Lead

For employing disabled people in the State Sector

Accessible meetings and events

Contents

Introduction

Organising meetings and events so that everyone can participate as much as possible and attendees' diverse needs are accommodated requires early planning and considered thought.

There are many details to consider when planning an event where disabled people will be attending. These include finding a suitable venue, creating a relevant agenda, designing communication materials and promoting the event.

This guide outlines key points to consider before, during and after an event. It provides best-practice principles, strategies to support different participant needs and checklists to ensure your event provides reasonable accommodation for disabled people.

Important considerations for organising and running an inclusive event:

- Be sure to know what physical accommodations attendees may need in order to fully participate – do not make assumptions.
- Before an event, provide attendees with opportunities to share information about their specific needs.
- Be respectful and kind – show all participants that they are valued and that their views are equally important.
- Design the event to be accessible to those attending. For example, do not expect attendees with visual impairments to be able to read a PowerPoint presentation.

1 Section 1: Planning

A well-planned event ensures that every participant has an equal opportunity to participate.

Understanding and responding to people's needs takes time. Building these timeframes into the planning will help ensure that the event runs smoothly.

Event-planning checklist

- Disabled people often face financial barriers to taking part in workshops and events. Do you have arrangements in place to meet these costs?
- Have funds been allocated to make the event accessible to everyone?
- Have you allowed enough lead time to book New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) interpreters, to get materials prepared in a variety of accessible formats, to review the material and to arrange any other necessary supports?
- If you have an attendee with an intellectual or learning disability, have you booked a Meeting Assistant and allowed time for them to read the material and discuss it with the person they are supporting?
- Do the starting times allow disabled attendees enough time to get prepared and find transport to meetings?
- Has material been sent in advance to NZSL interpreters, Meeting Assistants, people with learning disabilities and people who are blind or visually impaired?
- Are sufficient power points available for attendees' equipment, such as laptops?
- If this is a larger meeting or event, have NZSL interpreters, note takers, and at least one personal assistant been booked?

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Section 2: Venue

Choosing a suitable venue is a key decision when setting up an accessible event. A venue should easily accommodate a full range of disabled people attending the event.

Few venues may be completely accessible, but if organisers know what to look for and the questions to ask beforehand, many venues can be improved to better serve the needs of disabled participants.

Venue checklist

- Have you had an accessibility expert or a barrier-free auditor check the venue?
- Is the venue likely to have any building work going on between the time you have had an access check completed and the event itself?
- Do you have a list of nearby cafes and restaurants that are fully accessible?
- Is seating provided for those who cannot stand for a long time?
- Is there adequate parking for disabled people with clearly marked mobility parking spaces?
- Is signage for the street address and building name clearly visible from the street?

Getting to and from venue checklist

- Is accessible public transport available?
- If mobility taxis are needed, are the start and finish times outside of school runs (as mobility taxis are often fully booked at these times)?
- Does the venue have clearly signed pick-up and drop-off points?
- Is there a barrier-free path of travel from the parking area, bus stop or drop-off points into the building (no stairs, no uneven surfaces or loose gravel)?
- Have you provided a map locating the venue, parking and entrance (and possibly also the internal layout of the venue, including reception, toilets, meeting rooms and reception) and is the map in an accessible format?

Entry to venue checklist

- Can the main entry be used by everyone, or are disabled people expected to use a back entry, or go through a restaurant kitchen or building garage?
- Are entrance doors accessible (automatic preferable, if not then secured in an open position, with ramp and hand rails)?
- Do elevators have braille buttons; are the lifts large enough for power wheelchairs and scooters; are lift controls at wheelchair height; is there an auditory signal for people who are blind or have low vision?
- Do any entrances lead to doors where a buzzer or bell needs to be pushed to gain entrance?
- Have hazards been identified, and if so, is there signage to alert people to such things as slippery entry and foyer areas?

In the venue checklist

- Is the reception area large enough to enable people using mobility scooters, wheelchairs, guide or mobility dogs and other mobility aids to move about easily and safely?
- Are there tables at reception and registration with accessible height and knee recess space?
- Are chairs (including with arms) available at registration and reception?
- Are staff or volunteers available to assist participants with registration and to direct them to the relevant parts of the venue?
- Is there a quiet rest area with couches and some privacy?
- If the conference is at a hotel venue and is for more than one day, have you reserved a room for people who need to rest or to have personal-care needs met?

Emergency evacuation checklist

- Can people easily leave the venue in an emergency?
- Have participants been briefed about emergency procedures and do they know how they will be assisted?

Disability assistance dogs and guide dogs checklist

- Is there an outside grassed area for disability assistance dogs and guide dogs to use during the day?
- Are water bowls available for dogs?

Room set up and seating checklist

- Is a variety of seating available, including chairs with and without arms, and extra cushions?
- Are power sockets and leads (preferably taped down) available for participants' equipment and have they been told where they are available?
- Have interspersed spaces (not just at end of a row or at the back of the room) for wheelchairs and other mobility aids been provided?
- Is a hearing loop available and is it working?
- Are tables available for participants?
- Will the presenter be visible to everyone?
- If a stage or podium will be used, are they accessible to all speakers? If temporary ramps are used, do they have a rail?
- Does the venue have noisy or distracting background sounds (heaters, air conditioning units, background music)? If, so, can these be mitigated?
- Is there a height adjustable electronic whiteboard set up?

Toilets checklist

- Are there accessible toilets and are they near to meeting rooms (on the same floor)?
- Are accessible toilets being used for other purposes (cleaning equipment, spare chairs)? If so, can these be relocated?
- Are the accessible toilets large enough to accommodate power wheelchairs and scooters?
- Do the doors to the toilet areas (not just the accessible ones) have a raised tactile male or female sign (preferably with braille lettering as well) that is colour contrasted?
- Are toilet doors easy to open and lock for those with limited hand movement?

- Is the washbasin at wheelchair height and does it have space underneath for a wheelchair?
- Is the tap easy to operate for those with limited hand movement?
- Are the paper towels or hand dryer at wheelchair height?

Meal and refreshment breaks checklist

- Are the meeting rooms near to the reception/refreshment area?
- Is the reception/refreshment area large enough to provide easy circulation for participants who use wheelchair, scooters, guide dogs or other mobility aids?
- Have you allowed enough time for meal and refreshment breaks?
- Are staff or volunteers available to assist people with meals and refreshments, especially self-serve buffets?
- Are drinking straws and a variety of cups (not just small tea cups) supplied?
- Are sufficient seats (including chairs with arms) and tables available around the refreshment area?
- Are the tables accessible to people using wheelchairs?
- Has the catering service received a list of dietary needs well in advance (from information provided on registration forms or invitations) and will all items be clearly labelled?
- Has one staff person or volunteer been assigned to manage refreshment and meal services? Has that person been introduced and do people know where to find that person?

Venue staff checklist

- Do venue staff understand how to offer assistance to a disabled person and has someone (preferably a disabled person) briefed them?
- Have venue staff orientated attendees to the layout of the building with precise instructions (not waving hands)?
- Are staff available to escort people to the meeting room?

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Section 3: Registration form and pre-event information

The way the registration form and pre-event information are written is the first signal to disabled people that your organisation values their participation.

Your pre-event communications should clearly demonstrate your commitment to inclusion. Be sure to include a section asking participants to list what accommodations, services, and supports they require.

Registration checklist

- Is the registration form available in a variety of formats, including Easy Read, NZSL, large print, braille, audio visual, online?
- Does the invitation or notice of meeting include information about the accessibility of the event, including access and accommodation needed, without focusing on the disability of the participant?

For small events, the following wording may be useful:

Please let us know what supports you will require so we can make arrangements in advance. We would also appreciate being notified of any specific assistance you may require in the event of an emergency evacuation. For more detailed information, questions or concerns please contact (name of contact) at (email address or phone number).

See following sample registration form that could be used or adapted for planning accessible events.

Accessible meetings – sample registration form

➡ Name: _____

Event: _____ Date: _____

Please fill out the section below and indicate what accommodations and supports you will need access to during the event.

➡ **Allergies & Intolerances**

◯ Food/Drink (specify): _____

◯ Environmental (specify): _____

◯ Medication (specify): _____

➡ **Mobility Requirements**

◯ Personal Mobility Device (specify): _____

◯ Accessible transit to and from event site(s)

➡ **Personal Assistance Requirements**

◯ Personal Care Attendant / Caregiver / Family Member

◯ Advisors / Coach

◯ Psycho-Social Health Support

◯ Note Taker / ScribeMeeting assistant

I require the above support / service to assist me with:

_____

_____

Name of Attendant / Caregiver / Coach accompanying me to event:

_____

➡ **Service Animal & Animal Care**

◯ I will be bringing a service animal with me to the event and require on-site pet care services. Type of Service Animal (i.e. guide dog, hearing dog, seizure dog, mental health service dog, mobility service dog):

_____

◯ I have a companion animal at home that requires off-site accommodations (boarding) while I am attending the event.

Registration form

➔ **Language Requirements**

◯ Simultaneous translation (Please specify language):

◯ NZ Sign Language (ASL) interpretation

➔ **Service Requirements**

◯ Oral interpreter   ◯ Intervener

◯ Assistive listening system   ◯ Advisor

◯ Real-time captioning (CART) Please explain your service requirements below:

➔ **Alternative Media / Materials Format Requirements**

◯ Large-print materials   ◯ DAISY descriptive video

◯ Braille materials   ◯ Captioned video

◯ Audio-cassette   ◯ Audio transcripts

◯ Copies of materials on CD, USB flash drive, or other device (specify):

Please provide more detail on the alternative media or alternative materials formats you require:

➔ **Individualized Accommodation Requirements**

◯ Special dietary needs or restrictions (specify):

◯ Emergency evacuation needs (specify):

◯ Overnight accommodations (e.g. accessible hotel room) (specify):

Do you have any other accommodation requests for us? (Please specify):

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Section 4: Workshop presenters and facilitators

Some of the most important factors in creating an inclusive and accessible event include accessibly presented materials, a venue where the layout of the room encourages participation, and facilitators who ensure that any activities are inclusive.

Accessibility tips for workshop presenters and facilitators:

The following guidelines are also available online and in PDF and Word format on the Health and Disability Commission web site links given in the Resource section.

- At the beginning of your presentation, provide both a visual and verbal overview of the presentation outline.
- Verbally describe all graphics on the slides including tables, charts, and images during your presentation.
- Verbally indicate when you are changing slides so that everyone can follow along and anticipate topic changes.
- Verbally indicate when you are linking to an external website. Describe the website you are connecting to and how it is relevant to your presentation.
- Verbally indicate when you are about to play a video or audio file. This will prevent audience members who are blind or visually impaired from being startled or confused when the multimedia file starts. It will also allow them to put on their headsets if the described video is available.
- If the video description is not available, verbally recap what occurred in videos after the audience has viewed them.
- Ask attendees to wait until any Deaf person(s) are seated and the interpreters are in place before others sit. (Make sure the room is set up so that the interpreters have a space to be seated, especially near the presenter.) There should be a clear line of sight from the Deaf person to the interpreter and seating should be reserved.

- At the beginning of a meeting or small forum ask all participants to introduce themselves, using a microphone. This lets people who are blind or have a visual impairment know who is at the meeting and is helpful for all participants.

- Only one person should speak at a time before the next speaker begins. Participants should introduce themselves before they speak.

- During presentations, meetings and workshops ask people to identify themselves during discussion.

- During discussions, supply a roving mike to enable people with hearing impairments to participate.

- Make sure any icebreakers or interactive activities include disabled people.

- Avoid using abbreviations, jargon, and technical or specialist terms during your presentation, which may not be understood by all participants.

- Speak clearly and at a moderate pace and modulation to make the information easier to understand and communication easier for NZSL interpreters and note takers.

- When decision making involves interactive methods (flip charts, use of coloured stickers, cards etc), choose methods so that everyone at the meeting can participate independently (eg. use differently shaped, instead of differently coloured, cards, and use inclusive ways to indicate choices).

Accessible seating arrangements

The U-shape arrangement is good for relatively small groups where attendees are expected to participate. It is best practice to leave a minimum of 1-2 meters (2-3 meters is ideal) between the presenter's table or podium and tables where participants are seated. This allows individuals with mobility devices to freely navigate between the tables and into the centre of the arrangement should they wish to speak with individuals located in hard-to-reach spots, such as the corners.

Presenter's table arrangement

Presenter's Table

1-2m (minimum)
2-3m (best)
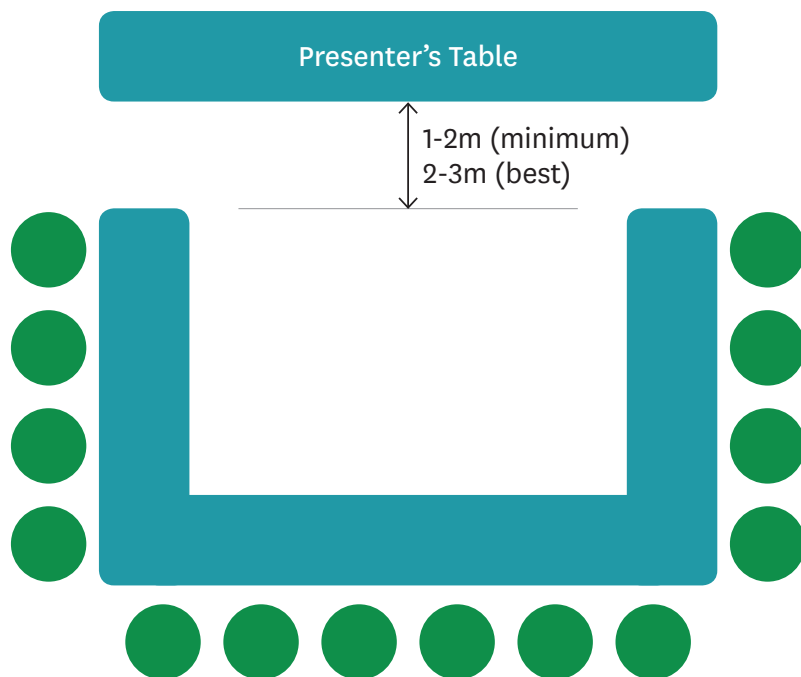
The U-shape and Hollow circle seating arrangements are often used when participants are expected to engage in an interactive discussion. Both require a large room, even for relatively small numbers. These arrangements can be accomplished using chairs alone or with chairs behind tables.

Hollow circle seating arrangement

1-2m

1-2m
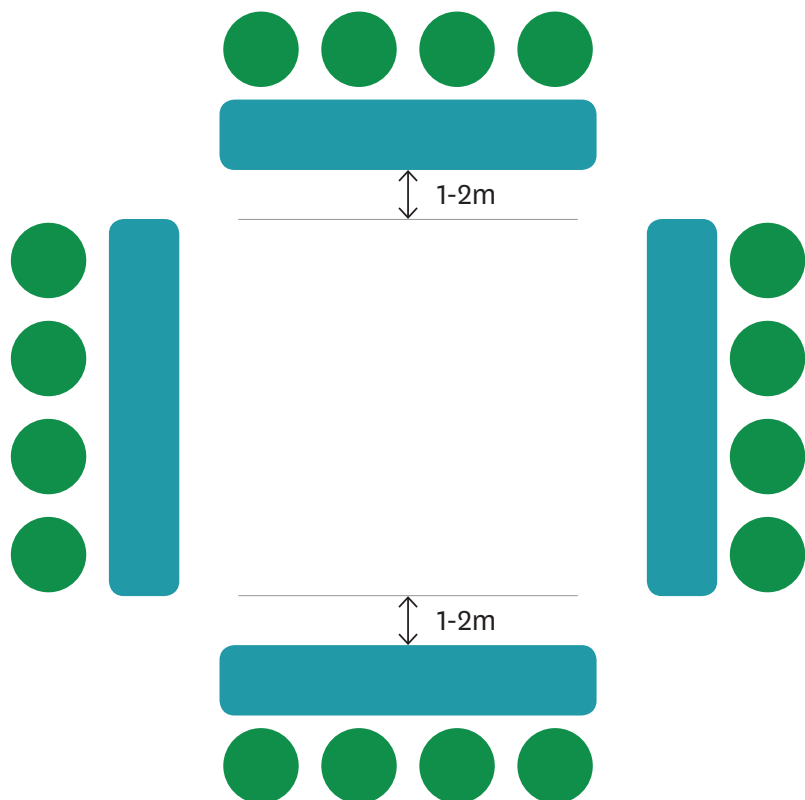
The Parallel tables arrangement can be used for small group meetings and events. It is especially useful for when a presentation is being given or a PowerPoint or video is being projected towards one end of the room. Projectors or teleconference equipment can be placed into the centre of the tables preventing anyone's view from being blocked and allowing cords to be run in between the tables to save space and prevent tripping. As always, ensure that there is space around all of the tables and chairs for individuals with mobility devices to move around freely.

Parallel tables seating arrangement

Projection Screen

1-2m
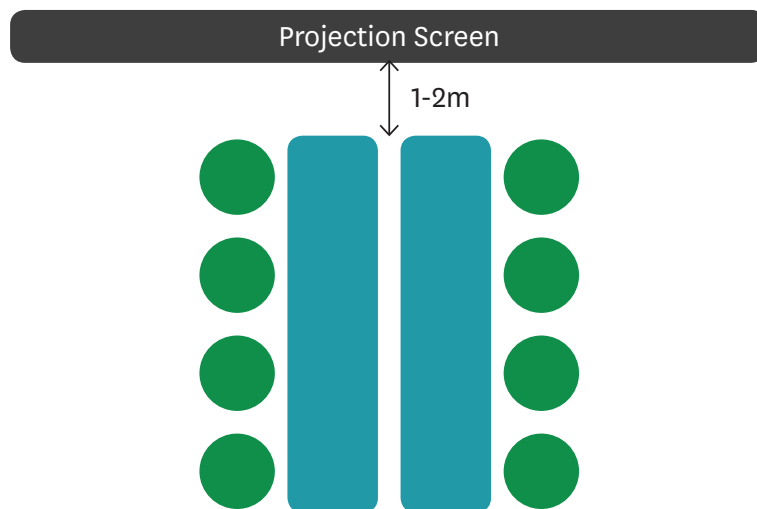
NZSL interpreters

If a NZSL interpreter will be signing at the event, please note the following:

- Give the interpreters regular breaks
- Provide them with the material prior to the meeting
- Give them a list of people attending, both Deaf and hearing
- Make sure the room is set up so that the interpreters have a space to be seated, especially near the presenter. There should be a clear line of sight from the Deaf person to the interpreter and seating reserved.

Meeting Assistants

Many people with learning disability benefit from having a Meeting Assistant alongside them. This role is a reasonable accommodation and is used to ensure equal participation in meetings. This role is usually required when people with learning disability are participating in meetings with other disabled people and non-disabled people. A Meeting Assistant's role varies depending on people's support needs. These needs are identified prior to the meeting and worked out between the person and the Assistant.

A Meeting Assistant's role is to be interpreter and translator of information. Meetings often run at a faster pace and use complex conceptual information which can be a barrier to participation for a person with a learning disability. Meeting Assistants can be seen talking quietly to the person. They are assisting the person to get a better understanding of conceptual information – this can involve relaying real life experiences.

Another role of the Meeting Assistants is to assist the person with the complex social skills sometimes required to be engaged within a large group at a meeting. People may also need additional support outside of meeting time, such as during break times or with tasks or items to be discussed after meetings.

Meeting Assistants aim to help the person build confidence and trusting relationships to enable effective group participation. They may use different techniques to help the person have their say. One style is an "interview" style of question and answers, where the Meeting Assistant conducts mini interviews with the person to help them have their say at the meeting. Time must be given for people to have a say in whatever way suits them to participate.

Workshops and break-out groups

- Are separate areas provided for break-out groups so that multiple groups are not working in the same space?
- Are there group facilitators who can ensure everyone has space and time to speak?
- Have NZSL interpreters and Meeting Assistants received notes about any break-out activities, or have worked with attendees prior to the meeting(s), so they are prepared?

Post-meeting follow-up

- Is key post-meeting information accessible and provided in NZSL, Easy Read and online?
- Have any follow-up actions and responsibility lines been clearly identified?
- Have you developed an accessible evaluation form which includes information about the event and the supports and services provided?

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Section 5: Accessible information

To ensure presentations delivered at your event are accessible, consider these aspects:

- Visual presentations (slideshows, videos, audio files)
- Handouts
- Verbal presentations

➔ Creating accessible PowerPoint presentations

Slideshows are a powerful communication tool but they are often inaccessible to people who are blind or visually impaired. Fortunately, there are ways you can create slideshows that are accessible to a wider audience:

- Keep the design simple and use a simple, uncluttered design template.
- Utilise the pre-defined text boxes, title boxes, and image boxes already incorporated into templates rather than creating your own.
- Use sans-serif fonts such as Arial, Verdana, or APHont (a font developed specifically for low-vision readers), in minimum 24pt.
- Be mindful of colour contrast issues. Most PowerPoint text is on coloured backgrounds. Light text on a dark background is best (white on dark blue, white on black, or yellow on black).
- Do not convey information with colour alone as some individuals may be colour-blind. Bolding, italicizing, or underlining words will make them stand out, but do not overuse these font effects as they will make your slides too visually distracting for anyone to easily read.
- Limit the number of bullet points and total quantity of text per slide. We recommend 5 words per bullet and 5-7 bullets per slide.

- If using Microsoft PowerPoint, consider incorporating audible slide transitions that notify audience members that you are moving to a new slide.

  - Disable automatic slide transitions and ensure slides change "on click". This allows audience members who want to review your slides at a later time to control the speed with which slides change.

  - Minimise the number of transitions or animations used in your presentation. These features can limit the functionality of adaptive technology.

  - For version 2010 or later, once you have finished creating your slideshow, use the "Document Accessibility Checker" to check for accessibility issues. This tool is able to scan the slideshow for elements that are missing descriptive text, elements that have no assigned order for adaptive technologies, slides that have no assigned titles and other accessibility issues.

Creating accessible videos

Showing a video during your presentation? It is best to present videos that have captions and audio description. Captions can be manually added to videos you produce in a number of programs, or you can hire an online captioning service to add captions to any video and then host it on their server. It's best to have audio description done by a professional contractor.

Creating accessible handouts

It is always helpful to have handouts to accompany a presentation. These provide more detailed information than your slides do and they allow participants to take better notes, refer back to material and follow along at their own speed. Key handouts requiring action should be available in a variety of formats including online large print, Easy Read and braille.

- Body text should be 12pt or greater. Use a serif font such as Times Roman, Bookman or Garamond for body text.
- Count the number of words in several sample lines of body text. If there are 15 words or more, increase your font size.
- Use sans serif fonts, such as Arial and Verdana, for headings and captions.
- Use white space on a page to break up dense text and make the content more readable.
- Watch your line lengths and make sure they are not too long.
- The right margins of your text should be "ragged" so that the lines end at different points. Ragged right justification helps readers better follow the text. Avoid a straight line on the right, or "full justification," which is harder to read because it creates hyphens and uneven spaces between words.
- Use highlighting carefully, such as boldface and different colours. Using too many highlighting methods can make text less readable.

Resource links

Barrier Free NZ

Barrier-free guide
www.barrierfreenz.org.nz/i/41f9b745b6162acd.pdf

Accessible car parks
www.barrierfreenz.org.nz/i/2c2c7d533ac87a50.pdf

Accessible reception and service counters
www.barrierfreenz.org.nz/i/563fcd10846a68c9.pdf

Blind Citizens of NZ

Blind advocacy organisation and resources
www.abcnz.org.nz

Blind Foundation

Creates braille files blindfoundation.org.nz

Be Accessible

Access checklist and resources www.beaccessible.org.nz

Emergency Management Training

Personal emergency evacuation plans (PEEP)
that include disabled people
www.emergencymanagement.co.nz/personal-emergency-
evacuation-plans-peep

Health & Disability Commissioner

"Making communication easy" – communicating
effectively with people with impairments
www.hdc.org.nz/publications/other-publications-from-hdc/
disability-resources/making-communication-easy---useful-
tips-to-make-it-easy-to-communicate-effectively-with-
people-with-impairments

Inclusive meeting practices for blind or vision-impaired
participants from the Association of Blind Citizens
of New Zealand
www.hdc.org.nz/publications/other-publications-from-hdc/
disability-resources/inclusive-meeting-practices-for-blind--
or-vision-impaired-participants-%28association-of-blind-
citizens-of-nz%29

IBM Accessible Analytics

Technical accessibility standards for graphic design
www-03.ibm.com/able/news/accessibleanalyticsfull.html

People First NZ

Easy Read information, working with Meeting Assistants
www.peoplefirst.org.nz

Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans (PEEP)

www.emergencymanagement.co.nz/personal-emergency-
evacuation-plans-peep

PowerPoint presentations

How to create accessible presentations
support.office.com/en-gb/article/Creating-accessible-
PowerPoint-presentations-6f7772b2-2f33-4bd2-8ca7-dae3b2b3
ef25?CorrelationId=06809a94-c6a8-411b-97d5-
009772095503&ui=en-US&rs=en-GB&ad=GB

Office for Disability Issues

Working with NZSL interpreters
www.odi.govt.nz/resources/guides-and-toolkits/working-with-
nzsl-interpreters/index.html

Upper Hutt City Council

Useful resource for staff serving customers with disabilities
www.upperhuttcity.com/community/disability-support/
discover-serving-customers-with-disabilities

Web Accessibility in Mind (WebAIM)

Web accessible services, articles and resources
webaim.org/techniques/alttext

YouTube

"How to Add Closed Captions to a YouTube Video"
www.youtube.com/watch?v=9K4WJs94FfY

Notes
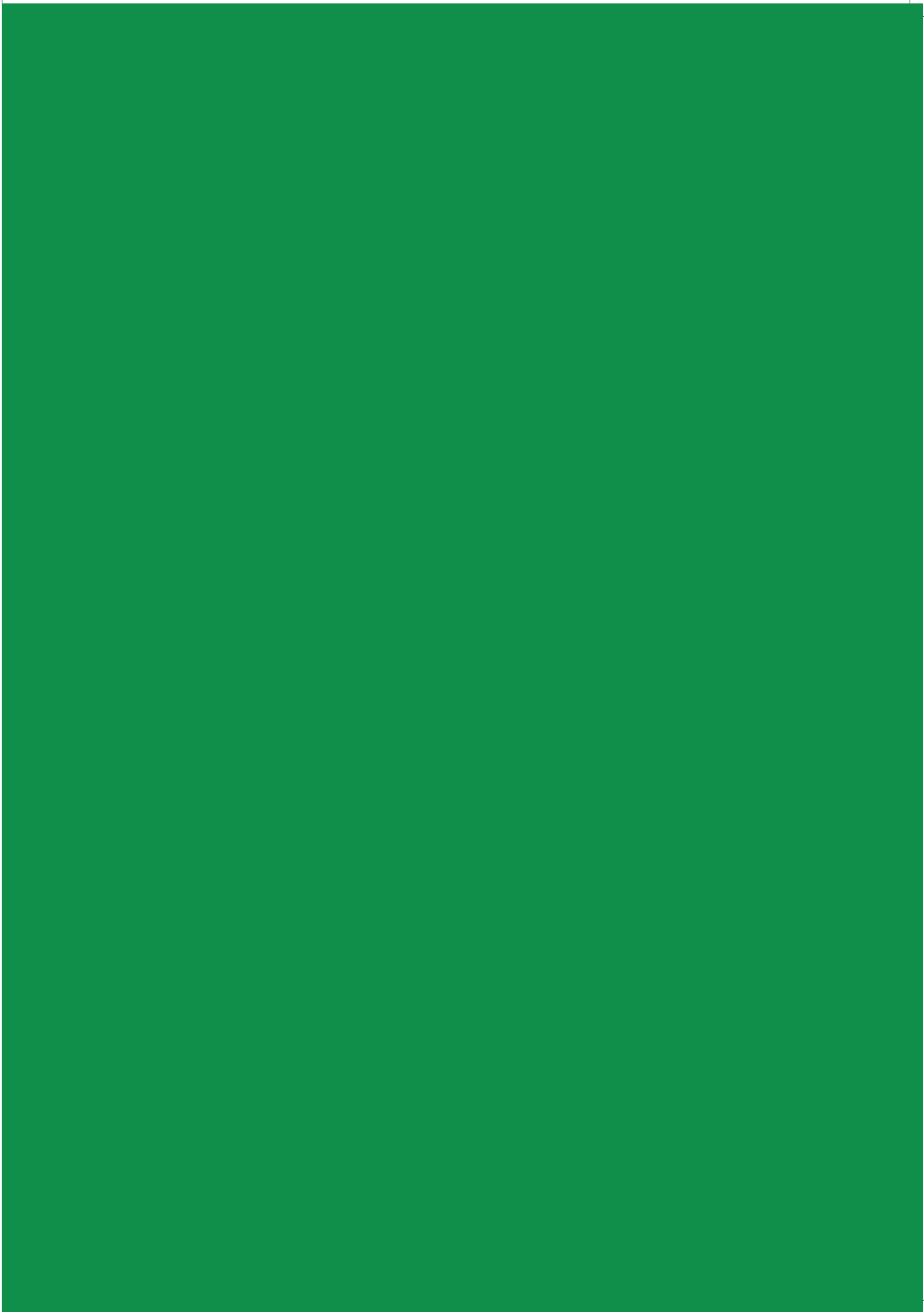
www.ssc.govt.nz/Lead

STATE SERVICES COMMISSION
Te Komihana O Ngā Tari Kāwanatanga

New Zealand Government

MINISTRY OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
TE MANATŪ WHAKAHIATO ORA