Follow internal policies on data privacy and information classification • Minimize the collection of personal and sensitive data • Use existing data sources where possible instead of collecting new data • Obtain informed and explicit user consent for data collection and use • Clearly communicate what data is collected and how it will be used • Design systems for interoperability and reuse using recognized standards • Allow users to access, manage, and request deletion of their data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collect data without clear ownership, management, and purpose • Gather personal data without user knowledge and consent • Share personally identifiable information with third parties without consent

Adapted from [United Nations Development Programme \(n.d.\), UNDP data principles](#); [World Bank Group \(2018\), Managing personal data responsibly: The World Bank Group personal data privacy policy](#).

Do No Harm Principles

Digital technologies for data collection can drive positive change, but they can also create unintended harm. It includes understanding that technology is not neutral and that it encompasses biases, power dynamics, and unintended consequences that can affect outcomes, particularly for marginalized groups. Thus, organizations should proactively identify and mitigate risks to people and the environment throughout the design and implementation process.

Cited from [UNDP \(n.d.\), Do No Harm: Digital Standards, United Nations Development Programme.](#)

There are two key areas of two parts: (1) ensure human rights and (2) protect the environment.

Part A: Ensure Human Rights

Digital technology can create unintended harm, such as privacy violation, discrimination, and misuse of data. The organization should apply a human rights-based approach to solve this challenge.

For example, biased datasets can lead to discriminatory outcomes in AI systems. Similarly, platforms designed to maximize engagement may unintentionally promote harmful or misleading content. Even well-intended solutions (e.g. public service platforms) may be misused in ways that undermine rights such as privacy or equality.

Key Reflection Questions

- Who could potentially suffer from this solution, and at what point?
- Which human rights are affected (e.g. privacy, equality, freedom of expression)?
- Who benefits from this solution, and who might be excluded?
- Has informed user consent been obtained?
- Could this solution be misused in harmful ways?
- What unintended consequences could emerge over time?

Part B: Protect the Environment

Digital technologies can support sustainability by improving energy efficiency, enabling cleaner production, and supporting more sustainable systems. However, they can also create environmental harm, both directly and indirectly. These impacts often include high energy consumption, resource extraction, and increasing waste.



Key Environmental Risks





- High energy use (e.g. data centers, AI, blockchain technologies)
- Resource extraction and material use (e.g. rare minerals)
- E-waste and poor disposal systems
- Reinforcing unsustainable behaviors (e.g. overconsumption)
- Indirect impacts across global supply chains

Key Reflection Questions

- What are the energy and resource requirements of this solution?
- What is the full lifecycle (production, use, and disposal)?
- Could this solution create waste or environmental harm over time?
- Does it encourage sustainable or unsustainable behaviors?
- Are there more environmentally responsible alternatives?

Practical Considerations

Group		Key Considerations
	Women & Gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow self-identification (not just binary male or female) • Separate gender identity from sex assigned at birth • Include “prefer to self-describe” and “prefer not to answer.” • Avoid assumptions based on names or pronouns • Explain why gender data is collected
	LGBTQIA+	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use multi-select options (identity is not fixed or singular) • Include open-ended fields for self-description • Do not combine gender identity and sexual orientation in one question • Ensure confidentiality and voluntary disclosure • Avoid forcing disclosure, make questions optional

Group		Key Considerations
	Disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on needs and accommodations, not medical labels • Avoid collecting sensitive health data unless necessary (and compliant) • Use functional questions (e.g., difficulty seeing, hearing, mobility) • Provide examples of accommodations (e.g., captions, screen readers) • Include “prefer not to answer.”
	Neurodivergence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer multiple formats for responses (written, visual, verbal) • Keep questions clear, simple, and structured • Avoid overwhelming respondents with long or complex surveys • Allow extra space for open-ended responses • Consider sensory-friendly survey design (layout, colors, length)
	Ethnic minorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use multi-select categories (allow multiple identities) • Include open-text fields for specific identity (e.g., “Karen”, “Rohingya”) • Avoid biased ordering (e.g., don’t always list “White” first) • Use culturally relevant and locally appropriate terms • Clearly explain how the data will support equity
	Rural or Remote	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide offline or low-bandwidth options (paper, phone, SMS) • Ensure tools are accessible without strong internet • Use simple language and avoid technical jargon • Consider local language translation Be mindful of digital literacy gaps

Adapted from Kaplowitz, R. & Laroche, J. 2020, More than numbers: A guide toward diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) in data collection.

Case Study from Seedstars - MERL as an Early Warning System: What Your Data Should Help You Fix Next Week

Monitoring, Evaluation, Research, and Learning (MERL) often gets treated as a rearview mirror: it helps explain what happens after a program ends. That's important for reporting. But it's not enough for inclusion because exclusion typically happens during delivery: when timing, formats, or support structures quietly make participation harder for certain founders.

An alternative approach - treating MERL as an early warning system. The goal isn't only to measure outcomes. It's to detect friction in real time, then change the program design before founders disengage.

If inclusion is systems design, MERL is one of the fastest ways to locate where the system is failing.

A predictive MERL approach asks:

- Where are people dropping off?
- What barriers correlate with disengagement?
- Which program elements are working differently for different groups?
- What can we change this week to reduce friction?

This is less about producing a perfect endline report and more about making weekly adjustments that keep founders in the room.

What "predictive" MERL looks like in practice

A predictive MERL system is lightweight enough to run weekly and specific enough to drive action. Seedstars described tools such as:

- Weekly pulse surveys to identify fatigue, confusion, or access issues before they become dropouts
- Dashboards that disaggregate participation and performance (by demographic, and importantly, by barrier type)
- Rapid feedback loops where program teams decide what to change and track whether it worked

A practical way to think about it: MERL should help you identify where your program is leaking potential - and what plug to use.

Shift from identity-only reporting to barrier-aware insight

Seedstars emphasized barrier-based segmentation as a complement to demographics.

Demographics help you understand who is in your program. Barrier tracking helps you understand what conditions participants need to succeed.

Examples of barriers you can track without overcomplicating your data:

- Connectivity (device + bandwidth constraints)
- Time constraints (caregiving, multiple jobs)
- Access constraints (language, disability accommodations)
- Network constraints (mentor/investor access)
- Confidence constraints (pricing, negotiation, public speaking formats)

When you track barriers, your program improvements become more targeted - and often improve the experience for everyone.

What Seedstars changed once MERL revealed the pattern

1) Retention dips linked to caregiving peaks

Seedstars observed women dropping out between weeks 4 and 6. MERL data suggested the dip aligned with caregiving pressure points. They adjusted program timing and added a confidence module. Retention rebounded—suggesting the issue wasn't capability or commitment, but competing demands on time.

2) Underperformance that turned out to be a design issue

In disability cohorts, disabled founders appeared to underperform on certain assignments. MERL helped isolate the problem: the format of the assignment was creating an accessibility barrier. When Seedstars changed how information was gathered, performance improved quickly. The skills were there; the system wasn't reading them.

The lesson: when founders struggle, the first question shouldn't be "What's wrong with them?" It should be "What in our design is making this harder than it needs to be?"

Practical MERL moves you can implement quickly

If you want MERL to guide action, you need a few repeatable habits.

1) Ask questions you can act on next week

Use pulse surveys that point to fixable causes, not vague satisfaction ratings.

Examples:

- “What prevented you from completing this week’s task?” (select one)
- “Which format would work better next week: live / recorded / asynchronous?”
- “Was anything inaccessible in today’s session?” (yes/no + optional details)

2) Watch the “middle weeks” closely

Many programs lose founders after the initial momentum fades. Identify your typical dropout window and instrument it: attendance, assignment completion, confidence signals, and qualitative feedback.

3) Treat the dashboard as a decision tool

A dashboard should not be a display. It should trigger decisions:

- What do we change next week?
- Who needs outreach?
- Which format adjustments will reduce friction?

4) Document what you changed—and what happened

If MERL is a learning system, your changes are the experiment. Keep a simple log:

- Change made
- Hypothesis (what barrier it addresses)
- Indicator you expect to move
- Result after 1-2 weeks

Adapted from [Presentation by Tom Sebastian at the ANDE Asia Access and Opportunity Learning Lab Session 4: Policy Frameworks to Foster Inclusion](#).

AI usage declaration: As the content for this toolkit was prepared by multiple authors, AI tools were used to remove redundancies and to maintain a consistent tone in some sections. AI tools were also used to generate some of the Harvard style references. Human oversight was applied to review, edit and integrate the AI-generated content.

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